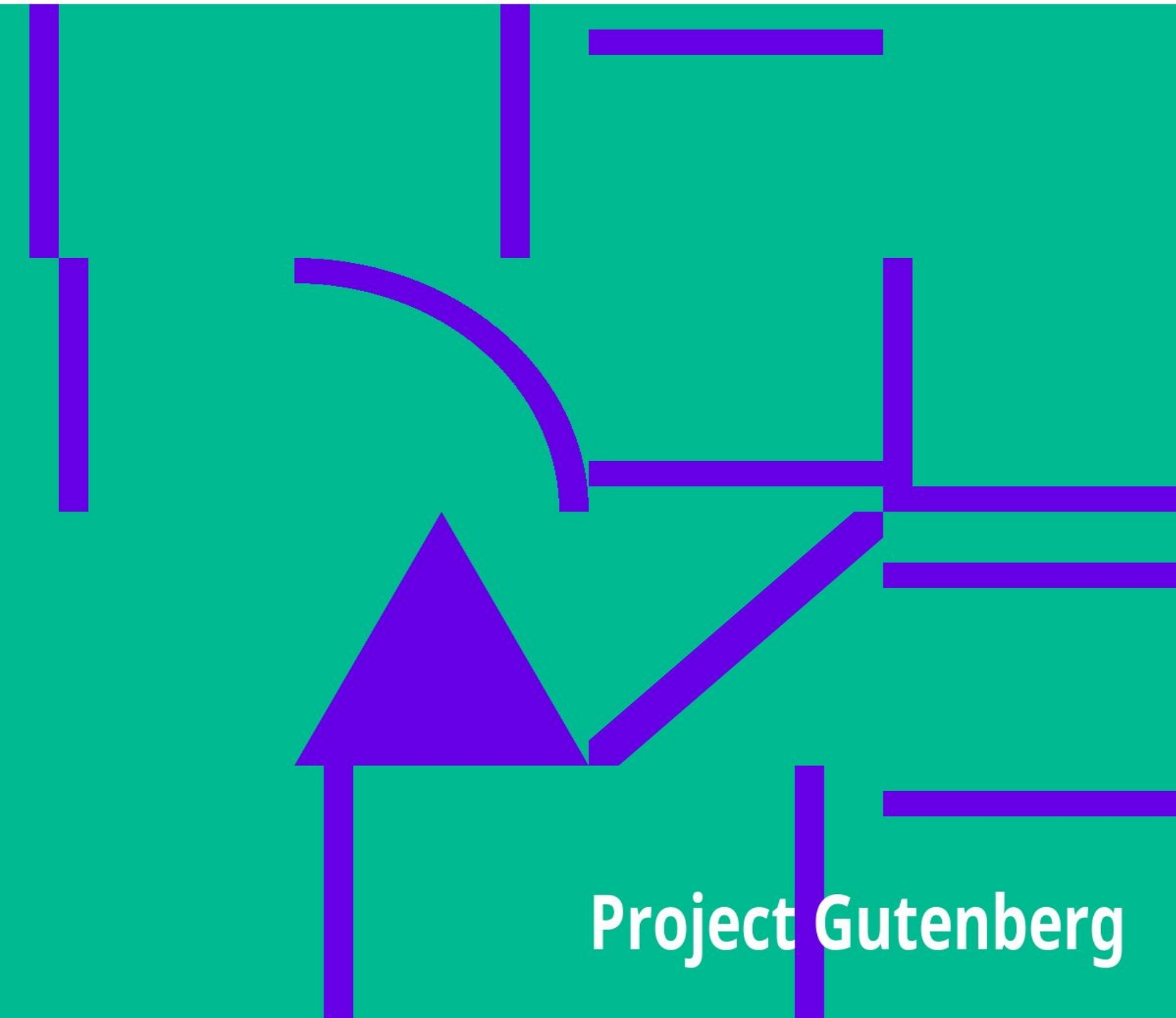
The Girl and the Bill

An American Story of Mystery, Romance and Adventure

Bannister Merwin



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

THE GIRL AND THE BILL

An American Story of Mystery, Romance

and Adventure

By BANNISTER MERWIN

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CHAPTER I

THE THRESHOLD OF ADVENTURE

The roar of State Street filled the ears of Robert Orme not unpleasantly. He liked Chicago, felt towards the Western city something more than the tolerant, patronizing interest which so often characterizes the Eastern man. To him it was the hub of genuine Americanism—young, aggressive, perhaps a bit too cocksure, but ever bounding along with eyes toward the future. Here was the city of great beginnings, the city of experiment—experiment with life; hence its incompleteness—an incompleteness not dissimilar to that of life itself. Chicago lived; it was the pulse of the great Middle West.

Orme watched the procession with clear eyes. He had been strolling southward from the Masonic Temple, into the shopping district. The clangor, the smoke and dust, the hurrying crowds, all worked into his mood. The expectation of adventure was far from him. Nor was he a man who sought impressions for amusement; whatever came to him he weighed, and accepted or rejected according as it was valueless or useful. Wholesome he was; anyone might infer that from his face. Doubtless, his fault lay in his overemphasis on the purely practical; but that, after all, was a lawyer's fault, and it was counterbalanced by a sweet kindliness toward all the world—a loveableness which made for him a friend of every chance acquaintance.

It was well along in the afternoon, and shoppers were hurrying homeward. Orme noted the fresh beauty of the women and girls—Chicago has reason to be proud of her daughters—and his heart beat a little faster. Not that he was a man to be caught by every pretty stranger; but scarcely recognized by himself, there was a hidden spring of romance in his practical nature. Heart-free, he never met a woman without wondering whether she was *the* one. He had never found her; he did not know that he was looking for her; yet always there was the unconscious question.

A distant whistle, the clanging of gongs, the rapid beat of galloping hoofs—fire-engines were racing down the street. Cars stopped, vehicles of all kinds crowded in toward the curbs.

Orme paused and watched the fire horses go thundering by, their smoking chariots swaying behind them and dropping long trails of sparks. Small boys were running, men and women were stopping to gaze after the passing engines, but Orme's attention was taken by something that was happening near by, and as the gongs and the hoof-beats grew fainter he looked with interest to the street beside him.

He had got as far as the corner of Madison Street. The scramble to get out of the way of the engines had here resulted in a traffic-jam. Two policemen were moving about, shouting orders for the disentanglement of the street-cars and vehicles which seemed to be inextricably wedged together.

A burly Irish teamster was bellowing at his horse. The hind wheel of a smart barouche was caught in the fore wheel of a delivery wagon, and the driver of the delivery wagon was expressing his opinion of the situation in terms which seemed to embarrass the elderly gentleman who sat in the barouche. Orme's eye traveled through the outer edge of the disturbance, and sought its center.

There in the midst of the tangle was a big black touring-car. Its one occupant was a girl—and such a girl! Her fawn-colored cloak was thrown open; her face was unveiled. Orme was thrilled when he caught the glory of her face—the clear skin, browned by outdoor living; the demure but regular features; the eyes that seemed to transmute and reflect softly all impressions from without. Orme had never seen anyone like her—so nobly unconscious of self, so appealing and yet so calm.

She was waiting patiently, interested in the clamor about her, but seemingly undisturbed by her own part in it. Orme's eyes did not leave her face. He was merely one of a crowd at the curb, unnoted by her, but when after a time, he became aware that he was staring, he felt the blood rush to his cheeks, and he muttered: "What a boor I am!" And then, "But who can she be? who can she be?"

A policeman made his way to the black car. Orme saw him speak to the girl; saw her brows knit; and he quickly threaded his way into the street. His action was barely conscious, but nothing could have stopped him at that moment.

"You'll have to come to the station, miss," the policeman was saying.

"But what have I done?" Her voice was broken music.

"You've violated the traffic regulations, and made all this trouble, that's what you've done."

“I’m on a very important errand,” she began, “and——”

“I can’t help that, miss, you ought to have had someone with you that knew the rules.”

Her eyes were perplexed, and she looked about her as if for help. For a moment her gaze fell on Orme, who was close to the policeman’s elbow.

Now, Orme had a winning and disarming smile. Without hesitation, he touched the policeman on the shoulder, beamed pleasantly, and said: “Pardon me, officer, but this car was forced over by that dray.”

“She was on the wrong side,” returned the policeman, after a glance which modified his first intention to take offense. “She had no business over here.”

“It was either that or a collision. My wheel was scraped, as it was.” She, too, was smiling now.

The policeman pondered. He liked to be called “officer”; he liked to be smiled upon; and the girl, to judge from her manner and appearance, might well be the daughter of a man of position. “Well,” he said after a moment, “be more careful another time.” He turned and went back to his work among the other vehicles, covering the weakness of his surrender by a fresh display of angry authority.

The girl gave a little sigh of relief and looked at Orme. “Thank you,” she said.

Then he remembered that he did not know this girl. “Can I be of further service?” he asked.

“No,” she answered, “I think not. But thank you just the same.” She gave him a friendly little nod and turned to the steering-gear.

There was nothing for it but to go, and Orme returned to the curb. A moment later he saw the black car move slowly away, and he felt as though something sweet and fine were going out of his life. If only there had been some way to prolong the incident! He knew intuitively that this girl belonged to his own class. Any insignificant acquaintance might introduce them to each other. And yet convention now thrust them apart.

Sometime he might meet her. Indeed, he determined to find out who she was and make that sometime a certainty. He would prolong his stay in Chicago and search society until he found her. No one had ever before sent such a thrill through his heart. He must find her, become her friend, perhaps——But, again he laughed to himself, “What a boor I am!”

After all she was but a passing stranger, and the pleasant revery into which his glimpse of her had led him was only a revery. The memory of her beauty and elusive charm would disappear; his vivid impression of her would be effaced. But even while he thought this he found himself again wondering who she was and how he could find her. He could not drive her from his mind.

Meantime he had proceeded slowly on his way. Suddenly a benevolent, white-bearded man halted him, with a deprecating gesture. “Excuse me, sir,” he began, “but your hat——”

Orme lifted his straw hat from his head. A glance showed him that it was disfigured by a great blotch of black grease. He had held his hat in his hand while talking to the girl, and it must have touched her car at a point where the axle of the dray had rubbed. So this was his one memento of the incident.

He thanked the stranger, and walked to a near-by hatter’s, where a ready clerk set before him hats of all styles. He selected one quickly and left his soiled hat to be cleaned and sent home later.

Offering a ten-dollar bill in payment, he received in change a five-dollar bill and a silver dollar. He gave the coin a second glance. It was the first silver dollar that he had handled for some time, for he seldom visited the West.

“There’s no charge for the cleaning,” said the clerk, noting down Orme’s name and address, and handing the soiled hat to the cash-boy.

Orme, meantime, was on the point of folding the five-dollar bill to put it into his pocket-book. Suddenly he looked at it intently. Written in ink across the face of it, were the words:

“Remember Person You Pay This To.”

The writing was apparently a hurried scrawl, but the letters were large and quite legible. They appeared to have been written on an uneven surface, for there were several jogs and breaks in the writing, as if the pen had slipped.

“This is curious,” remarked Orme.

The clerk blinked his watery eyes and looked at the bill in Orme’s hand. “Oh, yes, sir,” he explained. “I remember that. The gentleman who paid it in this morning called our attention to it.”

“If he’s the man who wrote this, he probably doesn’t know that there’s a law against defacing money.”

“But it’s perfectly good, isn’t it?” inquired the clerk. “If you want another instead——”

“Oh, no,” laughed Orme. “The banks would take it.”

“But, sir——” began the clerk.

“I should like to keep it. If I can’t get rid of it, I’ll bring it back. It’s a hoax or an endless chain device or something of the sort. I’d like to find out.”

He looked again at the writing. Puzzles and problems always interested him, especially if they seemed to involve some human story.

“Very well,” said the clerk, “I’ll remember that you have it, Mr.——” he peered at the name he had set down—“Mr. Orme.”

Leaving the hatter’s, Orme turned back on State Street, retracing his steps. It was close to the dinner hour, and the character of the street crowds had changed. The shoppers had disappeared. Suburbanites were by this time aboard their trains and homeward bound. The street was thronged with hurrying clerks and shop-girls, and the cars were jammed with thousands more, all of them thinking, no doubt, of the same two things—something to eat and relaxation.

What a hive it was, this great street! And how scant the lives of the great majority! Working, eating, sleeping, marrying and given in marriage, bearing children and dying—was that all? “But growing, too,” said Orme to himself. “Growing, too.” Would this be the sum of his own life—that of a worker in the hive? It came to him with something of an inner pang that thus far his scheme of things had included little more. He wondered why he was now recognizing this scantiness, this lack in his life.

He came out of his revery to find himself again at the Madison Street corner. Again he seemed to see that beautiful girl in the car, and to hear the music of her voice.

How could he best set about to find her? She might be, like himself, a visitor in the city. But there was the touring-car. Well, she might have run in from one of the suburbs. He could think of no better plan than to call that evening on the Wallinghams and describe the unknown to Bessie and try to get her assistance. Bessie would divine the situation, and she would guy him unmercifully, he knew; but he would face even that for another glimpse of the girl of the car.

And at that moment he was startled by a sharp explosion. He looked to the street. There was the black car, bumping along with one flat tire. The girl threw on the

brakes and came to a stop.

In an instant Orme was in the street. If he thought that she would not remember him, her first glance altered the assumption, for she looked down at him with a ready smile and said: “You see, I do need you again, after all.”

As for Orme, he could think of nothing better to say than simply, “I am glad.” With that he began to unfasten the spare tire.

“I shall watch you with interest,” she went on. “I know how to run a car—though you might not think it—but I don’t know how to repair one.”

“That’s a man’s job anyway,” said Orme, busy now with the jack, which was slowly raising the wheel from the pavement.

“Shall I get out?” she asked. “Does my weight make any difference?”

“Not at all,” said Orme; but, nevertheless, she descended to the street and stood beside him while he worked. “I didn’t know there were all those funny things inside,” she mused.

Orme laughed. Her comment was vague, but to him it was enough just to hear her voice. He had got the wheel clear of the street and was taking off the burst tire.

“We seem fated to meet,” she said.

Orme looked up at her. “I hope you won’t think me a cad,” he said, “if I say that I hope we may meet many times.”

Her little frown warned him that she had misunderstood.

“Do you happen to know the Tom Wallinghams?” he asked.

Her smile returned. “I know *a* Tom Wallingham and a *Bessie* Wallingham.”

“They’re good friends of mine. Don’t you think that they might introduce us?”

“They might,” she vouchsafed, “if they happened to see us both at the same time.”

Orme returned to his task. The crowd that always gathers was now close about them, and there was little opportunity for talk. He finished his job neatly, and stowed away the old tire.

She was in the car before he could offer to help her. “Thank you again,” she said.

“If only you will let me arrange it with the Wallinghams,” he faltered.

“I will think about it.” She smiled.

He felt that she was slipping away. “Give me some clue,” he begged.

“Where is your spirit of romance?” she railed at him; then apparently relenting: “Perhaps the next time we meet——”

Orme groaned. With a little nod like that which had dismissed him at the time of his first service to her, she pulled the lever and the car moved away.

Tumult in his breast, Orme walked on. He watched the black car thread its way down the street and disappear around a corner. Then he gave himself over to his own bewildering reflections, and he was still busy with them when he found himself at the entrance of the Père Marquette. He had crossed the Rush Street bridge and found his way up to the Lake Shore Drive almost without realizing whither he was going.

Orme had come to Chicago, at the request of Eastern clients, to meet half-way the owners of a Western mining property. When he registered at the Annex, he found awaiting him a telegram saying that they had been detained at Denver and must necessarily be two days late. Besides the telegram, there had been a letter for him—a letter from his friend, Jack Baxter, to whom he had written of his coming. Jack had left the city on business, it appeared, but he urged Orme to make free of his North Side apartment. So Orme left the Annex and went to the rather too gorgeous, but very luxurious Père Marquette, where he found that the staff had been instructed to keep a close eye on his comfort. All this had happened but three short hours ago.

After getting back to the apartment, Orme’s first thought was to telephone to Bessie Wallingham. He decided, however, to wait till after dinner. He did not like to appear too eager. So he went down to the public dining-room and ate what was placed before him, and returned to his apartment just at dusk.

In a few moments he got Bessie Wallingham on the wire.

“Why, Robert Orme!” she exclaimed. “Wherever did you come from?”

“The usual place. Are you and Tom at home this evening?”

“I’m so sorry. We’re going out with some new friends. Wish I knew them well enough to ask you along. Can you have some golf with us at Arradale to-morrow afternoon?”

“Delighted! Say, Bessie, do you know a girl who runs a black touring-car?”

“What?”

“Do you know a tall, dark girl who has a black touring-car?”

“I know lots of tall, dark girls, and several of them have black touring-cars. Why?”

“Who are they?”

There was a pause and a little chuckle; then: “Now, Bob, that won’t do. You must tell me all about it to-morrow. Call for us in time to catch the one-four.”

That was all that Orme could get out of her and after a little banter and a brief exchange of greetings with Tom, who was called to the telephone by his wife, the wire was permitted to rest.

Orme pushed a chair to the window of the sitting-room and smoked lazily, looking out over the beautiful expanse of Lake Michigan, which reflected from its glassy surface the wonderful opalescence of early evening. He seemed to have set forth on a new and adventurous road. How strangely the girl of the car had come into his life!

Then he thought of the five-dollar bill, with the curious inscription. He took it from his pocket-book and examined it by the fading light. The words ran the full length of the face. Orme noticed that the writing had a foreign look. There were flourishes which seemed distinctly un-American.

He turned the bill over. Apparently there was no writing on the back, but as he looked more closely he saw a dark blur in the upper left-hand corner. Even in the dusk he could make out that this was not a spot of dirt; the edges were defined too distinctly for a smudge; and it was not black enough for an ink-blot.

Moving to the center-table, he switched on the electric lamp, and looked at the blur again. It stood out plainly now, a series of letters and numbers:

EVANS, S. R. CHI. A. 100 N. 210 E. T.

The first thought that came to Orme was that this could be no hoax. A joker would have made the curious cryptogram more conspicuous. But what did it mean? Was it a secret formula? Did it give the location of a buried treasure? And why in the name of common sense had it been written on a five-dollar bill?

More likely, Orme reasoned, it concealed information for or about some person —“S. R. Evans,” probably. And who was this S. R. Evans?

The better to study the mystery, Orme copied the inscription on a sheet of note-

paper, which he found in the table drawer. From the first he decided that there was no cipher. The letters undoubtedly were abbreviations. “Evans” must be, as he had already determined, a man’s name. “Chi” might be, probably was, “Chicago.” “100 N. 210 E.” looked like “100 (feet? paces?) north, 210 (feet? paces?) east.”

The “A.” and the “T.” bothered him. “A.” might be the place to which “S. R. Evans” was directed, or at which he was to be found—a place sufficiently indicated by the letter. Now as to the “T.”—was it “treasure”? Or was it “time”? Or “true”? Orme had no way of telling. It might even be the initial of the person who had penned the instructions.

Without knowing where “A.” was, Orme could make nothing of the cryptogram. For that matter, he realized that unless the secret were criminal it was not his affair. But he knew that legitimate business information is seldom transmitted by such mysterious means.

Again and again he went over the abbreviations, but the more closely he studied them, the more baffling he found them. The real meaning appeared to hinge on the “A.” and the “T.” Eventually he was driven to the conclusion that those two letters could not be understood by anyone who was not already partly in the secret, if secret it was. It occurred to him to have the city directory sent up to him. He might then find the address of “S. R. Evans,” if that person happened to be a Chicagoan. But it was quite likely that the “Chi.” might mean something other than that “Evans” lived in Chicago. Perhaps, in the morning he would satisfy his curiosity about “S. R. Evans,” but for the present he lacked the inclination to press the matter that far.

In the midst of his puzzling, the telephone-bell rang. He crossed the room and put the receiver to his ear. “Yes?” he questioned.

The clerk’s voice answered. “Senhor Poritol to see Mr. Orme.”

“Who?”

“S-e-n-h-o-r—P-o-r-i-t-o-l,” spelled the clerk.

“I don’t know him,” said Orme. “There must be some mistake. Are you sure that he asked for me?”

There was a pause. Orme heard a few scattered words which indicated that the clerk was questioning the stranger. Then came the information: “He says he wishes to see you about a five-dollar bill.”

“Oh!” Orme realized that he had no reason to be surprised. “Well, send him up.”

He hung up the receiver and, returning to the table, put the marked bill back into his pocket-book and slipped into a drawer the paper on which he had copied the inscription.

CHAPTER II

SENHOR PORITOL

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, Senhor Poritol,” 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 Senhor Poritol 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 “r’s” 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 Senhor Poritol, 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." Again the widened smile. 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 Senhor Poritol. "Have you got it?" His fingers worked nervously.

"Yes," said Orme slowly, "I still have it."

Senhor Poritol 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.”

Senhor Poritol sighed. “I can assure you of my honesty of purpose, sir,” he said. “I cannot tell you about it. I have not the time. Also, it is not my secret. This bill, sir, is just as good as the other one.”

“Very likely,” said Orme dryly. He was wondering whether this was some new counterfeiting dodge. How easily most persons could be induced to make the transfer!

A counterfeiter, however, would hardly work by so picturesque and noticeable a method, unless he were carefully disguised—hardly even then. Was Senhor Poritol disguised? Orme looked at him more closely. No, he could see where the roots of the coarse black hair joined the scalp. And there was not the least evidence of make-up on the face. Nevertheless, 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, Senhor Poritol. I don’t know what all this mystery conceals, but I can’t give you that bill unless I know more about it—and I won’t,” he added, as he saw Senhor Poritol 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. Senhor Poritol 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 Senhor Poritol 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 wept to see him. 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.” Senhor Poritol’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 laughed. “I have no interest in South American gold mines.”

“Then accept this fresh bill,” implored Senhor Poritol, “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 Senhor Poritol, 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.

Senhor Poritol 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, Senhor Poritol. Print

in small capitals the name, ‘S. R. Evans.’”

Senhor Poritol 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.”

Senhor Poritol slowly printed out the name.

Orme took the paper, laying it before him. He then produced the coveted bill from his pocket-book. Senhor Poritol 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. “Senhor Poritol,” 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?”

Senhor Poritol 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.”

Senhor Poritol 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 pocket-book. “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.”

Senhor Poritol 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 lie to me, but you will have to make things clear." He considered. After all, he must make allowance; so he said: "Come back to-morrow with evidence that you are entitled to the bill, and you shall have it." He released Senhor Poritol.

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 fop. 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 Senhor Poritol had disappeared Orme telephoned to the clerk. "Send me up a porter," he ordered, "and have him stand just outside my door, with orders to enter if he hears any disturbance." He waited at the door till the porter appeared, then told him to remain in a certain place until he was needed, or until the visitors left.

Senhor Poritol remained downstairs for several minutes. Evidently he was explaining the situation to his friend. But after a time Orme heard the clang of the elevator door, and in response to the knock that quickly followed, he opened his own door. At 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 Senhor Alcatrante," explained Senhor Poritol.

The newcomer bowed with suave dignity.

"Senhor Alcatrante? The name is familiar," said Orme, smiling.

Poritol 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.

Alcatrante smiled, displaying a prominent row of uneven teeth.

“My young friend, Poritol,” he began, “tells me that you have in your possession the record of a secret belonging to him. 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. Alcatrante’s reputation was that of a fox, and as for Poritol, he was, to say the least, a person of uncertain qualities. Orme could not but admire the subtle manner in which Alcatrante sought delicately to limit his doubts to the mere possibility that Poritol was trying to pass spurious money. He decided not to settle the question at this moment.

“This seems to be rather a mixed-up affair, Senhor Alcatrante,” he said. “There is much more in it than appears. Call on me to-morrow morning, and you shall have my decision.”

Alcatrante and Poritol 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 to-morrow morning.”

“One other suggestion,” continued Alcatrante. “You may not be willing to give up the bill, but is there any reason why you should refuse to let Senhor Poritol copy the writing that is on it?”

“Only my determination to think the whole matter over before I do anything at all,” Orme replied.

“But the bill came into your hands by chance,” insisted the minister. “The information means nothing to you, though obviously it means a great deal to my young friend, here. May I ask what right you have to deny this request?”

“What right?” Orme’s eyes narrowed. “My right is that I have the bill and the information, and I intend to understand the situation better before I give the information to anyone else.”

“But you recognized Senhor Poritol’s handwriting on the bill,” exclaimed the minister.

“On the face of it, yes. He did not write the abbreviations on the back.”

“Abbreviations!” exclaimed Poritol.

“Please let the matter rest till morning,” said Orme stubbornly. “I have told you just what I would do.”

Poritol opened his mouth, to speak, but Alcatrante silenced him with a frown. “Your word is sufficient, Mr. Orme,” he said. “We will call to-morrow morning. Is ten o’clock too early?”

“Not at all,” said Orme. “Doubtless I shall be able to satisfy you. I merely wish to think it over.”

With a formal bow, Alcatrante turned to the door and departed, Poritol following.

Orme strolled back to his window and stood idly watching the lights of the vessels on the lake. But his mind was not on the unfolded view before him. He was puzzling over this mystery in which he had so suddenly become a factor. Unquestionably, the five-dollar bill held the key to some serious problem.

Surely Alcatrante had not come merely as the friend of Poritol, for the difference in the station of the two South Americans was marked. Poritol was a cheap character—useful, no doubt, in certain kinds of work, but vulgar and unconvincing. He might well be one of those promoters who hang on at the edge of great projects, hoping to pick up a commission here and there. His strongest point was his obvious effort to triumph over his own insignificance, for this effort, by its comic but desperate earnestness, could not but command a certain degree of respect.

Alcatrante, on the other hand, was a name to make statesmen knit their brows. A smooth trouble-maker, he had set Europe by the ears in the matter of unsettled South American loans, dexterously appealing to the much-overworked Monroe Doctrine every time his country was threatened by a French or German or British blockade. But his mind was of no small caliber. He could hold his own not only at his own game of international chess, but in the cultured discussion of polite topics. Orme knew of him as a clever after-dinner speaker, a man who could, when he so desired, please greatly by his personal charm.

No, Alcatrante was no friend of Poritol’s; nor was it likely that, as protector of

the interests of his countrymen, he would go so far as to accompany them on their errands unless much was at stake. Perhaps Poritol was Alcatrante's tool and had bungled some important commission. It occurred to Orme that the secret of the bill might be connected with the negotiation of a big business concession in Alcatrante's country. "S. R. Evans" might be trying to get control of rubber forests or mines—in the Urinaba Mountains, perhaps, after all.

In any event, he felt positive that the secret of the bill did not rightfully belong to Poritol. If the bill had been in his possession, he should have been able to copy the abbreviated message. Indeed, the lies that he had told were all against the notion of placing any confidence in him. The 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 in 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 on out to the street. What could a Japanese want of him?

CHAPTER III

THE SHADOWS

Orme walked north along the Lake Shore Drive. As best he could, he pieced together the curious adventures of the day. The mystery of the five-dollar bill and the extreme anxiety of Poritol seemed to be complicated by the appearance of the Japanese at the Père Marquette. Orme sought the simplest explanation. He knew that mysterious happenings frequently become clear when one definitely tries to fit them into the natural routine of every-day life. The Japanese, he mused, was probably some valet out of a job. But how could he have learned Orme's name. Possibly he had not known it; the clerk might have given it to him. The incident hardly seemed worth second thought, but he found himself persistently turning to one surmise after another concerning the Japanese. For Orme was convinced that he stood on the edge of a significant situation.

Suddenly he took notice of a figure a short distance ahead of him. This man—apparently very short and stocky—was also going northward, but he was moving along in an erratic manner. At one moment he would hurry his steps, at the next he would almost stop. Evidently he was regulating his pace with a purpose.

Orme let his eyes travel still farther ahead. He observed two men actively conversing. From time to time their discussion became so animated that they halted for a moment and faced each other, gesticulating rapidly. Every time they halted, the single figure nearer to Orme slowed down his own pace.

The oblivious couple came under a street lamp and again turned toward each other. Their profiles were distinct. Orme had already suspected their identity, for both had high hats and carried canes, and one of them was in a sack suit, while the other wore a frock coat. And now the profiles verified the surmise. There was no mistaking the long, tip-tilted nose of the shorter man and the glinting spectacles of the other. The two were Poritol and Alcatrante.

But who was the man trailing them? A friendly guard? Or a menacing enemy? Orme decided to shadow the shadow.

At a corner not far from the entrance to Lincoln Park, Poritol and Alcatrante became so apparently excited that they stood, chattering volubly for several minutes. The shadow stopped altogether. He folded his arms and looked out over the lake like any casual wanderer, but now and then he turned his head toward the others. He seemed to be indifferent to what they were saying, though he was near enough to them to catch fragments of their conversation, if he so desired. The South Americans were probably talking in that dialect of Portuguese which their nation has developed.

Meantime Orme also stopped, taking up a position like that of the shadow. He saw Poritol, with outstretched, questioning hands, his eyes fixed on the face of Alcatrante, who seemed to be delivering orders. The flashing reflections of light from the minister's spectacles indicated his authoritative nods of the head.

After a time Alcatrante evidently completed his instructions. He removed his hat and bowed formally. Little Poritol echoed the salute and, turning, shot off down a side street, with ridiculously rapid movements of his short legs. Orme inferred that he was bound for the North Clark Street car line. Alcatrante continued along the drive.

When the South Americans separated, the shadow quickly came to life. He hesitated for an instant, as if in doubt which of the two to follow, then decided in favor of Alcatrante, who was moving in leisurely fashion toward the park entrance, his head bowed in thought. Orme found himself wondering what snaky plots were winding through that dark mind.

The procession of three silently entered the park. The shadow was about a hundred feet behind Alcatrante. Orme kept the same distance between himself and the shadow.

The minister was in no hurry. Indifferent to his surroundings he made his way, with no apparent interest in the paths he took. At last he turned into a dark stretch and for the moment was lost to sight in the night.

Suddenly the shadow darted forward. Orme hurried his own pace, and in a moment he heard the sounds of a short, sharp struggle—a scuffling of feet in the gravel, a heavy fall. There was no outcry.

Orme broke into a run. At a point where the path was darkest he checked himself for an instant. A little distance ahead a man lay flat on the ground, and bending over him was a short, stocky figure.

Orme leaped forward and swung his cane. The stick was tough and the blow was

hard enough to send a man to earth, but the robber had heard Orme's approach, and looked up from his victim just in time. With a motion indescribably swift, he caught with one hand the descending cane and wrenched it from Orme's grasp. Then he crouched to spring.

At this instant Orme heard footsteps behind him. A turn of the head showed a threatening figure at his back. There had been four men in that procession through the park!

By a quick leap to one side, Orme placed himself for the moment out of danger. His two assailants, moving too fast to stop, bumped together. They faced about for another spring at him. And then there was a short scratching sound, and in the hand of the man on the ground flared a match.

"Ha!" exclaimed the prostrate Alcatrante, "I thought so!"

Orme found himself looking into the contorted faces of two Japanese.

Discovery was evidently the last thing the hold-up men desired, for they disappeared like a flash, diving through the shrubbery behind them. Orme, dazed and breathing hard, attempted no immediate pursuit. He stepped quickly to Alcatrante and helped him to his feet.

"I am not hurt," said the South American. "When the man threw me to the ground, I feigned that I was stunned. It is wiser not to resist a thug, is it not so?" He brushed the dust from his clothing with his handkerchief. Orme handed him his hat, which had rolled to one side. The minister rubbed it carefully with his coat-sleeve. "See," he laughed, nodding at the ground, "my cane is broken. I must have fallen on it."

"Since you're not hurt," said Orme, "we'd better get after the thieves."

"Bah!" replied Alcatrante. "What is the use? They are already far away—and they got nothing." He laughed. "Is it not always better to avoid notoriety, Mr. Orme?"

"As a rule, no doubt—but in this instance——"

"No," said Alcatrante firmly, "I really must insist that we let the matter drop. As for me, I shall return to my hotel. Perhaps you will walk along with me."

Orme hesitated. "I don't like those thieves to get off without a chase, *senhor*."

"But, my dear Mr. Orme, they did me no harm."

Orme shrugged his shoulders. "You forget that there was one after me as well as

one after you."

"No, I don't forget that. But don't you see, Mr. Orme? Those two men were not after our valuables."

