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Via Big Four Route



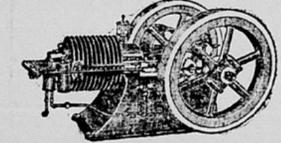
Tuesday, September 20

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The Girl and the Bill

By Bannister Merwin ILLUSTRATIONS BY RAY WALTERS



CHAPTER IX.

Number Three Forty-One. When Orme was aroused by the ringing of his telephone bell the next morning and heard the clerk's voice saying over the wire, "Eight o'clock, sir," it seemed as if he had been asleep but a few minutes.

During breakfast he reviewed the events of the preceding evening. Strange and varied though they had been, his thoughts chiefly turned to the girl herself, and he shaped all his plans with the idea of pleasing her. The work he had set for himself was to get the envelope and deliver it to the girl. This plan involved the finding of the man who had escaped from the tree.

The search was not so nearly blind as it would have been if Orme had not found that folded slip of paper in Maku's pocket. The address, "three forty-one North Parker street," was unquestionably the destination at which Maku had expected to meet friends.

To North Parker street, then, Orme prepared to go. Much as he longed to see the girl again, he was glad that they were not to make this adventure together, for the reputation of North Parker street was unsavory.

Orme found his way readily enough. There was not far to go, and he preferred to walk. But before he reached his destination he remembered that he had promised Alcatraz and Porito to meet them at his apartment at ten o'clock.

His obligation to the two South Americans seemed slight, now that the bill had passed from his hands and that he knew the nature of Porito's actions. Nevertheless, he was a man of his word, and he hurried back to the Pere Marquette, for the hour was close to ten. He was influenced to some extent by the thought that Porito and Alcatraz, on learning how he had been robbed of the bill, might unwittingly give him a further clue.

No one had called for him. He waited till ten minutes past the hour before he concluded that he had fulfilled his part of the bargain with them. Though he did not understand it, he attached no special significance to their failure to appear.

Once again he went to North Parker street. Three forty-one proved to be a notion shop. Through the window he saw a stout woman reading a newspaper behind the counter. When he entered she laid the paper aside and arose languidly, as though customers were rather a nuisance than a blessing. She was forty, but not fat.

Orme asked to see a set of studs. She drew a box from a show case and spread the assortment before him. He selected a set and paid her, offering a ten-dollar bill. She turned to a cash register and made change—which included a five-dollar bill.

Orme could hardly believe his eyes. The bill which she placed in his hand bore the written words: "Remember person you pay this to."

He turned it over. In the corner was a familiar set of abbreviations. There was no doubt about it. The bill was the same which had been taken from him, and which he had last seen in the possession of Maku.

What an instant piece of green paper that marked bill was! It had started him on this remarkable series of adventures. It had introduced excitable little Porito and the suave Alcatraz to his apartment. It had made him the victim of the attack by the two Japanese. It had brought the girl into his life. And now it came again into his possession just at the moment to prove that he was on the right track in his search for Maku and the man who had the papers.

The queerest coincidence was that the bill would never have come into his possession at all had it not been for his first meeting with the girl—who at that very time was herself searching for it. The rubbing of his hat against the wheel of her car—on so little thing as that had hinged the events followed.

"This is strange," Orme addressed the woman. "It doesn't hurt it any," said the woman, indifferently. "I know that. But it's a curious thing just the same."

The woman raised her shoulders slightly, and began to put away the stock she had taken out for Orme's benefit. "Who paid this to you?" persisted Orme.

concealed in her newspaper. At one side of the shop he found the entrance to a flight of stairs which led to the floors above. In the little hallway, just before the narrow ascent began, was a row of electric buttons and names, and under each of them a mail box. "34" had a card on which was printed: "Arima, Teacher of Original Kana Jiu-Jitsu."

Should he go boldly up and present himself as a prospective pupil? If Arima were the one who had so effectively thrown him the night before he would certainly remember the man he had thrown and would promptly be on his guard. Also, the woman in the shop had said, "You are one of the gentlemen he was expectin'." Others were coming.

Prudence suggested that he conceal himself in an entry across the street and keep an eye out for the persons who were coming to visit Arima. He assumed that their coming had something to do with the stolen paper. But he had no way of knowing who the athlete's guests would be. There might be no one among them whom he could recognize. And even if he saw them all go in, how would his own purpose be served by merely watching them? In time, no doubt, they would all come out again, and one of them would have the papers in his possession, and Orme would not know which one.

