

The Girl and the Bill

By **Bainster Merwin**
ILLUSTRATIONS BY **RAY WALTERS**



CHAPTER XIV.

Prisoners in the Dark.
Orme's hand still held her skirt. "Girl!" he whispered.

"Yes. Are you hurt?"

Her voice came to him softly with all its solicitude and sympathy. She knelt to help him if need be, her warm, supple hand rested gently on his forehead. He could have remained for a long time as he was, content with her touch, but his good sense told him that their safety demanded action.

"Not hurt at all," he said, and as she withdrew her hand, he arose. "Alcatraz caught me off guard," he explained.

"Yes, I saw him. There wasn't time to warn you."

"He has been dogging me for an hour," Orme continued. "I felt as though he were sitting on my shoulders, like an Old Man of the Sea."

"I know him of old," she replied. "He is never to be trusted."

"But you—how did you happen to be here, in the Rookery?"

"In the hope of finding you."

"Finding me?" she asked, and he smiled. "I called up the Pere Marquette about five minutes ago, and the clerk said that you had just been talking to him on the wire, but that he didn't know where you were. Then I remembered that you knew the Wallinghams, and I came to Tom's office to see if he had any idea where you were. I was on my way when I passed you in the elevator."

"Tom and Bossie are at Glenview," explained Orme.

"Yes, the girl at the inquiry desk told me. She went to get her hat to leave for the night, and I slipped into this chamber to wait for you."

"And here we are," Orme laughed—"papers and all. But I wish it weren't so dark."

Orme hunted his pockets for a match. He found just one.

"I don't suppose, Girl, that you happen to have such a thing as a match?" She laughed lightly. "I'm sorry—no."

"I have only one," he said. "I'm going to strike it, so that we can get our bearings."

He scratched the match on his sole. The first precious moment of light he permitted himself to look at her, fixing her face in his mind as though he were never to see it again. It rejoiced him to find that in that instant her eyes also turned to his.

The interchange of looks was hard for him to break. Only half the match was gone before he turned from her, but in that time he had asked and answered so many unspoken questions—questions which at the moment were still little more than hopes and yearnings. His heart was beating rapidly. If she had doubted him, she did not doubt him now. If she had not understood his feeling for her, she must understand it now. And the look in her own eyes—could he question that it was more than friendly? But the necessity of making the most of the light forced him to forget for the moment the tender presence of the girl who filled his heart. He therefore employed himself with a quick study of his surroundings.

The chamber was about ten feet square, and lined smoothly with white tiling. It was designed to show the sanitary construction of the Wallingham refrigerator. Orme remembered how Tom had explained it all to him on a previous visit to Chicago.

This was merely a storage chamber. There was no connection with an ice-chamber, and there were none of the hooks and shelves which would make it complete for its purpose. The only appliance was the thermometer, the coils of which were fitted in flush with the tiling, near the door, and protected by a glass metal grating. As for the door itself, its outline was a fine seam. There was a handle.

As the match burned close to his fingers, Orme pulled out his watch. It was twenty-nine minutes past five. Darkness again.

Orme groped his way to the door and tugged at the handle. The door would not open; built with air-tight nicety, it did not budge in the least.

This was what Orme had expected. He knew that Alcatraz would have shot the bolt. He knew, too, that Alcatraz would be waiting in the corridor, to assure himself that the last clerk left the office without freeing the prisoner—that all the lights were out and the office locked for the night. Then he would depart, exulting that the papers could not be delivered; and in the morning Orme would be released.

But had Alcatraz realized that the chamber was air-tight? Surely he had not known that the girl was already there. The air that might barely suffice to keep one alive until relief came would not suffice for two.

There was not the least opening to admit of ventilation. Even the places where, in a practical refrigerator, connection would be made with the ice-chamber, were blocked up; for that matter, they were on that side of the chamber which was built close into the corner of the office.

Orme drove his heel against the wall. The tiles did not break. Then he stepped back toward the middle of

the chamber. "Unless Walsh, the burglar, had played a trick on Portol and held the true papers back. I went straight from Arima's to the jail and had another talk with Walsh. He convinced me that he knew nothing at all about the papers. He seemed to think that they were letters which Portol wanted for his own purposes."

"Then you did not doubt me." Glad relief was in his voice.