"Indeed?"

"Not at all. What they would like is my little friend Poritol's secret."

"But why Japanese?" Orme was puzzled.

"Why, indeed? A cunning Japanese might as easily have got wind of it as anyone else."

"But why did you say, 'I thought so'?" persisted Orme.

"Did I say that? It must have been because I suspected that only a Japanese could be so agile as my assailant. But all this is immaterial. I should have warned you that Poritol's secret is dangerous. You should not have left your apartments."

"Well, this certainly is a queer kettle of fish," muttered Orme. He was beginning to feel disgusted with the situation. He did not like Alcatrante's oily smoothness, and he wondered whether it would not have been better to hand the bill over to Poritol at the first demand. But it came to his mind that in a certain degree he stood committed to continue the policy he had adopted. He had sought adventure; it was coming to him in full measure.

Together they walked back toward the park entrance. The minister seemingly exerted himself to regain the ground he had lost with Orme. He proved an interesting conversationalist—keen, slightly cynical, but not without an under-note of earnestness.

"You have seen me much abused by your press, Mr. Orme," he said. "That is natural. I have the interests of my own country to protect, and those interests are of necessity sometimes opposed to the interests of other countries. But if your people would be even more patient with us—all we need is time. There is reason for our persistent to-morrow; for we are young, and it is a slow process to realize on our resources. That is why we do not pay our debts more promptly."

Orme said nothing, but he thought of looted South American treasuries, of exiled presidents squandering their official stealings at Paris and Monte Carlo, of concessions sold and sold again to rival foreign companies.

They had now reached the park entrance. "There is a cab," said Alcatrante. "You

will ride with me as far as your hotel?”

“Thank you, no,” said Orme. “I rather need the walk.”

Alcatrante smiled persuasively. “Permit me to urge you. If you should be robbed, my little friend might lose his precious secret. Poor boy!” he added. “His father was my friend, and I cannot refuse him a service.”

The cab had swung around to the curb beside them. Orme had no fear of robbery on the lighted drive, but since Alcatrante was so insistent he felt inclined to yield. He might as well ride; so he permitted the minister to bow him into the cab, and presently they were whirling along southward. There was a period of silence. Then Alcatrante spoke meditatively.

“You see how it happened, I suppose,” he said. “Those Japanese were waiting outside your hotel. When Poritol and I came out, one of them followed us, while the other remained on guard. Then you started on your stroll, and the man who remained on guard set out after you.”

“Yes,” said Orme, “but I don’t see how the fellow could have known who I was.”

Alcatrante laughed. “Oh, he could have placed you in a number of different ways. He may have got your description from one of the servants—or from the clerk. But it is enough that he did know you.”

“Well,” said Orme, “this is beyond me. That five-dollar bill seems to be very much desired by different groups of persons.”

Alcatrante nodded. “I am not sure,” he said slowly, “but that it would ease young Poritol’s mind if you would place the bill in my hands for safekeeping. Not that he mistrusts you, Mr. Orme, but he imagines that you may not realize how important it is to him, and you might not guard it carefully.”

“I agreed to keep it until to-morrow,” said Orme, quietly. “As for thieves, my apartment is on the tenth floor, pretty well out of their reach. The only danger of robbery lies between the cab and the hotel office.

“I know, I know,” chuckled Alcatrante. “It is, of course, as you will. I was merely thinking of my young friend’s peace of mind. I am his fellow-countryman, you see, and his confidence in me——” he stopped, with another chuckle. “Singular, is it not, how impressionable are the young?”

Orme said nothing. He did not enjoy this fencing.

“Look at the lake,” Alcatrante suddenly exclaimed. “How beautiful an expanse of water. It has so much more color than the sea. But you should see our wonderful harbor of Rio, Mr. Orme. Perhaps some day I shall be permitted to show you its magnificences.”

“Who knows?” said Orme. “It would be very pleasant.”

“As to the bill,” continued Alcatrante quickly, “do you care to give it to me?”

Orme felt himself frowning. “I will keep it till the morning,” he said.

“Oh, well, it is of no consequence.” Alcatrante laughed shortly. “See, here is your hotel. Your company has been a pleasure to me, Mr. Orme. You arrived most opportunely in the park.”

Orme jumped to the curb and, turning, shook the hand that was extended to him. “Thank you for the lift, Senhor Alcatrante,” he said. “I shall look for you in the morning.”

“In the morning—yes. And pray, my dear sir, do not wander in the streets any more this evening. Our experience in the park has made me apprehensive.” The minister lifted his hat, and the cab rattled away.

The entrance to the Père Marquette was a massive gateway, which opened upon a wide tunnel, leading to an interior court. On the farther side of the court were the doors of the hotel lobby. As a rule, carriages drove through the tunnel into the court, but Orme had not waited for this formality.

He started through the tunnel. There was no one in sight. He noted the elaborate terra-cotta decorations of the walls, and marveled at the bad taste which had lost sight of this opportunity for artistic simplicity. But through the opening before him he could see the fountain playing in the center of the court. The central figure of the group, a naiad, beckoned with a hand from which the water fell in a shower. The effect was not so unpleasing. If one wished to be rococo, why not be altogether so? Like the South Americans? Was their elaborate ornamentation plastered on to an inner steel construction? Orme wondered.

Midway of the tunnel, and at the right as one entered, was a door leading into the porter’s office. This door was shut, but as Orme approached it, it noiselessly opened out. He expected to see a porter appear, and when no person stepped over the sill, he inferred that the door had been blown open by an interior draught.

Just as he was turning out to go around the the door—which shut off all view of him from the inner court—a figure shot through the opening.

Before Orme could dodge, he was seized firmly by the shoulders and jerked into the room, with a force that sent him staggering. He tripped over a chair and went to the floor, but quickly scrambled to his feet and wheeled about.

Two men stood between him and the door, which had been closed silently and swiftly. They were short and stockily built. Orme exclaimed aloud, for the light that filtered through a window from the street showed two faces unmistakably oriental.

If this was an ordinary robbery, the daring of the robbers was almost incredible. They ran the risk that the porter would return—if they had not already made away with him. Only the most desperate purpose could explain their action.

“What do you want?” demanded Orme.

“Your pocket-book,” replied one of the men—“queek!” He smiled an elusive smile as he spoke.

“What if I refuse?” said Orme.

“Then we take. Be queek.”

A call for help would hardly bring anyone; but Orme gave a loud cry, more to disconcert his enemies than with any hope of rescue.

At the same instant he rushed toward the door, and struck out at the nearer Japanese.

The blow did not land. His wrist was caught in a grip like an iron clamp, and he found himself performing queer gyrations. The Japanese had turned his back toward Orme and swung the imprisoned arm over his shoulder. A quick lurch forward, and Orme sailed through the air, coming down heavily on his side. His arm was still held, and in a few seconds he was on his back, his assailant astride him and smiling down into his face.

Orme struggled to free himself, and promptly felt a breaking strain on his imprisoned arm. The knee of the Japanese was under the back of Orme’s elbow. A moderate use of the leverage thus obtained would snap the arm like a pipe-stem. This Orme realized, as he ceased struggling. The strain on his arm relaxed slightly, but the grip was maintained.

“Jiu-jitsu,” explained the Japanese in a tone that sounded gently apologetic.

The other robber now stooped and ran his hands over Orme’s coat. Finding the pocket-book, he took it from its inside pocket and went swiftly to a table. He

produced from his own pocket a little electric hand-lamp, by the light of which he took rapid count of Orme's money.

His eyes glittered; a wide scar on his forehead stood out whitely. Suddenly he gave a little cry and held up a single bill. He jabbered excitedly to his companion for a moment, then spoke quietly to Orme.

"This all we want," he said. "We are not thief, see—I put other five-dollar bill in its place and leave pocket-book here."

He thrust the selected bill into his pocket, put the fresh bill in the pocket-book, and laid the pocket-book on the table.

"See here," said Orme, still prone, "what's the meaning of all this?"

"Don't say." The Japanese smiled. He went over to the door. "Come," he said. The man astride Orme released his hold and sprang to his feet. Like a flash, both the Japanese disappeared.

Orme jumped up. Seizing his pocket-book and his hat, he darted after his assailants. At the street entrance to the tunnel, he looked quickly in both directions, but his men were not in sight.

Pursuit was futile. Slowly he turned back. He thought of notifying the police, but, after all, he was none the worse off—except for his promise to Poritol and Alcatrante, now involuntarily broken. He must explain to them as best he could. The marked bill had been of no consequence to him except as a focus of adventure. And he had had about as much adventure as he could expect for one evening.

But the secret of the bill still tantalized him. Blindfolded, he had played in a game at which the others saw. It seemed unfair—as if he had some right to know the meaning of all these mysterious incidents. Why had Poritol wanted the bill so badly? Why had the desire to possess it driven the two Japanese to such extreme measures?

Orme crossed the court and entered the lobby. The clerk looked at him curiously.

"Mr. Orme," he said, "there is a young lady in the reception-room, waiting to see you."

"Me?" Orme looked his surprise.

"Yes, sir. She gave no name."

"Has she been waiting long?"

“Nearly an hour.”

Without further questioning, Orme turned to the door of the little green-and-gold room. At the threshold he paused in bewilderment. Arising to meet him, smiling frankly, was the girl of the car.

CHAPTER IV

THE GIRL OF THE CAR

“Oh,” she said, with a little gasp of recognition, “are *you* Mr. Orme?” Her cheeks flushed softly.

He bowed; his heart was beating furiously, and for the moment he dared not try to speak.

“Then we do meet again,” she exclaimed—“and as usual I need your help. Isn’t it queer?”

“Any service that I”—Orme began haltingly—“of course, anything that I can do ____”

The girl laughed—a merry ripple of sound; then caught herself and changed her manner to grave earnestness. “It is very important,” she said. “I am looking for a five-dollar bill that was paid to you to-day.”

Orme started. “What? You, too?”

“I, too? Has—has anybody else——?” Her gravity was more intense.

“Why, yes,” said Orme—“a little man from South America.”

“Oh,—Mr. Poritol?” Her brows were knit in an adorable frown.

“Yes—and two Japanese.”

“Oh!” Her exclamation was apprehensive.

“The Japanese got it,” added Orme, ruefully. That she had the right to this information it never occurred to him to question.

The girl stood rigidly. “Whatever shall I do now?” she whispered. “My poor father!”

She looked helplessly at Orme. His self-possession had returned, and as he urged her to a chair, he condemned himself for not guessing how serious the loss of the

bill must be to her. “Sit down,” he said. “Perhaps I can help. But you see, I know so little of what it all means. Tell me everything you can.”

With a sigh, she sank into the chair. Orme stood before her, waiting.

“That bill tells, if I am not mistaken,” she said, wearily, “where certain papers have been hidden. My father is ill at our place in the country. He must have those papers before midnight to-morrow, or——” Tears came into her eyes. Orme would have given much for the right to comfort her. “So much depends upon finding them,” she added—“more even than I can begin to tell you.”

“Let me help,” said Orme, eager to follow those papers all over Chicago, if only it would serve her. “Hear my story first.” Rapidly he recounted the adventures of the evening. She listened, eyes intent, nodding in recognition of his description of Poritol and Alcatrante. When he came to the account of the fight in the porter’s office and spoke of the Japanese with the scar on his forehead, she interrupted.

“Oh! That was Maku,” she exclaimed.

“Maku?”

“Our butler. He must have overheard my father and me.”

“Then he knew the value of the papers.”

“He must have. I am sorry, Mr. Orme, that you have been so roughly used.”

“That doesn’t matter,” he said. “They didn’t hurt me in the least. And now, what is your story? How did you get on the trail of the bill?”

“We came back from the East a few days ago,” she began. “My father had to undergo a slight operation, and he wished to have it performed by his friend, Dr. Allison, who lives here, so we went to our home in—one of the northern suburbs.

“Father could not go back East as soon as he had expected to, and he had the papers sent to him, by special arrangement with the—with the other parties to the contract. Mr. Poritol followed us from the East. I—we had known him there. He was always amusing company; we never took him seriously. He had business here, he said; but on the first day of his arrival he came out to call on us. The next night our house was entered by a burglar. Besides the papers, only a few things were taken.”

“Poritol?” exclaimed Orme, incredulously.

“It happened that a Chicago detective had been in our village on business during the day,” she went on. “He had recognized on the streets a well-known thief, named Walsh. When we reported the burglary the detective remembered seeing Walsh, and hunted him out and arrested him. In his pockets was some jewelry belonging to me, and in his room the other stolen articles were found—everything except the papers.”

“Did you tell the police about the papers?”

“No, it seemed wiser not to. They were in a sealed envelope with—with my father’s name on it, and would surely have been returned, if found with the other things. There are reasons why they would have—would try to please my father. We did let them know that an envelope containing something of value had not been recovered, and told them to make a thorough search.

“The afternoon after the burglary the news of Walsh’s arrest was telephoned out to us from Chicago. I talked with my father, who was not well enough to leave the house, and it seemed best that someone should go to the county jail and see Walsh and try to get the papers. My father had reasons for not wishing the loss to become known. Only he and I were acquainted with the contents of the envelope; so I insisted on going to Chicago and interviewing the burglar.”

She laughed, intercepting Orme’s admiring look. “Oh, it was easy enough. I planned to take our lawyer as an escort.”

“Did you?”

“No, and that is where my troubles really began. Just as I was preparing to go, Mr. Poritol called. I had forgotten that we had asked him out for an afternoon of golf. He *is* such a funny player.

“As soon as I told him I was going to the Chicago jail to interview a burglar about some stolen goods, he insisted on acting as escort. He was so amusingly persistent that I finally agreed. We set out for the city in my car, not waiting to take a train.

“When we reached the jail I presented a letter which my father had written, and the officials agreed to let me have a private interview with Walsh.”

Orme opened his eyes. This girl’s father must have considerable influence.

“It is a horrid place, the jail. They took us through a corridor to Walsh’s cell, and called him to the grating. I made Mr. Poritol stand back at the other side of the corridor so that he couldn’t hear us talk.

“I asked the man what he had done with the papers. He insisted that he had seen none. Then I promised to have him freed, if he would only return them. He looked meditatively over my shoulders and after a moment declined the offer, again insisting that he didn’t understand what I was talking about. ‘I took the other things, miss,’ he said, ‘and I suppose I’ll get time for it. But so help me, I didn’t see no papers.’”

The girl paused and looked at Orme. “This seems like wasting minutes when we might be searching.”

Orme was pleased to hear the “we.”

“Well,” she went on, “I knew that the man was not telling the truth. He was too hesitant to be convincing. So I began to promise him money. At every offer he looked past my shoulder and then repeated his denials. The last time he raised his eyes I had an intuition that something was going on behind me. I turned quickly. There stood Mr. Poritol, extending his fingers in the air and forming his mouth silently into words. He was raising my bids!

“It flashed upon me that the papers would be of immense value to Mr. Poritol—for certain reasons. If only I had thought of it before! I spoke to him sharply and told him to go outside. It always seemed natural to order him about, like a little dog.”

“However, little dogs have the sharpest teeth,” remarked Orme.

“That is true. He replied that he couldn’t think of leaving me alone in such a place. So there was nothing for me to do except to go. I would have to return later without Mr. Poritol. ‘Come along,’ I said. ‘My errand is done.’

“Mr. Poritol smiled at me in a way I didn’t like. The burglar, meantime, had gone to a little table at the back of his cell. There was an ink-bottle there and he seemed to be writing. Looking into the cell, Mr. Poritol said: ‘The poor fellow has very unpleasant quarters.’ Then he said to Walsh: ‘Can’t we do something to make your enforced stay here more comfortable, my very dear sir?’”

Orme smiled at the unconscious mimicry of her accent.

“Walsh came back to the grating. He held in his hand a five-dollar bill—the one that has made so much trouble. It had been smuggled in to him in some way. ‘You might get me some “baccy,”’ he said, thrusting the bill through the bars and grinning.

“Now I understood what was going on. I reached for the bill, as though it were

intended for me, but Mr. Poritol was quicker. He snatched the bill and put it in his pocket.

“I didn’t know what to do. But suddenly Mr. Poritol seemed to be frightened. Perhaps he thought that I would have him arrested, though he might have known that there were reasons why I couldn’t. He gave me a panicky look and rushed out of the corridor. Afterward I learned that he told the guard I had sent him on an errand.

“Well”—she sighed—“of course, I followed, after a last glance at Walsh, who was peering through the grating with a look of evil amusement. He must have been well paid, that burglar. But then,” she mused, “they could afford it—yes, they could well afford it.

“When I got to the street, Poritol was just disappearing in my car! I can only think that he had lost his head very completely, for he didn’t need to take the car. He could have mixed with the street-crowd and gone afoot to the hotel where ____”

“Alcatrante?”

“Yes, Mr. Alcatrante—where he was stopping, and have waited there. But Mr. Alcatrante was playing golf at Wheaton, and Mr. Poritol seems to have thought that he must go straight to him. He cannot escape from being spectacular, you see.

“He ran out through the western suburbs, putting on more and more speed. Meantime I set a detective on the track of the car. That is how I learned what I am now telling you. As for the car, Mr. Poritol sent it back to me this morning with a hired chauffeur. He wrote a note of abject apology, saying that he had been beside himself and had not realized what he was doing.

“After setting the detective at work, I went out to our place by train. I dreaded confessing my failure to father, but he took it very well. We had dinner together in his study. Maku was in the room while we were talking. Now I can see why Maku disappeared after dinner and did not return.”

“But how did Poritol lose the bill?” asked Orme.

The girl laughed. “It was really ridiculous. He over-speeded and was caught by one of those roadside motor-car traps, ten or twelve 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 ten dollars. He had in his pocket only eleven dollars and sixty-three cents, and the marked bill was nearly half of 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. Poritol 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. Poritol was more afraid of delay than anything else. He knew that I would put someone on his track.”

“When did all this happen?” asked Orme.

“Yesterday afternoon. Mr. Poritol 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 have 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 to-day, 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 anyone 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 'Chi.'—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 Poritol 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—to-night?”

“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 jinriksha 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 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. Poritol 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 more 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 its experience. He found himself recalling her every change of expression, 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 fled 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.”

“‘Chi. 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 one hundred paces. Then turn east, at right angles and go two hundred and ten 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 two hundred and ten 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 apparent 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, one hundred 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 though 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.

So he jumped to his feet and ran northward, then turned to the west. Circling about, he made for the gate at which he had entered. His pursuer either took the wrong lead in the darkness or stopped to examine Maku, if or when Orme went through the gate and doubled back, outside the fence, to the car, there was no sound of steps behind him. He jumped to the chauffeur's seat.

"Well?" inquired the girl, eagerly.

"Too late," said Orme. "I'm sorry. I caught Maku, but the man with the envelope got away."

She laid a hand on his arm. "Are you hurt?" There was unconcealed anxiety in her voice.

To say the things he yearned to say! To be tender to her! But he controlled his feelings and explained briefly what had happened, at the same time throwing on the power and driving the car slowly northward.

“I only know that the fellow ran northward,” he said. “He may have worked back or he may have gone on. He may have climbed another tree and waited.”

By this time they had come to the northern limits of the grounds, but he had seen no one.

Suddenly the girl exclaimed “Listen!”

Orme stopped the car. Somewhere from the distance came a faint hum. “Another car!” he muttered.

“Yes,” she said. “Oh, but I can do no more. I am tired, Mr. Orme. We cannot catch that car, even if it does hold the man we want—and there is no way of being sure that it does.”

“If there is any place to leave you, I will go after him alone.” He had turned the car as he spoke and was sending it slowly southward.

“No,” she said wearily. “We—you must do no more to-night. You have been so good, Mr. Orme—to help me in a matter of which I could tell you almost nothing. I won’t even try to thank you—except by saying that you have understood.”

He knew what she meant. He had met her need, because he had known its greatness without her telling him. His recognition of her plight had been unaccompanied by any suggestion of ignored conventions. No gushing thanks would have pleased him half so much.

He smiled at her wistfully. “Does it all end here?”

“No,” she said, “I will not let it end here. We are friends already; in fact, Mr. Orme, as soon as I can do so, I will see that we are friends in name. Can you accept as little a promise as that?”

“I can accept any promise from you,” he said gravely. “And now shall I take you home?”

“Not home. It is too far. But I have some friends a few blocks away who will take me in. Turn here, please.”

Under her guidance he took the car through several streets, drawing up at last before a large, comfortable-looking place, set back from the street, with a wide,

shrub-dotted lawn before it. Several windows were still lighted. He descended to help her out.

She hesitated. “I hate to ask it, Mr. Orme,” she finally said, “but you can catch the trolley back to Chicago. They will take care of the car here.”

He nodded. “But one thing, Girl,” he said. “I am going to find that other Japanese to-morrow. I shall get the envelope. Will you call me up at the apartment to-morrow noon? If I am not there, leave word where I can find you.”

“I will do that. But don’t get yourself hurt.” She let him help her to the ground.

“At noon,” he said.

“At noon. Good-night, my friend.” She offered her hand.

“Good-night, Girl,” he said, and then he bent over and kissed her fingers gently.

He stood by the car until she had crossed the lawn and ascended the steps—until the door opened and admitted her.

CHAPTER VI

A CHANCE LEAD

To follow the girl's suggestion and return at once to Chicago was Orme's intention when he said good-night to her. The hour was close to midnight, and the evening had been crowded so full with bewildering adventure that he was tired. Moreover, he looked forward to a morning that might well test his endurance even more strenuously.

He had now committed himself definitely to continue in the field against the Japanese. Except for his desire to serve this wonderful girl who had come so suddenly into his life, he doubtless would have permitted the mystery of the marked bill to remain unsolved. But since the recovery of the stolen papers was so important to her, he was prepared to run any risk in the struggle.

Who was she? But no, that was a question she did not wish him to ask. She was simply "Girl"—beautiful, tender, comprehending—his ideal incarnate. As he stood there, hesitant, before the house into which she had disappeared, he pictured her again—even to the strand of rebellious hair which had blown across her cheek. He could discover no fault in her perfection.

A man came into view on the drive at the side of the house: a servant to care for the car, of course; and Orme, with the uneasy feeling of one who has been trespassing, moved away toward the corner of the block. He looked back, however, and saw the newcomer clamber into the car and send it slowly up the drive.

At the same time a light illumined one of the upper windows of the house. A shadow was thrown on the curtain. Perhaps it was the girl herself. What explanation had she given her friends for appearing so late at their door? Probably she had told them no more than that she was tired and belated. She was not the kind of girl from whom an elaborate explanation would be asked or expected.

Then a thought startled him. Was this, perhaps, her home? No, she had spoken of

the people who lived here as her friends, and she would not have tried to keep the truth from him by subterfuge. If this were her home and she had not wished him to know it, she would have requested him to leave her before they had come so far.

It dawned upon him that it would not be hard for him to learn who lived in this house, and possibly through that knowledge to get a clue to her identity. His heart warmed as he realized how completely she had trusted him. His assurance that he would not try to find out who she was had satisfied her. And Orme knew that, if she had been so readily assured, it was because she had recognized the truth and devotion in him.

With a happy sigh, he turned his back once and for all and walked rapidly away. But he did not go toward the electric-car line, which he knew must lie a few blocks to the west. Instead, he retraced the course they had come, for he had decided to visit the university campus once more and try to discover what had become of Maku, and more especially of the other Japanese, who had secured the papers. That he would be recognized and connected with the attack on Maku, was unlikely.

When he came to the corner of Sheridan Road and Chicago Avenue, he hesitated for a moment. Should he go north through the campus and seek a trace of the Japanese who had escaped? Nearly half an hour had gone since the adventure among the trees, and the man must have got completely away by this time. Having the papers, he surely would not linger to learn the fate of Maku.

Orme found himself wondering how the Japanese had got to Evanston. Granting that it had not taken them long to solve the abbreviated directions on the five-dollar bill, they could hardly have come by motor-car, for they had had a good half-hour start, and yet Orme had discovered them before their work was completed. Only on the assumption that their car had broken down on the way could Orme admit that they had used a motor-car. Moreover, how were two Japanese, whose appearance did not indicate the possession of much ready money—how were they likely to have a car, or even to rent one? And had they believed that they might be pursued? Would they not have come to Evanston by an obvious route of train or trolley.

These considerations led Orme to think that the car which he and the girl had heard in the distance could not have been occupied by the escaping Japanese.

The fellow, then, had probably made for the electric-car line, and in that event he would be well on his way to Chicago by this time. The car he had caught must

have gone southward from Evanston about ten forty-five. The conductor would be likely to remember having had a Japanese on board; perhaps he would even remember where the Oriental had got off. The natural course for Orme, therefore, was to take a car himself and, if he did not meet the other car returning, to get off at the car-barns and make inquiries. The possibility that the Japanese had changed to the elevated road on the North Side was great, but the conductor might remember if the change had been made.

But Orme did not turn at once toward the car-line. Though his logic pointed in that direction, he was irresistibly influenced by a desire to walk eastward along the drive where it skirted the southern end of the campus. A half-hour might go by, and still he would not be too late to meet, on its return, the car which the Japanese would have taken. He started, therefore, eastward, toward the lake, throwing frequent glances through the iron fence at his left and into the dark shadows of the oaks.

He came to the lake without encountering anyone. The road here swept to the southward, and on the beach near the turn squatted the low brick building which the girl had told him was the life-saving station. A man was standing on the little veranda. His suit of duck was dimly white in the light from the near-by street-lamps.

“One of the crew,” Orme surmised, and he sauntered slowly down the little path.

The beach sloped grayly to the edge of the lake, where a breakwater thrust its blunt nose out like a stranded hulk. The water was calm, lapping the sand so gently that it was hard to believe that so gentle a murmur could ever swell into the roar of a northeaster. A launch that was moored at the outer end of the breakwater lay quiet on the tideless surface.

“Good-evening,” said Orme, as the man turned his head. “Are you on watch?”

The life-saver slowly stretched. “Till twelve,” he answered.

“Not much longer, then?”

“No, thank heaven!”

Orme laughed. “I suppose you do get more than you want of it,” he said. “But on a fine night like this I should think it would be mighty pleasant.”

“Not if you have to put in several hours of study after you get through.”

“Study?”

“Yes. You see, I have a special examination to-morrow.”

“A service examination?”

“Oh, no—college.”

“Are you a student?”

“All the crew are students. It helps a good deal, if you are working your way through college.”

“Oh, I see. But surely the university hasn’t opened for the fall?”

“No, but there are preliminary exams, for those who have conditions to work off.”

Orme nodded. “It’s a fine campus you have—with the groves of oaks.”

“Yes.”

“Just the place for a quiet evening stroll. I thought I’d walk up the shore.”

“There’s a rule against going in there after dark.”

“Is there? That’s too bad.”

“Something funny happened there just a little while ago.”

“So? What was it?” Orme was getting close to the subject he most desired to hear explained.

“Why, one of the cops was walking along the shore and he found a Japanese, stunned.”

“A Japanese!”

“He evidently had wandered in there and somebody had hit him over the head with a club.”

“After money?”

“Probably. There’ve been a good many holdups lately. But the slugger didn’t have a chance to get anything this time.”

“How so?”

“He was bending over the Jap when the cop came up. He got away.”

“Didn’t the cop chase him?”

“No, the fellow had a good start, so the cop stayed by the Jap.”

“And what became of the Jap?”

The life-saver jerked his head toward the door beside him. “He’s in there, getting over his headache.”

“Is he?” This was a contingency which Orme had not foreseen. Nor had he any desire to come face to face with Maku. But if he betrayed his surprise, the life-saver did not notice it.

“The cop is taking another look through the campus,” he continued.

“What does the Jap say about it?” asked Orme.

“He doesn’t say anything. It looks as though he couldn’t speak English. The cop is going to get Asuki.”

“Asuki?”

“A Jap student who lives in the dormitory.”

“Oh,” said Orme.

The fact that Maku would not talk was in a measure reassuring. His apparent inability to understand English was, of course, assumed, unless, indeed, he was still too completely dazed by the blow which Orme had given him, to use a tongue which was more or less strange to him. But what would he say if he saw Orme? Would he not accuse his assailant, hoping thus to delay the pursuit of his companion?

The danger was by no means slight. Orme decided quickly to get away from this neighborhood. But just as he was about to bid the life-saver a casual good-night, two men came around the corner of the building. One was a policeman, the other a young Japanese. Orme unobtrusively seated himself on the edge of the little veranda.

“How is he?” asked the policeman.

“All right, I guess,” replied the life-saver. “I looked in a few minutes ago, and he was sitting up. Hello, Asuki.”

“Hello, there,” responded the little Japanese.

“Come,” said the policeman, after an unsuspicious glance at Orme, and, mounting the steps, he led his interpreter into the station.

Now, indeed, it was time for Orme to slip away. Maku might be brought out at any moment. But Orme lingered. He was nearer to the solution of the secret if he

kept close to Maku, and he realized, for that matter, that by watching Maku closely and, perhaps, following him home, he might be led straight to the other man. If Maku accused him, it should not, after all, be hard to laugh the charge away.

A murmur of voices came from within the station, the policeman's words alone being distinguishable.

"Ask him," the policeman said, "if he knows who hit him."

The undertones of a foreign jargon followed.

"Well, then," continued the policeman, "find out where he came from and what he was doing on the campus."

Again the undertones, and afterward an interval of silence. Then the policeman spoke in an undecided voice.

"If he don't know anything, I can't do anything. But we might as well get a few more facts. Something might turn up. Ask him whether he saw anybody following him when he went into the campus."

Orme had been straining his ears in a vain endeavor to catch the words of Asuki. But suddenly his attention was diverted by a sound from the lake. It was the "puh-puh-puh-puh" of a motor-boat, apparently a little distance to the northward. The explosions followed one another in rapid succession.

He turned to the life-saver.

"What boat is that?" he asked.

"I don't know. Some party from Chicago, probably. She came up an hour or so ago—at least, I suppose she's the same one."

The explosions were now so rapid as to make almost one continuous roar.

"She's a fast one, all right," commented the life-saver. "Hear her go!"

"Are there many fast boats on the lake?"

"Quite a number. They run out from Chicago harbor now and then."

Orme was meditating.

"Exactly how long ago did this boat pass?"

"Oh, an hour or more. Why?"

"She seems to have been beached up north here a little way."

“She may have been. Or they’ve been lying to out there.”

In Orme’s mind arose a surmise that in this motor-boat Maku and his companion had come from Chicago. The surmise was so strong as to develop quickly into a certainty. And if the Japanese had come by this boat, it stood to reason that the one who had the papers was escaping in it. He must have waited some time for Maku and, at last, had pushed off to return alone.

Were these Japanese acting for themselves? That did not seem possible. Then who was their employer?

Orme did not puzzle long over these questions, for he had determined on a course of action. He spoke to the life-saver, who appeared to be listening to the droning conversation which continued within the station.

“The hold-up men may be in that boat,” remarked Orme.

“Hardly.” A laugh accompanied the answer.

“Well, why not? She came north an hour or so ago and either was beached or lay to until just now.”

“You may be right.” Then, before Orme knew what was happening, the young man opened the door and called into the station: “Hey, there! Your robber is escaping on that motor-boat out there.”

“What’s that?” The policeman strode to the door.

“Don’t you hear that boat out there?” asked the life-saver.

“Sure, I hear it.”

“Well, she came up from the south an hour or more ago and stopped a little north of here. Now she’s going back. Mr. Holmes, here”—he grinned as he said it —“Mr. Holmes suggests that the hold-up man is aboard.”

The reference to the famous detective of fiction was lost upon the policeman. “I guess that’s about it, Mr. Holmes,” he said excitedly; and Orme was much relieved to note that the life-saver’s humorous reference had passed for an introduction. The policeman would have no suspicion of him now—unless Maku ——

There was an exclamation from within the room. “What’s the matter?” asked the policeman, turning in the doorway.

The voice of Asuki replied: “He say the robber came in a bicycle—not in a boat.”

“But I thought he didn’t see the fellow coming.”

“He remember now.”

The policeman started. “How did he know what we were talking about out here?” he demanded.

“He understand English, but not speak it,” replied Asuki readily.

To the policeman this explanation was satisfactory. Orme, of course, found in it a corroboration of his guess. Maku evidently did not wish suspicion directed against the motor-boat.

The policeman re-entered the station, eager to avail himself of the information which Maku was now disposed to give him.

