

The GIRL and the BILL

SYNOPSIS.

At the expense of a soiled hat Herbert Orme saves from arrest a girl in a black touring car who has caused a traffic jam on State street. He buys a new hat and is given a five dollar bill with "Remember the person you pay this to," written on it. A second time he helps the girl in the black car and learns that in Tom and Beale Wallingham they have mutual friends, but gets no further hint of her identity. He discovers another inscription on the marked bill, which in a futile attempt to decipher it, he copies and places the copy in a drawer in a apartment. Senior Portiol, South American agent, calls and claims the marked bill. Orme refuses, and a fight ensues in which Portiol is overcome. He calls in Senior Albert, minister from his country, to vouch for him. Orme still refuses to give up the bill. He learns that a Jap has called for him. Orme goes for a walk and sees two Japs attack Albert. He rescues him. The minister tries diplomacy, but fails to get the marked bill. Returning to his rooms Orme is attacked by two Japs who effect a forcible exchange of the marked bill for another. Orme finds the girl of the black car waiting for him. She also wants the bill. Orme tells his story. She recognizes one of the Japs as her father's butler, Maku.

CHAPTER IV.—Continued.

The girl laughed. "It was really ridiculous. He over-speeded and was caught by one of those roadside motor car traps, 10 or 12 miles out in the country. They timed him, and stopped him by a bar across the road. From what the detective says, I judge he was frightened almost to speechlessness. He may have thought that he was being arrested for stealing the car. When they dragged him before the country justice, who was sitting under a tree near by, he was white and trembling.

"They fined him \$10. He had in his pocket only \$11.63, and the marked bill was nearly half the sum. He begged them to let him go—offered them his watch, his ring, his scarf pin—but the justice insisted on cash. Then he told them that the bill had a formula on it that was valuable to him and no one else.

"The justice was obdurate, and Mr. Portiol finally hit on the device which you have seen. It fitted in well with his sense of the theatrical; and the detective says that there was not a scrap of paper at hand. The point was that Mr. Portiol was more afraid of delay than anything else. He knew that I would put some one on his track."

"When did all this happen?" asked Orme.

"Yesterday afternoon. Mr. Portiol came back to Chicago by trolley and got some money. He went back to the country justice and discovered that the marked bill had been paid out. He has followed it through several persons to you, just as Maku did, and as I have done. But I heard nothing of the Japanese."

"You shouldn't have attempted this alone," said Orme, solicitously.

She smiled faintly. "I dared not let anyone into the secret. I was afraid that a detective might learn too much." She sighed wearily. "I have been on the trail since morning."

"And how did you finally get my address?"

"The man who paid the bill in at the hat shop lives in Hyde Park. I did not get to him until this evening, while he was at dinner. He directed me to the hat shop, which, of course, was closed. I found the address of the owner of the shop in the directory and went to his house. He remembered the bill, and gave me the addresses of his two clerks. The second clerk I saw proved to be the one who had paid the bill to you. Luckily he remembered your address.

Orme stirred himself. "Then the Japanese had the directions for finding the papers?"

"My predicament," said the girl, "is complicated by the question whether the bill does actually carry definite directions."

"It carries something—a set of abbreviations," said Orme. "But I could not make them out. Let us hope that the Japanese can't. The best course for us to take is to go at once to see Walsh, the burglar."

He assumed that she would accept his aid.

"That is good of you," she said. "But it seems a little hopeless, doesn't it?"

"Why? What else can we do? I suppose you saw to it that no one else should have access to Walsh."

"Yes, father arranged that by telephone. The man is in solitary confinement. Several persons tried to see him today, on the plea of being relatives. None of them was admitted."

"What money king was this girl's father, that he could thus regulate the treatment of prisoners?"

"So there were abbreviations on the bill?" she asked.

"Yes. They weren't very elaborate, and I puzzled over them for some time. The curious fact is that, for all my study of them, I can't remember much of anything about them."

"What I have since been through, apparently, has driven the letters out of my head."