"I have never doubted you," she said, simply.

There was silence. Only their breathing and the ticking of Orme's watch broke the stillness.

"I don't believe that Alcatraz knew that this place was unventilated," she remarked at last.

"No; and he didn't know that you were here."

"He thinks that you will be released in the morning, and that you will think it wiser to make no charges. What do you suppose his conscience will say when he learns—"

"Girl, I simply can't believe that there is no hope for us."

"What possible chance is there?" Her voice was steady. "The clerks must all have gone by this time. We can't make ourselves heard."

"Still, I feel as though I should be fighting with the door."

"You can't open it."

"But some one of the clerks going out may have seen that it was bolted. Wouldn't he have pushed the bolt back? I'm going to see."

He groped to the door and tugged at the handle. The door, for all the effort his effort had on it, might have been a section of solid wall.

"Come back," she called.

He felt his way until his foot touched the coat. As he let himself down beside her, his hand brushed over her hair, and unconsciously she leaned toward him. He felt the pressure of her shoulder against his side, and the touch sent a thrill through him. He leaned back against the wall and stared into the blackness with eyes that saw only visions of the happiness that might have been.

"We mustn't make any effort to break out," she said. "It is useless. And every time we move about and tug at the door, it makes us breathe that much faster."

"Yes," he sighed, "I suppose we can only sit here and wait."

"Do you know," she said softly, "I am wondering why our situation does not seem more terrible to me. It should, shouldn't it?"

"I hardly think so," he replied.

"The relative importance of our worldly affairs," she went on dreamily, "appears to change when one sees that they are all to stop at once. They recede into the background of the mind. What counts then is, oh, I don't want to think of it! My father—he—"

Her shoulders shook for a moment under the stress of sudden grief, but she quickly regained her control.

"There, now," she whispered, "I won't do that."

For a time they sat in silence. His own whirling thoughts were of a sort that he could not fathom; they possessed him completely, they destroyed, seemingly, all power of analysis, they made him dumb; and they were tan-

—you added, "unless—"

"You have your own friends, your interests. Oh, I—"

"My interests are all here—with you," he answered. "It is I who am to blame. I should have known what Alcatraz would do."

"You couldn't know. There was no way—"

"I sent you up here to wait for me. Then, when he and I came in, I turned my back on him, like a blind fool."

"No, no," she protested.

"After all," he said, "it was, perhaps, something that neither you nor I could foresee. No one is to blame. Isn't that the best view to take of it?"

Her cheek moved against his as she inclined her head.

"It may be selfish in me," he went on, "but I can't feel unhappy—now."

Her sobs had ceased, and she buried her face in his shoulder.

"I love you, Girl," he said, brokenly. "I don't expect you to care so much for me—yet. But I must tell you what I feel. There isn't—there isn't anything I wouldn't do for you, Girl—and be happy doing it."

She did not speak, and for a long time they sat in silence. Many emotions were racing through him. His happiness was almost a pain, for it came to him in this extremity when there was no hope ahead. She had not yielded herself, but she had not resisted his embrace; and now her head was on his shoulder. Indeed, he had given her no chance to confess what she might feel for him.

Orme would he give her that chance. No, it was better that her love for him—he knew now that in her heart she must love him—it was better that it should not be crystallized by definite expression. For he had thought of a way by which she, at least, might be saved. With the faint possibility of rescue for them both, he hesitated to take the step. And yet every moment he was using that much more of the air that might keep her alive through the night.

It would be only right to wait until he was reasonably sure that all the clerks in the office had gone. That time could not be long now. But already the air was beginning to seem close; it was not so easy to breathe as it had been.

Gently putting her from him, he said: "The air will last longer if we lie down. The heart does not need much blood, then."

She did not answer, but moved from her seat on his folded coat, and he took it and arranged it as a pillow, and, finding her hand, showed her where it was. He heard the rustle of her clothing as she adjusted herself on the floor. She clung to his hand, while he still sat beside her.

"Now," he said, cheerfully, "I am going to find out what time it is, by breaking the crystal of my watch. I've seen blind men tell the time by feeling the dial."

His watch was an old hunting-case which had belonged to his father. He opened it and cracked the crystal with his pocketknife. As nearly as he could determine by the sense of touch it was seven o'clock. Beside Wallingham he had broken an engagement with her for the second time that day.