Orme turned to the life-saver. “The Jap is lying,” he said.

“Think so?”

“Of course. If he understands English so well, he certainly knows how to make himself understood in it. His story of the bicycle is preposterous.”

“But what then?”

“Doesn’t it occur to you that perhaps the Jap himself is the robber? His intended victim may have got the better of him.”

“Yes,” said the young man doubtfully, “but the fellow ran.”

“That would be natural. Doubtless he didn’t want any notoriety. It’s possible that he thought he had killed his assailant, and had an unpleasant vision of being detained in the local jail until the affair could be cleared up.”

The life-saver looked at Orme searchingly.

“That sounds pretty straight,” he said at last. “I guess you know what you are talking about.”

“Perhaps I do,” said Orme quietly. “In any event I’d like to see who’s in that boat out there.”

“There isn’t a boat nearer than Chicago that could catch her. They have run her several miles out into the lake before turning south, or she would have been pretty close to Chicago already. She’s going fast.”

The roar of the motor was indeed becoming a far-off sound.

“Why not telephone the Chicago police to intercept her?”

“There’s no evidence against her,” replied Orme; “only surmises.”

“I know, but——”

“And, as I suggested, whoever was attacked by that Jap in there may not want notoriety.”

Suddenly the distant explosions stopped—began again—stopped. Several times they were renewed at short intervals—“puh-puh-puh”——“puh-puh”——“puh-puh-puh-puh”—then they ceased altogether.

“Hello!” exclaimed the life-saver. “They’ve broken down.”

He picked up a pair of binoculars which had been lying on the veranda near him, and scanned the surface of the lake.

“Make her out?” queried Orme.

“No, she’s too small, and too far off.” He handed the night-glass to Orme, who in turn searched the water vainly.

“Whose boat is that moored to the breakwater?” asked Orme, lowering the glass.

“Belongs to a man here in town.”

“Would he rent it?”

“No. But he lets us run it once in a while. We keep an eye on it for him.”

Orme took out his watch. “It’s almost twelve,” he said. “You’ll be relieved in a few moments. Do you suppose I could persuade you to take me out to the other boat?”

The life-saver hesitated. “I’d like to,” he said. “But my study——”

“There’ll be some sport, if we get within reach of the man out there,” Orme put in.

“Well—I’ll do it—though the chances are that they will make their repairs and be off again before we come within a mile.”

“I’m much obliged to you,” said Orme. “If you would let me make it right——”

“For taking you out in another man’s boat? No, sir.”

“I know. Well—my name is Orme, not Holmes.”

“And mine,” grinned the life-saver, “is Porter.”

A man turned in from the drive, and sauntered toward them.

“There’s my relief,” said Porter. “Hello, Kelmsley.”

“Hello,” replied the newcomer.

“Just wait till I punch the clock,” said Porter to Orme.

“Punch the clock? Oh, I see; the government times you.”

“Yes.”

Porter went into the station for a moment; then, returning, he exchanged a few words with the relief and led Orme down to the breakwater. The launch which was moored there proved to be a sturdy boat, built for strength rather than for speed.

Orme cast off while Porter removed the tarpaulin from the motor and made ready to turn the wheel over.

“Is the policeman still busy with the Jap?” Orme questioned suddenly.

“Yes.”

“He won’t get anything out of him,” said Orme—“except fairy-stories.”

Porter started the motor and stepped forward to the steering-wheel. Slowly the launch pushed out into the open lake, and the lights of the shore receded.

No sound had come from the disabled boat since its motor stopped. Doubtless it was too far off for the noise of repairs to be heard on the shore. Orme peered over the dark surface of the water, but he could see nothing except the lights of a distant steamer.

“I know why he went out so far,” remarked Porter. “He is running without lights.”

“That in itself is suspicious, isn’t it?” Orme asked.

“Why, yes, I suppose so—though people aren’t always as careful as they might be. Our own lights aren’t lighted, you see.”

“Have you any clue at all as to where she is?”

“Only from the direction the sounds came from just before the explosions stopped. She had headway enough to slide some distance after that, and I’m allowing for it—and for the currents. With the lake as it is, she would be carried in a little.”

For nearly half an hour they continued straight out toward mid-lake. Orme

noticed that there was a slight swell. The lights of Evanston were now mere twinkling distant points, far away over the dark void of the waters.

Porter shut off the power. “We must be pretty near her,” he said.

They listened intently.

“Perhaps I steered too far south,” said Porter at last.

He threw on the power, and sent the boat northward in slow, wide circles. The distant steamship had made progress toward the northeast—bound, perhaps, for Muskegon, or some other port on the Michigan shore. She was a passenger steamer, apparently, for lines of portholes and deck-windows were marked by dots of light. There was no other sign of human presence to be seen on the lake, and Orme’s glance expectantly wandered to her lights now and then.

At last, while he was looking at it, after a fruitless search of the darkness, he was startled by a strange phenomenon. The lights of the steamer suddenly disappeared. An instant later they shone out again.

With an exclamation, Orme seized the steering-wheel and swung it over to the right.

“There she is,” he cried, and then: “Excuse me for taking the wheel that way, but I was afraid I’d lose her.”

“I don’t see her,” said Porter.

“No; but something dark cut off the lights of that steamer. Hold her so.” He let go the wheel and peered ahead.

Presently they both saw a spot of blacker blackness in the night. Porter set the motor at half-speed.

“Have you got a bull’s-eye lantern?” asked Orme in an undertone.

“Yes, in that locker.”

Orme stooped and lighted the lantern in the shelter of the locker.

“Now run up alongside,” he said, “and ask if they need help.”

The outline of the disabled boat now grew more distinct. Porter swung around toward it and called:

“Need help?”

After a moment’s wait, a voice replied:

“Yes. You tow me to Chicago. I pay you.”

It was a voice which Orme recognized as that of the Japanese who had been with Maku in the attack at the Père Marquette.

“Can’t do that,” answered Porter. “I’ll take you in to Evanston.”

“No!” The tone was expostulatory. “I go to Chicago. I fix engine pretty soon.”

At this moment Orme raised his lantern and directed its light into the other boat. It shone into the blinking eyes of the Japanese, standing by the motor. It shone ——

Great Heaven! Was he dreaming? Orme could not believe his eyes. The light revealed the face of the one person he least expected to see—for, seated on a cushion at the forward end of the cockpit, was the girl!

CHAPTER VII

A JAPANESE AT LARGE

What was the girl doing out there in mid-lake in the company of her enemy? Orme had seen her enter the house of her friends in Evanston; had bidden her good-night with the understanding that she was to make no further move in the game before the coming morning. She must have left the house soon after he walked away.

Had she known all the time where the Japanese was? Had she hunted him out to make terms with him? If that were the case, her action indicated a new and unsuspected distrust of Orme himself. Her failure to call for help when Orme and Porter came up in their launch seemed to show that her presence in the other boat was voluntary. And yet Orme could not believe that there was not some simple explanation which she would welcome the first chance to make. He could not doubt her.

The immediate thing to do, however, was to find out just what she desired. Suppressing his excitement, he called out:

“Girl!”

At the same time he turned the lantern so that his own face was illuminated.

“Mr. Orme!” she cried, rising from her seat. “You here?”

“At your service.”

He smiled, and turned his eyes for an instant on her companion. The face of the Japanese was a study. His eyes were narrowed to thin slits, and his mouth was formed into a meaningless grin.

Orme spoke to the Japanese in French. “Maku has confessed,” he said. “He is under arrest.”

The face of the Japanese did not change.

“Do you understand?” asked Orme, still in French.

There was no answer, and Orme turned to the Girl and said, in French.

“I don’t think he understands this language.”

“Apparently not,” she replied, in the same tongue.

“Tell me,” he went on, “are you there of your own will?”

“No.”

“Has he the papers?”

“I think so. I don’t know.”

“See if you can manage to get past him, and I will help you into our boat.”

“I’ll try.” She nodded, with a brave effort to show reassurance.

Orme frowned at the Japanese. “What are you doing with this young lady?” he demanded.

“No understand.”

“Yes, you do understand. You understood well enough when you robbed me this evening.”

“No understand,” the Japanese repeated.

The girl, meantime, had moved slowly from her position. The two boats were close together. Suddenly, after a swift glance from Orme, the girl stepped to the gunwale and leaped across the gap. Orme reached forward and caught her, drawing her for a brief instant close into his arms before she found her footing in the cockpit.

“Splendid!” he whispered, and she tossed her head with a pretty smile of relief.

Porter had been standing close by, the boathook in his hands. “Is there anything more to be done?” he asked of Orme.

“Yes, wait a moment.”

The Japanese had made no move to prevent the girl’s escape. Indeed, while she was leaping to the other boat, he balanced himself and turned to his motor, as though to continue the work of repair.

“Now, then,” called Orme, “you must give me those papers.”

“No understand.” The Japanese did not even look up from his task.

Orme turned to Porter. “Give me the boathook,” he said, and, taking it, he hooked it to the gunwale of the other boat, drawing the two crafts together. His intention was to use the boathook to bring the Japanese to terms. But the Oriental was too quick. His apparent indifference vanished, and with a cat-like pounce, he seized the boathook and snatched it from Orme’s grasp.

The action was so unexpected that Orme was completely taken by surprise. He made ready, however, to leap in unarmed, but the Japanese thrust the blunt end of the boathook at him, and the blow, which struck him in the chest, sent him toppling backward. He was saved from tumbling into the cockpit by Porter, who caught him by the shoulders and helped him to right himself. The two boats tossed for a moment like corks in the water.

When Orme again leaped to the gunwale, the Japanese was using the boathook to push the craft apart. A final shove widened the distance to six or eight feet. The jump was impossible. Even if the boats had been nearer together it would have been folly to attempt an attack.

Stepping down into the cockpit, Orme bent over the girl, who had sunk down upon a cushion. She seemed to be content that he should play the game for her.

“What is wrong with his motor?” he said. “Do you know?”

She answered in an undertone: “I shut off the gasoline-supply. He wasn’t looking. He didn’t see.”

“Good for you, Girl!” he exclaimed. “Where did you do it? At the tank?”

“No. Unfortunately the valve is at the carburetter. Oh,” she continued, “we *must* get the papers!”

Orme turned to Porter. “Are you willing to take a risk?” he asked.

“Anything in reason.” The life-saver grinned. “Of course, I don’t understand what’s going on, but I’ll back you.”

“This is a good, stout tub we are in.” Orme hesitated. “I want you to ram her nose into that other boat.”

Porter shook his head.

“That’s going pretty far,” he said. “I don’t know that there is warrant for it.”

“It won’t need to be a hard bump,” Orme explained. “I don’t want to hurt the fellow.”

“Then why——?”

“To frighten him into giving up some papers.”

Porter looked straight into Orme’s eyes. “Do the papers belong to you?” he demanded.

“No.” Orme spoke quietly. “They belong to this young lady—or, rather, to her father. This Japanese, and the other one, there on the shore, stole them.”

“What is the lady’s name?”

“I can’t tell you that.”

“But the police——”

“It isn’t a matter for the police. Please trust me, Mr. Porter.”

The life-saver stood irresolute.

“If this boat is damaged, I’ll make it good five times over,” continued Orme.

“Oh, it wouldn’t hurt the boat. A few scratches, perhaps. It’s the other boat I’m thinking of.”

“It’s pretty grim business, I know,” remarked Orme.

The younger man again studied Orme’s face. “Can you give me your word that the circumstances would justify us in ramming that boat?”

It flashed over Orme that he had no idea what those circumstances were. He knew only what little the girl had told him. Yet she had assured him again and again that the papers were of the greatest importance. True, throughout the affair, thus far, with the exception of the blow he had given Maku, the persons concerned had offered no dangerous violence. The mysterious papers might contain information about South American mines—as little Poritol had suggested; they might hold the secrets of an international syndicate. Whatever they were, it was really doubtful whether the necessity of their recovery would justify the possible slaying of another man.

Perhaps the girl had unconsciously exaggerated their value. Women who took a hand in business often lost the sense of relative importance. And yet, she had been so sure; she had herself gone to such lengths. Then, too, the South Americans had hired a burglar to break into her father’s house, and now this Japanese had abducted her. Yes, it was a serious game.

Orme answered Porter. “I give you my word,” he said.

Porter nodded and tightened his lips.

“At the very least, that fellow has tried to abduct this young lady,” added Orme.

“All right,” said Porter. “Let her go.”

The other boat had drifted about fifty feet away. Orme called out.

“Hello, there, Japanese. Will you give up the papers.”

No answer came.

“If you won’t,” cried Orme, “we are going to ram you.”

“Oh, no!” exclaimed the girl suddenly. “We mustn’t drown him.”

“We shan’t,” said Orme. “But we will give him a scare.” Then, in a louder voice: “Do you hear?”

The only reply was the tapping of metal on metal. The Japanese, it seemed, was still trying to find out what was wrong with his motor.

“Well, then,” Orme said to Porter, “we’ll have to try it. But use low speed, and be ready to veer off at the last minute.”

“He’ll try to fend with the boathook,” said Porter.

“If he does, I’ll get him.”

“How?”

“Lasso.” Orme picked up a spare painter that was stored under the seat, and began to tie a slip-noose.

The girl now spoke. “I suppose we shall have to do it,” she said. “But I wish there were a less dangerous, a less tragic way.”

Hardly knowing what he did, Orme laid his hand gently on her shoulder. “It will be all right, dear,” he whispered.

If the word embarrassed her, the darkness covered her confusion.

Porter had started the motor, setting it at a low speed, and now he was steering the boat in a circle to gain distance for the charge.

“I’ve lost the other boat,” exclaimed Orme, peering into the darkness.

“She’s off there,” said Porter. “You can’t see her, but I know the direction.”

He swung the launch around and headed straight through the night.

“Hold on tight,” Orme cautioned the girl, and, coiling his lasso, he went to the bow.

The launch moved steadily forward. Orme, straining his eyes in the endeavor to distinguish the other boat, saw it at last. It lay a few points to starboard, and Porter altered the course of the launch accordingly.

“Make for the stern,” called Orme, “and cripple her propeller, if you can.”

Another slight change in the course showed that Porter understood.

As the lessening of the distance between the two boats made it possible to distinguish the disabled speeder more clearly, Orme saw that the Japanese was still tinkering with the motor. He was busying himself as though he realized that he had no hope of escape unless he could start his boat.

Narrower, narrower, grew the intervening gap of dark water. Orme braced himself for the shock. In his left hand was the coiled painter; in his right, the end of the ready noose, which trailed behind him on the decking. It was long since he had thrown a lariat. In a vivid gleam of memory he saw at that moment the hot, dusty New Mexican corral, the low adobe buildings, the lumbering cattle and the galloping horses of the ranch. There he had spent one summer vacation of his college life. It was ten years past, but this pose, the rope in his hand, flashed it back to him.

Now they were almost on the Japanese. For the moment he seemed to waver. He glanced at the approaching launch, and reached uncertainly for the boathook. Even his subtle resources were almost at an end. Yet it did not seem to occur to him to yield.

And then, as for the hundredth time he laid his hands on the motor, he uttered a cry. It was plain to Orme that the cause of the supposed breakdown had been discovered. But was there time for the Japanese to get away? It was doubtful. He opened the feed-pipe, and let the gasoline again flow in. The launch was now so near that Orme could almost have leaped the gap, but the Japanese bent his energy to the heavy fly-wheel, tugging at it hurriedly.

The motor started. The boat began to move.

Even now it looked as though the collision could not be prevented, but the Japanese, seizing the steering-wheel, turned the boat so quickly to starboard that the stern fell away from the bow of the approaching launch. There was no crash, no hard bump; merely a glancing blow so slight that in that calm water it scarcely made the boats careen.

Then Orme threw his noose. The distance was less than ten feet, and the loop

spread, quick and true, over the head of the Japanese. But, swift though the action was, the Japanese had an instant to prepare himself. His right arm shot up. As Orme, jerking at the rope, tried to tighten the noose, the hand of the Japanese pushed it over his head and it slid over the side into the water. In a few seconds the swift boat had disappeared in the night.

Tightening his lips grimly, Orme drew the wet rope in and mechanically coiled it. There was nothing to say. He had failed. So good an opportunity to recover the papers would hardly return.

Silently he turned back to the others. Porter had swung the launch around and was heading toward the distant lights of Evanston. The girl was peering in the direction whence came the sound of the receding boat. Thus, for some time they remained silent.

At last the girl broke into a laugh. It was a rippling, silvery laugh, expressing an infectious appreciation of the humor of their situation. Orme chuckled in spite of himself. If she could laugh like that, he need not stay in the dumps. And yet in his mind rankled the sense of failure. He had made a poor showing before her—and she was laughing. Again the corners of his mouth drew down.

“I suppose the notion *is* amusing,” he said—“a cowboy at sea.”

“Oh, I was not laughing at you.” She had sobered quickly at his words.

“I shouldn’t blame you, if you did.”

“It is the whole situation,” she went on. “And it wouldn’t be so funny, if it weren’t so serious.”

“I appreciate it,” he said.

“And you know how serious it is,” she went on. “But truly, Mr. Orme, I am glad that we did not damage that boat. It might have been terrible. If he had been drowned——” her voice trailed off in a faint shudder, and Orme remembered how tired she must be, and how deeply disappointed.

“Now, Girl,” he said, bending over her and speaking in a low voice, “try to forget it. To-morrow I am going after the papers. I will get them.”

She looked up at him. Her eyes were softly confident. “I believe you,” she whispered. “You never give up, do you?”

“No,” he said, “I never give up—when I am striving for something which I greatly want.” There was meaning in his voice, though he had struggled to

conceal it. She lowered her eyes, and said no more.

Slowly the lights of shore grew brighter. After a time Orme could distinguish the masses of trees and buildings, grayly illuminated by the arc-lamps of the streets. He spoke to Porter in an undertone.

“Can you land us some distance south of the life-saving station?” he asked.

“Sure. I’ll run in by the Davis Street pier.”

“I’ll be obliged to you,” Orme sighed. “I made a bad mess of it, didn’t I?”

“Oh, I don’t know,” replied the life-saver. “We got the lady.”

Orme started. “Yes,” he said, “we got the lady—and that’s more important than all the rest of it.”

Porter grinned a noncommittal grin and devoted himself to the wheel.

They had saved the girl! In his disappointment over the escape of the Japanese Orme had forgotten, but now he silently thanked God that Porter and he had come out on the water. The girl had not yet explained her presence in the boat. In her own good time she would tell him. But she had been there under compulsion; and Orme shuddered to think what might have happened.

He stole a glance at her. She was leaning back on the seat. Her eyes were closed and her pose indicated complete relaxation, though it was evident from her breathing that she was not asleep. Orme marveled at her ability to push the nervous excitement of the evening away and snatch the brief chance of rest.

When at last the launch ran up under the end of a little breakwater near the Davis Street pier, she arose quickly and sprang out of the boat without help. Then she turned, as Orme stepped up beside her, and spoke to Porter. “If you and Mr. Orme had not come after me,” she said, “there’s no telling whether I should ever have got back. I should like to shake hands with you,” she added; and bending down, she held out her firm white hand.

Then Orme laid his hand on the life-saver’s shoulder. “You’ve done a piece of good work to-night,” he said.

Porter laughed embarrassedly. “I only ran the boat for you,” he began.

“You took me at my word,” said Orme, “and that’s a good deal in such a case. Good-by. I will look you up before I go back East.”

At the side of the girl, Orme now walked slowly through the deserted streets. It was some time before she spoke.

“After you left me at the home of my friends—” she began at last.

“Don’t try to tell about it,” he interrupted quickly. “You are tired. Wait for another time.”

They were passing under a street-lamp at the moment, and she glanced up at him with a grateful smile, pleased apparently by his thought of her.

“That is good of you,” she exclaimed, “but my story is easily told. Let me go on with it. I explained myself to my friends as best I could and went to my room. Then it suddenly occurred to me that Maku and his friend might have come to Evanston by boat.”

“Just as, later, it occurred to me.”

“I thought that the other man might be waiting for Maku. The motor-car that we heard—there was no good reason for thinking that our man was in it.”

She paused.

“I know,” he said. “I thought of those things, too.”

“It flashed on me,” she went on, “that if I could find the man, I might be able to buy him off. I didn’t believe that he would dare to injure me. There are reasons why he should not. My car had been taken in, but I had them bring it out, and I told them—well, that part doesn’t matter. Enough that I made an excuse, and went out with the car.”

“You should have taken someone with you.”

“There was the likelihood that the Japanese would run, if I had a companion. As long as I was alone, he might be willing to parley, I thought. At least, he would not be afraid of me alone. So I went north on Sheridan Road to the upper end of the lower campus. There is a crossroad there, you remember, cutting through to the lake, and I turned in. I left the car near a house that is there, and walked on to the edge of the bluff.

“Moored to a breakwater below was a boat, and a man was standing near her. I called out to him, asking what time it was. He answered, ‘Don’ know,’ and I knew him at once to be foreign and, probably, Japanese. So I went down toward him.

“When he saw that I was coming, he got into the boat. He seemed to be frightened and hurried, and I inferred that he was about to cast off, and I called out that I was alone. At that he waited, but he did not get out of the boat, and I

was standing at the edge of the breakwater, just above him, before he actually seemed to recognize me."

"Did you know him?" asked Orme.

"I never saw him before to my knowledge; but he made an exclamation which indicated that he knew me."

"What did he do then?"

"I told him that I wished to talk to him about the papers. His answer was that, if I would step down into the boat, he would talk. He said that he would not leave the boat, and added that he was unwilling to discuss the matter aloud. And I was foolish enough to believe his excuses. If he wished to whisper, I said to myself, why, I would whisper. I never felt so like a conspirator."

She paused to look up at the street-sign at the corner which they had reached, and turned to the right on a shady avenue.

"Well, I got into the boat," she continued. "I told him that I—my father was prepared to pay him a large sum of money for the papers, but he only shook his head and said, 'No, no.' I named a sum; then a larger one; but money did not seem to tempt him, though I made the second offer as large as I dared.

"'How much *will* you take then?' I asked at last. Instead of answering, he bent down and started the motor, and then I noticed for the first time that while I was talking we had been drifting away from the dock. I made ready to jump overboard. We were near the shore, and the water was not deep; anyway, I am a fair swimmer. But he turned and seized my wrists and forced me down into the bottom of the boat. I struggled, but it was no use, and when I opened my mouth to scream, he choked me with one hand and with the other pulled from his pocket a handkerchief and tried to put it in my mouth."

She gave a weary little laugh.

"It was such a crumpled, unclean handkerchief, I couldn't have stood it. So I managed to gasp that, if he would only let me alone, I would keep quiet."

"The brute!" muttered Orme.

"Oh, I don't think he intended to hurt me. What he feared, as nearly as I can make out, is that I might have him intercepted if he let me go free. That must have been why he tried to take me with him. Probably he planned to beach the boat at some unfrequented point on the North Side and leave me to shift for myself.

“When your boat came, of course I didn’t know who was in it. I never dreamed it would be you. And I had promised to keep still.”

“Hardly a binding promise.”

“Well, before he stopped threatening me with that awful handkerchief, he had made me swear over and over that I would not call for help, that I would not make any signal, that I would sit quietly on the seat. When you recognized me, I felt that all need of observing the promise was over.”

“Naturally,” muttered Orme.

She sighed. “It does seem as though Fate had been against us,” she said.

“Fate is fickle,” Orme returned. “You never know whether she will be your friend or your enemy. But I believe that she is now going to be our friend—for a change. To-morrow I shall get those papers.”

CHAPTER VIII

THE TRAIL OF MAKU

When for the second time that night he bade the girl adieu and saw her enter the house of her friends, Orme went briskly to the electric-car line.

He had not long to wait. A car came racing down the tracks and stopped at his corner. Swinging aboard at the rear platform, he glanced within. There were four passengers—a man and woman who, apparently, were returning from an evening party of some sort, since he was in evening dress and she wore an opera-cloak; a spectacled man, with a black portfolio in his lap; a seedy fellow asleep in one corner, his head sagging down on his breast, his hands in his trousers pockets; and—was it possible? Orme began to think that Fate had indeed changed her face toward him, for the man who sat huddled midway of the car, staring straight before him with beady, expressionless eyes, was Maku.

Under the brim of his dingy straw hat a white bandage was drawn tight around his head—so tight that from its under edge the coarse black hair bristled out in a distinct fringe. The blow of the wrench, then, must have cut through the skin.

Well—that would mean one more scar on the face of the Japanese.

The other scar, how had Maku come by that? Perhaps in some battle with the Russians in Manchuria. He seemed to be little more than a boy, but then, one never could guess the age of a Japanese, and for that matter, Orme had more than once been told that the Japanese had begun to impress very young soldiers long before the battle of Mukden.

While making these observations, Orme had drawn his hat lower over his eyes. He hoped to escape recognition, for this opportunity to track Maku to his destination was not to be missed. He also placed himself in such a position on the platform that his own face was partly concealed by the cross-bars which protected the windows at the end of the car.

In his favor was the fact that Maku would not expect to see him. Doubtless the

Japanese was more concerned with his aching head than with any suspicion of pursuit, though his somewhat indeterminate profile, as visible to Orme, gave no indication of any feeling at all. So Orme stood where he could watch without seeming to watch, and puzzled over the problem of following Maku from the car without attracting attention.

The refusal of the other Japanese to accept the girl's offer of money for the papers had given Orme a new idea of the importance of the quest. Maku and his friend must be Japanese government agents—just as Poritol and Alcatrante were unquestionably acting for their government. This, at least, was the most probable explanation that entered Orme's mind. The syndicate, then,—or concession, or whatever it was—must be of genuine international significance.

Though Orme continued to smother his curious questionings as to the meaning of the secret, he could not ignore his general surmises. To put his confidence in the girl—to act for her and for her alone—that was enough for him; but it added to his happiness to think that she might be leading him into an affair which was greater than any mere tangle of private interests. He knew too, that, upon the mesh of private interests, public interests are usually woven. The activity of a Russian syndicate in Korea had been the more or less direct cause of the Russo-Japanese War; the activity of rival American syndicates in Venezuela had been, but a few years before, productive of serious international complications. In the present instance, both South Americans and Japanese were interested. But Orme knew in his soul that there could be nothing unworthy in any action in which the girl took part. She would not only do nothing unworthy; she would understand the situation clearly enough to know whether the course which offered itself to her was worthy or not.

In events such as she had that night faced with him, any other girl Orme had ever met would have shown moments of weakness, impatience, or fear. But to her belonged a calm which came from a clear perception of the comparative unimportance of petty incident. She was strong, not as a man is strong, but in the way a woman should be strong.

The blood went to his cheeks as he remembered how tenderly he had spoken to her in the boat, and how plain he had made his desire for her. What should he call his feeling? Did love come to men as suddenly as this? She had not rebuked him—there was that much to be thankful for; and she must have known that his words were as involuntary as his action in touching her shoulder with his hand.

But how could she have rebuked him? She was, in a way, indebted to him. The

thought troubled him. Had he unintentionally taken advantage of her gratitude by showing affection when she wished no more than comradeship? And had she gently said nothing, because he had done something for her? If her patience with him were thus to be explained, it must have been based upon her recognition of his unconsciousness.

Still, the more he pondered, the more clearly he saw that she was not a girl who, under the spell of friendly good will, would permit a false situation to exist. Her sincerity was too deep for such a glossing of fact. He dared assume, then, that her sympathy with him went even so far as to accept his attitude when it was a shade more than friendly.

More than friendly! Like a white light, the truth flashed upon him as he stood there on the rocking platform of the car. He and she would have to be more than friendly! He had never seen her until that day. He did not even know her name. But all his life belonged to her, and would belong to her forever. The miracle which had been worked upon him, might it not also have been worked upon her? He felt unworthy, and yet she might care—might already have begun to care—But he put the daring hope out of his mind, and looked again at Maku.

The Japanese had not moved. His face still wore its racial look of patient indifference; his hands were still crossed in his lap. He sat on the edge of the seat, in order that his feet might rest on the floor, for his legs were short; and with every lurch of the car, he swayed easily, adapting himself to the motion with an unconscious ease that betrayed supple muscles.

The car stopped at a corner and the man and woman got out, but Maku did not even seem to glance at them. Orme stepped back to make way for them on the platform, and as they descended and the conductor rang the bell, he looked out at the suburban landscape, with its well-lighted, macadamized streets, its vacant lots, and its occasional houses, which seemed to be of the better class, as nearly as he could judge in the uncertain rays of the arc-lamps. He turned to the conductor, who met his glance with the look of one who thirsts to talk.

“People used to go to parties in carriages and automobiles,” said the conductor, “but now they take the car when they’ve any distance to go. It’s quicker and handier.”

“I should think that *would* be so, here in the suburbs,” said Orme.

“Oh, this ain’t the suburbs. We crossed the city limits twenty minutes ago.”

“You don’t carry many passengers this time of night.”

“That depends. Sometimes we have a crowd. To-night there’s hardly anyone. Nobody else is likely to get on now.”

“Why is that?”

“Well, it’s only a short way now to the connection with the elevated road. People who want to go the rest of the way by the elevated, would walk. And after we pass the elevated there’s other car-lines they’re more likely to take, where the cars run frequenter.”

“Do you go to the heart of the city?”

“No, we stop at the barns. Say, have you noticed that Jap in there?”

The conductor nodded toward Maku.

“What about him?”

“He was put aboard by a cop. Looks as though somebody had slugged him.”

“That’s so,” commented Orme. “His head is bandaged.”

“Judging from the bandage, it must have been a nasty crack,” continued the conductor. “But you wouldn’t know he’d been hurt from his face. Say, you can’t tell anything about those Johns from their looks, can you, now?”

“You certainly can’t,” replied Orme.

The conductor glanced out. “There’s the elevated,” he said. “I’ll have to go in and wake that drunk. He gets off here.”

Orme watched the conductor go to the man who was sleeping in the corner and shake him. The man nodded his head vaguely, and settled back into slumber. Through the open door came the conductor’s voice: “Wake up!”—Shake—“You get off here!”—Shake—“Wake up, there!” But the man would not awaken.

Maku was sitting but a few feet from the sleeping man. He had not appeared to notice what was going on, but now, just as the conductor seemed about to appeal to the motorman for help, the little Japanese slid along the seat and said to the conductor: “I wake him.”

The conductor stared, and scratched his head. “If you can,” he remarked, “it’s more’n I can do.”

Maku did not answer, but putting his hand behind the sleeping man’s back, found some sensitive vertebra. With a yell, the man awoke and leaped to his feet. The conductor seized him by the arm and led him to the platform.

The car was already slowing down, but without waiting for it to stop, the fellow launched himself into the night, being preserved from falling by the god of alcohol, and stumbled away toward the sidewalk.

“Did you see the Jap?” exclaimed the conductor. “Stuck a pin into him, that’s what he did.”

“Oh, I guess not,” laughed Orme. “He touched his spine, that was all.”

The car stopped. The spectacled passenger with the portfolio arose and got off by way of the front platform. Would Maku also take the elevated? If he did, unless he also got off the front platform, Orme would have to act quickly to keep out of sight.

But Maku made no move. He had returned to his former position, and only the trace of an elusive smile on his lips showed that he had not forgotten the incident in which he had just taken part. Meantime Orme had maintained his partial concealment, and though Maku had turned his head when he went to the conductor’s help, he had not appeared to glance toward the back platform.

The conductor rang the bell, and the car started forward again with its two passengers—Maku within, Orme without—the pursuer and the pursued.

“I thought the motorman and I was going to have to chuck that chap off,” commented the conductor. “If the Jap hadn’t stuck a pin into him——”

“I don’t think it was a pin. The Japanese know where to touch you so that it will hurt.”

“An’ I didn’t even like to rub the fellow’s ears for fear of hurtin’ him. I heard of a man that was made deaf that way. Smashed his ear-drums.”

“I wonder where the Jap will get off?” said Orme.

“Oh, he’ll go right through to the barns and take a Clark Street car. There’s a lot of them Japs lives over that way. He’ll be one of ’em, I guess.”

“Unless he’s somebody’s cook or valet.”

“I don’t believe he is. But, of course, you never know.”

“That’s true,” said Orme. “One never knows.”