"Oh, do try to remember," she implored. "Even if you recall only one or two bits of it, they may help me."

"There was something about a man named Evans," he began. "S. R. Evans, it was."

"Evans? That is strange. I can't think how any one of that name could be involved."

"Then S. R. Evans is not your father?" he ventured.

"Oh, no." She laughed a light little laugh. "My father is—but are you sure that the name was Evans?"

"Quite sure. Then there was the abbreviation 'Chl.'—which I took to mean 'Chicago.'"

"Yes!" she breathed.

"And there were numerals—a number, then the letter 'N.'; another number, followed by the letter 'E.'" So far north, so far east, I read it—though I couldn't make out whether the numbers stood for feet or paces or miles."

"Yes, yes," she whispered. Her eyes were intent on his. They seemed to will him to remember. "What else was there?"

"Odd letters, which meant nothing to me. It's annoying, but I simply can't recall them. Believe me, I should like to."

"Perhaps you will a little later," she said. "I'm sorry to be such a bother to you."

"Bother!"

"But it does mean so much, the tracing of this bill."

"Shall we go to see Walsh?" he asked.

"I suppose so." She sighed. Apparently she was discouraged. "But even if he gives the information, it may be too late. The Japanese have the directions."

"But perhaps they will not be able to make them out," he suggested.

She smiled. "You don't know the Japanese," she said. "They are abominably clever at such things. I will venture that they are already on their way to the hiding-place."

"But even if the papers are in the pocket of one of them, it may be possible to steal them back."

"Hardly." She arose. "I fear that the one chance is the mere possibility that Maku couldn't read the directions. Then, if Walsh will speak out—"

"Now, let me say something," he said. "My name is Robert Orme. Apparently we have common friends in the Wallinghams. When I first saw you this afternoon, I felt that I might have a right to your acquaintance—a social right, if you like; a sympathetic right, I trust."

He held out his hand. She took it frankly, and the friendly pressure of her fine, firm palm sent the blood tingling through him.

"I am sorry," she said, "that I can't give you my name. It would be unfair just now—unfair to others; for if you knew who I am, it might give you a clue to the secret I guard."

"Some day, I hope, I may know," he said gravely. "But your present wish is my law. It is good of you to let me try to help you."

At the same instant they became conscious that their hands were still clasped. The girl blushed, and gently drew hers away.

"I shall call you 'Girl,' Orme added. "A name I like," she said. "My father uses it. Oh, if I only knew what that burglar wrote on the bill!"

Orme started. What a fool he had been! Here he was, trying to help the girl, forcing her to the long, tired recital of her story, when all the time he held her secret in the table in his sitting-room. For there was still the paper on which he had copied the abbreviated directions.

"Wait here," he said sharply, and without answering the look of surprise on her face, hurried from the room and to the elevator. A few moments later he was back, the sheet of paper in his hand.

"I can't forgive my own stupidity," he said. "While I was puzzling over the bill this evening I copied the secret on a sheet of paper. When Portiol came I put it away in a drawer and forgot all about it. But here it is." He laid the paper on the little, useless onyx table that stood beside her chair.

She snatched it quickly and began to examine it closely.

"Perhaps you can imagine how those letters puzzled me," he volunteered.

"Hush!" she exclaimed; and then: "Oh, this is plain. You wouldn't know, of course, but I see it clearly. There is no time to lose."

"You are going to follow this clue now—tonight?"

"Maku will read it on the bill, and—oh, these Japanese! If you have one in your kitchen, you never know whether he's a Jintoksha man, a college student, or a vice-admiral."

"You will let me go with you?" Orme was trembling for the answer. He was still in the dark, and did not know how far she would feel that she could accept his aid.

"I may need you, Mr. Orme," she said simply.

It pleased him that she brought up no question of possible inconvenience to him. With her, he realized, only direct relations were possible.

"How much of a journey is it?" he ventured to ask.

"Not very long. I intend to be mysterious about it." She smiled brightly. Her face had lighted up wonderfully since he gave her the paper that contained the secret of the bill.