"There is one thing more to do," he said. "It is seven o'clock; I don't know how much longer we shall be able to breathe easily, and I am going to write a note which will explain matters to the persons who find us—if I should not happen to be able to tell them."

Laboriously he pencilled on the back of an old envelope the explanation of their presence there, making a complete and careful charge against Alcatraz. He laid the message on the floor.

On second thought, he picked it up again and put it in his pocket, for if by any chance they should be rescued, he might forget it. In that event his discovery would possibly bring an exposure of facts which the girl and her father would not care to have disclosed.

A faint whisper from the girl.

"What is it?" he asked, bending tenderly for her answer.

"You must lie down, too."

He began to move away, as if to obey her.

"No," she whispered—"here. I want you near me."

Slowly he reclined and laid his head on the coat. Her warm breath was on his face. He felt for her hand, and found it held tightly to his.

His own mind was still torn with doubts as to the best course. Should he put himself out of the way that she might live? The sacrifice might prove unnecessary. Rescue might come when it was too late for him, yet not too late, if he did not hurry his own end. And if she truly loved him and knew that she loved him, such an act on his part would leave her a terrible grief which time would hardly cure.

He tried to analyze their situation more clearly, to throw new light on his duty. The clerks must all have gone by now. There would be a visit or two from a night watchman, perhaps, but there was scarcely one chance in a hundred that he would unbolt the door.

The air was vibrating rapidly; they could not both live through the night. But—if she loved him as he loved her, she would be happier to die with him than to live at the cost of his life.

He pictured for himself again that last look of her face; its beauty, its strength, its sweet sympathy. He seemed to see the stray wisp of hair that had found its way down upon her cheek. Her perfect lips—how well he remembered!—were the unopened buds of pure womanly passion.

After all, whether she loved him or not, there would still be much in life for her.

Time would cure her sorrow. There would be many claims upon her, and she would, sooner or later, resume her normal activities.

Slowly he disengaged his hand from her clinging fingers. In his other hand he still held his pocketknife. To open a vein in his wrist would take but a moment. His life would well away, there on the tiles.

She would think he was asleep; and then she herself would drift away into unconsciousness which would be broken only after the door was opened in the morning.

"Where are you, Girl?" he asked.

"Here," she answered, very near him.

He reached out and found her hand, and she did not withdraw it from his clasp.

"The rascal has locked us in," he said. "I'm afraid we shall have a long wait."

"Will it do any good to shout?"

"No one could hear us through these walls. No, there's nothing to do but remain quiet. But you needn't stand, Girl."

He led her to the wall. Removing his coat, he folded it and placed it on the floor for a cushion, and she seated herself upon it. He remained standing near by.

"The papers," he said, "are in that coat you are sitting on."

He laughed, with a consciousness of the grim and terrible humor of their situation—which he hoped she had not realized. Here they were, the hard-sought papers in their possession, yet they were helpless even to save their own lives.

"I wish you would shout," she said.

"Very well," he said, and going over to the door, he called out several times with the full power of his lungs. The sound, pent in that narrow room, fairly crashed in their ears, but there was no answer from without.

"Don't do it again," she said at last. Then she sighed. "Oh, the irony of it!" she exclaimed.

"I know," he laughed. "But don't give up, Girl. We'll deliver those papers yet."

"I will not give up," she said, gravely. "But tell me, how did you get the papers?"

Orme began the story of the afternoon's adventures.

"Why don't you sit down?" she asked.

"Why?" he stammered. "I—"

He had been so conscious of his feeling toward her, so conscious of the fact that the one woman in all the world was looking in here alone with him, that since he arranged her seat he had not trusted himself to be near her. And she did not seem to understand.

She wished him to sit beside her, not knowing that he felt the almost overpowering impulse to take her in his arms and crush her close to him. That desire would have been more easily controlled, had he not begun to believe that she in some degree returned his feeling for her. If they escaped from this black prison, he would rest happy in the faith that her affection for him, now, as he supposed so largely friendly, would ripen into a glorious and complete love. But it would not be right for him to presume—to take advantage of a moment in which she might think that she cared for him more than she actually did. Then, too, he already foresaw vaguely the possible necessity for an act which would make it best that she should not hold him too dear. So long he stood silent that she spoke again.