As the car plunged onward, Maku suddenly put his hand in his pocket. He drew it out empty. On his face was an expression which may mean “surprise,” among the Japanese. He then fumbled in his other pockets, but apparently he did not find what he was looking for. Orme wondered what it might be.

The search continued. A piece of twine, a pocket-knife, a handkerchief, were produced in turn and inspected. At last he brought out a greenback, glancing at it twice before returning it to his pocket. Orme knew that it must be the marked bill. But Maku was looking for something else. His cheek glistened with perspiration; evidently he had lost something of value. After a time, however, he stopped hunting his pockets, and seemed to resign himself to his loss—a fact from which Orme gathered that the object of his search was nothing so valuable that it could not be replaced.

When he had been quiet for a time, he again produced the greenback, and examined it attentively. From the way he held it, Orme judged that he was looking at the well-remembered legend: “Remember Person You Pay This To.” Presently he turned it over and held it closer to his eyes. He was, of course, looking at the abbreviated directions.

“You’d think that Jap had never seen money before,” remarked the conductor.

“Perhaps he hasn’t—that kind,” replied Orme.

“Maybe he guesses it’s a counterfeit.”

“Maybe.”

“Looks as though he was trying to read the fine print on it.”

“Something you and I never have done, I imagine,” said Orme.

“That’s a fact,” the conductor chuckled. “I never noticed anything about a bill except the color of it and the size of the figure.”

“Which is quite enough for most men.”

“Sure! But I bet I pass on a lot of counterfeits without knowin’ it.”

“Very likely. The Jap has evidently finished his English lesson. See how carefully he folds the bill before he puts it away.”

“We’re comin’ to the barns,” said the conductor. “Far as we go.”

As he spoke, the car slowed down and stopped, and Maku arose from his seat. Orme was at the top of the steps, ready to swing quickly to the ground, if Maku left the car by the rear door. But the Japanese turned to the forward entrance. Orme waited until Maku had got to the ground, then he, too, descended.

Maku did not turn at once toward the Clark Street car that was waiting to start down-town. He stood hesitant in the street. After a moment, his attention seemed to be attracted by the lights of an all-night restaurant, not far away, and he

crossed the street and walked rapidly to the gleaming sign.

Orme followed slowly, keeping on the other side of the street. If Maku was hungry, why, Maku would eat, while he himself would wait outside like a starving child before a baker's window. But Maku, it seemed, was not hungry. Through the window Orme saw him walk to the cashier's desk and apparently ask a question. In answer, the woman behind the desk-pointed to a huge book which lay on the counter near by. Orme recognized it as the city directory.

For some time Maku studied the pages. Then he seemed to appeal to the cashier for help, for she pulled the book to her, looked at him as though she were asking a question, and then, rapidly running through the leaves, placed her finger at a certain part of a certain page and turned the book around so that the Japanese could see. He nodded and, after bowing in a curious fashion, came back to the street.

Orme had, meantime, walked on for a little way. He would have gone to the restaurant in an endeavor to find out what address Maku had wished, but for two reasons: The cashier might refuse to tell him, or she might have forgotten the name. In either event his opportunity to follow Maku would thus be lost—and to follow Maku was still his best course. Accordingly he watched the Japanese go back to a Clark Street car and climb aboard.

It was an open car, with transverse seats, and Maku had chosen a position about two-thirds of the way back. There was, as yet, only one other passenger. How to get aboard without being seen by Maku was a hard problem for Orme, but he solved it by taking a chance. Walking rapidly toward the next corner, away from the car, he got out of the direct rays of the street-lamp, and waited.

Presently the car started. It almost reached Orme's corner when he signaled it and, hurrying into the street, swung on to the back platform.

There had been barely time for the car to slow down a little. Maku could not well have seen him without turning his head, and Orme had watched the little Japanese closely enough to know that he had continued to stare straight before him.

Safe on the back platform, a desire to smoke came to Orme. He found a cigar in his case and lighted it. While he was shielding the match, he looked over his hollowed hand and saw Maku produce a cigarette and light it. The Japanese had apparently wished the consolation of tobacco just as Orme had.

"An odd coincidence," muttered Orme. "I hope it wasn't mind-reading." And he

smiled as he drew a mouthful of smoke.

Lincoln Park slid by them on the left. The car was getting well down into the city. Suddenly Maku worked along to the end of his seat and got down on the running-board. The conductor pulled the bell. The car stopped and the Oriental jumped off.

The action had been so quick that Orme, taken off his guard, had not had time to get off first. He, therefore, remained on the car, which began to move forward again. Looking after Maku, he saw that the Japanese, glancing neither to right nor to left, was making off down the side street, going west; so he in turn stepped to the street, just as Maku disappeared beyond the corner. He hurried quickly to the side street and saw Maku, half a block ahead, walking with short, rapid steps. How had Maku got so far? He must have run while Orme was retracing the way to the corner. And yet Maku seemed to have had no suspicion that he was being followed.

The chase led quickly to a district of poor houses and shops—an ill-looking, ill-smelling district, where every shadow seemed ominous. Whenever they approached a corner, Orme hurried forward, running on his toes, to shorten the distance in the event that Maku turned, but the course continued straight until Orme began to wonder whether they were not getting near to the river, one branch of which, he knew, ran north through the city.

At last Maku turned into an alley, which cut through the middle of a block. This was something which Orme had not expected. He ran forward and peered down the dark, unpleasant passage. There was his man, barely visible, picking a careful way through the ash-heaps and avoiding the pestilential garbage-cans.

Orme followed, and when Maku turned west again at the next street, swung rapidly after him and around the corner, with the full expectation of seeing him hurrying along, half a block away. But no one was in sight. Had he slipped into one of the near-by buildings?

While Orme was puzzling, a voice at his elbow said, “Hello!”

He turned with a start. Flattened in a shadowed niche of the wall beside him was Maku!

“Hello!” the Japanese said again.

“Well?” exclaimed Orme sharply, trying to make the best of the situation.

“You mus’ not follow me.” The Japanese spoke impassively.

“Follow you?”

“I saw you in a mirror at the other end of car.”

So that was it! Orme remembered no mirror, but the Japanese might apply the word to the reflecting surface of one of the forward windows.

“You lit a match,” continued Maku. “I saw. Then I come here, to find if you follow.”

Orme considered. Now that he was discovered, it would be futile to continue the chase, since Maku, naturally, would not go to his destination with Orme at his heels. But he said:

“You can’t order me off the streets, Maku.”

“I know. If you follow, then we walk an’ walk an’ walk—mebbe till nex’ week.” Orme swore under his breath. It was quite clear that the little Japanese would never rejoin the man who had the papers until he was sure that he had shaken off his pursuer. So Orme simply said:

“Good-night.”

Disappointed, baffled, he turned eastward and walked with long strides back toward the car-line. He did not look to see whether Maku was behind him. That did not matter now. He had missed his second opportunity since the other Japanese escaped him in the university campus.

Crossing North Clark Street a block north of the point at which he and Maku had left the car, he continued lakeward, coming out on the drive only a short distance from the Père Marquette, and a few minutes later, after giving the elevator-boy orders to call him at eight in the morning, he was in his apartment, with the prospect of four hours of sleep.

But there was a final question: Should he return to the all-night restaurant near the car-barns and try to learn from the cashier the address which Maku had sought? Surely she would have forgotten the name by this time. Perhaps it was a Japanese name, and, therefore, the harder to remember. True, she might remember it; if it were a peculiar combination of letters, the very peculiarity might have fixed it in her mind. And if he hesitated to go back there now, the slim chance that the name remained with her would grow slimmer with every added moment of delay. He felt that he ought to go. He was dog-tired, but—he remembered the girl’s anxiety. Yes, he would go; with the bare possibility that the cashier would remember and would be willing to tell him what she

remembered, he would go.

He took up his hat and stepped toward the door. At that moment he heard a sound from his bedroom. It was an unmistakable snore. He tip-toed to the bedroom door and peered within. Seated in an arm-chair was a man. He was distinctly visible in the light which came in from the sitting-room, and it was quite plain that he was sound asleep and breathing heavily. And now for the second time his palate vibrated with the raucous voice of sleep.

Orme switched on the bedroom lights. The man opened his eyes and started from the chair.

“Who are you?” demanded Orme.

“Why—the detective, of course.”

“Detective?”

“Sure—regular force.”

“Regular force?”

The stranger pulled back his coat and displayed his nickeled star.

“But what are you doing here?” gasped Orme, amazed.

“Why, a foreign fellow came to the chief and said you wanted a man to keep an eye on your quarters to-night—and the chief sent me. I was dozing a bit—but I’m a light sleeper. I wake at the least noise.”

Orme smiled reminiscently, thinking of the snore. “Tell me,” he said, “was it Senhor Alcatrante who had you sent?”

“I believe that *was* his name.” He was slowly regaining his sleep-benumbed wits. “That reminds me,” he continued. “He gave me a note for you.”

An envelope was produced from an inside pocket. Orme took it and tore it open. The sheet within bore the caption, “Office of The Chief of Police,” and the few lines, written beneath in fine script, were as follows:

> “Dear Mr. Orme:
>
> “You will, I am sure, pardon my seeming over-anxiety for your safety, and the safety of Poritol’s treasure, but I cannot resist using my influence to see that you are well-protected to-night by what you in America call ‘a plain-clothes man.’ I trust that he will frighten away the Yellow Peril and permit you to slumber undisturbed. If you do not wish him inside

your apartment, he will sit in the hall outside your door.

"With all regard for your continued good health, believe me, dear Mr. Orme,

"Yours, etc., etc.,
"PEDRO ALCATRANTE."

In view of everything that had happened since the note was penned, Orme smiled a grim smile. Alcatrante must have been very anxious indeed; and yet, considering that the minister knew nothing of Orme's encounter with the Japanese and his meeting with the girl, the sending of the detective might naturally have been expected to pass as an impressive, but friendly, precaution.

The detective was rapidly losing his self-assurance. "I had only been asleep for a moment," he said.

"Yes?" Orme spoke indifferently. "Well, you may go now. There is no longer any need of you here."

"But my instructions——"

"Were given under a misapprehension. My return makes your presence unnecessary. Good-night—or good-morning, rather." He nodded toward the door.

The detective hesitated. "Look a here!" he suddenly burst out. "I never saw you before."

"Nor I you," replied Orme.

"Then how do I know that you are Mr. Orme? You may be the very chap I was to keep out, far as I know."

"Sure enough, I may be," said Orme dryly, adding—"But I am not. Now go."

The detective narrowed his eyebrows. "Not without identification."

"Ask the night-clerk," exclaimed Orme impatiently. "Can't you see that I don't wish to be bothered any longer?"

He went over to the door and threw it open.

"Come," he continued. "Well, here then"—as the detective did not move —"here's my card. That ought to do you."

He took a card from his pocket-case and offered it to the detective, who, after scrutinizing it for a moment, let it fall to the floor.

“Oh, it’s all right, I guess,” he said. “But what shall I say to the chief?”

“Simply say that I didn’t need you any longer.”

The detective picked up his hat and went.

“Thank Heaven!” exclaimed Orme as he closed the door. “But I wonder why I didn’t notice his hat. It was lying here in plain sight.”

He went to the telephone and spoke to the clerk. “Did you let that detective into my apartment?” he asked.

“Why, yes, Mr. Orme. He was one of the regular force, and he said that you wanted him here. I called up the chief’s office, and the order was corroborated. I meant to tell you when you came in, but you passed the desk just while I was down eating my supper. The elevator-boy let you in, didn’t he?”

“Yes. Never mind, it’s all right. Good-night.”

But when Orme examined his traveling-bag, he found that someone had evidently made a search through it. Nothing had been taken, but the orderly arrangement of his effects had been disturbed. His conclusion was that Alcatrante had bribed the fellow to go much farther than official zeal demanded. Doubtless the minister had paid the detective to hunt for a marked five-dollar bill and make a copy of whatever was written on it—which would have been quite a safe proceeding for the detective, if he were not caught at the task. A subtle man, Alcatrante; but no subtler than the Japanese.

Dismissing the incident from his mind, Orme again made ready to return to the all-night restaurant. He paused at the door, however, to give the situation a final analysis. Maku had lost something. After hunting for it vainly, he had gone to the city directory for information which appeared to satisfy him. Then what he lost must have been an address. How would he have been likely to lose it?

Orme’s fatigue was so great that he repeated the question to himself several times without seeing any meaning in it. He forced his tired brain back to the first statement. Maku had lost something. Yes, he had lost something. What was it he had lost? Oh, yes, a paper.

It was futile. His brain refused to work.

Maku had lost a paper. A paper?

“Ah!” Orme was awake now.

“How stupid!” he exclaimed.

For he had entirely forgotten the paper which he had taken from the pocket of the unconscious Maku, there on the campus! He had thrust it into his pocket without looking at it, and in the excitement of his later adventures it had passed utterly from his memory.

Another moment and he had the paper in his hand. His fingers shook as he unfolded it, and he felt angry at his weakness. Yes, there it was—the address—written in an unformed hand. If he had only thought of the paper before, he would have been saved a deal of trouble—would have had more sleep. He read it over several times—"Three forty-one, North Parker Street"—so that he would remember it, if the paper should be lost.

"I'm glad Maku didn't write it in Japanese!" he exclaimed.

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 Alcatrante and Poritol 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 Poritol's actions. Nevertheless, he was a man of his word, and he hurried back to the Père Marquette, for the hour was close to ten. He was influenced to some extent by the thought that Poritol and Alcatrante, 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 especial 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 fair.

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 insistent piece of green paper that marked bill was! It had started him on this remarkable series of adventures. It had introduced excitable little Poritol and the suave Alcatrante 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 that 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.

“How should I remember? I can’t keep track of all the persons that come in the store during the day.”

“But I should think that anything so queer as this——” He saw that he could get nothing from her except by annoying her.

The woman glared. “What you a botherin’ about? Why don’t you leave well enough alone?”

Orme smiled. “Tell me one thing,” he said, “do you know a Japanese that lives hereabouts?”

“Oh,” said the woman, “so you’re one of the gentlemen he was expectin’, eh? Well, it’s the front flat, two flights up.”

“Thank you,” said Orme. He walked out to the street, whence a backward glance showed him the woman again 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. “3a” had a card on which was printed:

“ARIMA, TEACHER OF ORIGINAL KANO 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:

“MADAME ALIA, CLAIRVOYANT AND TRANCE MEDIUM.”

“I think I will have my fortune told,” muttered Orme, as he pressed Madame Alia’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 blowsy 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 unmixed with suspicion.

“Madame Alia?” 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 that 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.

Madame Alia 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.—This 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. “I am afraid,” he said slowly, “that my case is too serious for the cards.”

She brightened. “You’d ought to have a trance-reading—two dollars.”

“I’d take any kind of reading that would help me, but I’m afraid the situation is too difficult.”

“Then why did you come?” Again the look of suspicion.

“I came because you could help me, 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 sizing 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. “I 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 pocket-book 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 phony?”

“No—but I want it. Here’s another.” As he took a fresh bill from his pocket-book 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.

Madame Alia 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 teaching?"

"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 crouched and peered through the dingy lace curtains that were swaying in the breeze.

The interior was dim, but Orme succeeded in distinguishing the furniture. There were straw mats on the floor and several chairs stood about. At the opposite side of the room was a closed door. From his knowledge of Madame Alia's apartment, Orme knew that this door opened into the hall of the building, and the

square of ground glass, with its reversed letters of the athlete’s name, told him that it was used as the chief entrance. Madame Alia preferred her clients to enter into another room.

In the farther corner of the interior Orme saw a large square table. It was covered with a red print cloth, which hung over the edge, nearly to the floor. 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. Someone 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 some other person entered? 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 tip-toed over to the table. Another instant and he was under the cover.

CHAPTER X

“FIND THE AMERICAN”

As Orme let the table-cover fall back to its normal position and turned to get himself into a comfortable attitude, his hand touched something soft and yielding. For a moment he was startled, but the sound of a throaty purr, and the realization that his hand was resting on fur soon told him that his companion in hiding was a cat.

He wondered whether the Japanese liked pets. From what little he knew of Japanese character it did not seem to him consistent that they should care for animals. Yet here was a peaceful tabby.

In order to accommodate himself to his close quarters, Orme had to double his legs back, resting on his thigh and supporting the upper part of his body with one hand. The cat settled down against his knee.

The light filtered redly through the table-cover. To his satisfaction he found a small hole, evidently a burn made by some careless smoker. Through this aperture he could look out. His range of vision included the greater part of the room, excepting the side on which the table stood. He could see the window and several chairs, as well as the door into the adjoining room, but the door into the hall was out of view, at his right.

While he was looking about, a man came from the next room. Doubtless it was Arima; at least Orme recognized the Japanese who had overcome him in the porter’s office at the Père Marquette the night before. He stepped into the room with a little smile on his brown face. Seating himself in a chair, he fixed his heels in the rungs and clasped his hands about his knees. He was waiting.

The black eyes rested on the table. To Orme they seemed to be boring through the cover that concealed him, and he hardly dared to breathe, but the Asiatic appeared to observe nothing unusual. Orme wondered at the unfathomable intelligence of those eyes. He had often said of the Chinese and Japanese that he did not trust them for the reason that a Caucasian could never tell what they were

thinking about. The racial difference in thought processes he found disconcerting.

A bell rang. Arima went to the door, out of view, and opened it. Orme could hear persons mounting the stairs, and presently the voice of Arima said, “Come in,” and the visitors entered the room.

Pausing near the door for a moment, they exchanged a few whispered sentences. Then one of them walked over toward the window. Orme repressed an exclamation, for the figure that came into view was the figure of Poritol—dapper, assertive.

He was dressed as on the night before, and his precious high hat was hugged close to his shoulder.

His eyes roved with an exaggerated assumption of important cunning. Presently he threw over his shoulder a rapid sentence in a foreign tongue. It sounded like Spanish, and Orme inferred that it was a dialect of Portuguese.

The answer came from an oily tongue; the voice was Alcatrante’s.

What were the South Americans doing here? It was only a few hours since the Japanese had set on Alcatrante, yet here he was in a stronghold of the enemy—and expected! Had the astute diplomat fallen into a trap?

Arima was standing, not far from Poritol. His face was expressionless. Looking from Alcatrante to Poritol and back again, he said in English: “The mos’ honorable gentleman will soon be here.”

“That is right,” said Alcatrante suavely. “Mention no names.”

Arima nodded slightly.

The silence grew intense. Orme was relieved when it was broken by another ring of the bell, and Arima slipped to the door. Alcatrante moved over beside Poritol and whispered a few words, scarcely moving his lips. His face looked yellow by daylight, and the eyes behind the gold spectacles were heavy-lidded and almost closed. Orme inferred that the night had been sleepless for Alcatrante.

These observations were interrupted by the entrance of the newcomer. He paused at the threshold, evidently to salute, for Poritol and Alcatrante bowed low. Then quick steps crossed the floor and into view came a nervous but assured-looking little figure—a Japanese, but undoubtedly a man of great dignity. His manner of sharp authority would be hard to dispute, for it was supported by a personality that seemed to be stronger than Alcatrante’s. Who he was Orme could not guess,

but that he was somebody of importance it was easy to see.

The stranger bowed again and addressed himself to Alcatrante. The conversation was carried on in French.

“It is well that you communicated with me, sir,” he said, “we were working at cross-purposes when, in reality, our interests were identical.”

Alcatrante bowed. “I came to that conclusion late last night,” he said. “I do not deny that it would have pleased me to carry the affair through by myself.”

“Yes, your position would then have been stronger.” The Japanese smiled faintly.

“But,” continued Alcatrante, with a slight grimace, “the activity of your men made that impossible. I have no lieutenants such as yours.” He shot an ugly gleam at Poritol, whose sudden assumption of fearsome humility was in strange contrast to his usual self-assurance.

“As we hold the documents”—the Japanese spoke with great distinctness—“you will necessarily admit our advantage. That means, you will understand, a smaller commission on the next contract.”

Alcatrante twisted his face into the semblance of a smile. “Not too small, or we cannot undertake the work,” he said.

“No, not too small,” the stranger agreed calmly, “but smaller than the last. You must not forget that there are others who would gladly do the same work.”

“Yes, but at best they cannot get the terms we get.”

“Possibly. That is a matter still to be determined. Meantime we have assumed that our interests in this document are identical. Let us test it.”

“One word first,” said Alcatrante. “I take it that, if our interests are sympathetic with yours, we may count on your protection?”

“Most assuredly.”

“Then——?”

“Then we shall see. My fairness is clear in that I give you a sight of the document with myself. I might have denied all knowledge of it.”

Alcatrante smiled as if to say: “I already knew so much that you could not risk that.”

The stranger turned to Arima and said something in Japanese. Arima replied, and the stranger explained to Alcatrante: “I asked about my man Maku. The

American struck him on the head last night, and injured him. But he is recovering. He is troublesome—that American."

Orme started. His head bumped against the table.

"What's that?" exclaimed Poritol, advancing. "There's something under that table!" He stooped to lift the cover.

One chance flashed into Orme's mind. Quickly he seized the cat, which was still sleeping against his knee, and pushed it under the table-cover. It walked out into the room, mewing plaintively.

"A cat," said Poritol, drawing back.

Arima explained in English: "It belongs to lady upstairs. Comes down fire-escape. Shoo! Shoo!" He clapped his hands and the animal bounded to the window-sill and disappeared up the iron steps.

"And now," began the stranger, "shall we examine the documents?"

"One moment," said Alcatrante. "I should first like a clear understanding with you—some words in private." He moved to a corner, and there the stranger joined him. They talked in an undertone for several minutes, Alcatrante gesturing volubly, the stranger nodding now and then, and interjecting a few brief words.

What was going on was more than ever a mystery to Orme. The stranger's reference to "the next contract" strengthened the surmise that the documents in the envelope were connected with a South American trade concession. Alcatrante had plainly concluded that his interests and those of the Japanese were identical. He must have communicated with the strange Japanese the first thing in the morning. That would account for his failure to call at the Père Marquette at ten o'clock. Learning that the bill had been taken from Orme, and that the coveted documents were in the possession of the Japanese, he had no object in keeping his appointment. As for Poritol, he had become a figure of minor importance.

But Orme did not let these questions long engage him, for he had made a discovery. Where his head bumped against the table, the board above him—solid, as he had supposed—rattled strangely. At the moment he could not investigate, but as soon as the cat had satisfied the suspicions of Poritol, and Alcatrante and the stranger had retired to their corner, he twisted his head back and examined the wood above him.

The table had a drawer. From the room outside this drawer was concealed by the cloth cover, and Orme had not suspected its existence.

Now, the table was cheaply made. The drawer was shallow and narrow, and it was held in position, under the table, by an open framework of wood. When it was pushed in, it was stopped at the right place by two cleats; there was no solid strip to prevent its being pushed in too far.

Orme put his hand to the back of the drawer. There was a space between it and the table-top.

Cautiously he pushed his hand through the opening. His fingers touched a flat object—a pad of paper, or—the thought made his heart beat—a large, thick envelope. Could Arima have used the drawer as a hiding-place?

Slowly he got the edge of the object between his first and second fingers and drew it a little way toward the back of the drawer. A moment later he had it under his eyes.

Yes, it was a long envelope of heavy linen, and there were bulky papers within. The gummed flap was toward him. He was interested to note that, important though the documents seemed to be, the envelope was not sealed with wax.

He remembered what the girl had said: her father’s name was written on the address side. He had only to turn it over to learn who she was. In the circumstances such an act might be justified. But she had not wished him to know—and he would even now respect her wish and keep his own promise to her.

His first thought was to slip the envelope into his pocket, but it occurred to him in time that, if it did indeed contain the documents concerning which Alcatrante and the stranger were disputing, it would be sought and missed long before he could escape from the room. So, taking a pencil from his pocket, he inserted it under the corner of the flap and slowly worked the flap free. The strength of the linen prevented any tearing.

He removed the contents of the envelope—two folded sheets of parchment paper, held together by an elastic band—and thrust them into the inside pocket of his coat. All this was done swiftly and noiselessly.

It now remained to find something to take the place of the abstracted documents. In his pocket were some printed prospectuses of the mine which he had come to Chicago to investigate. In shape and thickness they were not dissimilar to the documents which he had taken. He slipped the prospectuses into the envelope

and, wetting his finger, rubbed it along the gummed surface of the flap. Enough glue remained to make the flap adhere, after a little pressure. The job was by no means perfect, but it was not likely to be detected.

At that moment Alcatrante raised his voice and said, still in French: “You are sure, then, that this will not only delay the game, but end it.”

“Quite sure,” said the Japanese. “Unless the documents are signed before midnight to-night nothing can be done for sometime. We have the Germans fixed. They will do what they have thus far agreed to do, but if any technical hitch arises, such as a failure to sign within the time-limit, they will decline to renew negotiations. That was all we could get from them, but it is enough—now.”

“And for other ships,” said Alcatrante, “the commission shall be five hundred thousand.”

“Five hundred thousand. Seven hundred and fifty was too much.”

“Five hundred thousand in gold.”

“In gold.”

Orme slipped the envelope back into the drawer and put his eye to the hole in the cover. His position was now more and more critical, for to open the drawer and get the envelope, Arima would have to lift the table cover.

The stranger turned to Arima. “Give us the envelope,” he said.

Arima approached the table. Orme crowded back against the wall as far as he could, knowing that the chances of escaping discovery were strongly against him. But he was saved by the very eagerness of the others. They all crowded about Arima, as he lifted the cover, opened the drawer, and took out the envelope. So close did they stand that Orme was out of their angle of vision. The table-cover fell again, and he was safe. He resumed his position at the peep-hole.

The stranger stepped to the middle of the room, the others gathering around him. With a quick jerk he tore the envelope open, and taking out the papers, ran his eye over them rapidly. He uttered an exclamation. “What is it?” said Alcatrante. The South American’s hand was shaking, and perspiration stood out on his forehead.

The Japanese snarled. “Tricked! They’ve fooled us. That honorable burglar of yours got the wrong envelope.”

Alcatrante snatched the papers. "'Prospectus,'" he read, "'of the Last Dare Mining Company.' But I do not understand."

The Japanese glared at him angrily. "If you had kept out of this business," he snapped, "and let Maku attend to it, everything would have been right. Now your burglars have spoiled it." He snatched back the harmless prospectuses and tore them in two, throwing the fragments to the floor and grinding them under his heel.

Arima spoke. "Pardon, honorable sir, Maku say the right envelope was taken from the safe. Maku know."

"Ha! Then it was you who were tricked—outwitted. That American reached the tree before you last evening and substituted these papers. Go back to Japan, Arima. I don't need you."

Arima bowed submissively. As for the stranger, his rage gave way to despair.

"What shall I say to the Emperor?" he muttered. "What shall I say to the Emperor?"

Then his feelings came again under control; he looked calmly at Alcatrante. "Well," he said, "what would you suggest?"

Alcatrante's face was a puzzle. Every shade of doubt, disappointment, anger, suspicion, and shrewd deduction passed over it. He was putting into play that marvelous power of concentration on subtle issues that had enabled him to play so brilliantly the rôle of international under-dog. At last he smiled and spoke.

"Find the American," he said.

Suddenly there was a knock at the door. Arima looked at his master, who nodded indifferently and said: "Yes, see who it is. It can do no harm now."

Orme heard the door open. What startled him first was the action of Poritol, who stepped back to the wall, his jaw dropping, his face a picture of embarrassment and fright. Alcatrante and the stranger showed amazement.

For a moment they stood thus in silence, and then from the door came a clear voice:

"What? You here, Mr. Alcatrante? And the Japanese minister?"

Orme almost sprang from his hiding-place. The voice was the voice of the girl!

CHAPTER XI

THE WAY OUT

The sound of the girl's voice brought the men in the room to life. Her words were shaded to a tone of fearless scorn which must have bitten deep, for Alcatrante and the Japanese minister looked like school-boys caught in wrong-doing. The South American gnawed at his lip; the Japanese looked at the floor, and Orme now realized that the manner which had seemed so indicative of a masterful personality was the manner which springs from power—the manner that is built upon the assurance of a tremendous backing.

The tension was broken by Poritol. The little man's dismay suddenly gave way to an eager and voluble excitement, and he rushed across the room, exclaiming: "Oh, my dear miss——"

"No names," commanded Alcatrante harshly, turning on his subordinate.

"My dear young lady," continued Poritol breathlessly, "I am the victim of your misunderstanding. You will permit me to explain."

She answered with an even, cutting edge in her voice: "You cannot explain, Mr. Poritol."

"But——" he began, blind to her meaning.

"I do not care to hear you," she said; and Poritol slunk back to his former position. From his face it was clear that he had no desire except to get away.

Meantime Alcatrante aroused himself. "My friend here"—he indicated the Japanese—"and myself are here on business which concerns our two nations. Your appearance, I presume, is due to a desire to engage the professional services of Mr. Arima. Or perhaps you were trying to find the fortune-teller upstairs." He barely repressed his sneer.

The girl did not answer. She had remained by the door, and but for the attitudes of the others, Orme would not have known but that she had gone. As it was, he

could read in their bearing the disconcerting effects of her continued disdain.

The Japanese spoke. “Will you enter, miss, or shall we direct you on your way? Arima will come out and talk with you, if you so wish.”

Still no answer. To Orme, in his hiding, there was something uncanny in her failure to respond. But he could picture her—Truth, calm in the presence of subterfuge.

“Will you not state your desire?” Again the Japanese. He was smiling now, with the false politeness of his race.

And then she spoke: “That envelope on the floor was stolen from my father’s home. It bears my father’s name.”

Before Alcatrante could stop him, little Poritol, with some vague hope of making amends, had snatched up the torn envelope and taken it to her. He returned to the range of Orme’s vision with an air of virtuous importance.

“The contents,” said the girl—“where are the papers?”

Alcatrante and the Japanese looked at each other. It was as if they said, “In view of our failure we might as well make a clean breast of it.” But Alcatrante was too cunning to take the initiative in confession. He left that to the Japanese, who spoke unhesitatingly.

“The only papers in the envelope were these.” He picked up the torn prospectuses from the floor and held them extended in his hand. “Our surprise is as great as yours.”

“Do you expect me to believe that?”

“Whether you believe it or not, my dear young lady, it is true.”

There was a moment of silence, then the Japanese continued: “We have reason to think that the envelope was for a time last night in the possession of an American, and that he substituted these circulars for whatever the envelope may have held.”

Orme’s impulse to declare himself was almost irresistible. A man whose instincts were less cautious would have thrown the table over and ranged himself beside the girl. Orme was not fearful, but he knew that the chances of a successful outcome would be lessened by exposure. Even if he and the girl got safely from the room, there would be a pursuit, and the risk of losing the papers would be great.

As for the girl, she clearly was in no danger. These men would not harm her.

But would the assertion of the Japanese lead her to doubt Orme? Would she believe that he had actually recovered the papers the night before and kept them for his own purposes? He remembered that he had given her only the scantiest account of his adventure at the tree, for he had wished to spare her the details of an incident that meant her disappointment as well as his own. She might now readily attribute his reticence to a desire to conceal something.

And then came her voice. Her first words brought a glow to Orme's heart: "I know that you are mistaken. No American has those papers." Orme breathed his relief. Then she added the dubious word—"Unless——"

So she did doubt him after all. Well, he could not blame her. The scene in the room—the frankness of the Japanese, which could only be attributed to discomfiture; the empty envelope; the torn prospectuses on the floor, all these conditions pointed to the truth of the explanation she had heard.

On the other hand, there was his appearance on the lake, an hour or more after the episode on the campus. Might it not occur to her that, had he already secured the papers, he would have had no object in the further pursuit of the Japanese? But, perhaps she would think that he was seeking Arima to sell the papers back to him; or that, in spite of his appearance of surprise, he had been a witness of her abduction and had gone out on the water to save her. There were so many things she might think! Indeed, that dubious word "unless" might even signify, "unless he has secured the papers since I last saw him." But no; she would gather from the situation in which she found her enemies that the envelope had not been out of their possession since it was taken from the tree. Orme shut his lips together hard. Her doubt of him would have to be endured, even though it shattered his pleasant dream of her complete and sympathetic understanding.

Alcatrante, meantime, was studying the girl with curious eyes. His look was both perplexed and admiring.

"Do you mind telling me how you happened to come to this place?" he asked.

She answered indifferently: "Supposing that the Japanese had stolen the papers, I searched Maku's room at our house. There was a torn envelope there, with the name 'Arima' printed in the corner."