But he knew that she must be tired; so he said: "Can't you send me



A Figure Swung From the Lower Branch Apparently Without Haste.

alone on this errand? It may be late before it is done, and—"

"And I will not sit and rest while you do all the work. Besides, I cannot forego the excitement of the chase."

He was selfishly glad in her answer. "Do we walk?" he asked.

"We will go in the motor," she said.

"Where is it?"

"I left it around the corner. The thought came to me that Mr. Portiol might be here, and I didn't wish him to recognize it."

Orme thought of the hard quest the girl had followed that day—battling for her father's interests. What kind of a man could that father be to let his daughter thus go into difficulties alone? But she had said that her father was unable to leave the house. Probably he did not know how serious the adventure might be. Or was the loss of the papers so desperate that even a daughter must run risks?

Together they went out to the street. Orme caught a dubious glance from the clerk, as they passed through the lobby, and he resented it. Surely anyone could see—

The girl led the way around the corner into a side street. There stood the car. He helped her in and without a word saw that she was restfully and comfortably placed in the seat next to the chauffeur's. She did not resist the implication of his mastery.

He cranked up, leaped to the seat beside her, and took the levers. "Which way, Girl?" he asked.

"North," she answered.

The big car swung out in the Lake Shore Drive and turned in the direction of Lincoln park.

CHAPTER V.

"Evans, S. R."

The car ran silently through the park and out on the broad Sheridan road. Orme put on as much speed as was safe in a district where there were so many police. From time to time the girl indicated the direction with a word or two. She seemed to be using the opportunity to rest, for her attitude was relaxed.

The hour was about eleven, and the streets were as yet by no means deserted. As they swung along Orme was pleased by the transition from the ugliness of central Chicago to the beauty of suburbs—doubly beautiful by night. The great highway followed the lake, and occasionally, above the muffled hum of the motor, Orme could hear the lapping of the wavelets on the beach.

The girl roused herself. Her bearing was again confident and untired. "Have you been up this way before?" she asked.

"No, Girl."

"This is Buena park we are passing now. We shall soon reach the city limits."

Clouds had been gathering, and suddenly raindrops began to strike their faces. The girl drew her cloak most closely about her. Orme looked to see that she was protected, and she smiled back with a brave attempt

at cheerful comradeship. "Don't worry about me," she said. "I'm quite dry." With that she leaned back and drew from the tonneau a light robe, which she threw about his shoulders.

The act was an act of partnership merely, but Orme let himself imagine an evidence of solicitude in her thoughtfulness. And then he demanded of himself almost angrily: "What right have I to think such thoughts? She has known me only an hour."

But to him that hour was as a year, so rich was his experience. He found himself recalling her every characteristic gesture. "She has accepted me as a friend," he thought, warmly. But the joy of the thought was modified by the unwelcome reflection that the girl had had no choice. Still, he knew that, at least, she trusted him, or she would never have let him accompany her, even though she seriously needed protection.

They were passing a great cemetery. The shower had quickly ended. The white stones and monuments fed by the car like dim and frightened ghosts. And now the car swung along with fine houses, set back in roomy grounds, at the left, the lake at the right.

"Do you know this city?" the girl asked.

"I think not. Have we passed the Chicago limits?"

"Yes. We are in Evanston."

"Evanston?" Orme had a glimmer. The girl turned and smiled at him. "Evanston—Sheridan Road."

"Evans—S. R.," exclaimed Orme.

She laughed a low laugh. "Ah, Monsieur Dupin!" she said.

Speeding along the lake front, the road turned suddenly to the left and west, skirting a large grove of trees which hugged the shore. Just at the turn was a low brick building on the beach. "The life-saving station," explained the girl; "and these are the grounds of the university. The road goes around the campus, and strikes the lake again a mile or more farther north."

Large buildings were at their right after they turned. Orme noted that they were scattered among the trees—some near the street, some at a distance back. Then the road again turned to the north, at a point where less imposing streets broke in from the west and south.