For all he was aware, some of the guests had already arrived. They might even now be gathering with eager eyes about the unfolded documents. No, Orme realized that his place was not on the sidewalk. By some means he must get where he could discover what was going on in the front flat on the third floor. Standing where he now was there was momentary danger of being discovered by persons who would guess why he was there. Maku might come.

Orme looked to see who lived in "4a," the flat above the Japanese. The card bore the name: "Madam Alla, Clairvoyant and Trance Medium."

"I think I will have my fortune told," muttered Orme, as he pressed Madam Alla's bell and started up the stairs.

At the top of the second flight he looked to the entrance of the front apartment. It had a large square of ground glass, with the name "Arima" in black letters. He continued upward another flight and presently found himself before two blank doors—one at the front and one a little at one side. The side door opened slowly in response to his knock.

Before him stood a blowy but not altogether unprepossessing woman of middle years. She wore a cheap print gown. A gipsy scarf was thrown over her head and shoulders, and her ears held loop earrings. Her inquiring glance at Orme was not unmixing with suspicion.

"Madam Alla?" inquired Orme. "She nodded and stood aside for him to enter. He passed into a cheap little reception hall which looked out on the street, and then, at her silent direction, went through a door at one side and found himself in the medium's sanctum.

The one window gave on a dimly lighted narrow space which apparently had been cut in from the back of the building. Through the dusty glass he could see the railing of a fire-escape platform, and cutting diagonally across the light, part of the stairs led to the platform above. There was a closed door, which apparently opened into the outer hall. In the room were dirty red hangings, two chairs, a couch, and a small square center table.

Madam Alla had already seated herself at the table and was shuffling a pack of cards. "Fifty-cent reading?" she asked, as he took the chair opposite her.

Orme nodded. His thoughts were on the window and the fire escape, and he hardly heard her monotonous sentences, though he obeyed mechanically her instructions to cut and shuffle.

"You are about to engage in a new business," she was saying. "You will be successful, but there will be some trouble about a dark man. Look out for him. He talks fair, but he means mischief.—There is a woman, too.—The man will try to prejudice her against you." And all the time Orme was saying to himself, "How can I persuade her to let me use the fire escape?"

Suddenly he was conscious that the woman had ceased speaking and was running the cards through her fingers and looking at him searchingly. "You are not listening," she said, as he met her gaze.

He smiled apologetically. "I know—I was preoccupied." "I can't help you if you don't listen." Orme inferred that she took pride in her work. He sighed, and looked grave. "My affair," he said slowly, "that may case is too serious for the cards."

but not by a reading. "What do you mean?" Plainly she was frightened. "I don't put people away. That's out of my line. Honest!" "Do I look as if I wanted anything crooked done?" Orme smiled. "It's hard to tell what folks want," she muttered. "You're a fly-cop, aren't you?" "What makes you think that?" "The way you been sining things up. You aren't going to do anything, are you? I pay regular for my protection every month—five dollars—and I work hard to get it, too."

Orme hesitated. He had known at the outset that he was of a class different from the ordinary run of her clients. The difference undoubtedly had both puzzled and frightened her. He might disabuse her of the notion that he had anything to do with the police, but her misapprehension was an advantage that he was loath to lose. Fearing him, she might grant any favor.

"Now, listen to me," he said at last. "Don't mean you any harm, but I want you to answer a few questions." She eyed him furtively. "Do you know the man in the flat below?" he demanded.

"Mr. Arima? No. He's a Jap. I see him in the halls sometimes, but I don't do no more than bow, like any neighbor." "He's noisy, isn't he?" "Only when he has pupils. But he goes out to do most of his teaching. Is he wanted?" "Not exactly. Now look here. I believe you're a well-meaning woman. Do you make a good thing out of this business?"

"Fair." She smiled faintly. "I ain't been in Chicago long, and it takes time to work up a good trade. I got a daughter to bring up. She's with friends. She don't know anything about what I do for a living."

"Well," said Orme, "I'm going to give you five dollars toward educating your girl." He took a bill from his pocketbook and handed it to her. She accepted it with a deprecating glance and a smile that was tinged with pathetic coquetry. Then she looked at it strangely. "What's the writing?" she asked.

Orme started. He had given her the marked five-dollar bill. "I didn't mean to give you that one," he said, taking it from her fingers. "She stared at him. 'Is it funny?' "No—but I want it. Here's another." As he took a fresh bill from his pocketbook he discovered to his surprise that the marked bill, together with the few dollars in change he had received after his purchase in the shop below, was all that he now had left in his pocket. He remembered that he had intended to draw on his funds that morning. His departure from New York had been hurried, and he had come away with little ready cash.