Alcatrante bowed. "You are cleverer than most Americans, my dear young lady," he said. His lips curved into a smile that disclosed his fangs.

"That," she replied, "is as it may be. But I have not your admiration for trickery,

Mr. Alcatrante."

Again he smiled. "Ah," he exclaimed, "trickery is the detail work of diplomacy." Then with a shade of seriousness in his voice, he asked: "Why did you use that word 'unless'?"

"Why, indeed?" She made this noncommittal answer, and if Alcatrante had hoped to soothe her into friendliness and draw from her a clue to her suspicions, he was disappointed.

There was another period of silence, broken at last by the Japanese. "The fact that we have failed, my dear young lady," he said, "makes concealment unnecessary. I know, of course, that this matter will never become public. You understand that the representatives of great nations often have to take steps which, as private citizens, they would never think of."

"Yes," she answered, "I understand. There is no more to be said. Good-day."

There was a step and the sound of the door closing. She had gone.

Alcatrante and the Japanese looked at each other. "We have not failed—yet," said Alcatrante in French. "The girl does not know where the documents are, or she would not have come here. If her father does not have them before midnight our plans are safe. We remain merely at a loss as to the details of the documents, and we already know what they contain in a general way."

"Yes," agreed the Japanese, "things do not look so black, perhaps. But I am interested in your former advice."

"Yes?"

"Find the American! That is what *she* will try to do."

"We had an appointment with him this morning," said Alcatrante grimly, "but when you said that your man had the envelope, it no longer seemed necessary to go. We—you and I—still have the same object in view. I suggest that we now set out separately."

"As you wish," said the Japanese calmly. Doubtless he knew that Alcatrante was grasping at a straw which might still give him the advantage in future negotiations. "I am honored by your co-operation thus far." He bowed formally.

Alcatrante returned the bow and, beckoning to Poritol, left the room.

The Japanese minister turned to Arima and talked rapidly in his native tongue. From his manner it was plain that he was giving orders. At last, with a little

gesture of authority, he put on his hat and walked out. The door closed after him with a slam.

Arima, now alone, seated himself in a chair and appeared to meditate. Again his hands were clasped about his knees and his beady eyes fixed on space. For fully fifteen minutes he sat thus; then, with a little clucking sound, he leaped to his feet and hurried into the next room.

Now was Orme's chance. He lifted the table-cover and rose to his feet. Arima had not closed the door after him, but Orme was not in the line of direct view into the other room, and he had to risk the possibility of being seen before he reached the window.

Or should he try for the door? It all depended upon what part of the next room Arima was in; but the window seemed safer, for the opening and closing of the door would be sure to attract attention.

Orme moved toward the window slowly, watching the opening through which Arima had disappeared. He got half-way to the window; three more steps would bring him to the sill. And then, without warning, Arima leaped into the room. Even in that moment Orme caught a glimpse of a mirror in the farther room, and knew that the Japanese had seen his reflection.

At this instant another man appeared, close behind Arima. A bandage was wrapped around his head. It was Maku, who presumably had been in the apartment all the time.

Orme stood little chance of overcoming the two. Quick as cats, with muscles like steel springs and a great variety of scientific tricks of offense and defense, they could handle him as they willed in a direct encounter. If Orme had had a revolver, he would now have drawn it. Yet he knew that this was not a case for fire-arms. Obviously, if he used a dangerous weapon in these men's rooms and was afterward caught, it would fare hard with him, for the real facts would be suppressed and he would be sentenced as an ordinary housebreaker, perhaps with some clemency due to his personal standing.

A quick intuition told him that he would not escape lightly if they fairly got their hands on him. The two Japanese had hitherto shown much patience with him. Their desire seemed to have been to avoid hurting him any more than was necessary. But there is a limit to Japanese patience. The scathing words of the Japanese minister must still be burning in Arima's brain. And Maku, who had controlled himself while Orme was following him through the streets of the North Side, no longer had a diplomatic reason for restraining his rage against the

man who had struck him down. In any event, the eyes of Arima and Maku glittered angrily, and Orme realized that he could expect no mercy.

He caught up a chair and raised it over his head, prepared to bring it down on Arima, who was only a few feet from him and coming fast.

The Japanese raised his arms, to fend the expected blow. With sudden inspiration, Orme hurled the chair at his opponent's feet. There was a crash. Arima sprawled headlong. Maku, who was close behind, tried to leap over Arima, but his feet went through the rungs of the chair, and he, too, crashed to the floor.

As he threw the chair Orme leaped back. Before the Japanese could get out of their tangle, he had jumped over the window-sill and was running up the fire-escape. Madame Alia, was at her window, a look of startled inquiry on her face. She stepped back as he crowded into the room.

"Quick!" he said. "They'll be after me. Hide me somewhere."

"Come!" She took his sleeve and pulled him to a corner. There she pushed aside the dingy hanging and Orme saw that the wall was covered with a wainscoting that ran from floor to ceiling.

The medium looked at him with bright eyes. "You're the real sort," she whispered, and a wave of color in her cheeks brought back the suggestion of girlish beauty. "I saw that scrap there through a hole in the floor. You're the goods." She pressed his arm almost affectionately, then, with her free hand, she pushed against the paneling. Noiselessly a section of it turned inward, disclosing a dark cavity. "Get in!"

Orme quickly slipped into the darkness, the panel closed, and he heard the swish of the hanging as it dropped back against the board.

It was not too soon. Two soft thuds told him that the Japanese had dropped over the sill into the room.

He heard the woman give a well-feigned scream of surprise.

"'Scuse us, miss,"—it was Arima's voice—"we looking for sneak thief. He come in here."

"Be off with you. I've just come from the front room there, and there wasn't a soul came in."

"We saw him."

“He must have gone out to the hall, then.” The woman’s voice had a note of mollification—as though she had suddenly recognized the right of the two Japanese to enter the apartment. “*I* didn’t hear him.”

A few words of Japanese colloquy; then Arima: “I look around. My friend go to hall.” A door closed; evidently Maku had gone out; and then Orme heard steps. After this there was a long wait, while the Japanese examined the other rooms, the woman evidently offering him her aid. At last they returned.

“Well, I go back,” said Arima. “I saw him come in the window. My friend will know. See you later.”

Presently the woman raised the hanging and whispered through the boards: “He went back down the fire-escape. His friend’s in the hall. He’ll find out you haven’t went down, and then he’ll come back.”

“I’ll try the roof,” whispered Orme. “Perhaps I can get on to another house that way.”

“Wait till I see.” She walked away, but soon returned.

“No use,” he heard her say. “That Jap’s a sitting on the fire-escape watching. He grinned when I looked down.”

Orme pondered. “Help me out of this,” he whispered, “and there’ll be something in it for you.”

She moved impatiently. “Cut it out! I don’t want nothing. You’re a good sport, that’s all.” She paused. “Not that I’d mind having a present. But I don’t want no money.”

Orme caught the distinction. “I’ll remember,” he said. “And what shall I do now?”

“You’ll have to stay in there a while, I guess.”

“I simply must get away—and within an hour or two.”

“I’ll manage that,” she answered confidently.

“But how——?”

“You’ll see. Just leave it to me.”

Orme smiled to himself, there in the darkness. Of course, he would leave it to her; but he did not see how she was to rid him of the watchful Japanese.

“There’s just one thing,” he whispered. “Whatever is done, will have to be done

without help from outside. This is not a matter for the police."

"I understand. Why can't you just leave it to me? I don't believe you trust me a little bit!"

"But I do," he protested. "I am absolutely in your hands."

He heard her sigh faintly. "I'm going to put down the window now," she said. "It ain't safe for me to stand here talking to you unless I do. That Arima fellow might pop up the fire-escape any time."

She was back in a few moments. He had heard the window creak down, and had wondered whether the action would add to Arima's suspicion.

"If he comes up now," she explained in an undertone, "the glare on the outside of the window will keep him from seeing in very plain."

After that she did not speak for some time, but the occasional movements of her body, as she leaned against the panel, were audible to Orme. He found himself wondering about her—how she had happened to take up the career of fortune-telling. She must have been a handsome woman; even now she was not unattractive.

The delay grew more and more irksome. It seemed to Orme as though he had been behind the panel for hours. After a while he asked:

"What time is it?"

"About two o'clock. Ain't you hungry?"

Orme laughed softly. "I hadn't thought about it."

"Wait a minute." She moved away. When she returned she pulled up the hanging and opened the panel. In her hand was a thick sandwich. "I was just going to eat my own lunch when you came back through the window," she explained.

He took the sandwich. She looked at him boldly. He was standing close to her in the opening. There was an expression that was almost defiant in her eyes. "I—I want my present."

"You shall have it, Madame Alia," he said.

"You ain't my kind—and it won't make no difference to you." Her voice faltered and her eyes dropped. "I want you to kiss me."

Orme looked at her, and understood. He put his arms around her and kissed her gently on the lips. There was no disloyalty in it. He was simply satisfying the

craving of this poor woman’s soul—a craving for a tribute to which she could always revert as the symbol of a high friendliness. She felt that he was of a different world; he knew that the world was all one, though partitioned off by artificial barriers, but he could not correct her view.

She clung to him for a moment after his lips left hers, then released herself from his clasp and moved back into the room, her face averted. Was it to hide a blush? Orme did not ask himself, but respecting her reticence of spirit, silently closed the panel and was again in darkness.

For a time he stood there quietly. His back was against the wall,—his hands easily touched the paneling that shut him off from the room. He wondered what this secret place was for, and taking a match from his pocket, he lighted it.

The enclosure seemed to extend all the way across the side of the room. Farther along, lying on the floor and standing against the wall, were contrivances of which at first he could make nothing—poles, pieces of tin, and—were those masks, heaped in the corner? From a row of pegs hung long robes—white and black.

The truth flashed into Orme’s mind. He was in Madame Alia’s ghost-closet!

CHAPTER XII

POWER OF DARKNESS

To Orme the next half-hour was very long. He seated himself upon the floor of the closet and ate the sandwich which the clairvoyant had brought him. Occasionally he could hear her moving about the apartment.

“Poor charlatan!” he thought. “She is herself a ‘good sort.’ I suppose she excuses the sham of her profession on the ground that it deceives many persons into happiness.”

He struck another match and looked again at the ghostly paraphernalia about him. Near him hung a black robe with a large hood. He crushed one of the folds in his hands and was surprised to discover how thin it was and into how small space it could be compressed. Not far away stood several pairs of large slippers of soft black felt. The white robes were also of thinnest gossamer—flimsy stuff that swayed like smoke when he breathed toward it.

By the light of a third match he looked more carefully at the other apparatus. There was a large pair of angel-wings, of the conventional shape. The assortment of masks was sufficiently varied for the representation of many types of men and women of different ages.

The match burned down to his fingers, and again he sat in darkness, wondering at the elaborateness of the medium’s outfit. She was a fraud, but he liked her—yes, pitied her—and he felt inclined to excuse in so far as he could. For the kiss which he had given her he felt no regret; it was hers, in all innocence, for what of good she might have found in it.

The minutes dragged by. He thought of the precious documents, safe in the inside pocket of his coat. What they were, he did not try to determine, but it was plain that they must be of international importance. The talk of ships and Alcatrante’s references to commissions had puzzled him. But suddenly came to his mind the newspaper rumors that Japan was secretly adding vessels to her navy through the agency of a South American republic which was having

cruisers and battle-ships built in Europe, to turn them over at their completion, to the Japanese. There was, as yet, no international proof of this policy, for none of the ships had been completed, but the South American country was certainly adopting a policy of naval construction quite out of proportion to her position among the Powers.

How came the girl to be involved in this mix-up of nations? Through her father, of course—but who was he? A concessionaire? Her courage and determination, employed against shrewd men, was as notable as the beauty of her face and mind, for she was like a queen in her assured comprehension.

How it quickened his heart to think of her! The poor, faded medium, with the smolder of old flames in her eyes, with the records of hard experience written on her face, was a child in stature beside the girl—a child with yearnings that could never be satisfied.

Well, the girl had doubted him. He could not wonder at that, for the facts were all against him, and she had known him only for a few hours. Yet he had hoped—he had believed—that she would know the truth and the devotion in him without further evidence. Perhaps he had expected too much from her noble insight. After all—and that was part of the loveliness of her—she was a very human girl.

The panel swung open, and Madame Alia stood looking down at him. She spoke in an undertone.

“The Japs are still watching. Arima is sitting on the fire-escape by his window, and I can hear the other fellow moving around in the hall outside my door. I think they’re on to your being here.”

Orme thought for a minute. “I’ve got to get away soon,” he said. “I don’t mind telling you that there are papers that must be delivered before twelve o’clock to-night.”

“Can I take them for you?”

“I don’t know where to tell you to take them.”

She sighed. “I guess you don’t trust me.”

“Trust you? Of course, I do. But the truth is, Madame Alia, that it is going to need hard work on my part to find the person to whom the papers belong. I don’t even know his name.” Secretly he condemned himself now, because he had not overcome his scruples and looked at the address on the envelope while he had

the chance.

Again she sighed. “Well,” she said, “of course, it’s beyond me. Do you—do you mind my knowing *your* name?”

“Pardon me,” he said. “I didn’t realize that you didn’t know it already. My name is Robert Orme.”

She looked at him with a smile. “Well, Mr. Orme, I’ll get you out of this. I think I know a way. But you’ll have to do just what I tell you.”

“I depend on you,” he said.

She laid her hand on his shoulder with a friendly pressure. “You’ll have to wait in here a while longer—and you’ll have to keep mighty quiet. I’ve got a circle at three o’clock—a séance. They come once a week, and I can’t well put them off. You see, I work alone. It’s a small circle, and I never liked the idea of helpers; they’re likely to give you away sooner or later. I stretch a curtain across this corner for a cabinet, and they tie me to a chair—and then things happen.” She smiled faintly. “I know *you* won’t hurt my game.”

“All your secrets are safe with me.” He glanced at the dark interior of the closet.

“I didn’t know any other place to put you,” she said simply. “They’d have got you, if you had went to the hall—Sh-h!” The panel closed and she was away. A moment later he heard her talking with Arima, who apparently had again climbed up to her window.

“Thief must be here,” said Arima. “He not been in hall. My friend know. We see him come in here.”

“I told you he wasn’t here. If you don’t believe me, why don’t you call the cops.”

“We not want cops. I come in and watch.”

“But I’m going to hold a circle here in a few minutes.”

“What?” Arima’s voice had a puzzled note.

“A séance. The spirits come. You know. All sit around, with the light turned down, and spirits come.”

“Oh!” The Japanese either understood or pretended to. “I come, then.”

After a period of hesitation the woman said: “Why, yes, I guess you can—if you keep still. Your friend can come, too. You’re a neighbor, and I won’t charge you

anything."

"All right. I call my friend." Footsteps crossed the room and the door to the hall was opened. Presently it closed again, and Orme heard fragments of a conversation in Japanese.

From other sounds Orme gathered that the woman was arranging chairs. "Sit here, you two," he heard her say. "You'll have to keep quiet when the rest come. Do just what they do? Be sure, now."

The bell now began to ring at frequent intervals, each time announcing the arrival of newcomers. Madame Alia's clients were quickly assembling; Orme could hear them whispering among themselves.

A clinking noise he did not at first understand. Then he realized that it was the sound of silver dropping into a hat. Someone was taking up the collection. He knew, too, when they hung the curtain across his corner of the room, shutting off the space in which the medium was to sit, and when they lighted the gas and drew down the shades at the window. Then he heard them lead her into the cabinet and tie her to the chair.

The silence that followed these preparations grew oppressive. The clients were waiting for the right "current," and Madame Alia, Orme had no doubt, was using the interval to free herself from her bonds.

In a little while someone started the hymn, "Over the River They Beckon to Me," and the others took it up—women's voices, chiefly, struggling through the melody in their trebles, with the mumbled undertones of one or two men.

A draught of cooler air struck Orme's cheek; a hand found his shoulder; a voice whispered. Under cover of the singing Madame Alia had opened the panel. Her lips were close to his ear. In the creepy tension of the waiting Orme had almost forgotten that Madame Alia's ghosts were a cheat, and the touch of her hand made him start, but her first words brought him to himself.

"Hush!" she whispered. "You'll get your chance in a minute. Put on a pair of black felt slippers. Here"—she groped along the floor, and gave him the slippers. They were large, and went easily over his shoes.

"Now the black robe, just behind you."

He took it from its peg, and slipped into it.

"Cover your head and face with the hood."

He did as directed, finding the eyeholes with his fingers.

“Hide your hands in the sleeves. Now, listen. I’m going to keep them busy looking at the curtains. When you hear a gong ring three times, come through the panel, and go between the curtain and the wall-hanging, on the side toward the window. The gas is down to a pinpoint. Those folks think they can see a lot more than they do. But they won’t see you, unless you show some white. Anyhow they’ll be watching the cabinet. Keep outside the circle of chairs, and work your way to the door of the next room. There are hangings there; go through them. You’ll find light enough in the next room to get to the door into the hall. First stuff the robe under the sofa. You’ll *find* your hat under there. You left it here when you came, and I tucked it away. You’d better wear the slippers down to the street. Never mind about returning them—unless you care to come. Now, be careful.”

“The Japanese—where are they?”

“At the other side of the circle. Don’t worry about them. They’re only kids when it comes to my game. Now, wait till I get the things I need.” She slipped past him in the closet, and he heard faint rustlings as she gathered her paraphernalia. Soon she was back at the panel. The last stanza of the hymn was drawing to a close. “Be sure you follow directions,” she whispered.

“I will.” He pressed her hand gratefully.

“And—and you won’t forget me.”

With a sudden yearning that seemed to be beyond her control, she leaned her body against him. Her warm breath was on his face; her arm found its way around him and held him convulsively.

“Oh,” she whispered, “I can’t bear to have you go. Don’t forget me—please don’t forget me.”

“I shall never forget you, and what you have done for me,” he answered gravely.

“You will come back and see me—sometime?”

“I will come back. And I should like to bring a friend, who will have even more cause to thank you than I have."

“A friend?” A tinge of apprehension colored the question: “A—a woman?”

“Yes.”

The soft curves of her body were quickly withdrawn from him.

“Oh,” she whispered, “I don’t believe I want to see her.”

For a moment she stood motionless. Then she said:

“Are you sorry you kissed me?”

“No,” he answered, “I am not.”

Her lips brushed his forehead, and he was alone. Groping with one hand, he assured himself that the panel remained open. All in black, he awaited the signal.

And now strange manifestations began in the room without. There were rappings, some faint, some loud—coming apparently from all quarters. Invisible fingers swept gently across the strings of a guitar. Then came the soft clangor of a gong—once, twice, three times.

Orme slipped through the panel, into the cabinet. Keeping close to the wall, he moved to the left and worked out into the room. The rappings were now louder than before—loud and continuous enough to cover any slight sound he might make. A little gasp came from the circle as he went out into the room. At first he thought that he had been seen. To his eyes, fresh from complete darkness, the room seemed moderately light; but the gas was little more than a tiny blue dot.

As he took a step forward he saw why the circle had gasped. Through the curtains of the cabinet came the semblance of a tenuous wraith in long, trailing robes of white. It was almost formless, its outlines seeming to melt into the gloom.

Advancing a little way into the circle, it shrank back as though timorous, then wavered. From the circle came a woman’s voice—anxious, eager, straining with heart-break—“Oh, my sister!”

The figure turned toward her, slowly extended its arms, and glided back to the curtains, where it stood as though waiting.

The sobbing woman arose from her chair and hastened toward the wraith.

“Agnes!” she whispered imploringly. “Won’t you speak to me, Agnes?”

The ghostly figure slowly shook its head.

“Are you happy, Agnes? Tell me. Oh, don’t go until you have told me.”

The figure nodded mutely, and with a final slow gesture, waved the woman back to her seat.

Meantime Orme cast his eyes over the circle. Dimly he saw faces, some stolid,

some agitated; and there, at the farther end were the two Japanese, intent as children on these wonders. Their sparkling eyes were directed to the cabinet.

The apparition had disappeared between the curtains. But now there was a fresh gasp of wonder, as the figure of a little child stepped out into the room. It did not go far from the cabinet, and it alternately advanced and retreated, turning this way and that, as though looking for someone.

“It wants its mother!” exclaimed one of the women in the circle. “Is your mother here, little one?”

The child stared at the speaker, then withdrew to the curtains.

“They will begin to talk after a while,” explained the woman—“when the control gets stronger. I always feel so tender for these little lost spirits that come back to hunt for their loved ones.”

Orme moved swiftly around the circle. He passed so close to the Japanese that he could have touched them. The felt slippers made his steps noiseless; the thick rug absorbed the shock of his weight.

He passed through the hangings of the doorway to the next room. There he had no gaslight; the window-shades, however, were not drawn so closely but that a little daylight entered. He removed the robe and stuffed it under the old sofa at one side.

His hat, as Madame Alia had said, was there, and he put it on and went to the hall door. The circle had begun to sing another hymn. Orme got into the hall, shut the door silently, and hurried down the stairs, the long-drawn strains of the song following him and dying away as he neared the street entrance. In the lower hall he removed the felt slippers and tossed them into a corner.

He was amazed at the loudness of the street noises, and the glare of the sunlight as he stepped to the sidewalk. He stood there blinking for a moment, until his eyes became accustomed to the light. The foot-procession of the city streamed by him.

Suddenly a man turned in toward the doorway, and, with a startled exclamation, stopped short. Orme found himself looking into the gleaming eyes of Alcatrante.

CHAPTER XIII

AN OLD MAN OF THE SEA

“Oh, Mr. Orme, you are the man I most wished to see.” The minister’s voice carried a note of unrestrained eagerness. He extended his hand.

Orme accepted the salutation, mustering the appearance of a casual meeting; he must keep Alcatrante out of the building.

“I was sorry that I could not be at your apartment this morning,” continued Alcatrante, “and I hope you did not wait too long.”

“Oh, no,” replied Orme. “I waited for a little while, but concluded that something had called you away. Has Senhor Poritol recovered from his anxiety?”

“Why, no,” said Alcatrante. “But the course of events has changed.” He linked his arm in Orme’s and walked along with him toward the center of the city. “You see,” he went on, “my young friend Poritol overestimated the importance of that marked bill. It did give the clue to the hiding place of certain papers which were of great value to him. What he failed to realize was that the papers could be of little importance to others. And yet, so perturbed is he that he has asked me to offer a considerable reward for the recovery of these papers.”

“Indeed?”

“Yes.” Alcatrante sent a slanting glance at Orme. “The sum is ridiculously large, but he insists on offering one thousand dollars.”

“Quite a sum,” said Orme calmly. He was interested in the minister’s indirections.

“As for the events of last night”—continued Alcatrante, stopping short, with a significant glance.

“Well?” said Orme indifferently.

“I trust that you did not think me absurd for sending that detective to you. That I did so was a result of poor Poritol’s frantic insistence.”

“Indeed?”

“My young friend was so afraid that you would be robbed.”

“I was robbed,” laughed Orme, trying to make light of the situation.

“Why, how was that?” Alcatrante’s surprise was well assumed.

“Oh, after I said good-night to you, the two Japanese caught me while I was going through the tunnel to the courtyard.”

“My dear Mr. Orme!”

“They are clever, those Japanese.”

“And afterward you went out again?”

“What makes you think that?”

Alcatrante bit his lip. “Why,” he stammered, “the detective reported that you were absent when he arrived.”

“And therefore,” remarked Orme coolly, “he got access to my apartment and, after rummaging through my things, went sound asleep in my bedroom, where I found him snoring when I returned.”

The minister swung his cane viciously at a bit of paper that lay on the sidewalk.

“He was not a clever detective,” continued Orme. “And as for Poritol, don’t you think he had better offer his reward to the Japanese?”

“No,” replied Alcatrante. “They may have stolen the clue from you, but I have reason to think that the papers were already gone when they went to look for them. Poritol is really very anxious.”

“Doubtless,” said Orme.

“Perhaps,” added Alcatrante, after a short wait, “he might even go as high as two thousand.”

“Indeed? Then there will surely be many answers to his advertisement.”

“Oh, he will not advertise.” Alcatrante laughed. “Already he knows where the papers are. While waiting for the clue of the bill, he discovered what others had already availed themselves of it.”

“That is curious.” Orme smiled. “How did he discover that?”

“In a roundabout way. I won’t take time for the story.”

They walked along in silence for a little distance. Orme was figuring on an escape, for the minister’s clutch on his arm was like that of a drowning man’s. Finally he sought the simplest means of getting away. “I have an engagement,” he said. “I shall have to leave you here. Thank you for walking with me thus far.” He disengaged his arm.

“My dear Mr. Orme,” said Alcatrante, “why should we beat around the bush?”

“Why, indeed?” said Orme.

“Poritol knows that his papers are in your possession. Speaking for him, I offer you five thousand.”

“Why do you drag Poritol into this?” said Orme. “You know that he has merely been your agent from the start. You think he has bungled, but I tell you, you are the one who bungled, for you picked him to do the work. He had bad luck hiring a burglar for you. He lost his head when he ran away with another person’s motor-car and had to hand the marked bill to a country justice. He showed bad judgment when he tried to fool me with a fancy lie. But you are the real bungler, Senhor Alcatrante. Any capable diplomat could tell you that.”

Alcatrante’s yellow face grew white about the lips. His eyes flashed balefully.

“Curse you!” he exclaimed. “You know more than is good for you. Take care!”

Orme laughed in disgust. “Oh, drop this melodrama. I am not afraid of cheap Machiavellis. In this country there are some crimes that are not excused by high office.”

The minister’s teeth showed. “You shall see, my young friend.”

“Doubtless. But let me tell you one thing; if anything happens to me, my friends will know where to look for the criminal.”

Alcatrante snarled. “Don’t be too sure——”

“If necessary,” continued Orme, “a word to certain persons as to the commission for building warships—Five hundred thousand, is it not? by the new arrangement—in gold——”

Alcatrante, in ungovernable rage, raised his light cane and struck. Orme fended the blow with his arm, then wrenched the cane away and threw it into the street. A swarm of passers-by gathered about them so quickly that in a moment they

were the center of a circle.

“You dunce,” said Orme. “Do you want the police?”

“No,” muttered Alcatrante, controlling himself with a great effort. “You are right.” He darted into the crowd at one side, and Orme, quick to take the hint, disappeared in the opposite direction, crossing the street and jumping into an empty cab, which had drawn up in anticipation of a fight.

“To the Rookery,” he ordered, naming the first office-building that came into his head.

“Sure,” said the driver, and away they rattled.

A glance back showed Orme that the crowd was dispersing.

At a distance was Alcatrante. He had seen Orme’s escape, and was looking about vainly for another cab. But cabs are not numerous on North Parker Street, and Orme, so far as he could tell, was not followed.

When his cab drew up at the busy entrance on La Salle Street, he found his way to the nearest public telephone. The hour was close to five, and he must discover quickly where he could find the girl. He called up the Père Marquette. “This is Mr. Orme,” he explained to the clerk. “Have there been any calls or messages for me?”

“Yes, sir, Mr. and Mrs. Wallingham called up at twelve-thirty to know if you were going to Arradale with them.”

The golfing engagement! Orme had not even thought of it since the evening before.

“Anything else?”

“Yes, sir. A Japanese came about one o’clock. He left no name.”

“The same man who came last evening?”

“No, sir, an older man.”

The Japanese minister had doubtless gone straight from Arima’s apartment to the Père Marquette. “Anything else?” asked Orme.

“There was a ’phone call for you about eleven o’clock. The party left no name.”

“A woman’s voice?”

“Yes, sir. She said: ‘Tell Mr. Orme that I shall not be able to call him up at noon,

but will try to do so as near two o'clock as possible.'"

"Did she call up again at two?"

"No, sir. There's no record of it."

Orme understood. In the interval after her attempt to reach him she had learned at Arima's of his seeming treachery. "Very well," he said to the clerk, and hung up the receiver.

What should he do now? The girl had given him up. He did not know her name or where to find her, and yet find her he must and that within the next few hours. The unquestionably great importance of the papers in his pocket had begun to weigh on him heavily. He was tempted to take them out, there in the telephone-booth, and examine them for a clue. The circumstances justified him.

But—he had promised the girl! Stronger than his curiosity, stronger almost than his wish to deliver the papers, was his desire to keep that promise. It may have been foolish, quixotic; but he resolved to continue as he had begun. "At ten o'clock," he said to himself, "if I have not found her, I will look at the papers or go to the police—do whatever is necessary." He did not like to break promises or miss engagements.

There was his engagement with the Wallinghams. It had absolutely gone from his mind. Bessie would forgive him, of course. She was a sensible little woman, and she would know that his failure to appear was due to something unavoidable and important, but Orme's conscience bothered him a little because he had not, before setting out that morning, telephoned to her that he might be detained.

Bessie Wallingham! She knew the girl! Why had he not thought of that before?

He got the Wallinghams' number. Were they at home? No, they had gone to Arradale and would probably remain until the last evening train. He rang off.

It remained to try Arradale. After some delay, he got the clubhouse. Mrs. Wallingham? Yes, she had just come in. Would Mr. Orme hold the wire?

Mr. Orme certainly would, and presently he was rewarded for the delay by hearing Bessie's brisk little voice.

"Hello?"

"Who?"

"Bob?"

"Well you ought to be ashamed of yourself; we waited over and took the next

train.”

“Oh, yes, I know all about these very busy people.”

“Nonsense! I was fooling, of course. But we were sorry you didn’t come.”

“What?”

“That girl? Why, what’s the matter with you, Robert Orme?”

“Business importance? That won’t do, Bob. You’ll have to ’fess up.”

“Do I know such a girl? Are you serious?”

“Why, Bob, I can think of several. Shall I name them?”

“Not give their names! What on earth is the matter with you?”

“Oh, part of the business, is it? Well, let me see. Tall and beautiful, you say. Dark eyes and hair. A black touring-car. Hum! I know, three girls to whom the description applies. It might be—but you don’t wish me to mention the name. Well, you’ll have to think of something more distinctive.”

Orme thought in vain. The image of the girl was ever in his mind, but describe her he could not. At last he said: “The girl I mean lives in one of the suburbs. She has a father who has lately undergone a slight operation. He is, I think, a man who is involved in negotiations with other countries.”

“Oh! Where did you meet her? Why, Bob, how interesting! I never thought of her, but she’s one of my dearest friends.”

“Now, listen, Bessie. It is absolutely necessary that I should reach her father’s house before midnight. You must help me.”

He heard her laugh. “Help you? Of course I will.”

“Where does she live?”

“Not very far from Arradale. Bob, you come right out here. I will see to the rest. It certainly is the funniest coincidence.”

“I’ll catch the first train.”

“There’s one at six—for men who come out to dine.”

“All right. Expect me. Good-by.”

Orme looked at his watch. He had an hour and a half—which meant that time must be killed. It would be unwise to return to the Père Marquette, for the South

Americans and the Japanese might both be on watch for him there. But he did not care to wander about the streets, with the chance of coming face to face with some of his enemies. It was obvious that swift and elaborate machinery would be set in motion to catch him. Of course, there were many places where he could conceal himself for an hour, but——

Tom Wallingham's office! Why had he not thought of that before? Tom was at Arradale with Bessie, but the clerks would let Orme stay in the reception-room until it was time to start for his train. Indeed, Orme remembered that Bixby, the head clerk, had been at the wedding of Tom and Bessie—had in fact taken charge of the arrangements at the church.

Moreover, Tom's office was in this very building—the Rookery. Doubtless it was for this reason that the Rookery had popped into his head when he gave directions to the cab-driver on North Parker Street.

Hurrying to the elevators, Orme was about to enter the nearest one, when suddenly a hand seized his elbow and pulled him to one side. He turned quickly and saw—Alcatrante.

The minister was breathing rapidly. It was plain that he had made a quick pursuit, but though his chest heaved and his mouth was partly open, his eyes were curiously steady. "One minute, Mr. Orme," he said, forcing his lips to a smile. "I had hard work to follow you. There was no other cab, but a small boy told me that you directed your driver to the Rookery. Therefore, I got on a street-car and rode till I found a cab." He said all this in the most casual tone, retaining his hold on Orme's elbow as though his attitude were familiar and friendly. Perhaps he was thus detailing his own adventures merely to gain time; or perhaps he was endeavoring to puzzle Orme.

