

The Girl and the Bill

By **Bannister Merwin**
ILLUSTRATIONS BY **RAY WALTERS**



CHAPTER II.

Senior Portol.

When Orme answered the knock at the door a singular young man stood at the threshold. He was short, wiry, and very dark. His nose was long and complacently tilted at the end. His eyes were small and very black. His mouth was a wide, uncertain slit. In his hand he carried a light cane and a silk hat of the flat-brimmed French type. And he wore a gray sack suit, pressed and creased with painful exactness.

"Come in, Senior Portol," said Orme, motioning toward a chair. The little man entered, with short, rapid steps. He drew from his pocket a clean pocket handkerchief, which he unfolded and spread out on the surface of the table. Upon the handkerchief he carefully placed his hat and then, after an ineffectual effort to make it stand against the table edge, laid his cane on the floor.

Not until all this ceremony had been completed did he appear to notice Orme. But now he turned, widening his face into a smile and extending his hand, which Orme took rather dubiously—it was supple and moist.

"Oh, this is Mr. Orme, is it not?" "Yes," said Orme, freeing himself from the unpleasant handshake. "Mr. Robert Orme?" "Yes, that is my name. What can I do for you?"

For a moment Senior Portol appeared to hover like a timid bird; then he seated himself on the edge of a chair, only the tips of his toes touching the floor. His eyes danced brightly.

"To begin with, Mr. Orme," he said, "I am charmed to meet you—very charmed." He rolled his "rs" after a fashion that need not be reproduced. "And in the second place," he continued, "while actually I am a foreigner in your dear country, I regard myself as in spirit one of your natives. I came here when a boy, and was educated at your great University of Princeton."

"You are a Portuguese—I infer from your name," said Orme. "Oh, dear, no! Oh, no, no, no!" exclaimed Senior Portol, tapping the floor nervously with his toes. "My country he freed himself from the Portuguese yoke many and many a year ago. I am a South American, Mr. Orme—one of the poor relations of your great country. Then he suddenly became grave, and leaned forward, his hands on his knees. "But this is not the business of our meeting, Mr. Orme."

"No?" inquired Orme. "No, my dear sir. I have come to ask of you about the five-dollar bill which you received in the hat shop this afternoon." He peered anxiously. "You still have it? You have not spent it?"

"A marked bill, was it not?" "Yes, yes. Where is it, my dear sir, where is it?" "Written across the face of it were the words, 'Remember person you pay this to.'"

"Oh, yes, yes." "And on the back of it—?" "On the back of it!" gasped the little man. "Was a curious cryptogram." "Do not torture me!" exclaimed Senior Portol. "Have you got it?" His fingers worked nervously. "Yes," said Orme slowly, "I still have it."

Senior Portol hastily took a fresh five-dollar bill from his pocket. "See," he said, jumping to the floor, "here is another just as good a bill. I give this to you in return for the bill which was paid to you this afternoon." He thrust the new bill toward Orme, and waved his other hand rhetorically. "That, and that alone, is my business with you, dear sir."

Orme's hand went to his pocket. The visitor watched the motion eagerly, and a grimace of disappointment contracted his features when the hand came forth, holding a cigar case. "Have one," Orme urged.

In his anxiety the little man almost danced. "But, sir, he broke forth, 'I am in desperate hurry. I must meet a friend. I must catch a train.'"

"One moment," interrupted Orme. "I can't very well give up that bill until I know a little better what it means. You will have to show me that you are entitled to it—and"—he smiled—"meantime you'd better smoke."

Orme did not feel warranted in giving up the marked bill without a definite explanation. The little man was a comic figure, but his bizarre exterior might conceal a dangerous plot. He might be a thief, an anarchist, anything.

"Please, my dear sir, please do not add to my already very great anxiety," pleaded the visitor. Orme spoke more decisively. "You are a stranger, Senior Portol. I don't know what all this mystery conceals, but I can't give out that bill unless I know more about it—and I won't," he added, as he saw Senior Portol open his mouth for further pleading.

"Very well," sighed the little man. He hesitated for an instant, then added: "I do not blame you for insisting and I suppose I must say to you everything that you demand. No, I do not smoke the cigar, please. But if you do not object—" He produced a square of cigarette paper and some tobacco from a silver-mounted pouch, and deftly rolled a cigarette with one hand, accepting a match from Orme with the other. Closing his eyes, he inhaled the smoke deeply, breathing it out through his nostrils.

"Well—" he hesitated, his eyes roving about the room as if in search of something—"Well, I will explain to you why I want the bill."

Orme lighted a fresh cigar and settled himself to hear the story. Senior Portol drew a second handkerchief from his pocket and mopped his damp brow.