"Stop at this corner," said the girl. Orme threw on the brakes.

"We are in Evanston, on the Sheridan road," she said, "and this street cutting in from the south is Chicago avenue."

"Chl. A.!" exclaimed Orme.

She had taken the paper from the pocket of her coat, and was scanning it closely. "One hundred paces north and two hundred and ten east. 'T.' must mean 'tree.'"

Orme jumped to the ground. He noticed that the university grounds were cut off from the street by an iron fence. There was a gate at the corner by which they had stopped. The gate was not closed. If it were customary to shut it at night, there had been some neglect on this particular evening.

"You'd better go in through the gate," said the girl, "and follow the west fence northward for 100 paces. Then turn east, at right angles and go 210 paces—I suppose it must be paces, not feet."

"Yes," said Orme. "That would be the natural way for a burglar in a hurry to measure."

"I will move the car north on Sheridan road a little way," she went on, "so as not to be in the glare of this street light."

This was the first evidence she had shown of nervousness, and Orme suddenly realized that enemies might be lurking among the trees.

"It might be well for you to take the electric hand-lamp," she added. "It's in the kit-box, I think."

He looked in the kit-box, but the lamp was not there. He told her so.

"Maku may have stolen it," she said.

Orme slipped a heavy wrench into his pocket and closed the kit-box. With the girl, he avoided any reference to the possible presence of the Japanese among the trees, but knowing that he was no match for them unarmed, with their skill in Jiu-Jitsu, he resolved to be in some measure prepared.

He walked through the gate and began to pace northward, keeping close to the fence and counting his steps. Meantime the car followed his course, moving along the side of the road just west of the fence. Orme counted his hundred paces north, then turned east.

He saw that the 210 paces which he now had to take would carry him well over toward the lake. The girl evidently had not realized how great the distance would be. She would be nearer him, if she turned back to the corner and followed the Sheridan road eastward toward the life-saving station, but Orme did not suggest this to her, though the car was within twenty feet of him, the other side of the fence. If there should be a struggle, it would please him just as well that she should be out of hearing, for her anxiety, he knew, was already great, though she kept it closely under control.

Eastward he went through the trees. When he had covered about half the distance he found himself approaching the side of a large building. There must be some mistake. Had he deviated so widely from the course? In leaving the fence he had taken sights as carefully as he could.

Then the explanation struck him. Walsh, the burglar, had probably paced in eastward from the fence and come to the building just as he had. There was no good hiding-place apparently near at hand, and Walsh would hardly have retraced his steps. What, then, would he have done? Orme asked himself. Why, he would have turned north or south.

Orme looked in both directions. North and south of the building were open driveways. Walsh must have gone around the building, then continued eastward. This is what Orme now proceeded to do.

Remembering the number of paces to the side of the building, he chose the northward course, because there was less light north of the building. He hugged the side of the building, counting his steps, and, after reaching the corner, turned eastward. He now counted his paces along the northern side of the building.

When he reached the corner of the eastern side of the building, he paced as far southward on the eastern side as he had gone northward on the western side, and on reaching a point due east of the place at which he had originally come to the building, he added the number of paces from the fence to the building to the number of paces he had taken along the northern side of the building, and continued eastward toward the lake.

At the two hundredth pace he stopped to reconnoiter. Not more than two hundred feet ahead of him he could see dimly, through the tree trunks, the expanse of the lake. There was no sound, no evidence that any other person was near.

He proceeded cautiously for ten paces. Many trees were near him. He would have to examine all of them, for it was hardly possible that he had followed Walsh's course with unerring exactness. If the tree was within twenty feet of him north or south, that was as much as he could expect.

One thing was clear to him. Walsh had probably chosen a tree that could easily be distinguished from the others, either by its size or by some peculiarity of form. Also, the tree must have a hollow place in which the envelope could be concealed. Orme now decided that Walsh must have found his tree first and then paced westward to the fence. The even number, 100 paces north from the gate, could be only a coincidence.