"Do sit down," she said. "I will give you part of my coat."

There was a tremulous note in her laugh, but as she seated herself, she spoke with great seriousness. "When two persons understand each other as well as you and I," she said, "and are as near death as you and I, they need not be embarrassed by conventions. We never have been very conventional with each other," he replied, shakily. Her shoulder was against his. He could hear her breathing.

"Now tell me the rest of the story."

"First I must change your notion that we are near death."

He could feel that she was looking at him in the blackness. "Don't you think I know?" she whispered. "They will not find us until tomorrow. There isn't air enough to last. I have known it all from the first."

"Some one will open the door," he replied. "We may have to stay here quite a while, but—"

"No, my friend. There is no likelihood that it will be opened. The clerks are leaving for the night."

He was silent.

"So finish the story," she went on.

"Finish the story!" That was all that he could do.

"Finish the story!" His story and hers—only just begun, and now to end there in the dark.

But with a calmness as great as her own, he proceeded to tell all that had happened to him since he boarded the electric car at Evanston and saw Maku sitting within. She pressed his hand gently when he described the trick by which the Japanese had brought the pursuit to an end. She laughed when he came to the meeting with the detective in his apartment. The episode with Madam Alla he passed over lightly, for part of it rankled now. Not that he blamed himself foolishly; but he wished that it had not happened.

"That woman did a fine thing," said the girl.

He went on to describe his efforts to get free from Alcatraz.

"And you were under the table in Arima's room," she exclaimed, when he had finished.

"I was there; but I couldn't see you, Girl. And you seemed to doubt me."

"To doubt you?"

"Don't you remember? You said that no American had the papers; but

—you have your own friends, your interests. Oh, I—"

"My interests are all here—with you," he answered. "It is I who am to blame. I should have known what Alcatraz would do."

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"Bah!" His mind cleared in a flash. What a fool he was! Need he doubt her for an instant? Need he question what she would do when she found that he was dead? And she would know it quickly. This living pulsing girl beside him loved him! She had told him in every way except in words. In life and in death they belonged to each other.

They were one forever. They still lived, and while they lived they still would be love. And if hope failed, there still would be love.

His pent-up emotions broke restraint. With unthinking swiftness, he threw his arm over her and drew her tight to him. His lips found hers in a long kiss—clung in ecstasy for another, and another.

Her arms went about his neck. He felt as though her soul had passed from her lips to his own.

"My lover!" she whispered. "I think I have always cared."

"Oh, Girl, Girl!" He could utter no more.

With a faint sigh she said: "I am glad it is to be together." She sat up, still holding his hand. "If it need be at all," she added, a new firmness in her voice.

"If it need be at all!" Orme searched his mind again for some promise of escape from this prison which had been so suddenly glorified for them. The smooth, unbreakable walls; the thin seam of the door; the thermometer. Why had he not thought of it before? The thermometer!

With an exclamation, he leaped to his feet.

"What is it?" she cried.

"A chance! A small chance—but

still a chance!"

He found his way to the handle of the door, which his first attempt at escape had taught him was not connected with the outer knob. Then he located the covering which protected the coils of the thermometer.

Striking with his heel, he tried to break the metal grating. It would not yield. Again and again he threw his weight into the blows, but without effect.

At last he remembered his pocket-knife. Thrusting one end of it through the grating, he prodded at the glass coils within. There was a tinkling sound. He had succeeded.

He groped his way back to the girl and seated himself beside her. With the confession of their love, a new hope had sprung up in them. They might still be freed, and though the air was becoming stifling, neither of them believed that a joy as great as theirs could be born to live but a few hours.

For the hundredth time he was saying: "I can't believe that we have known each other only one day."

"And even now," she mused, "you don't know my name. Do you want me to tell you?"

"Not until you are ready."

"Then wait. It will come in due form. Some one will say, 'Mr. Orme, Miss—'"

"The name doesn't matter," said Orme. "To me you will always be just—'Girl.'"

The joyous moments rushed by. She had crept close to him again, and with her head on his shoulder, was saying: "There is so much for us to tell each other."