"You must know, my very dear sir," he began, "that I come from a country which is very rich in the resources of nature. In the unsettled interior are very great mineral deposits which are little known, and since the day when the great Vega made the first exploration there has been the belief that the Urinaba mountains hide a great wealth in gold. Many men for three hundred years have risked their most precious lives to go look for it. But they have not found it. No, my dear sir, they have not found it—until—But have patience, and you shall hear everything."

"A few days ago a countryman of mine sent word that he was about to die. He asked that I, his early friend, should come to him immediately and receive news of utmost importance. He was lying sick in the hotel of a small city in Wisconsin. He was a tobacco agent and he had been attacked by death while he was on a business trip.

"Filled with the heartbroken hope to see him once more before he died, I went even as I was, to a train and made all haste to his bedside."

"What was his name?" asked Orme. "Lopez," replied Senior Portol promptly; and Orme knew that the answer might as well have been Smith. But the little man returned quickly to his story.

"My friend had no strength left. He was, oh, so weak that I went to sleep. But he sent the doctor and the priest out of the room, and then—and then he whispered in my ear a secret. He had discovered rich gold in the Urinaba country. He had been trying to earn money to go back and dig up the gold. But, alas! now he was dying, and he wished to give the secret to me, his old friend.

"Tears streamed on my cheek." Senior Portol's eyes filled, seemingly at the remembrance. "But I took out my fountain pen to write down the directions he wished to give. See—this was the pen." He produced a gold-mounted tube from his waistcoat.

"I searched my pockets for a piece of paper. None could I discover. There was no time to be lost, for my friend was growing weaker, oh, very fast. In desperation I took a five-dollar bill, and wrote upon it the directions he gave me for finding the gold. Even as I finished it, dear Lopez breathed his last breath."

Orme puffed at his cigar. "So the bill carries directions for finding a rich deposit in the Urinaba mountains?" "Yes, my dear sir. But you would not rob me of it. You could not understand the directions." "Oh, no," Orme said. "I have no interest in it. I am a gold miner."

"Then accept this fresh bill," implored Senior Portol, "and give me back the one I yearn for."

Orme hesitated. "A moment more," he said. "Tell me, how did you lose possession of the marked bill?"

The South American writhed in his chair and leaned forward eagerly. "That is the most distressing part of all," he exclaimed. "I had left Chicago at a time when my presence in this great city was very important indeed. Nothing but the call from a dying friend would have induced me to go away. My whole future in this country depended upon my returning in time to complete certain business."

"So, after dear Lopez was dead, I rushed to the local railroad station. A train was coming in. I searched my pocket for my money to buy my ticket. All I could find was the five-dollar bill!"

"It was necessary to return to Chicago; yet I could not lose the bill. A happy thought struck me. I wrote upon the face of it the words you have seen, and paid it to the ticket agent.

I called his attention to the writing and implored him to save the bill if he could until I returned, and if not, to be sure to remember the person he gave it to."

Orme laughed. "It does seem funny," said Senior Portol, rolling another cigarette, "but you cannot imagine my most frantic desperation. I returned to Chicago and transacted my business. Then I hastened back to the Wisconsin city. Woe is me! The ticket agent had paid the bill to a Chicago citizen. I secured the name of this man and finally found him at his office on La Salle street. Alas! he, too, had spent the bill, but I tracked it from person to person, until now, my dear sir, I have found it! So—" he paused and looked eloquently at Orme.

"Do you know a man named Evans?" Orme asked. Senior Portol looked at him in bewilderment. "S. R. Evans," insisted Orme. "Why, no, dear sir—I think not. But what has that to do—?"

Orme pushed a sheet of paper across the table. "Oblige me, Senior Portol," he said. "Oblige me, Senior Portol. R. Evans."

Senior Portol was apparently reluctant. However, under the compulsion of Orme's eye, he finally took out his fountain pen and wrote the name in flowing script. He then pushed the paper back toward Orme, with an inquiring look.

"No, that isn't what I mean," exclaimed Orme. "Print it. Print it in capital letters." Senior Portol slowly printed out the name.

Orme took the paper, laying it before him. He then produced the coveted bill from his pocketbook. Senior Portol uttered a little cry of delight and stretched forth an eager hand, but Orme, who was busily comparing the letters on the paper with the letters on the bill, waved him back.

After a few moments Orme looked up. "Senior Portol," he said, "why didn't you write the secret on a time-table, or on your ticket, before you gave the bill to the agent?"

Senior Portol was flustered. "Why," he said uncertainly, "I did not think of that. How can we explain the mistakes we make in moments of great nervousness?"

"True," said Orme. "But one more point. You did not yourself write your friend's secret on the bill. The letters which you have just printed are differently made."

Senior Portol said nothing. He was breathing hard. "On the other hand," continued Orme, turning the bill over and eyeing the inscription on its face, "your mistake in first writing the name instead of printing it shows me that you did write the words on the face of the bill." He returned the bill to his pocketbook. "I can't give you the bill," he said. "Your story doesn't hold together."