But Orme was simply annoyed. He knew how dangerous Alcatrante could be. "I am tired of being followed, Senhor," he said disgustedly, freeing his elbow.

Alcatrante continued to smile. "That is part of the game," he said.

"Then you will find the game serious." Orme shut his lips together and glanced about for a policeman.

Alcatrante again grasped his elbow. "Do you want publicity?" he asked. "Your principals do not. Publicity will injure us all."

Orme had been given enough light to know that the South American's words were true.

“If it comes to publicity,” continued Alcatrante with an ugly grin, “I will have you arrested for stealing a certain important—document and offering to sell it to me.”

“Rubbish!” laughed Orme. “That would never work at all. Too many persons understand my part in this matter. And then”—as he noticed the flash of triumph in Alcatrante’s eyes—“I could not be arrested for stealing a document which was not in my possession.” It was too late; Alcatrante had been able to verify his strong suspicion that Orme had the papers.

A wave of anger swept over Orme. “Publicity or no publicity,” he said, “unless this annoyance stops, I will have you arrested.”

Alcatrante smiled. “That would not pay, Mr. Orme. There would be counter-charges and you would be much delayed—perhaps even till after midnight to-night. You Americans do not know how to play at diplomacy, Mr. Orme.”

Controlling himself, Orme hurried quickly to the nearest elevator. He had timed his action; the starter was just about to close the door as he hurried in. But quick though he was, Alcatrante was close behind him. The agile South American squeezed into the elevator by so close a margin that the door caught his coat.

“Here! What you tryin’ to do?” shouted the starter.

Alcatrante, pressing in against Orme, did not reply.

The starter jerked the door open, and glared at Alcatrante. The steady and undisturbed eye of the minister had its effect, and after a moment of hesitation the starter banged the door shut and gave the signal and the car leaped upward.

Tom Wallingham’s office was on the eighth floor. Though he knew that Alcatrante would cling to him, Orme could think of nothing better to do than to go straight to the office and count on the assistance of Bixby, who would certainly remember him. Accordingly he called out “Eight!” and, ignoring Alcatrante, left the elevator and walked down the hall, the South American at his elbow.

They passed a long series of doors, the glass panels of which were inscribed, “The Wallingham Company—Private,” with index-fingers pointing the direction of the main entrance. This was the Chicago branch of the great New York Corporation, and Thomas Wallingham, senior, had placed his son in charge of it two years before. The business was the manufacturing of refrigerators. One side of the reception-room which Orme entered hurriedly, Alcatrante still beside him, was given over to a large specimen refrigerator chamber, built in with glistening

white tiles. The massive door, three feet thick, was wide open, showing the spotless inner chamber. In the outer wall was a thermometer dial fully a foot in diameter.

Once inside the reception-room, Orme stopped and looked again at Alcatrante. There was menace in the look, but the South American did not flinch. Indeed, the glance which met his own seemed to Orme to be disarmingly good-natured. Its essence was a humorous recognition that the situation had its ridiculous side.

But Orme, knowing that much was at stake, did not for an instant trust his unwelcome companion. Alcatrante would cling to him like an Old Man of the Sea, awaiting the opportunity to get the better of him. Every wile would be employed; but publicity was no part of the game—Orme began really to believe that.

To shake off Alcatrante, perhaps there was no better way than to lure him to some deserted place and overpower him. But would not Alcatrante be likely to have anticipated such a move? And would he not resort to desperate measures of his own before Orme could put his own plans into practice? Bixby might help.

Orme walked over to the inquiry-window. “I want to see Mr. Bixby,” he said, offering his card.

The young woman behind the window took the card, but at the same time she said: “Mr. Bixby left a few minutes ago. He won’t be back to-day. Shall I keep the card for him?”

“It doesn’t matter, thank you,” he said, turning away. Luck was against him. Besides Bixby no one in that office knew him.

Alcatrante smiled genially. “Since Mr. Bixby is absent,” he remarked, “shall we leave the verification of the notes until to-morrow?”

“What are you talking about?” exclaimed Orme.

“Why”—Alcatrante’s face was the picture of astonishment—“the Wallingham Company notes, of course. The notes you wish to sell me.” His voice was raised so that the girl behind the window could not help hearing.

“Rot!” said Orme.

“What?” A note of indignation crept into Alcatrante’s voice. “Are you evading? Perhaps you thought I would not insist on the verification.” Another clerk, a man, had joined the girl behind the window. Alcatrante suddenly addressed him. “This Mr. Orme told me that he needed to raise money and would transfer to me

cheap some notes signed by your company. I met him at the hotel. He said that, if I would come here with him, he would show the notes and have them verified. I don't understand."

The clerk left the window and, opening a door, came into the reception-room. "What are the notes you have?" he asked.

"I have none," replied Orme, in disgust. "I have never pretended to have any. This man is crazy, I think." He pointed to Alcatrante. "He has followed me here uninvited for reasons of his own. I asked for Mr. Bixby, whom I know. I would have asked for Mr. Wallingham, my personal friend, but that I had already learned of his being at Arradale."

"There's funny business here somewhere," exclaimed Alcatrante, with great earnestness. "Do you mean to say that you did not introduce yourself to me in the lobby of the Framington and ask me to buy the notes?"

Orme did not answer.

With a conservative eye the clerk looked at the two. He was not one to involve himself in a dubious affair.

"I can't settle this matter for you, gentlemen," he said.

With a slight bow, Orme went into the hall. It dawned upon him why Alcatrante had invented so remarkable a story. Without question, the minister had feared that Orme would enlist aid in the office, or that at least he would manage to deposit the coveted papers in safety while he found other means to get rid of his shadow. Hence the sudden effort to discredit Orme.

In the long corridor Orme gave no further attention to Alcatrante, who was pattering along beside him. The course he now had in mind was to hire a cab and ride out of the city—all the way to Arradale, if possible. The distance could not be much greater than fifteen miles. If Alcatrante chose to pursue, well and good. There would be ways of disposing of him.

Then an audacious notion flashed into Orme's mind. Why not let Alcatrante ride with him? Why not take the minister all the way to his destination and at the end turn him over as a prisoner?

The idea was hardly practicable. He might meet other enemies, and in that event he would not care to have an enemy already at his side. It came to him for the first time that the nearer he approached his goal, the greater would be the opposition he would have to overcome. Whatever else the South Americans and

Japanese might do, they would have their guards about the house of the girl's father. Hitherto he had assumed that, once free of Alcatrante and safe on the train to Arradale, he would have plain going; but now he realized that the dangers would pile up higher as he advanced. In any event, he must get rid of Alcatrante, and as they approached the elevator grills, he spoke.

"Senhor," he said, "unless you stop following me, I shall be obliged to hurt you. I give you fair warning."

Alcatrante laughed. "If you hurt me, as you threaten, you will find yourself in difficulties. You will be arrested, and you will have no opportunity to deliver the documents on time. My position as minister—my extra-territoriality—will make it very difficult for you to extricate yourself."

Orme looked grimly down into the sallow face. "My fist against your chin," he said, "might do it."

Alcatrante did not lose his smile. "You will hardly try that, I think. There would not be time for you to get away. People in these passing elevators would see you."

Orme turned away and pressed the "down" button, and a few seconds later a descending car stopped. He pushed his way in, Alcatrante after him.

The elevator was crowded. Clerks and stenographers were beginning to leave their offices, for the hour was nearly five. Orme wedged his way in at one side and, in order to gain a momentary sense of seclusion, turned his back upon the persons who were pressing against him and stood with face to the side of the cage, looking through the scroll-work of the grating to the swiftly ascending cables in the next well. He was conscious that Alcatrante stood close to him as the car began to slip downward. It was all very ridiculous, this persistent pursuit of him.

Suddenly Alcatrante's voice burst out, "Stop the car! I've been robbed! Stop the car!"

There was immediate commotion; a girl screamed, and the swaying of the huddled group made the car rattle. The elevator-man quickly threw over his lever. The car stopped with a jerk, between floors.

Orme had started to turn with the others, but with a quick exclamation he checked his movement and pressed his face again to the grating. A remarkable thing had happened. The ascending car in the next well had stopped at Alcatrante's outcry. The few passengers it was carrying, eager to see what was

happening, hurried to the side nearest to Orme. Less than two feet from his face was the face of a girl. Almost before he saw her at all he knew her. He forgot that he had given her apparent cause to doubt him; he did not stop to wonder what she was doing in this building.

“Girl!” he whispered.

Her lips parted; her eyes opened wider.

“Girl! Go to Tom Wallingham’s office. I’ll come up there. Keep out of sight when you hear me coming. Alcatrante is with me.”

She nodded.

“I have the papers,” he added, and his heart thumped happily when he saw joy and gratitude flash into her eyes.

From his position and manner he might have been explaining to her what was happening in his own car. But now, conscious of the necessity of taking part in the discussion about him, he reluctantly turned away from the girl.

Alcatrante was still exclaiming volubly. His purse had disappeared. It had been in his pocket just before he entered the car. Therefore someone in the car must have taken it. He did not accuse any single person, though he flashed suspicious glances at Orme, who recognized, of course, that the move was directed against himself.

To embarrass Orme with arrest and detention would well suit the purposes of Alcatrante. At this late hour such an event would prevent the delivery of the papers. Orme wondered whether the minister had realized that the papers might be found by the police and disposed of properly. The explanation of this apparent oversight on the part of Alcatrante was not difficult, however, for, perhaps it was not a part of the plan that Orme should be actually thrown into a cell. It was more likely that an arrest would be followed, after as much delay as Alcatrante could secure, by a refusal to prosecute. One advantage to Alcatrante would be the opportunity of getting assistance while Orme was in the hands of the police so that after the prisoner was released he would have more than one person to contend with. Alcatrante would give up acting alone.

“Somebody has my purse!” Alcatrante was shouting. “Somebody here! You must not let anybody out!”

The elevator-boy had been gaping in seeming paralysis, but now several of the passengers—men who doubtless were sure of their positions—were angrily

ordering him to take the car down. Some of them had trains to catch.

“No! No!” screamed Alcatrante.

Orme had kept out of the discussion, but now he spoke quietly. “I think, Senhor Alcatrante”—he uttered the name distinctly, knowing that the South American probably did not wish himself identified—“I think that, if the boy will take the car almost to the bottom, the starter will help you.”

There was a chorus of seconds to this suggestion. The boy pulled the lever and let the car descend slowly, while Alcatrante continued to exclaim.

How would the South American try to throw suspicion where he wished it? Orme puzzled over this question, for certainly the police would not arrest all the passengers. And then he suddenly remembered how Alcatrante had crowded against him when they entered the car.

A cold wave of horror swept over him. Was it possible that——?

He put his hand into the left side pocket of his coat. Something was there that did not belong there—a smooth, bulging purse. Alcatrante had put it there.

Orme fingered the purse. He would have to get rid of it, but he dared not to drop it to the floor, and if he thrust it through the grating and let it fall into the elevator well, someone would be almost certain to detect the action. There was only a moment left before the car would stop. He looked down at Alcatrante, who was close in front of him. Then his face relaxed and in spite of the gravity of his situation he smiled; for he had found a solution. Promptly he acted upon it.

The car halted just below the ceiling of the first floor. “What’s the matter with you?” called a voice—the voice of the starter.

“Man robbed,” said the elevator-boy.

“Bring the car down.”

“No!” shouted Alcatrante. “The thief is in the car. He must not escape.”

“I won’t let him out. Bring the car down.”

The boy let the car descend to the floor level. The starter placed himself against the gate. “Now then, who was robbed?” he demanded.

Alcatrante crowded forward. “It was I. My purse is gone. I had it just before I got in.”

“Oh, it was you, was it?” The starter remembered the trouble Alcatrante had

made a few minutes before. “Sure you didn’t drop it?”

“I am certain that I did not.”

The passengers were shuffling their feet about, in a vain effort to touch the lost property. A young girl was giggling hysterically.

“Perhaps you put it in the wrong pocket, and didn’t look careful enough.”

“I looked, I looked,” exclaimed Alcatrante. “Do you think I would not know. See! I put it in this pocket, which now is empty.”

He thrust his hand into the pocket which he had indicated. Suddenly his expression changed to astonishment.

“Find it?” grinned the starter.

With the blankest of looks Alcatrante pulled the purse from his pocket. “It was not there two minutes ago,” he muttered.

“You’ve been dreamin’,” remarked the starter, opening the gate with a bang. “All out!”

Orme chuckled to himself. In a moment Alcatrante would realize how the purse had been replaced in his pocket, and he would be furious. Meantime Orme entered another elevator, to go back to the eighth floor, and, as he had expected, the minister followed him.

When they were outside the office of the Wallingham Company, Orme paused, his hand on the door. “Senhor Alcatrante,” he said, “this business must end. I shall simply have to call the police.”

“At your own risk,” said Alcatrante. Then an ugly light flashed in his eyes and his upper lip lifted above his yellow teeth. “You got the better of me there in the elevator,” he snarled. “You won’t get the better again.”

Orme opened the office-door. He glanced about the reception-room, to see whether the girl had hidden herself. She was not in view; indeed, there was even no one at the inquiry-window. Orme reasoned that at this hour some of the clerks might be leaving—which would mean, perhaps, that they were first putting away their books. At least they would not be expecting business callers.

The door of the great sample refrigerator was ajar only two or three feet. When Orme was there a few minutes before it had been wide open. He wondered whether the girl had chosen it as her hiding-place. If she had, his plan of action would be simplified, for he would slip the papers in to her, then get Alcatrante

from the room.

In a casual way he folded his arms. He could now put his hand into his inside coat-pocket and the motion would hardly be noticed.

For a moment he stood as though waiting for someone to appear at the inquiry-window. Though Alcatrante was watching him closely, Orme continued to act as if he were the only person in the room.

And now the dial of the big thermometer in the outer wall of the refrigerator appeared to catch his eye, and he strolled over to it. This placed him almost in the open doorway. Apparently his eyes were on the dial, but in reality he was glancing sidewise into the chamber of the refrigerator. He glimpsed a moving figure in there—heard a faint rustling. Thrusting his hand into the inside of his coat, he was about to take out the precious papers to pass them in to her.

Then he received a violent push from behind. He plunged forward, tripped with one foot on the sill of the refrigerator doorway, and went in headlong, sprawling on the tiled floor. His clutching hand caught the fold of a woman's skirt. Then, though he remained conscious, everything suddenly turned black.

Bewildered as he was, several seconds passed before he realized that the massive door had been closed—that he and the girl were prisoners.

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, and 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. “Alcatrante 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?”

“I called up the Père 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 Bessie 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 their 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 close 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 as Orme had expected. He knew that Alcatrante would have shot the bolt. He knew, too, that Alcatrante 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 Alcatrante 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.

“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 yet 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 locked 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 compelling 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 your coat.”

There was a tremulous note in her laugh, but as he seated himself, 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 to-morrow. There isn’t enough air to last. I have known it from the first.”

“Someone 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 his meeting with the detective in his apartment. The episode with Madame Alia 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 Alcatrante.

“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 added, unless——”

“Unless Walsh, the burglar, had played a trick on Poritol 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 Poritol 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 Alcatrante 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 effect 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 tangled inextricably in the blended impressions of possession and loss.

“But you,” she said at last, “is your father living?”

“No,” he replied.

“And your mother?” she faltered.

“She has been dead many years. And I have no brothers or sisters.”

“My mother died when I was a little child,” she mused. “Death seemed to me much more awful then than it does now.”

“It is always more awful to those who are left than to those who go,” he said. “But don’t think of that yet.”

“We *must* think of it,” she insisted.

He did not answer.

“You don’t wish to die, do you?” she demanded.

“No; and I don’t wish you to die. Try to take a different view, Girl. We really have a chance of getting out.”

“How?”

“Someone may come.”

“Not at all likely,” she sighed.

“But a chance is a chance, Girl, dear.”

“Oh!” she cried, suddenly. “To think that I have brought you to this! That what you thought would be a little favor to me has brought you to death.”

She began to sob convulsively.

It was as though for the first time she realized her responsibility for his life; as

though her confidence in her complete understanding of him had disappeared and he was again a stranger to her—a stranger whom she had coolly led to the edge of life with her.

“Don’t, Girl—don’t!” he commanded.

Her self-blame was terrible to him. But she could not check her grief, and finally, hardly knowing what he did, he put his arm around her and drew her closer to him. Her tear-wet cheek touched his. She had removed her hat, and her hair brushed his forehead.

“Girl, Girl!” he whispered, “don’t you know?—Don’t you understand? If chance had not kept us together, I would have followed you until I won you. From the moment I saw you, I have had no thought that was not bound up with you.”

“But think what I have done to you!” she sobbed. “I never realized that there was this danger. And you—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 Alcatrante 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; even now her head was on his shoulder. Indeed, he had given her no chance to confess what she might feel for him.

Nor 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 so 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 pocket-knife. As nearly as he could determine by the sense of touch, it was seven o’clock. Bessie Wallingham would be wondering by this time why 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 we should not happen to be able to tell them.”

Laboriously he penciled on the back of an old envelope the explanation of their presence there, making a complete and careful charge against Alcatrante. 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 its 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, and 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 vitiating 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 pocket-knife. 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.

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 must hope. 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.”

“O, 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 all come in due form. Someone 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 say now.” He kissed her tenderly.

“Oh, but there is much more.”

“Where shall we begin?” asked Orme.

“Well, to be matter-of-fact, do you live in Chicago?”

“No, dear. I live in New York.”

“I didn’t even know that,” she whispered, “And about me. Our family home has been in one of the suburbs here since I was a small girl. For several years I was sent East to school, and after that I went abroad with some friends. And since then——”

“It can’t be so very long,” he whispered, “though you speak as though it were decades.”

“It is six years. Since then my father and I have spent our winters in the East, coming back home for the summers. Just think how much you are learning about me!”

Orme lifted her hand to his lips.

Suddenly the room filled with a light which to their expanded pupils seemed bright as the sun. The door had been opened and an electric light in the reception-hall shone in. Framed in the doorway was the outline of a man.

Orme shouted joyfully and jumped to his feet.

“Why—what——?” the man began.

Orme helped the girl up, and together they went to the outer light. For a moment they could do nothing but breathe, so good the fresh air of the reception-room seemed to them. Then, looking at the man again, Orme saw that it was the clerk to whom Alcatrante had made his accusation two hours before.

“How did you come to be in there?” the clerk demanded.

Orme hesitated; then he decided to make no charges. “I got rid of that crazy fellow who was following me around,” he said, “and I came back, and this young lady and I went in to examine your refrigerator. The door was ajar, and someone pushed it shut and locked it. We should have smothered if you had not come.”

“It was the merest chance,” said the clerk. “My work kept me late. As I was leaving, I happened to glance at the thermometer dial here. It registered below freezing. I couldn’t understand that, for there is no ice in the refrigerator, so I opened the door to see.”

“I broke the coil,” explained Orme, “in the hope that the night watchman might be interested in the dial.”

“Well,” said the clerk, drawing a long breath, “you had a close shave. There isn’t any night watchman—at least not in this office. If I had balanced my books on time to-day, you two would have stayed where you were until to-morrow morning.”

“I will come in to-morrow to see Mr. Wallingham and explain everything. I will pay for a new thermometer, too, if he will let me.”

“I don’t think he will let you do that,” said the clerk. “He will be grateful that nothing worse happened.”

“Yes, I believe he will,” replied Orme.

He glanced at the clock. It was a quarter after seven. Going back into the chamber which, had been the scene of both their danger and their happiness, he got his coat and the girl’s hat. The parchment papers crackled in his pocket as he put the coat on. The girl, meantime, adjusted her hat.

“Say,” said the clerk, holding the outer door open for them to pass through, “was that fellow’s story about your holding notes of ours—was there anything in it?”

“Absolutely untrue,” replied Orme.

“He must have had you confused with somebody else.”

“He must have.” Orme held out his hand. “Many thanks to you for saving our lives.”

Then Orme and the girl made their way to the elevator.

CHAPTER XV

FROM THE DEVIL TO THE DEEP SEA

“How shall we go?” asked Orme, as they descended to the street level.

“By train. There is no other convenient way, since my car is at home.” She looked at him doubtfully, and added, “but they will be watching the railroad stations.”

He nodded. “A motor would be safer—if we can get one.” He gave her hand a secret pressure while the elevator-boy was opening the door for them, and as she passed before him she flashed upon him a look so filled with love and trust that the sudden thrill of his happiness almost stifled him.

At the La Salle Street entrance Orme had a fleeting glimpse of the watching Alcatrante. The South American, after one astonished stare, darted away in the dusk. He would follow them, of course, but Orme decided to say nothing about him to the girl.

“I must telephone,” she said suddenly, stopping as if to turn back into the building. “Father will be very anxious.”

“The booths in the building must be closed,” he said. “We’d better try a drug store.”

Accordingly they made their way to the nearest, and the girl went to the booth. The door was shut for a long time.

While he was waiting, Orme glanced through the brilliant window. In the light of an electric lamp across the street he discerned faintly a motionless figure; without hesitation he crossed the pavement, recognizing Alcatrante more clearly as he left the dazzle of the store.

The minister did not budge. His face, as Orme approached, was cold and expressionless.

“Senhor,” exclaimed Orme, “does your trade include murder?”

“Not at all. Why do you ask, Mr. Orme?”

“Because only a lucky intervention has saved you from the murder of a young lady and myself.”

“You are exaggerating, my dear sir.” Alcatrante laughed.

“Is it your custom to lock people into air-tight chambers?”

“Air-tight?” Alcatrante was clearly disconcerted. “I did not suppose that it was air-tight. Also, I did not dream that the young lady was there. But this game is a serious game, Mr. Orme. You do not appear to understand. When one is working for his country, many strange things are justified.”

“Even murder?”

“Even murder—sometimes.”

Orme had an inspiration. “Thank you for the truth, Senhor,” he said. “I, too, am working for my country. If you continue to follow us, I shall assume that you have murder in your mind, and I shall act accordingly.”

Alcatrante smiled coolly.

“This is fair warning,” continued Orme.

He glanced to the drug store and saw the girl coming out of the telephone-booth. Hastening across the street, he met her at the door.

“If father had had any idea of such complications when we came West,” she said, “there would have been plenty of men near by to help us. As it is, we shall have to act alone. It is not a matter for detectives—or for the police, I—I almost wish it were,” she faltered.

Orme wondered again whether this father could have realized what dangers the girl was encountering. But, as if divining his sudden anger against the man who could let his daughter run such risks, she added: “He doesn’t know, of course, the details of our adventures. I have permitted him to think that it is simply a matter of searching.”

“And now he is reassured.”

“Yes. Oh, you have no idea yet how important it is.”

“You were a long time in the booth,” he said.

A mysterious smile flittered across her face. “I thought of another person I wished to talk to. That person was hard to get.”

“Long distance?”

“It proved necessary to use long distance.”

Then she caught a glimpse of the figure across the street. “There’s Mr. Alcatrante,” she exclaimed.

“Yes, I have just had a talk with him.”

Her face showed concern.

“Don’t let him worry you, dear,” he added. “He will try to balk us. We must expect that. But I think I can take care of him.”

“I believe it,” she said, softly.

He wondered whether she could guess how relentlessly he was planning to deal with Alcatrante. Would she justify the course he had in mind? As to her attitude, he felt doubtful. Perhaps she did not agree with the South American that murder was sometimes necessary in the service of one’s country.

Moreover, while Alcatrante was undoubtedly serving the interest of his country, Orme had no real certainty that he himself was in a similar position. He had every reason to infer that the papers were of importance to the United States Government, but after all he could only go by inference. The affairs of some private corporation in the United States might have a serious bearing on problems in South America and the Far East. He decided to sound the girl for information that would be more definite.

But first the question as to their next move must be answered.

“Do you know where we can get a motor?” he said.

“No”—she prolonged the word doubtfully. “We may have to take a motor-cab.”

“It would be safer than the railroad or the electric line.” Then he asked with great seriousness “Girl, dear, I don’t know much about the meaning and value of these papers in my pocket, and I don’t care to know any more than you choose to tell me. But let me know just this much: Are they as important to you as they are to our enemies? Have you really been justified in the risks you have run?”

“You have seen how far Alcatrante and the Japanese have been willing to go,” she replied, gravely. “I am sure that they would not hesitate to kill us, if it seemed necessary to them in their effort to get possession of the papers. Now, my dear, they are even much more important to my father.”

“In his business interests?”

“Much more than that.”

They were walking along the glimmering cañon of La Salle Street, which was now almost deserted in the dusk. A motor-car swept slowly around the corner ahead and came toward them. It had but one occupant, a chauffeur, apparently. He wore a dust-coat, a cap, and goggles which seemed to be too large for him.

Regardless of Alcatrante, who was following them, Orme hailed the chauffeur. “Will you take a fare?” he called.

The man stopped his car and after a moment of what Orme interpreted as indecision, nodded slowly.

“How much by the hour?” asked Orme.

The chauffeur held up the ten fingers of his two hands.

Orme looked at the girl. He hadn’t that much money with him.

“If I only had time to cash a check,” he said.

“All right,” she whispered. “I have plenty.”

They got into the tonneau, and the girl, leaning forward, said: “Take the Lake Shore Drive and Sheridan Road to Evanston.”

Again the chauffeur nodded, without turning toward them.

“He doesn’t waste many words,” whispered the girl to Orme.

While the car was turning Orme noted that Alcatrante had stopped short and was watching them. It was some reason for surprise that he was not hunting for a motor in which to follow.

Perhaps his plans were so completely balked that he was giving up altogether. No, that would not be like Alcatrante. Orme now realized that in all likelihood the minister had foreseen some such circumstance and had made plans accordingly.

He was more and more inclined to believe that Alcatrante had but half expected to keep him long imprisoned in Wallingham’s office. Then what had been the purpose underlying the trick? Probably the intention was to make Orme prisoner for as long a period as possible and, in any event, to gain time enough to communicate with Poritol and the Japanese and whatever other persons might be helping in the struggle to regain the papers. The probabilities were that Alcatrante had been using the last two hours to get in touch with his friends.

And now those friends would be informed promptly that Orme and the girl were setting out by motor. This analysis apparently accounted for Alcatrante's nonchalance. Orme and the girl seemed to be escaping, but in truth, if they approached their destination at all, they must run into the ambuscade of other enemies. Then the nearer the goal, the greater the danger.

As the motor slid smoothly northward on La Salle Street, Orme looked back. Alcatrante had made no move. The last glimpse that Orme had of him showed that slight but sinister figure alone on the sidewalk of the deserted business street.

They crossed the Clark Street bridge. "Keep on out North Clark Street until you can cross over to Lincoln Park," said Orme to the chauffeur.

The only indication that the order had been heard was a bending forward of the bowed figure on the front seat.

Orme explained to the girl. "It will be better not to take the Lake Shore Drive. They may be watching the Père Marquette."

"You are right," she said. "As a precaution, we'd better not pass the hotel."

"How surprised I was to find you waiting for me there last evening," mused Orme—"and how glad!"

"I never called on a man before," she laughed.

"I had made up my mind only a little while before," he continued, "to stay in Chicago till I found you."

"I'm afraid that would not have been easy." She returned the pressure of his hand, which had found hers. "If it hadn't been for those papers, we might never have met."

"We were bound to meet—you and I," he said. "I have been waiting all my life just for you."

"But even now you don't know who I am. I may be a—a political adventuress—or a woman detective—or——"

"You may be," he said, "but you are the woman I love. Your name—your business, if you have one—those things don't matter. I know you, and I love you."

She leaned closer to him. "Dear," she whispered impulsively, "I am going to tell you everything—who I am, and about the papers——"

“Wait!” He held his hand before her mouth. “Don’t tell me now. Do as you planned to do. Be simply ‘Girl’ to me for a while longer.”

She moved closer to him. Their errand, the danger, were for the time forgotten, and the motor hummed along with a burden of happiness.

“You haven’t looked at the papers yet,” said Orme, after a time. They were turning east toward Lincoln Park.

“Do I need to?”

“Perhaps not. I took them from the envelope which you saw at Arima’s. But here they are. I did not look at them, of course.”

He drew the parchments from within his coat and placed them in her hand.

While she examined them, he looked straight ahead, that he might not see. He could hear them crackle as she unfolded them—could hear her sigh of content.

And then something occurred that disquieted him to a degree which seemed unwarranted. The chauffeur suddenly turned around and glanced swiftly through his goggles at the girl and the papers. The action was, perhaps, natural; but there was an assured expectancy in the way he turned—Orme did not like it. Moreover, there was something alarmingly familiar in the manner of the movement.

Somewhere Orme had seen a man move his body like that. But before his suspicions could take form, the chauffeur had turned again.

The girl handed the papers back to Orme. “These are the right papers,” she said. “Oh, my dear, if you only knew how much they mean.”

He held them for a moment in his hand. Then, after returning them to his pocket with as little noise as possible, he caught the girl’s eye and, with a significant glance toward the chauffeur, said in a distinct voice:

“I will slip them under the seat cushion. They will be safer there.”

Did the chauffeur lean farther back, as if to hear better? or was the slight movement a false record by Orme’s imagination?

Orme decided to be on the safe side, so he slipped under the cushion of the extra seat another mining prospectus which he had in his pocket, placing it in such a way that the end of the paper protruded. Then he put his lips close to the girl’s ear and whispered:

“Don’t be alarmed, but tell me, does our chauffeur remind you of anyone?”

She studied the stolid back in front of them. The ill-fitting dust-coat masked the outline of the figure; the cap was so low on the head that the ears were covered.

“No,” she said, at last, “I think not.”

With that, Orme sought to reassure himself.

They were in Lincoln Park now. Over this same route Orme and the girl had ridden less than twenty-four hours before. To him the period seemed like a year. Then he had been plunging into mysteries unknown with the ideal of his dreams; now he was moving among secrets partly understood, with the woman of his life —loving her and knowing that she loved him.

One short day had brought all this to pass. He had heard it said that Love and Time are enemies. The falseness of the saying was clear to him in the light of his own experience. Love and Time are not enemies; they are strangers to each other.

On they went northward. To Orme the streets through which they passed were now vaguely familiar, yet he could hardly believe his eyes when they swung around on to the Lake Front at Evanston, along the broad ribbon of Sheridan Road.

But there was the dark mysterious surface of Lake Michigan at their right. Beyond the broad beach, he could see the line of breakwaters, and at their left the electric street lights threw their beams into the blackness of little parks and shrubby lawns.

The car swept to the left, past the university campus.

“Do you remember?” asked the girl, in a low voice, pressing his arm. Then, “Don’t!” she whispered. “Someone will see!” for he had drawn her face to his.

They came to the corner of Chicago Avenue and Sheridan Road, where they had halted the night before in their search for the hidden papers. “We’d better give him further directions,” said the girl.

But the chauffeur turned north at the corner and put on more speed.

“He’s taking the right direction,” she laughed. “Perhaps his idea is to follow Sheridan Road till we tell him to turn.”

“I don’t quite like it,” said Orme, thoughtfully. “He’s a bit too sure of what he’s doing.”

The girl hesitated. “It *is* funny,” she exclaimed. “And he’s going faster, too.” She

leaned forward and called up to the chauffeur: “Stop at this corner.”

He did not seem to hear. She repeated the order in a louder voice, but the only answer was another burst of speed.

Then Orme reached up and touched the chauffeur’s shoulder. “Stop the car!” he cried.

The chauffeur did not obey. He did not even turn his head.

Orme and the girl looked at each other. “I don’t understand,” she said.

“I’m afraid I am beginning to,” Orme replied. “He will not stop until we are where he wishes us to be.”

“We can’t get out,” she exclaimed.

“No. And if I pull him out of the seat, the car will be ditched.” He puzzled vainly to hit on a method of action, and meantime the moments sped.

They passed the university grounds quickly. Orme retained an impression of occasional massive buildings at the right, including the dome of an observatory, and at the left the lighted windows of dwellings.

He saw, too, the tower of a lighthouse, a dark foundation supporting a changing light above; and then the road turned sharply to the left and, after a few hundred yards, curved again to the north.

Suddenly the chauffeur slowed down. On either side were groves of trees. Ahead were the lights of an approaching motor.

Orme was still at a loss, and the girl was awaiting some decision from him. When the chauffeur at last turned and spoke—three short words—Orme realized too late the situation he and the girl were in.