A little to his left Orme discovered a trunk much larger than its neighbors. It ran up smoothly about eight feet to the first limb. An agile man could easily get up to this limb and pull himself into the branches. A cavity such as are so common in oaks, would furnish a good place for hiding the envelope away.

He looked up. Suddenly a light appeared among the branches. It was a short ray, striking against the trunk. Before Orme could realize what was happening a hand appeared in the little bar of radiance and was inserted apparently into the trunk of the tree. A moment later it was withdrawn. It held an oblong of white.

Involuntarily Orme took a step forward. A twig cracked under his foot. Instantly the light went out.

Orme drew the wrench from his pocket and stood tense. There was no other tree quite close enough for the man above him to spring to its branches. He would have to drop near Orme.

Standing there, the wrench in his hand, Orme felt that the advantage was his. He heard rustlings in the branches above his head and kept himself alert to guard against the man dropping on his shoulders.

To strike the Japanese down as he dropped from the tree, that was his plan. But meantime, where was the other Japanese? Was he among the near shadows? If so, he might even now be creeping stealthily toward Orme. The likelihood of such an attack was disconcerting to think of. But as Orme was wondering about it, it occurred to him that the man in the tree would not have gone on guard so quickly. If his confederate were near at hand, it was natural that he should have put the light out, but would he not immediately afterward have given some signal to the friend below? And would he not take it for granted that, were a stranger near, his watcher would have managed to give warning? No, the other Japanese could not be on guard.

Perhaps, thought Orme, only one of them had come on this quest. He hoped that this might be the case. He could deal with one.

The man in the tree was taking his own time to descend. Doubtless he would await a favorable moment, then alighting on the ground as far from Orme as possible, make off at top speed.

But now, to Orme's surprise, a figure swung from the lower branch apparently without haste. Once on the ground, however, the stranger leaped toward Orme.

An intuition led Orme to thrust out his left arm. It was quickly seized, but before the assailant could twist it, Orme struck out with the wrench, which was in his right hand. Swift through the motion was, his opponent threw up his free arm and partly broke the force of the blow. But the wrench reached his forehead nevertheless, and with a little moan, he dropped to the ground in a heap.

As Orme knelt to search the man, another figure swung from the tree and darted northward, disappearing in the darkness. Orme did not pursue—it was useless—but a sickening intuition told him that the man who had escaped was the man who had the envelope.

He struck a match. The man on the ground was moving uneasily and moaning. There was a scar on his forehead. It was Maku.

He went through the unconscious man's pockets. There was no envelope such as he was looking for, but he did find a folded slip of paper which he thrust into his own pocket. A discovery that interested him, though it was not now important, he made by the light of a second match. It was the marked five-dollar bill. He would have liked to take it as a souvenir, if for no other reason, but time was short and Maku, who evidently was not seriously hurt, showed signs of returning consciousness.

Another occurrence also hastened him. A man was strolling along the lake shore, not far away. Orme had not seen his approach, though he was distinctly outlined against the open background of lake and sky. The stranger stopped. The striking of the two matches had attracted his attention.

"Have you lost something?" he called.

"No," Orme replied.

The man started toward Orme, as if to investigate, and then Orme noticed that outlined on his head was a policeman's helmet.

To be found going through the pockets of an unconscious man was not to Orme's liking. It might be possible to explain the situation well enough to satisfy the local authorities, but that would involve delays fatal to any further effort to catch the man with the envelope.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

India's National Dish.

Rice and curry is the national dish in India. Just barely enough curry to flavor, and each grain when cooked is puffed up all by itself of snowy lightness. Small quantities of meat, or dried fish, are served with the curry sauce, freshly made of coconut water, peppers, tumeric, etc. The West African and West Indian do not use curry, but season by boiling it with a piece of salt fish, salt pork or chicken. Polished rice is a cheat, and eaten exclusively is deadly, so should by right and law be kept out of New York.

By BANNISTER MERWIN

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