With a queer little scream the South American bounded from his chair and flung himself at Orme. He struck no blow, but clawed desperately at Orme's pocket. The struggle lasted only for a moment. Orme, seizing the little man by the collar, dragged him, wriggling, to the door.

"Now get out," said Orme. "If I find you hanging around I'll have you locked up."

Senior Portol whispered: "It is my secret. Why should I tell you the truth about it? You have no right to know."

Orme retained his hold. "I don't like your looks, my friend," he said. "There may have been reason why you should be to me, but you will have to make things clear." He considered. After all, he must make allowance; so he said: "Come back tomorrow with evidence that you are entitled to the bill, and you shall have it."

He released Senior Portol. The little man had recovered his composure. He went back to the table and took up his hat and cane, refolding the handkerchief and slipping it into his pocket. Once more he was the Latin fox. He approached Orme, and his manner was deprecatory.

"My most abject apologies for attacking you, sir. I was beside myself. But if you will only permit me I will bring up my friend, who is waiting below. He will, as you say, vouch for me."

"Who is he?" "A very, very distinguished man." Orme pondered. The adventure was opening up, and he felt inclined to see it through. Bring him," he said shortly.

When Senior Portol had disappeared Orme telephoned to the clerk. "Send me up a porter," he ordered.

The porter appeared, and Orme handed him the five-dollar bill. "I have a small package for you," he said, handing him a small box. "It is a very valuable one."

Orme hesitated. "A moment more," he said. "Tell me, how did you lose possession of the marked bill?"

The South American writhed in his chair and leaned forward eagerly. "That is the most distressing part of all," he exclaimed. "I had left Chicago at a time when my presence in this great city was very important indeed. Nothing but the call from a dying friend would have induced me to go away. My whole future in this country depended upon my returning in time to complete certain business."

"So, after dear Lopez was dead, I rushed to the local railroad station. A train was coming in. I searched my pocket for my money to buy my ticket. All I could find was the five-dollar bill!"

the side of his former visitor stood a dapper foreigner. He wore a long frock coat and carried a glossy hat, and his eyes were framed by large gold spectacles.

"This is the Senior Alcatraz," explained Senior Portol. The newcomer bowed with suave dignity.

"Senior Alcatraz? The name is familiar," said Orme, smiling. Portol assumed an air. "He is the minister from my country to these United States."

Orme understood. This was the wary South American diplomat whose name had lately been so prominent in the Washington dispatches. What was he doing in Chicago?

"I am glad to meet you," said Orme. Alcatraz smiled, displaying a prominent row of uneven teeth. "My young friend, Portol," he began, "tells me that you have in your possession the record of a secret belonging to me. What that secret is, is immaterial to you and me, I take it. He is an honorable young man—excitable, perhaps, but well-meaning. I would suggest that you give him the five-dollar bill he desires, accepting from him another in exchange. Or, if you still doubt him, permit me to offer you a bill from my own pocket."

He drew out a fat wallet. The situation appeared to be simplified. And yet Orme was dubious. There was mischief in the bill; so much he felt sure of. Alcatraz's reputation was that of a fox, and as a person of uncertain qualities, Orme could not but admire the subtle manner in which Alcatraz sought delicately to limit his doubts to the more possibility that Portol was trying to pass spurious money. He drew before him to settle the question at this moment.

"This seems to be rather a mixed-up affair, Senior Alcatraz," he said. "There is much more in it than appears. Call on me tomorrow morning and you shall have my decision."

Alcatraz and Portol looked at each other. The minister spoke: "Will you engage not to give the bill to anyone else in the interval?"

"I will promise that," said Orme. "It is only fair. Yes, I will keep the bill until tomorrow morning. Best of references. Have your wife, no children. Address, L. H. care Edgeworth, Marshalltown, Iowa."

"Wanted—Position by cook, 12 years' experience. Can furnish references. J. G. box 2, Union, Iowa."

"Wanted—Painting of all kinds, also graining, and papering. Will paint your buggy or wagon. J. L. Hankins, St. Anthony."

"Pearls Wanted—Send by registered mail. If my offer is not satisfactory, will return. Lathrop Produce Company, Belmont, Iowa."

"Wanted—Leave your wants at the Marshalltown Employment Agency. Phone 783."

"Wanted—Let your wants be known. Carl's Employment Agency. Phone 950."

HELP WANTED—MALE. "Wanted—Good, honest boy, 12 years old, who really wants and is in need of a good christian home in the country. Apply Dr. Rosa Liebke."

"Wanted—Six brick masons and three stone masons, one plumber and steam fitter, union scale. Carl's Employment Agency."