Madam Alla slipped the bill into her bosom and waited. She knew well enough that her visitor had some demand to make. "Now," said Orme, "I am going to use your fire escape for a little while." The woman nodded. "I want you to keep all visitors out," he continued. "Don't answer the bell. I may want to come back this way quick."

"This is straight business, isn't it? I don't want to get into no trouble." "Absolutely straight," said Orme. "All you have to do is to leave your window open and keep quiet."

"You can count on me," she said. "Perhaps you know all about the place down there, but if you don't, I'll tell you that the fire escape leads into his reception room."

Orme smiled. "You seem to be acquainted with your neighbor, after all?" "I've come up the stairs when his door was open."

"Does he seem to be pretty busy with his teachings?" "Evenings, he is. And some come in the afternoon. I always know, because they thud on the floor so when they wrestle."

"And mornings?" "He generally seems to be away mornings."

"I fancy he's what you'd call a noisy neighbor," said Orme. "Oh, I don't mind. There's more or less noise up here sometimes." She smiled frankly. "Spirits can make a lot of noise. I've known them to throw tables over and drag chairs all around the room."

"Well"—Orme was not interested in spirits—"be sure you don't let anybody in here until I come back."

Again she nodded. Then she went into the reception hall and he heard her push the bolt of the door. She did not return, but her steps seemed to move into one of the other rooms. Orme went to the window, pushed it up, and climbed out on the fire escape. He was glad to see that the wall across the court was windowless. He might be observed from the buildings that backed up from the next street, but they apparently belonged to a large storage loft or factory. There were no idle folk at the windows.

The window of the room below was open. This was in one sense an advantage—and Orme blessed the Japanese athletes for their insistence on fresh air; but on the other hand, it made quietness essential. Slowly he let himself through the opening in the platform and moved a few steps down the ladder. Then he crept and peered through the dingy lace curtains that were swaying in the breeze.

If he could reach that table and conceal himself beneath it, his position would be better. And now he suddenly remembered that the outline of his head would be visible against the outer light to anyone within. The room seemed to be empty, but—at that instant he heard a door open. He drew his head up. Some one was moving about the room. The steps went here and there. Chairs were shifted, to judge from the sound. But evidently there was only one person, for Orme could hear no voices. He decided that Arima was preparing for visitors. Again he heard a door open and close. Had Arima gone out, or had



"You seem to be acquainted with your neighbor, after all." Orme waited a moment, listening; no sound came from within. He lowered his head and peered. The room was empty.

Arima might return at any moment, but the chance had to be taken. Quickly, silently, Orme descended to the platform, slid over the sill and tiptoed over to the table. Another instant and he was under the cover.

(To Be Continued.) PAYS \$10,000 FOR HER CHILD. Indiana Woman Buys Possession of Boy Given Father on Divorce.

El Paso, Tex., Sept. 8.—Paying \$10,000 for possession of her 9-year-old boy, Alexander Ferdinand Brunshwig, Mrs. William Eichel, formerly the wife of Felix Brunshwig, has established a new record for divorce court proceedings here. The court decree at the time the divorce was granted in 1907 gave Mrs. Eichel possession of the boy two months each year, the carrying out of which required the father to send the boy from Paris, where he was making his home, once each year. For a consideration of \$10,000 an agreement was made with the father giving the mother possession of the boy until he is 14 years old. Mrs. Eichel, accompanied by her son, left for Chicago as soon as the decree was issued, and from there will go to her home in Evansville, Ind.

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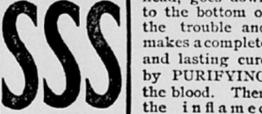
Storm Lake Burglar 10 Years Old. Storm Lake, Sept. 8.—For some time past a succession of petty thefts have annoyed the people here. Business houses and residences were broken into and small amounts of money and goods taken. Tuesday morning a suspected youngster was followed and watched while making attempts to enter two or three places. When nabbed he confessed to all the previous enterings and larcenies. The boy, who is but little more than 10 years old, has been before convicted of various larcenies and was under probation. He will now, without doubt, be sent to the industrial school at Eldora.

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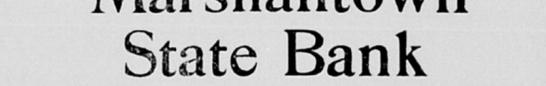
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