“We stop now,” said the chauffeur.

And the girl, with a horrified gasp, exclaimed: “Maku!”

Yes, it was the Japanese.

Calmly he put on the brakes and brought the car to a standstill by the roadside; then, removing his goggles, turned to Orme and the girl and smiled an unscrutable smile. There was an ugly bruise on his forehead, where Orme had struck him with the wrench.

But quick though Maku was, he was not quick enough to see a motion which Orme had made immediately after the moment of recognition—a motion which

had even escaped the notice of the girl. Perhaps it accounted for the coolness with which Orme met his enemy’s eyes.

CHAPTER XVI

THE STRUGGLE

The approaching car now drew up near by, and three men jumped lightly to the road.

In the radiance of the lamps on the two cars, Orme recognized Arima. The men with him were also Japanese, though Orme was not conscious that he had ever seen them before.

It was clear enough how he and the girl had blundered into the hands of the Orientals. Maku had undoubtedly secured a car and had driven it to the vicinity of the Rookery in response to a telephoned order from Alcatrante, transmitted, in all likelihood, through the Japanese minister.

The appearance of the car on La Salle Street had been expected by the South American. Perhaps he had not anticipated that Orme would hail it; the probability was that he had wished Maku's assistance without a definite idea of what that assistance should be; but the use of the car by Orme fell in nicely with his plans. He had assumed readily enough the direction the car would take, and getting promptly into telephonic communication with Arima, had arranged this meeting on the road.

Orme now remembered that Arima's car, when approaching, had sounded its horn at regular intervals, in series of threes—evidently a signal.

"Don't worry, Girl, dear," whispered Orme. "I—" he broke off his sentence as the newcomers clustered about the tonneau, but the confident glance of her eyes reassured him.

He knew not what they were to face. The Japanese, he inferred, would not deal with him pleasantly, but surely they would not harm the girl.

Arima opened the door of the tonneau and with a lightning motion grasped Orme by the wrist.

“Get out,” he ordered.

Orme was in no mind to obey. There were four of the Orientals against him, and he stood little chance of success in a fight with them, but if he could only delay matters, someone might pass and he could raise an alarm. So he sat firm, and said, calmly:

“What do you want?”

“Get out,” repeated Arima.

When Orme still made no move to leave his seat, the steely fingers on his wrist ran up his forearm and pressed down hard upon a nerve-center. The pain was almost unbearable, and for the moment his arm was paralyzed. A quick jerk brought him to the ground. As he alighted, stumblingly, Maku caught him by the other arm. He was held in such a way that for the moment it seemed futile to struggle. Arima, meantime, spoke rapidly in Japanese to Maku. Perhaps he, as commander of the situation, was giving precise orders as to what was to be done.

Orme looked over his shoulder at the girl. She was clutching the door of the tonneau and leaning forward, staring with horrified eyes.

“Keep cool,” he counseled.

Her answer was a moan of anguish, and he realized that she feared for him.

Suddenly she began to call for help. Twice her cries rung out, and then one of the Japanese leaped into the tonneau and placed his hand over her mouth, smothering her voice.

The sight of this action was too much for Orme. He began a furious effort to break away from his captors. One sudden motion freed his right arm from Arima’s clutch, and he reached for Maku’s throat. But after a moment of scuffling, he was again held securely.

“Girl!” he shouted, “don’t try to call out. Keep quiet.”

The Japanese in the tonneau appeared to understand the words, for he took his hand away from the girl’s mouth, though he remained beside her, ready to put an end to any fresh outbreak.

“Now,” said Orme, turning his eyes on Arima, “what does this mean?”

“You give us papers,” replied the Japanese softly.

“I have no papers that mean anything to you.”

“We see. Give them to me.”

“What papers do you want?” demanded Orme.

“You know.” Arima’s voice sounded less patient.

“But I have nothing that you care anything about,” repeated Orme.

At that Arima began rapidly to search Orme’s pockets. There was sufficient light from the lamps of the two cars to illuminate the scene.

Arima’s left hand still held Orme’s right forearm, and his right hand was free to hunt for the papers. Maku, on the other side, had meantime strengthened his grip on Orme’s left arm, at the same time raising one knee so that Orme could feel it pressing against the small of his back.

“What this!” asked Arima, taking a long envelope from the inner pocket of Orme’s coat and holding it up for inspection.

“A blank contract,” said Orme. “Do you want it?”

Arima took the paper from the envelope and examined it. Then with an exclamation of disgust he replaced it in Orme’s pocket and continued his search.

“You see,” said Orme calmly, “there is nothing here.”

The Japanese, muttering in his own tongue, ran his hands over Orme’s body and even looked into his hat. Nothing was found.

“You might as well believe me first as last,” exclaimed Orme. “The papers you want are not here.”

Arima was clearly puzzled. “You had them,” he began.

“Possibly. But I haven’t them now. How would you feel if I should tell you that the young lady and I have made this journey simply to throw you off the scent, and that the papers were being delivered by another person?”

“I not believe,” declared Arima shortly.

Suddenly Maku began to jabber at Arima, who, after an instant of consideration, gave a quick order to the fourth Japanese, who stood by. This man went to the tonneau and got the prospectuses which Orme had placed under the seat cushion.

Arima snatched the papers with his free hand, then, resigning Orme entirely to Maku’s care, and clucking strangely, opened them.

A glance sufficed. With a cry of disappointment, he tore the papers in two and

threw them to the ground.

He thrust his face close to Orme's. "Where the papers?" he said.

Orme did not reply.

The Japanese who had brought the prospectuses from the tonneau now stepped to Maku's assistance, for Orme had made a motion of the body which showed that he was rapidly losing his patience.

"Queek!"

Still no answer.

"Ha!" The exclamation had a ring of triumph. "Mees have um!" He nodded toward the car where the girl still sat.

"No," exclaimed Orme vehemently. "She has not."

"Mees have um," repeated Arima. "We hunt. We see."

"I tell you she has not," said Orme.

"No believe you." Arima chuckled. "Come, mees."

As Orme twisted himself around, he was enraged to see the Japanese in the car seize the girl by the arm and drag her to the ground. Once on her feet, she did not resist, but permitted herself to be led toward the little group.

Arima advanced a step to meet her. "Give me papers," he said.

"I have no papers," she protested despairingly.

"We search you," said Arima, taking another step toward her and extending his hands.

It may be that Arima did not intend actually to lay hands on her. His thought may have been that the threat would induce Orme to tell where the papers really were. But the effect on Orme was to set him ablaze with anger.

His swift, indignant purpose seemed to multiply his strength until the little men who held him were like children in his hands.

A sudden jerk, and he had pulled both his arms free. Maku and the man at his other side were taken completely by surprise, and before they had time to recover themselves, Orme had thrown his arms around them and crushed their heads together with such force that they dropped limp and unconscious to the ground. They were out of the fight.

At the first sounds of struggle, Arima turned. Now, as Orme charged toward him, he bent slightly forward, every muscle tense, ready to strike or trip or twist.

His framework was overlaid by muscles that were like supple steel. Light and quick, he had a strength that could hardly have been inferred from his build. And though Orme's outbreak had been sudden, the Japanese was apparently not in the least disconcerted.

He knew how to turn the rush of the American into a disastrous fall. He knew how to prod with his bony knuckle the angry man's solar plexus—how to step swiftly aside and bring the horny edge of his hand against sensitive vertebrae. He could seize Orme by the arm and, dropping backward to the ground, land Orme where he wished him. Yes, Arima had every reason to feel confident. Many a time had he got the better of American fist-fighters.

But a system of offense and defense which is based upon the turning of an opponent's strength against himself absolutely depends for its success upon an accurate estimate of the opponent's intentions. A sudden shift of physical purpose may put your jiu-jitsu adept at a loss.

Arima, from his knowledge of American fighting methods, had reason to think that Orme would continue his charge and strike out with his fists when he came near enough. That, however, is something that Orme did not do. For, in his two previous encounters with the Japanese, he had learned much. He had learned, among other things, the value of the unexpected. And though his anger was almost blinding, he cooled, during those few short strides, to his usual caution.

Within two paces of Arima, he stopped short.

For one tense moment Orme opened his senses to all impressions. He could hear, with almost painful distinctness, the moans of the two men he had stunned and the rustling sounds made by their writhings.

He caught a glimpse of the girl. The searchlight of one of the cars struck full on the side of her face, and drew there a distinct shadow of the network of her disarranged hair. He saw the strained, excited look in her eyes.

Her captor still held her arm. He was watching Orme and Arima indifferently, as though quite confident of Japanese skill.

All this Orme observed in an instant. Then his eyes were again on Arima.

He knew that he would have to attack. To await the trick holds of the Japanese would be to invite defeat. But if he attacked, he must use an unexpected method.

Suddenly he raised his left arm above his head and clenched his fist. His right arm remained by his side.

A step forward. The upraised arm descended. Swiftly Arima reached upward to seize it. But even as the one arm descended, Orme swung his other, with terrific force, up from the waist, and caught Arima on the mouth.

The blow missed the chin, but it was hard enough to fell any man of ordinary strength. Arima staggered back, past the girl, and brought up against the side of one of the cars. But with hardly an instant for recovery, he leaped forward again and the man who was holding the girl also sprang at Orme.

It would be folly to meet the two. Orme turned and ran quickly in among the trees of the little grove. The darkness was his friend, for the pursuers halted in their quick run and separated, proceeding more cautiously.

As for Orme, once in shelter, he stopped for breath.

He could see the two men coming toward him. They were outlined against the radiance from the motor-cars. Cautiously he stepped toward the south, hoping that they would pass him in the darkness, but he dared not move rapidly, lest a stumble or the breaking of a twig betray him.

All this time the engines of the two cars had continued to work, and their muffled chug-chug-chug helped to cover the noise of footsteps.

What pleased him most was to see, out of the corner of his eye, that the girl had taken advantage of her release to climb to the chauffeur’s seat of the car in which Maku had brought them from Chicago. That meant that, if he could reach the car, they might get away. But the papers——

By this time Orme was between his pursuers and the road. He stopped and groped about till he found a fair-sized stone, then worked toward the edge of the grove. The moment was at hand to make a dash.

Ten steps would take him to the car; then a leap into the tonneau, and off to the northward he and the girl would speed. Pursuit would be delayed for a few precious moments, for the Japanese would have to turn the other car around. Those few moments would determine the margin of success or failure.

But there were the papers. At all cost they must be secured. The plan that flashed into Orme’s mind was to draw the Japanese from the spot and then, jumping from the car, let the girl lead the pursuers on while he returned.

Just as he was about to rush for the car he heard a sound among the trees. He

wheeled and saw the dim outline of one of his enemies coming toward him. In his excitement he had forgotten that just as they could be seen by him when they were between him and the road, so he could now be seen by them. Undoubtedly he was outlined, as they had been, against the background of the light.

The Japanese was only a few feet away. Orme threw the stone; by good luck it struck the man in the stomach, and he dropped to the ground and rolled in silent agony.

But at the same moment Orme was seized from behind, and held in a grip he could not break. Indeed, when he tried to break it, there was a sudden, killing strain on his spine. Then Arima's voice said, close to his ear:

"Where the papers?"

The papers!

Japanese character thus brought its fresh surprise to Orme. Even after this hard fight, when three of his friends lay groaning on the ground—when he had in his power the man who had injured them, who had temporarily bested himself—Arima's chief thought was still of the papers!

He seemed to have none of the semi-barbarian vengefulness that might have been expected. He merely wished the papers—wished them the more desperately with every passing moment. The lives of his companions counted for nothing besides the papers!

"Where?" repeated Arima.

"I haven't them," said Orme. "You ought to know that by this time."

The answer was a torturing pressure on Orme's spine. "You tell," hissed Arima.

As the pressure increased Orme's suffering was so keen that his senses began to slip away. He was gliding into a state in which all consciousness centered hazily around the one sharp point of pain.

Then, suddenly, he was released. For a moment he staggered limply, but his strength surged back, and he was able to see how the situation had changed.

The girl had swung her car in closer to the edge of the grove and nearer to the struggling figures. Doubtless she had some idea of helping. But the effect of the change in the position of her car was to permit the searchlight of the other car to throw its bright beam without interruption down the road. And there, perhaps fifty feet to the southward, gleamed something white.

The girl could not see it, for her car was headed north. But Arima saw it, and in a flash he realized what it was. The papers lay there at the side of the road, where Orme had tossed them a moment before the two cars met.

There had been no other way to dispose of them. If the car from the north had stopped at a different angle, or if the other car had not moved, the light would not have shone upon them, and the Japanese might not have suspected where they were. Or, if Orme had tossed them a few feet farther to one side, they would have been out of the range of the light. But there they lay.

Arima leaped toward them. Even as he started, a figure appeared at the other side of the road and walked over toward the two cars. It was a man with brass buttons and policeman's helmet. He walked with authority, and he held a stout club in his hand.

"What's goin' on here?" he demanded. Arima stopped in his tracks.

To Orme, at this moment, came the memory of the girl's desire to avoid publicity. "Nothing wrong," he said.

The policeman stared. "I've been watchin' you from over there," he said. "It looks like nothin' wrong, with men fighting all over the ground."

"Just a little trial of strength," explained Orme.

"Trial of strength, hey?"

"Well," admitted Orme, "this man"—pointing to Arima—"wanted something that I had. It's not a matter for the police."

"Oh, it ain't? Somebody's been hurt." He gestured with his club toward the shadows where the three injured men were slowly coming back to their senses.

"Not seriously," said Orme.

"We'll see about that later," replied the policeman decidedly.

Orme tried to carry the affair off boldly. Every moment of delay now threatened defeat for him. "There is nothing serious," he said. "They have done me no real harm. But the young lady and I shall be obliged to you, if you will keep these Japanese here until we can get away. They attacked us, but I don't wish to make a complaint against them."

The policeman showed new interest. He glanced at Arima. "Japanese!" he exclaimed. "There was one slugged on the campus last night. I guess you'll all have to come along with me."

“Nonsense!” protested Orme. “Just because somebody hit a Japanese over the head last night——”

“Ah, you know about that, do you? No”—as Orme made a movement—“stand where you are.” He drew his revolver.

During this colloquy, Arima had edged nearer and nearer to the papers. Orme’s sudden step was involuntary; it was due to the fact that he had seen Arima stoop swiftly and pick up the papers and thrust them into his pocket.

“Keep quiet,” continued the policeman. “And you, there”—he nodded toward Arima—“come here.”

Arima hesitated, but the muzzle of the revolver turned toward him, and he came and stood a few feet away.

“There’s somethin’ mighty funny about this,” continued the policeman. “We’ll just get into one of these cars and go to the station.”

“This man and me?” asked Orme. He had visions of no great difficulty in satisfying the questions of the local justice, but he knew that an arrest would mean delay, perhaps of hours. And Arima had the papers.

“I mean that man, and you, and the woman. I’ll send someone for the others. If you’re the fellow that did the sluggin’ on the campus last night, you won’t get away from me again.”

“What’s the use of dragging the young lady into this?” demanded Orme.

“None o’ your business.”

“Can I speak to her a minute, first?”

“No, you can’t. There’s been too many Chicago hold-up men around here lately, and I won’t take chances with you.” The policeman made this explanation apparently in deference to Orme’s appearance, which, in spite of the evidence of struggle, was that of a gentleman. “Looks don’t always tell,” he continued.

That the girl should be taken to the station and held, under such suspicious circumstances was simply not to be thought of.

Doubtless she could quickly set in motion forces that would liberate her, but the disgrace of detention was something she must be saved from at any cost.

She was known in Evanston. Her identity once established, the story of her arrest would be sure to spread. Her position would then be the more painful, because the circumstances of the case were such that she was unwilling to explain them.

Moreover, Orme realized that, if he and Arima were held, the care of the girl would be his first thought, and the recovery of the papers would be forced into second place. That would not be according to her wish. Assuredly, if he was to get the papers, he could do better alone.

She sat in the car, not more than six feet from him, her face the picture of mingled emotions. Orme saw that he must reassure her as to himself before he carried out the plan which had suddenly come to his mind.

“You will make a mistake, officer, if you detain me,” he said, speaking distinctly, so that the girl would be sure to hear.

“Cut it out,” said the policeman.

“A little telephoning will set me free in an hour,” Orme continued, bending to pick up his hat, which had fallen to the ground at the beginning of the fight. “You can’t do anything except take me to the station and find out that you have bungled.”

“That’s my affair,” said the policeman. “But here, we’ve done enough talkin’.” He waved his revolver in a gesture which indicated that they were to enter the car.

Now, Orme knew that the girl had not seen him throw the papers to the road. Neither had she seen Arima pick them up. Whatever guess she had made as to his disposal of them, there was no reason for her to doubt that he had again got them into his possession, during some stage of the struggle.

He looked at her earnestly and significantly, then smiled slightly, in the thought of reassuring her.

When he was certain that she was watching his every move, he glanced at the car, then up the road to the north. Then, with such quickness that the policeman had no time to prevent, he snatched from the inner pocket of his coat the envelope containing the blank contract which had first disappointed Arima, and tossed it into the tonneau.

“Go!” he shouted.

Like a shot, she sent the car forward. It disappeared swiftly into the night.

Thus far, Orme was satisfied. He had got the girl safely away. She thought that he had thrown the papers into the car, and when she came to examine them she would be disappointed, but Orme felt that she would then understand—that she would continue to trust him.

As the car darted away the policeman swung his club at Orme.

Before the blow could strike, the upraised arm was caught by a little hand and with a quick jerk, the policeman was pulled to the ground. His revolver, which he held in his left hand, went off as he fell, and a leaf, cut from a tree above by the bullet, sailed into Orme's face.

The policeman lay helpless in the cunning hold of Maku—Maku, who, fully restored to his senses, had crept up to save Arima from the law.

Orme wondered whether the girl had heard the shot. Probably not, for she was driving into the wind. But he had no time to consider the point, for Arima, suddenly conscious of freedom, leaped for the remaining car. He had the papers; he would hurry them safely to his master, leaving Orme and the policeman to the mercies of his reviving confederates.

The papers were still first in his thoughts. And why not? Orme remembered the scathing rebuke by the Japanese minister. In the flash of thought that preceded his own action he realized that the recovering of the papers was Arima's one means of righting himself.

As Arima grasped the steering-wheel of the car and threw on the clutch, Orme ran behind the tonneau. His action was swiftly calculated to give the impression that he was dodging around the car in the hope of escaping on foot.

That is what Arima might have thought, had he glanced around—what Maku might have thought, had he done more than throw one swift glance at Arima, then devote himself again to the prostrate officer.

But Orme, reaching upward, got his hands over the high back of the tonneau. He hung on tightly, raising his feet from the ground. The car plunged forward.

For a time Orme merely kept his position. The dust whirled up in his face, and he had to close his eyes, but he was conscious that the car was gaining speed rapidly.

The situation was as difficult as it was dangerous. He planned nothing less than to climb into the car and deal with Arima even while they were flying along the road. But he must wait until they had gone a safe distance from the battleground. On the other hand, he must act before they got into the thickly settled streets of the town.

He figured that they had gone about a quarter of a mile, when he began his effort. Pulling himself up by his hands, he peered over the back of the tonneau.

He could see Arima, huddled forward over the steering-wheel, doubtless watching the road ahead with a careful eye for obstacles and for the police.

For Arima was driving the car at a law-breaking speed. Clearly, he was an adept at motoring. But Orme did not stop to ask himself how a humble teacher of jiu-jitsu—a professional athlete—had acquired so much skill in the handling of a car.

It proved hard to get into the tonneau. Several times he got one leg almost over the back, only to be dislodged as the car bumped into a rut or over a stone. Once he almost lost his grip entirely. But a final effort gave him a leg-hold, and slowly —very slowly—he climbed over to the leather cushions of the wide seat.

If Arima now turned and saw him, almost anything might happen. But before he could become conscious that anyone was near him, Orme was crouching in the tonneau.

The car was going at a thirty-five-mile clip. The street lights were flashing by, and not far ahead were the frequent lights of houses. Nothing could be done here; therefore Orme got down as low as he could. He realized that he would have to wait till they had passed through the town.

Arima had not remained on the Sheridan Road. He had taken a street which struck off from it, more directly southward, and Orme surmised that the intention was to avoid the main streets of Evanston.

When the car came to a cross street and turned westward this surmise was strengthened. They bumped over railroad tracks. Several times they passed other vehicles.

Presently Orme raised his head and discovered that the houses were thinning out. The car appeared to be heading straight into the open country, and Arima put on more speed. Forty miles an hour was not a high estimate for the rate at which they were traveling.

For several minutes Orme continued in his crouching position. The positions of the stars told him that they were still going west—not south toward Chicago. Every turn of the wheels, therefore, was carrying him farther into unknown territory—farther from the girl and all chance of communicating with her. Surely he must act soon, if he was to act at all; for Arima evidently was proceeding to some rendezvous, where Orme might find himself again in the midst of an overwhelming number of enemies.

But what could he do? Rapidly he turned over in his mind the various courses

open to him. Should he try to stun Arima with a blow, and then reach forward and take the steering-wheel before the car could swerve into the ditch?

The blow might not prove effective. In that case, the chances were that Arima would involuntarily swing the car to one side. Then there would be a smash—with death or serious injury threatening both Arima and himself.

Should he try to cut a tire?

The feat was almost impossible. In attempting it, he would run great risk of premature discovery, and even if he succeeded in the attempt, the situation would be little changed. The necessity of stopping the car to make repairs might not put Arima in his hands.

The plan he at last decided upon was to throw his left arm around Arima's neck and draw him straight back, trusting that he might be able to get over the seat and set the brakes without losing his grip. The throat of the jiu-jitsu adept is tough, made so by patient development of neck muscles, but Orme had a strong arm, and he believed, moreover, that Arima would not have time to protect himself by stiffening his muscles before the grip was secured.

The car was skimming along over the turnpike like some flying bird of night. Orme glanced back over the way they had come. A soft electric glow in the sky told where Evanston lay, several miles to the east. Far to the south a greater glow showed the position of Chicago.

Pulling himself erect, Orme leaned forward. It seemed as though Arima must hear him breathe. Slowly he advanced his arm. Then, darting swiftly, he threw it around Arima's neck and drew backwards with a jerk.

The Japanese was taken completely unawares. Uttering a strangled cry, he let go of the steering-wheel and clutched at the choking arm that held him; he could not break the grip.

Meanwhile Orme reached for the steering-wheel with his free arm. But Arima, kicking frantically, struck the wheel with his foot, just as Orme was about to seize it. The car turned sharply to one side. Into the ditch it plunged.

As the fore wheels dropped into the depression, the body of the car rose in the air. Orme, still clinging to Arima, shot forward. He was conscious, in that fraction of a second, that he must release his hold, or Arima's neck would be broken; so he unbent his arm.

The earth arose and something struck him heavily. He saw a firmament of

brilliant stars. Then all was black.

CHAPTER XVII

A CHANCE OF THE GAME

The first impression that came to Orme with returning consciousness was one of impending disaster. His mind was renewing its last thought before it had ceased to work.

Then he realized that the disaster had already occurred, and he moved his arms and legs, to see if they had been injured. They gave him no pain, and he raised himself to a sitting position.

The soft night hovered about him. He heard confusedly the droning of insects, and the distant mournful call of a whip-poor-will. The roar of the car was strangely missing. What had become of it? And where was Arima? These were the first questions he asked himself as he became able to think without confusion.

He now became aware that his head hurt, and raising his hand, he found a large bump under the hair above his right temple. Turning, he discovered that he had been thrown over the fence into a field of thick-standing grain, which had broken his fall. His head must have struck the fence in passing.

He got to his feet. At first he was bothered by dizziness, but that soon disappeared.

Climbing the fence, he saw that the car had turned over on one side. At a glance there were no evidences of superficial damage, but it would take a team of horses and some time to right it and get it back into the road. The lamps had been extinguished.

In the ditch near the car lay Arima. One of his legs was bent under him horribly. Orme hurried over to him.

The Japanese was conscious. His beady eyes glittered wetly in the starlight, but he said no word, gave no groan, made no show of pain. Whatever he may have suffered, he endured with the stoicism that is traditional in his race.

“Much hurt?” asked Orme, bending over him.

“My leg broke.” Arima spoke unemotionally.

Orme considered. “I’ll send you help,” he said, at last. “Lie quiet for a little while, and you will be looked after.”

He rose, smoothed out his clothing, and pulled himself together. It was not part of his program to let whomever he might meet know that he himself had been concerned in the wreck.

In a moment he returned to Arima. “I’ll have to have those papers,” he said.

Silently the Japanese reached within his coat and drew out the papers. He held them up for Orme to take.

“You have me beat,” he said. “Spirit told me I must fail.”

A picture of the scene in Madame Alia’s rooms came to Orme; the darkness broken only by a pinpoint of gaslight; the floating, ghostly forms; the circle of awed believers, with the two Japanese, intent as children.

The medium’s work for him had not ended when she helped him to escape. Mentally he redoubled his thanks to her, for she had so impressed the fatalistic mind of Arima that he gave the papers over without making necessary a final struggle.

By the size and shape of the papers Orme recognized them. Nevertheless, to make sure that he was not being deceived; he slid his hands over Arima’s coat, and felt in the pockets. He found nothing that resembled the papers he had, so he thrust them into his own pocket.

He now took out his watch. There was not enough light to see what time it was, and he ran his fingers over the dial, as he had done during that time of imprisonment, earlier in the evening. As nearly as he could tell it was ten minutes past nine. He could hardly believe that it was so early.

With a final, “Take it easy,” to Arima, Orme now started down the road toward the lights of a house, a quarter of a mile ahead.

He had it in mind to examine the papers, to find a clue to the name of the girl’s father. The sentiment which had led him to refuse her offer to tell him everything must now be neglected. There might still be time to deliver the papers before midnight, but he did not dare delay.

For one thing, he had only the haziest notion as to his whereabouts. Obviously

he was somewhere west of Evanston, but that meant little in an unfamiliar country. He would have to find some conveyance.

Not altogether without sympathy for his fallen enemy, he nevertheless felt that Arima had received no more than he deserved. There had been no hesitation about the different attacks made upon himself. He had provoked no assault unless by the fact that he had the marked bill in his possession. But the calmness with which Arima had endured his final defeat aroused admiration. After all, the Japanese had merely acted under orders. And now Orme's first thought was to get help for him.

He came to the lights he had seen. They shone through the windows of a small farmhouse a few rods back from the road. A short avenue of poplars led to the door.

In response to Orme's knock, the man of the house appeared—a German with sleepy eyes and tousled yellow hair.

"There is an injured man down the road a way," said Orme. "Motor-car smash."

"So?"

"His leg is broken, I think. I made him as comfortable as I could. Can you get a doctor? The man will rest quiet till a doctor comes. He can't be moved very well."

"*Ein* doctor? *Ja. Es ist* one *bei* Niles Center. *Mein* son vill go for him. Too bad! Too bad! Come in."

"No, thank you," said Orme carelessly.

"Vas you in *der* accident?"

"Do I look it?" Orme laughed.

"*Nein*, you do not look it. *Ach!* Dese autymobles! Dey makes much harm."

"It *is* too bad," admitted Orme.

"He vas a millionaire, maybe. Dey comes by here so fast, going to Arradale. Hans! *Komm Hier! Ein* man is gesmashed. *Du* must for *der* doctor go." He turned back to Orme. "*Mein* son, he will go."

But Orme had no ears for what the sympathetic German said. One word had made his heart leap.

"Arradale!"

There he was to have dined with Tom and Bessie Wallingham! He had forgotten them utterly. Were they still at the golf club? Possibly, and, in any event, if he could reach the club, he would be near a railroad.

“How far is Arradale?” he asked.

“*Halb*-miles. *Und* vere did you say *der* hurt man vas?”

“A few hundred feet back there.” Orme indicated the direction. “Can I reach Arradale by this road?”

“Next turn—*rechts*. I will take de man some *schnapps*.”

“That will be good. His friends will make it right with you.”

“*Ach!* Do not say so!”

The German shook his head in deprecation of the idea that he wished any return for his services. Meantime his long-legged, towheaded son had come from within and stood gaping behind his father.

“Vill you go back to *der* man *mit* me?” asked the German.

“No,” said Orme.

“So? Vell, all right.”

“I’m sorry I can’t wait,” said Orme. “I’ve done what I could, and I have a long way to go.”

“Sure! Dat’s all right!”

“Then thank you very much. Good-night.”

Orme walked briskly to the road and turned west. He felt assured that Arima would be looked after.

Following the road to the first crossing, he turned to the right. In a few minutes he saw the lights of the clubhouse, and a little later he stepped upon the veranda.

Many people were seated in the comfortable porch chairs. The charms of the summer evening had held them after their afternoon of play. And from one of the groups came the sound of a voice—a man’s voice—which Orme found vaguely familiar. He could not place it, however, and he quickly forgot it in his general impression of the scene.

In this atmosphere of gayety he felt strangely out of place. Here all was chatter and froth—the activity of the surface-joy of living; but he had stepped into it

fresh from a series of events that had uncovered the inner verities.

Here the ice tinkled in cool glasses, and women laughed happily, and every one was under the spell of the velvety summer evening; but he had looked into the face of Love and the face of Death—and both were still near to his heart.

He found a servant and asked for the Wallinghams.

“Mr. Wallingham has left, sir,” said the man, “but Mrs. Wallingham is here.”

“Ask her if Mr. Orme may speak to her.”

He smiled rather grimly as the servant departed, for he anticipated Bessie’s laughing accusations.

And presently she came, an admonishing finger upheld.

“Robert—Orme,” she exclaimed, “how dare you show your face now?”

“I couldn’t help it, Bessie. Honest, I couldn’t. I must ask you to forgive and forget.”

“That’s a hard request, Bob. You have broken two engagements in one day—and one of them for dinner. But never mind. I have a weakness that I acquired from Tom—I mean the weakness of believing in you. Go ahead and explain yourself.”

“It would take too long, Bessie. Please let me put it off.”

“Until you can manage a good excuse? You want all the trumps.”

“My explanation is all tangled up with other people’s affairs. Where’s Tom?”

“He went back to the city early—awfully sorry that he couldn’t stay to have dinner with you. There is a committee or something this evening.”

“Bessie, you know what I asked you over the telephone. Can you—can you help me?”

“What—*Now?*”

“Yes.”

“Why, Bob, what’s the matter with you? This is no time of day to make a call.”

“It’s very important, Bessie. It doesn’t concern the young lady alone. I simply must be at her house within the next two hours.”

She eyed him earnestly. “If you say that, Bob, I must believe you. And, of course, I’ll help all I can.”

Orme sighed his relief. “Thanks,” he said.

She flashed a speculative glance at him.

“I’m sorry,” he said, “that I can’t tell you what it’s all about. You’ll just have to take my word for it.”

“Have I asked you to tell me?”

“No, you marvel of womanhood. You are dying of curiosity, I don’t doubt, but your restraint is superhuman.”

Again she looked at him keenly. “Bob, you are dying of curiosity yourself. Don’t you suppose I can see?”

“It’s something harder than curiosity,” said Orme simply.

“How eager are you!” She laughed. “Now, there is plenty of time. The trip won’t take us more than half an hour; so come along and meet some friends of mine.”

“Bessie—if you *could* hurry——”

“We can’t start until the car comes. I’m expecting it at any moment. So be good, and come along. There’s such an interesting man—and very distinguished. We don’t try to pronounce his name. Just think, he was engaged for dinner here, also, and came too late. And ever since he arrived he’s been called to the telephone at five-minute intervals. So exciting! Nobody can guess what he’s so busy about.”

She threaded her way through the lively groups on the veranda, and reluctantly he followed. The voice which he had so nearly recognized sounded closer, then stopped with a curious little laugh that was loudly echoed by others.

Bessie broke in upon the lull that followed. “Excellency, may I present another man who missed his dinner?” she said saucily. “Mr. Orme.”

The man addressed was sitting comfortably in a wicker chair that was several sizes too large for him. At the mention of Orme’s name he got to his feet with startling alacrity.

“Mr.—*Orme*?” His surprise was unmistakable.

“Mr. Robert Orme,” said Bessie.

Someone struck a match to light a cigar, and in the sudden light Orme found himself looking into the face of the Japanese minister.

“I think I have never met you before,” said the minister slowly.