"Wanted—Boy over 18 at Pilgrim hotel. Good pay, board and room to reliable boy."

"Wanted—Man under 35 to fit for railway mail clerk; good starting salary. Rapid advancement; best opportunity in government service; demands immediate action; must be physically sound and not afraid of work. Address Interstate, Box 1283, Omaha, Neb."

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"Wanted—Girls and women at the canning factory to peel tomatoes. Western Grocery Company Mills."

"Wanted—High school girl to assist in general housework. 313 North Third street. Phone 823."

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"Wanted—Women to iron at home half day each week. Phone 401 red."

"Wanted—Girl for housework; man employed to assist. Mrs. D. T. Denmond, 405 West Main street."

two South Americans were altogether too eager.

Orme decided to go for a walk. He could think better in the open air. He took up his hat and cane and descended the elevator.

In the office the clerk stopped him. "A man called to see you a few minutes ago, Mr. Orme. When I told him that you were engaged with two visitors he went away."

"Did he leave his name?" asked Orme. "No, sir. He was a Japanese."

Orme nodded and went out to the street. What could a Japanese want of him?

Pictures by Telegraph. An Italian scientist sends pictures by telegraph by decomposing them, as it were, into elementary signs, designated by letters of the alphabet, which are transmitted in the ordinary way and retranslated into a copy of the original.

Judicial Wisdom. Philip of Macedonia, in passing sentence on two rogues, ordered one of them to leave Macedonia with all speed and the other to try and catch him.—Plutarch.

Overfed Britishers. Tens of thousands in our midst today are suffering from the effects of too frequent meals.—British Health Review.

We Give It Up. Who was the great woman who first thought of cooking sauerkraut and spare ribs together?—Atchison Globe.

Low Death Rate in Philippines. Any ideas that the Philippines are unhealthful as an abiding place for Americans would seem to be dispelled by the statement issued from the bureau of insular affairs that the death rate among the more than 8,000 government employees in the islands for the quarter ended March 31 was only 6.9 per 1,000 a year. These employees, of whom some 3,700 are Americans, include all the officials and employees of the insular, provincial and municipal governments and the police and fire departments of Manila.

Rapid Growth of Empire. When Queen Victoria ascended the throne her subjects numbered 138,000,000, who she ruled the figure were about 400,000,000.

Explanation Simple. "Dis paper," said Meandering Mike, "wants to know why de cities is over-crowded when dere is so much work offered in de country." "Well," responded Plodding Pete, "ain't dat de reason?"

Awful Confession. "Mother," said the repentant, "I've a dreadful thing to confess to you. Last night, when you told me to lie down in bed, I lied down, but after you turned out the gas I grounded my teeth at you in the dark!"

The Secret. She—I don't see how the freshmen can keep their little caps on their heads. He—Vacuum pressure.—Cornell Widow.

Farm Homes Near College Town

240 acres, 5 miles from Iowa Falls, 6 room, story and half house, stone foundation. Good cellar. Well at house and well and windmill at barn. Large barn, room for 12 head of horses and 18 cows, holds 30 tons of hay, buggy and machine shed. Corn crib with trevise, 2 acres of orchard. Well fenced. \$27.50 per acre. \$1,000 on contract, \$5,200 March 1st and balance 7 years at 5 per cent.

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good condition. Carl's Employment Agency. "For Sale—On easy payments, bar fixtures, new and second hand billiard and pool tables, billiard and bowling supplies. We lead in cheap prices. The Brunswick-Balke-Gullender Company, Marshalltown, Iowa." **LIVESTOCK—HORSES, ETC.** "For Sale—Two fresh cows. Harry Landstrum, Liscomb, Iowa. Battin Grove." "For Sale—Fifteen head of native work horses. Inquire 905 South Center. C. A. Plumb." **FOR SALE—CITY PROPERTY.** "For Sale—Grey mare 5 years, weight about 1,000 lbs. Telephone 72 on 12." "For Sale—A bargain if sold before Sept. 15, good six-room house and full lot with fruit, north side. Address owner 25, Times-Republican." "To prospective buyers for a good home in Marshalltown, you will get a bargain at 615 West Main street, modern house, full lot and barn. Must be sold soon. George W. Beasley." **IOWA LANDS.** "For Sale—Iowa land, 240 acres good Iowa land, \$50 per acre. Owner, Mrs. E. E. Overbaugh, Renwick, Iowa." "For Sale—Well improved, good 150 acre farm, eleven miles from Mason City, 2 1/2 from Rock Falls and 1/2 from Nora Springs. For price and terms address W. W. White, Iowa Falls, Iowa." "For Sale—Seventy-three acres three and one-half miles east of Marshalltown, Iowa. Good improvements, good lot, running water and timber on it. Best bargain yet offered. Address R-22, care T. R."

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The Struggle Lasted Only for a Moment.