"There seems to be only one thing to

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Children always love to have a "finger in the pie" and to help with whatever is going on. When mother or nurse does everything for them they are deprived of a great deal of pleasure and will not be so well fitted to struggle for themselves when the time comes as they would have been if they had been accustomed to do things for themselves. They should be encouraged to be useful and to assist with any preparations that may be going on.

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Wanted—By every man and woman: one of our daily expense records; 50 cents in stamps or money order will bring one by return mail. Dept. L, Junior Mfg. Company, Aspinwall, Pa.

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Wanted—Leave your wants at the Marshalltown Employment Agency, Phone 753.

Wanted—Let your wants be known Carl's Employment Agency, Phone 959

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Wanted—Man to wash pens at Pilgrim hotel. Will pay good wages.

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HELP WANTED—FEMALE.
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Wanted—Agents; if you are earning less than \$35 a week send for our latest proposition. Particulars free. Nelson Supply Company, 532 Dearborn avenue, Chicago, Ill.

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For Sale—Victor talking machine, 70 records, \$23. Phone 818, yellow.

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For Sale—Model F Buick, new tires, top, wind shield, gas lamps, 5 passenger. One condition, \$150. Model F Cadillac, top, 5 passenger, fine shape, \$275. Four cylinder runabout, running order, \$175. Two cylinder runabout, good condition, 18 h. p., \$150. Address: Lavin City Garage, Cedar Falls, Iowa.

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For Sale—Dry pine kindling at New Masonic Temple Building.

For Sale—Cabbage and green tomatoes. Cabbage, cracked heads, half price. 794 Bromley street.

For Sale—Household goods. Cheap, 269 1/2 West Main.

For Sale—New White sewing machine. Must be sold before Sept. 21, 1404 West Linn Street.

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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-Collender Company, Marshalltown, Iowa.

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For Sale—Horse and buggy. 403 West State street.

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For Sale—Family driving horse, cheap for cash. Inquire 106 North Eighth avenue.

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For Sale—Improved 10 acres in the town of Abiton, belonging to the C. C. Cowgill estate; suitable for truck or

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For Sale—Good business building and living rooms, paved street. This property consists of a practically new-room house, 4 closets and vanity, all hard wood floors, electric water in house, well, coal house, barn, buggy shed, chicken house. The lot has a frontage on Main street about 150 feet, is 40 feet deep and contains 13 acres. The property is now occupied by Mr. L. D. Hampton, who will show it to any one interested and can give full particulars concerning it. Possession can be given Nov. 1, 1910. Bids will be given for a few days and time will be given on reasonable amount of the purchase price at 6 per cent interest, if desired. Look it over and mail your bid to the First National Bank, Albert Lea, Minn.

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For Sale—Or will trade for city property or western land, thirty-one acres, 2 1/2 miles north of town. Address H-19, care this office.

For Sale—100 acre farm in high state of productivity; buildings first class; large and commodious; an abundance of water. Good road to market, and school at door. Terms reasonable and price low for the quality. Come and let us show you. John C. Ewing, Rioota, Iowa.

For Sale—Farm of 79 acres, well improved; 120 acre tract, 60 miles south of town. Fred Valert, Marshalltown, Iowa.

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For Sale—80 acres 6 1/2 miles from Marshalltown; 2 1/2 miles from Green Mountain; \$125 per acre. E. G. Wallace, Marshalltown, Iowa.

For Sale—A good 80-acre farm with fair improvements, 3 1/2 miles southwest of the court house in Marshalltown. Price \$125 per acre. Will give good terms. A. J. Whitney, 37 West State street, Marshalltown. Phone 549.

For Sale—Westward farm of 240 acres in Jefferson township, one mile east and one mile south of Van Cleve and two miles west and one mile north of Haverville. Offered for sale to divide an estate. J. C. Goodman, State Center, Iowa.

For Sale—Iowa lands in Howard county, \$50 to \$80 per acre. Large list of tracts. Address: Spaulding & O'Donnell, Elma, Iowa.

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To Rent—Modern cottage, 606 North Center. Enquire P. P. Lierle.

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Strayed or Stolen—A dark red heifer, 7 months old, North E. E. Sisco, Center street, R. F. D. No. 6, Phone 216 on 4B, Reward.

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Stolen—Bicycle taken Monday evening from front of Meeker Laundry building. Reward will be paid for return to George Willford.

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