“I think not,” replied Orme.

He was much disquieted by the encounter. Now he understood that Arima had been bound for this very place.

If only he had refused to let Bessie drag him into her circle! The minister would not have known his face, but the mention of his name gave full enlightenment.

The minister resumed his seat, and a chair was brought for Orme. There were other introductions.

A woman’s voice renewed the conversation. “Excellency, won’t you tell us another of your very interesting stories?”

The minister turned to her. “I will tell you one,” he said, “that you will not find in the literature of my country. It is a story of the secret service, and it came to me through my personal acquaintance with some of the participants.”

“Oh, that will be splendid!” exclaimed the woman.

The minister waited for a moment. He turned his face toward Orme, and asked politely: “You will not mind listening to what I have to say, Mr. Orme?”

“Why, to be sure not,” replied Orme, wondering.

“My stories are not always short,” continued the minister, “as the others already know. But they sometime hold meanings which, in my country, at least, would be perfectly plain.”

After this odd bit of by-play, he began his narrative:

“There was a man who lived in the city of Takamatsu, on the island of Shikoku. His name was Kimaga, and he was much respected by all who knew him, for he was painstakingly devoted to his aged and mos’ honorable parents. By trade he was a maker of vases—a—what you call him—a potter.

“One day while Kimaga was walking upon the road, he saw before him on the ground a letter. He picked it up. It was sealed, but he discovered upon the outside a curious writing which he could not make out. In fact, Kimaga could not read at all. He was very poorly educate.

“But Kimaga was charm by the grace and beauty of the writing. Though he could not read it, it fascinated his eyes. He decided to keep it, making no attempt to find the rightful owner. You must know that in Nippon beauty is worship by the humblest workman.

“It happened that the letter had been written by a Chinese spy, and it contained a

report concerning our fortifications. Now there is in Nippon a very secret service. It is not responsible to the government. It is compose of nobles who for many and many a generation have bound themselves by a strong oath to do patriotic service which the government itself might be too embarrassed to undertake. If they are oblige to use extreme measures, and are arrested because of what they have done, they calmly accept the punishment of the law without explaining their actions. Sons of noble houses have been executed for assassinating secret enemies of Nippon, and they have met this fate as their oath demanded.

“Members of this secret service knew about this letter of the Chinese spy. They knew, also, that it had been lost, and before long they learned that Kimaga had picked it up. How they learned all this does not matter. But they also knew that the relations between Nippon and China at the time were of such a strain that their government, not wishing to give cause of war, would hesitate to punish the Chinese spy.

“In the meantime Kimaga had become so enamor of the letter that he could not bear to let it go out of his possession. When he was alone he would feast his eyes upon the beautiful writing. But it was not long before he discovered that men were watching him, and he became filled with fear. Why should he be watched? Had he done a guilty thing?

“So greatly did the fear swell in him that he decided to take the letter back to the place where he had found it, and drop it again in the road. But when he got to the place and looked for a last time at the writing, it give him such longing to keep it that he thrust it into his breast again and hurried back to his shop.

“That night a man came to see Kimaga.

“‘Are you Kimaga, the maker of vases?’ he said.

“Kimaga, all trembling, replied that he was.

“‘Then,’ said the man, ‘I have come to you with high purpose. You have a letter which does not belong to you. Give it to me.’

“‘Does it belong to you?’ asked Kimaga, his desire putting armor on his fear.

“‘That is not to be asked,’ replied the man. ‘I am *samurai*. For the glory of Nippon you mus’ give me the letter.’

“But Kimaga did not wish to let the letter go. ‘How do you know that I have it?’ he said. ‘You have not seen it.’

“‘It is enough that I know,’ said the man. ‘Three days I allow you. If by then the letter has not been placed on the altar of the war-god, in the shrine of Samiya, then you will be assassinated.’

“With that the man went away.

“Kimaga was now almos’ dead with fright. For the first day he did nothing but weep. The second day he put on mourning and set his affairs in order. The third day he held the letter in his hand for many hours and filled his mind with the beauty of the writing. He could not give it up. Rather would he die. And at last he placed it in a lacquer box and buried it deep at the foot of the largest cherry-tree in his garden.

“He arose to go back into his house, an’ his head was bowed over with terror. You see, he felt that many eyes were watching him from the near-by walls, an’ he thought he heard breathings and the whispers of strangers. What should he do now? He dare not advance; he dare not stay where he was. So exceeding affrighted was he that he groaned aloud. From all about him came groans that answered his. Once more he groaned, and once more his ears were filled with the answers.

“Then he took one step toward his house. Nothing happened. He took another step, an’ his knees they shook like the palsy. The breathings an’ whisperings seem, oh, so much nearer now. But he muster all his strength an’ put out his foot for the third step. It did not reach the ground again before the vengeance struck him.

“The next morning his wife found him dead. His head had been severed from his body.”

The minister stopped and sat back in his chair.

“How awful!” exclaimed the woman who had asked for a story.

“Not so,” said the minister affably. “In serving my country, such things mus’ be done. Kimaga should have given the letter. Don’t you think so, Mr. Orme?”

The parable was quite clear to Orme. He understood the threat.

“In America,” he said, drily, “we do not worship penmanship.”

“But an American might for other reasons keep a letter that did not belong to him.”

“Not if he was honorable. His natural course would be to see that it was

delivered to the person for whom it was intended. Certainly he would not give it to any man who could not prove his right to it."

"Would he not? But if he were told that he mus' die——?"

"In that case he would inform his friends of the threats against him, and they would see that his murderers were hanged. Assassination is not popular in America, Excellency."

Orme did not attempt to conceal the contempt in his words, and several of the listeners moved in their chairs, betraying their embarrassment.

"Perhaps, then, Mr. Orme," said the minister, "you could favor us with a story which would show the attitude of an American in such an affair."

Orme laughed. "Oddly enough," he replied, "I can give you just such a story—if you all care to hear it."

"Go on," murmured one of the men.

"It happened to a friend of mine," said Orme. "He had in his possession a number of proxies, the use of which would determine the control of a certain corporation. While he was carrying these proxies to the country-house of the man to whom he was to deliver them, he was attacked by a man who was acting for another faction. This man secured the advantage over my friend and, robbing him of the proxies, jumped into a waiting motor-car to make his escape."

"And did he escape?" the minister interrupted.

"He thought himself safe," continued Orme, "but my friend had caught the back of the motor-car just as it started. He climbed silently into the tonneau, and throwing his arm around the neck of the thief, pulled him backward from his seat.

"The car was ditched, and my friend and the thief were both thrown out. My friend was not hurt. The thief, however, had his leg broken."

"What happened then?" inquired the minister; for Orme had paused.

"Oh, my friend took the proxies from the thief's pocket and walked away. He stopped at the nearest farmhouse and sent help back."

"Even in America," commented the minister, "the frien's of the injured man might see that his hurt was avenge. The man who caused the accident should be made to suffer."

"Oh, no," said Orme. "If the matter were pressed at all, the correct thing to do

would be to arrest the man with the broken leg. He had stolen the papers in the first place. Harm came to him, when he tried to escape with the papers after stealing them. But as a matter of fact, the average American would consider the affair at an end."

"Your story and mine are dissimilar," remarked the minister.

"Perhaps. But they involve a similar question: whether a man should yield passively to a power that appears to be stronger than his own. In America we do not yield passively unless we understand all the bearings of the case, and see that it is right to yield."

At this moment a motor-car came up the drive. "There's our car, Bob," said Bessie. "Wait a moment, while I get my wraps. I know that you are impatient to go."

"I know that you are a good friend," he whispered, as she arose.

He did not care to remain with the group in Bessie's absence. With a bow, he turned to stroll by himself down the veranda. But the minister jumped to his feet and called:

"Mr. Orme!"

Orme looked back. "Please be so good as to return," continued the minister.

With mere politeness, Orme halted, and took a step back toward his chair.

An air of startled expectancy was manifest in the positions taken by the different members of the group. The minister's voice had sounded sharp and authoritative, and he now stepped forward a pace or two, stopping at a point where the light from one of the clubhouse windows fell full on his face. Clearly he was laboring under great excitement.

"You have something to say to me?" inquired Orme. He foresaw an effort to detain him.

"I am compelled to ask the ladies to leave us for a few minutes," said the minister, seriously. "There is a matter of utmos' importance."

He bowed. The women, hesitating in their embarrassment, rose and walked away, leaving the half-dozen men standing in a circle.

"I find myself in an awkward position," began the minister, slowly. "I am a guest of your club, and I should never dream of saying what I mus' say, were my own personal affairs alone involved. Let me urge that no one leave until I have done."

For a tense moment he was silent. Then he went on:

“Gentlemen, while we were talking together here, I had in my pocket certain papers of great importance to my country. In the last few minutes they have disappeared. I regret to say it—but, gentlemen, someone has taken them.”

There was a gasp of astonishment.

“I mus’ even open myself to the charge of abusing your hospitality, rather than let the matter pass. If I could only make you understand how grave it is”—he was brilliantly impressive. Just the right shade of reluctance colored his earnestness.

“I have every reason to think,” he continued, “that the possession of those papers would be of immense personal advantage to the man who has been sitting at my right—Mr. Orme.”

“This is a serious charge, Excellency,” exclaimed one of the men.

“I am aware of that. But I am obliged to ask you not to dismiss it hastily. My position and standing are known to you. When I tell you that these papers are of importance to my country, you can only in part realize how great that importance is. Gentlemen, I mus’ ask Mr. Orme whether he has the papers.”

Orme saw that the minister’s bold stroke was having its effect. He decided quickly to meet it with frankness. “The papers to which His Excellency refers,” he said quietly, “are in my pocket.”

Several of the men exclaimed.

“But,” Orme went on, “I did not take them from His Excellency. On the contrary, his agents have for some time been using every device to steal them from me. They have failed, and now he is making a last attempt by trying to persuade you that they belong to him.”

“I submit that this smart answer does not satisfy my charge,” cried the minister.

“Do you really wish to go further?” demanded Orme. “Would you like me to explain to these men what those papers really mean?”

“If you do that, you betray my country’s secrets.”

Orme turned to the others. “His Excellency and I are both guests here,” he said. “Leaving his official position out of the question, my word must go as far as his. I assure you that he has no claim at all upon the papers in my pocket.”

“That is not true!”

The minister’s words exploded in a sharp staccato.

“In this country,” said Orme, calmly, “we knock men down for words like that. In Japan, perhaps, the lie can be passed with impunity.”

“Gentlemen, I ask that Mr. Orme be detained,” exclaimed the minister furiously.

“I will not be detained,” said Orme.

The other men were whispering among themselves, and at last one of them stepped forward as spokesman. “This is a serious matter for the club,” he said. “I suggest, Mr. Orme, that we go to the library”—he glanced significantly at the other groups on the veranda—“where no one can overhear us, and talk the matter over quietly.”

“But that will exactly fit in with his scheme,” exclaimed Orme, heatedly. “He knows that, in the interests of our own country”—he hazarded this—“I must be at a certain place before midnight. He will use every means to delay me—even to charging me with theft.”

“What is that?” Bessie Wallingham’s voice broke in upon them. “Is anyone daring to accuse Bob Orme?”

In her long, gray silk motor-cloak, with the filmy chiffon veil bound about her hat, she startled them, like an apparition.

The spokesman explained. “His Excellency says that Mr. Orme has stolen some papers from him.”

“Then His Excellency is at fault,” said Bessie, promptly. “I vouch for Mr. Orme. He is Tom’s best friend, and Tom is one of the governors of the club. Come, Bob.”

She turned away decisively, and Orme recognized the advantage she had given him, and strode after her. From noises behind him, he gathered that the men were holding the minister back by main force.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE GOAL

The chauffeur was opening the door of the waiting car. It was a black car—a car with strangely familiar lines. Orme started. “Where did that come from?” he demanded.

Bessie smiled at him. “That is my surprise for you. My very dear friend, whom you so much desire to see, telephoned me here this evening and asked me to spend the night with her instead of returning to Chicago. She promised to send her car for me. It was long enough coming, goodness knows, but if it had appeared sooner, I should, have gone before you arrived.”

Orme understood. The girl had telephoned to Bessie while he waited there on La Salle Street. She had planned a meeting that would satisfy him with full knowledge of her name and place. And the lateness of the car in reaching Arradale was unquestionably owing to the fact that it had not set out on its errand until after the girl reached home and gave her chauffeur the order. Orme welcomed this evidence that she had got home safely.

Bessie jumped lightly into the tonneau, and Orme followed. The car glided from the grounds. Eastward it went, through the pleasant, rolling farming country, that was wrapped in the beauty of the starry night. They crossed a bridge over a narrow creek.

“You would hardly think,” said Bessie, “that this is so-called North Branch of the Chicago River.”

“I would believe anything about that river,” he replied.

She laughed nervously. He knew that she was suppressing her natural interest in the scene she had witnessed on the veranda; yet, of course, she was expecting some explanation.

“Bessie,” he said, “I am sorry to have got into such a muss there at the club. The Japanese minister was the last man I wanted to see.”

She did not answer.

“Perhaps your friend—whom we are now going to visit—will explain things a little,” he went on. “I can tell you only that I had in my pocket certain papers which the Jap would have given much to get hold of. He tried it by accusing me of stealing them from him. It was very awkward.”

“I understand better than you think,” she said, suddenly. “Don’t you see, you big stupid, that I know where we are going? That tells me something. I can put two and two together.”

“Then I needn’t try to do any more explaining of things I can’t explain.”

“Of course not. You are forgiven all. Just think, Bob, it’s nearly a year since you stood up with Tom and me.”

“That’s so!”

“How time does go! See”—as the car turned at a crossing—“we are going northward. We are bound for the village of Winnetka. Does that tell you anything?”

“Nothing at all,” said Orme, striving vainly to give the Indian name a place in his mind.

On they sped. Orme looked at his watch. It was half-past ten.

“We must be nearly there,” he said.

“Yes, it’s only a little way, now.”

They were going eastward again, following a narrow dirt road. Suddenly the chauffeur threw the brakes on hard. Orme and Bessie, thrown forward by the sudden stopping, clutched the sides of the car. There was a crash, and they found themselves in the bottom of the tonneau.

Orme was unharmed. “Are you all right, Bessie? he asked.

“All right.” Her voice was cheery.

He leaped to the road. The chauffeur had descended and was hurrying to the front of the car.

“What was it?” asked Orme.

“Someone pushed a wheelbarrow into the road just as we were coming.”

“A wheelbarrow!”

“Yes, sir. There it is.”

Orme looked at the wheelbarrow. It was wedged under the front of the car. He peered off into the field at the left. Dimly he could see a running figure, and he hastily climbed the rail fence and started in pursuit.

It was a hard sprint. The running man was fast on his feet, but his speed did not long serve him, for he stumbled and fell. He did not rise, and Orme, coming up, for the moment supposed him to be stunned.

Bending over, he discovered that the prostrate man was panting hard, and digging his hands into the turf.

“Get up,” commanded Orme.

The man got to his knees and, turning, raised supplicating hands.

“Poritol!” exclaimed Orme.

“Oh, Mr. Orme, spare me. It was an accident.” His face worked convulsively. “I—I——” Something like a sob escaped him, and Orme again found himself divided between contempt and pity.

“What were you doing with that wheelbarrow?”

Poritol kept his frightened eyes on Orme’s face, but he said nothing.

“Well, I will explain it. You followed the car when it started for Arradale. You waited here, found a wheelbarrow, and tried to wreck us. It is further evidence of your comic equipment that you should use a wheelbarrow.”

Poritol got to his feet. “You are mistaken, dear Mr. Orme. I—I——”

Orme smiled grimly. “Stop,” he said. “Don’t explain. Now I want you to stay right here in this field for a half hour. Don’t budge. If I catch you outside, I’ll take you to the nearest jail.”

Poritol drew himself up. “As an *attaché* I am exempt,” he said, with a pitiful attempt at dignity.

“You are not exempt from the consequences of a crime like this. Now, get on your knees.”

Whimpering, Poritol kneeled.

“Stay in that position.”

“Oh, sir—oh, my very dear sir. I——”

“Stay there!” thundered Orme.

Poritol was still, but his lips moved, and his interlaced fingers worked convulsively.

As Orme walked away, he stopped now and then to look back. Poritol did not move, and Orme long carried the picture of that kneeling figure.

“Who was it?” asked Bessie Wallingham, as he climbed back over the fence.

“A puppy with sharp teeth,” he replied, thinking of what the girl had said. “We might as well forget him.”

She studied him in silence, then pointed to the chauffeur, who was down at the side of the car.

“Anything damaged?” Orme queried.

“Yes, sir.”

“Much?”

“Two hours’ work, sir.”

“Pshaw!” Orme shut his teeth down hard; Poritol, had he known it, might have felt thankful that he was not near at hand. He turned to Bessie. “How much farther is it?”

The chauffeur answered. “About three miles, sir.”

Three miles over dark country roads—and it was nearly eleven o’clock. He glanced ahead. In the distance a light twinkled.

“Bessie,” he said, “come with me to that farmhouse. We must go on. Or, if you prefer to wait here——”

“I’ll go with you, of course.”

They walked along the road to the farm gate. A cur yelped at their feet as they approached the house, and an old man, coatless and slippered, opened the door, holding an oil lamp high above his head. “Down, Rover! What do you want?” he shouted.

“We’ve got to have a rig to take us to Winnetka,” said Orme. “Our car broke down.”

The old man reflected. “Can’t do it,” he said, at last. “All shet up fer the night. Can’t leave the missus alone.”

A head protruded from a dark upper window. “Yes, you can, Simeon,” growled a woman’s guttural voice.

“Wall—I don’t know——”

“Yes, you can.” She turned to Orme. “He’ll take ye fer five dollars cash. Ye can pay me.”

Orme turned to Bessie. “Have you any money?” he whispered.

“Heavens! I left my hand-bag in my locker at the clubhouse. How stupid!”

“Never mind.” Orme saw that he must lose the marked bill after all. Regretfully he took it from his pocket. The woman had disappeared from the window, and now she came to the door and stood behind her husband. Wrapped in an old blanket, she made a gaunt figure, not unlike a squaw. As Orme walked up the two or three steps, she stretched her hand over her husband’s shoulder and snatched the bill, examining it closely by the lamplight.

“What’s this writin’ on it?” she demanded, fiercely.

“Oh, that’s just somebody’s joke. It doesn’t hurt anything.”

“Well, I don’t know.” She looked at it doubtfully, then crumpled it tight in her fist. “I guess it’ll pass. Git a move on you, Simeon.”

The old man departed, grumbling, to the barn, and the woman drew back into the house, shutting the door carefully. Orme and Bessie heard the bolts click as she shot them home.

“Hospitable!” exclaimed Bessie, seating herself on the doorstep.

After a wait that seemed interminable, the old man came driving around the house. To a ramshackle buggy he had hitched a decrepit horse. They wedged in as best they could, the old man between them, and at a shuffling amble the nag proceeded through the gate and turned eastward.

In the course of twenty minutes they crossed railroad tracks and entered the shady streets of the village, Bessie directing the old man where to drive. Presently they came to the entrance of what appeared to be an extensive estate. Back among the trees glimmered the lights of a house. “Turn in,” said Bessie.

A thought struck Orme. If Poritol, why not the Japanese? Maku and his friends might easily have got back to this place. And if the minister had been able to telephone to his allies from Arradale, they would be expecting him.

“Stop!” he whispered. “Let me out. You drive on to the door and wait there for

me.”

Bessie nodded. She did not comprehend, but she accepted the situation unhesitatingly.

Orme noted, by the light of the lamp at the gate, the shimmer of the veil that was wound around her hat.

“Give me your veil,” he said.

She withdrew the pins and unwound the piece of gossamer. He took it and stepped to the ground, concealing himself among the trees that lined the drive.

The buggy proceeded slowly. Orme followed afoot, on a parallel course, keeping well back among the trees. At a certain point, after the buggy passed, a figure stepped out into the drive, and stood looking after it. From his build and the peculiar agility of his motions, he was recognizable as Maku. Orme hunted about till he found a bush from which he could quietly break a wand about six feet long. Stripping it of leaves, he fastened the veil to one end of it and tip-toed toward the drive.

The Japanese was still looking after the buggy, which had drawn up before the house.

Suddenly, out of the darkness a sinuous gray form came floating toward him. It wavered, advanced, halted, then seemed to rush. The séance the afternoon was fresh in the mind of the Japanese. With screams of terror, he turned and fled down the drive, while Orme, removing the veil from the stick, moved on toward the house. Madame Alia’s game certainly was effective in dealing with Orientals.

A moment later Orme and Bessie had crossed the roomy veranda and were at the door, while the old man, still grumbling, swung around the circle of the drive and rattled away. Orme’s heart was pounding. When the servant answered the bell, he drew back and he did not hear the words which Bessie spoke in a low voice. They were ushered into a wide reception-hall, and the servant went to announce them.

“You wish to see her alone,” said Bessie. “Go in there and I will arrange it.”

He went as she directed, into a little reception-room, and there he waited while subdued feminine greetings were exchanged in the hall without. Then, at last, through the doorway came the gracious, lovely figure of the girl.

“Oh,” she whispered, “I knew you would come, dear—I knew.”

He took her hands and drew her to him. But with a glance at the doorway she held herself away from him.

In his delight at seeing her he had almost forgotten his mission. But now he remembered.

“I have the papers,” he said, taking them from his pocket.

“I was sure you had them. I was sure that you would come.”

He laid them in her hands. “Forgive me, Girl, for fooling you with that blank contract.”

She laughed happily. “I didn’t look at it until I got home. Then I was so disappointed that I almost cried. But when I thought it over, I understood. Oh, my dear, I believed in you so strongly that even then I went to my father and told him that the papers were on the way—that they would be here in time. I just simply *knew* you would come.”

Regardless of the open doorway he clasped her closely, and she buried her face in his coat with a little laugh that was almost a sob. Then, suddenly, she left him standing there and, holding the papers tight, went from the room.

CHAPTER XIX

A SAVED SITUATION

He waited impatiently for her return. Bessie, he knew, might be in one of the rooms just across the hall, but, though Bessie was a trump, he did not go to look for her. The girl might come back at any moment—and he did not wish to miss one instant of her presence.

Again he considered the miracle of her appearance in his life, and he rejoiced that, from the first, he had been able to be of service to her. Those loving, trusting words that she had just spoken—how they glowed in his heart! She had known that he would succeed! He could only think that the secret telegraphy of his love had sent her messages of confidence.

And yet he did not even know her name. The house was just such a one as he might have imagined to be her home—beautiful, with the air of a longer family tradition than is commonly found in the Middle West—unobtrusive but complete. And the furnishings of the room in which he was standing were in quiet but perfect taste.

On a table near him lay a book. Mechanically he picked it up.

It opened at the fly-leaf. Something was written there—her name, perhaps.

He closed the cover without reading the inscription, conscious only of a line of writing in a feminine hand that might be hers or another's. No, he could wait. The name did not matter. She was his, and that was enough.

Near the book lay an empty envelope, addressed to—he averted his eyes.

He found himself wondering whether Poritol was still kneeling in the field, and whether Maku was still running, and whether the Japanese minister was still telling charming stories on the porch at Arradale.

And presently, when she came again, her face radiant, and said softly, "You have done a great thing, my dear"—when she said that, he could only look and look

and thank Heaven for his blessedness.

“Where were the papers when you fooled me into leaving you?” she asked.

“Arima had them. It’s quite a story, Girl, dear.”

“Then, wait a little while,” she interrupted; “we have permission to see the papers signed.”

A smile of mischief alone betrayed her recognition of his bewilderment.

Why should the signing be treated as a matter of such importance? It must mean a great deal to her and hers. The hour was now about half-past eleven, and he remembered that in a short time it would have been too late.

She led him through the adjoining room and to the curtained doorway of a library—long, alcoved, shelved with books, and furnished with heavy leather chairs. In the center was a large table of polished mahogany, upon which rested a reading-lamp.

The glow of this lamp illuminated the forms and faces of a group of serious-faced men—two seated, the others standing. In the golden light, with the dim background of shelves, surmounted here and there by a vase or a classic bust, the group impressed Orme like a stately painting—a tableau distinguished by solemn dignity.

“We are to remain here and keep very quiet,” whispered the girl.

Orme nodded. His eyes were fixed on the face of a man who sat at the table, a pen poised in his hand. Those strong, straight features—the eyes, with their look of sympathetic comprehension, so like the girl’s—the lips, eloquent in their calmness—surely this was her father. But Orme’s heart beat faster, for the face of this man, framed in its wavy gray hair, was familiar. He seemed to know every line of it.

Where had he seen this man? That they had never met, he felt certain, unless, indeed, they had shaken hands in a casual and forgotten introduction.

Or was he led into a feeling of recognition by the undoubted resemblance of father to daughter? No, it could not be that; and yet this man, or his picture—ah! The recognition came to Orme in a flash.

This was the magnetic face that was now so often appearing in the press—the face of the great, the revered, the able statesman upon whom rested so great a part of the burden of the country’s welfare. No wonder that Orme recognized it,

for it was the face of the Secretary of State! And the girl was his daughter.

Orme was amazed to think how he had failed to piece the facts together. The rumors of important international negotiations; the sudden but not serious illness of the Secretary; his temporary retirement from Washington to Chicago, to be near his favorite physician—for weeks the papers had been full of these incidents.

When South Americans and Japanese combined to hinder the signing of mysterious papers, he should have realized that the matter was not of private, but of public importance. But the true significance of the events into which he had been drawn had escaped his logical mind. It had never occurred to him that such a series of plots, frequent though they might be in continental Europe, could ever be attempted in a country like the United States. And then, he had actually thought of little besides the girl and her needs.

He glanced at her now, but her gaze was fixed on the scene before them. The brightness of her eyes and her quickened breathing told him how intense was her interest.

Across the table from the Secretary of State sat a younger man. His breast glittered with decorations, and his bearing and appearance had all the stiffness of the high-born Teuton.

Of the men who stood behind the two seated figures, some were young, some were old, but all were weighted with the gravity of a great moment. Orme inferred that they were secretaries and *attachés*.

And now pens scratched on paper. The Secretary of State and the German Ambassador—for Orme knew that it must be he—were signing documents, apparently in duplicate, for they exchanged papers after signing and repeated the action. So these were the papers which at the last hour Orme had restored; and this was the scene which his action had made possible—all for the sake of a girl.

And when the last pen-stroke had been completed and the seated men raised their eyes and looked at each other—looked at each other with the responsible glance of men who have made history—at that moment the girl whispered to Orme: “Come,” and silently he followed her back to the room in which he had first awaited her.

“Oh, Girl,” he whispered, as she turned and faced him, “Oh, Girl, I am so glad!”

She smiled. “Please wait for a moment.”

When she had disappeared he repictured the scene they had just witnessed. With all its absence of pomp, it had left with him an impression that could never be effaced.

Again the girl appeared in the doorway, and leaning on her arm was her father. Orme stepped forward. The Secretary smiled and extended his hand.

“Mr. Orme,” he said, “we owe you much. My daughter has told me something of your experiences. You may be sure that I had no notion, when this affair began, that she would have to envelop herself and others in so much mystery, but now that all has ended well, I can only be thankful.” He seated himself. “You will excuse me; I am not quite strong yet, though, as I might say, very convalescent.”

The girl was leaning on the back of her father’s chair. “Tell father the story, won’t you, please?” she asked.

So Orme quickly narrated the series of events that began with his stroll along State Street the afternoon of the day before. “It doesn’t sound true, does it?” he concluded.

“But the marked five-dollar bill will always be evidence of its truth,” said the girl; and then, with a suggestion of adorable shyness, “We must go and redeem that bill sometime.”

The Secretary was pondering. He had listened with manifest interest, interrupting now and then with questions that helped to bring out salient points. At the report of the conversation between Alcatrante and the Japanese concerning the commissions on ships, he had leaned forward with especial attention. And now, after a few moments of thought, he said:

“The Japanese minister we can handle. As for Alcatrante, I must see to it that he is recalled—and Poritol.”

“Poor little Mr. Poritol!” exclaimed the girl. “Do you think he is still kneeling in that field?”

“Possibly,” said Orme, smiling. “We will look to see when we go to redeem the bill.”

“I think, Mr. Orme,” said the Secretary, “that I may fairly give you a little clearer insight into the importance of the papers which you rescued for us. You have seen stories of the rumors of negotiations with some foreign Power?”

“Yes,” said Orme.

“But, perhaps you have not known of the secret but aggressive policy which Japan has lately adopted toward us. The exchange of friendly notes a few years ago might as well not have occurred. If we had done nothing to check the tendencies in the Pacific, we should have been at war within another year. Only a complete understanding and definite agreement with some strong nation could prevent hostilities. The Anglo-Japanese alliance eliminated Great Britain as a possible ally. There were reasons why it seemed inadvisable to turn to France, for an arrangement there would involve the recognition of Russian interests. Therefore, we sought an alliance with Germany.

“The German Ambassador and myself drafted a treaty last month, with the proviso that it must be signed within a certain period which, as you know, will expire within a few minutes. My illness followed, and with it the necessity of coming to our home, here. I had expected to return to Washington last week, but as Doctor Allison forbade me to travel for a while longer, I had the drafts of the treaty sent on, and urged the German Ambassador to pay me a long-deferred visit. He and his suite have been here several days, in mufti.

“Now, Mr. Orme, this treaty concerns two important relations—a just balance of power in the Pacific and a just arrangement by which the countries of South America can be made to live up to their obligations. I cannot go into details, and it will be some months before the treaty will be made public—but Japan must not dominate our Pacific trade routes, and the Monroe Doctrine must be applied in such a manner that it will not shelter evil-doers. You understand now why Alcatrante and the Japanese minister were working together.”

“It is quite clear,” said Orme. “I don’t wish you to tell me any more than is advisable, but the Japanese minister said that, if the new treaty should lapse, the German Government would not renew it.”

“Very true,” said the Secretary. “The German Ambassador is pleased with the treaty. After it had been drafted, however, and after his home government had agreed to the terms, Japan brought pressure to bear in Germany. The result of this Japanese effort—which contained a counter-proposition for the isolation of Russia—was that the German Government weakened—not to the point of disavowing the arrangement with us, but in the event of a redrafting of the treaty, to the adoption of a less favorable basis of negotiations, or, possibly, even to the interposition of such obstacles as would make a treaty possible. You can see how essential these papers were to us. There was not time to provide new copies, for the lost drafts carried certain seals and necessary signatures which could not be duplicated on short notice.”

“Did the German Ambassador know of the loss?” Orme was encouraged to ask questions by the Secretary’s obvious desire to explain as fully as he could.

“No one knew of it, Mr. Orme, excepting my daughter and myself—that is, no one besides the South Americans and the Japanese. It seemed wise to say nothing. There were no secret service men at hand, and even if there had been, I doubt if they would have acted as efficiently as you have acted. The police, I know, would have bungled, and, above all else, publicity had to be avoided.

“As things have turned out, I am glad that Poritol set his burglar on us when he did; otherwise Maku would have got the treaty at the last moment. Alcatrante’s desire to secure a diplomatic advantage over the Japanese was really the saving of us.”

The Secretary paused. His face lighted up with a rare smile. “Above everything else, Mr. Orme, I thank you.”

He arose and rang for a servant.

“And now,” he continued, “I know you will excuse me if I return to my guests. My daughter will bring you in presently, so that we may have the pleasure of making you acquainted with them. And, of course, you will remain with us till to-morrow.” He smiled again and went slowly from the room on the arm of the servant.

Orme turned to the girl. Her face was rosy and her eyes were fixed on the arm of her chair.

“Girl, dear,” he said, “I can hardly believe that it is all true.”

She did not answer, and while he gazed at her, surprised at her silence, failing to understand her sudden embarrassment, Bessie Wallingham appeared in the doorway and stood hesitant.

“Am I still not wanted?” said Bessie, roguery in her voice. “Sure, ye’ll find me a faithful servant. I minds me own business and asks no questions.”

The girl rushed over to her friend.

“Oh, Bessie,” she cried, with a little laugh—“Oh, Bessie, won’t you please come in and—and——”

Orme began to understand. “And wait for us a little longer,” he broke in.

Masterfully he led the girl out through the doorway to the hall.

Bessie Wallingham looked after their retreating figures. “Well? I never!” she

exclaimed.

THE END

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