

GOOD ROADS,
GOOD HOMES,
BEST CHEESE

CLOVERDALE COURIER.

The Nestucca Valley First,
Last and all the
Time.

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PEARL of the ARMY

Guy W. McConnell

FIRST EPISODE

The Traitor.

One soft midsummer twilight three officers of engineers, U. S. A., stood in a group upon the Arlington quay at Fortress Munn on the celebrated Atlantic Widewaters. Up the channel on scheduled time steamed overnight northbound packets. In its slip at the dock a ferry boat prepared to leave for the railroad terminal across the bay. Now its shrill siren summoned all passengers to go aboard.

Bidding the others adieu, the youngest member of the party took his departure, carrying considerable baggage. Presently he was seen mounting to the ferry's upper deck.

For a moment in the evening afterglow he stood at the rail, a commanding figure of soldierly strength, grace and distinction. Touching his hat to his superiors on the platform below, he turned away.

Battalion Major Brent's acknowledgment of the young captain's departing salute was perfunctory enough, but in the response of the third officer, Col. Richard Dare, their regimental leader, kindly personal interest was obvious.

"Perfectly stunning chap, even to that Vandyke he wears," bluntly admitted the major, himself a handsome man. He lit a cigarette and inhaled deeply. "And—rich."

The trace of envy in the major's voice was not lost upon the colonel. "Capt. Ralph Payne is a splendid type," he said quietly. "Patriots of his stamp—and yours, Thornton—are America's noblemen. Incidentally," his eyes were twinkling now, "another member of my family seems to agree with me. But what a strictly neutral body she is as regards you two!"

The colonel chuckled soberly as a saturnaline look crept into the major's face. Then he did an unusual thing. Placing a firm hand on the shoulder of the dapper officer and keenly regarding him, he said:

"Major Brent, my daughter, Pearl Dare, is a true American girl. Her forefathers fought for the honor and integrity of this country, as I have and probably shall again. She is of a marriageable age. It is in the nature of her blood and breeding that

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her husband will be an army man and that her children will bear the colors of which she feels herself to be a part. You will pardon if I speak frankly. The opportunity may never again be so propitious. My observation tells me that her choice lies between Payne and yourself, either of whom, as surely you know, is acceptable to me. And now of you I make this request. I am growing old. If, in the uncertain events of which we appear to be on the eve, I should be mustered into eternity, you will be my successor in line. I should like to have the feeling that if out of her heart, Pearl should place her hand for life's guidance in that of Ralph Payne, the blow which will fall upon you shall not alter the close comradeship between us, man to man, and that you will always take a watchful interest in her well-being."



"Pearl, Will You Be My Wife?"

A singular expression flittered over the features of the man to whom these unexpected words were addressed.

"Your confidence, Colonel Dare, overwhelms me," he rejoined. And that was all he said. A moment later the Washington and Baltimore boats nosed against the wharf. Colonel Dare took passage on the latter, going at once to his stateroom. Brent, entered the former.

On the following day these now notable characters in contemporaneous American history quietly arrived in the national city, unknown to any of their personal friends or acquaintances, not even to Pearl Dare who was spending the summer in town at her father's house.

This was in July toward the close of a century after one James Monroe, a president of the United States, proclaimed the law of our seas to the nations of the world.

In the ground under one wing of the army administration building at the capitol is a certain chamber, the exact location of which remains a profound departmental secret. Its existence, in fact, is known only to a chosen few high military officials having to do with the program of the war college. A concealed passage connects it with one of the private anterooms in the suite of the secretary of war, through a panel hidden in the wainscoting.

Thither Colonel Dare, upon reaching the war office, cautiously picked his way. Major Brent, he found, had already arrived as had also the chief of staff and his aides. Presently Captain Payne entered, completing the caucus.

At a sign, an aide-de-camp closed and bolted the door, outside which a trustworthy officer of rank stood on guard. Chairs were now drawn close to the table while from a portfolio the chief's personal aide took a slim, oblong packet which he presented to his superior.

The packet was opened. It was found to contain a sheet of paper about thirteen inches square. On one side was an ink sketch of a magnificently designed tree, each leaf bearing a numeral. The other side of the paper, when exposed to the silent inspection of the conferees, appeared to be plain.

"This, gentlemen," gravely announced the chief of staff, "is a military document of the last importance. Up until recently we have thought our fortifications of the Panama Canal adequate to successfully defend it against attack of a foe. This piece of paper proves, in a startling way, the fallacy of this view. It conceives a simple strategy to capture the Zone, from a land source hitherto overlooked by us, without destroying the locks."

The effect of this speech upon the little group of grim-visaged men at the table was electrical. In consternation their eyes were riveted upon the drawing the speaker held in his hand. The mind of each, familiar with every foot of ground at the Isthmus, was filled with wonder and perplexity.

"But, already is this masterpiece in army tactics steeped in a tragic circumstance; and that is why you are here," went on the chief of staff, hardly able to repress the excitement he felt. "Its author purports to be a young civilian engineer, lately returned from the Zone. Upon arrival he came directly to me, delivering the document and—this." He took from his watch chain a plain gold locket.

It was a simple ornament of jewelry such as is commonly worn. It opened on a hair-thin hinge into halves about the size of a 50-cent piece. Each of the lids held a false casing behind which a wafer, resembling paraffin, was hidden.

"This wafer," explained he, removing one and holding it in the light, "is a chemical invention of the designer of the document. He alone knows its component parts, although this much he has told me: A fluid compound is formed by dissolving it in pure rain water. This applied thoroughly to the apparently plain back of the tracing exposes the key to the numerals on the leaves of the tree now concealed in invisible ink and reveals the plan in its entirety."

"Now, here," he continued, speaking rapidly to his thoroughly astonished audience, "a terrible contingency has arisen. The plan is in the original, no copy having been made. No one but this remarkable person actually knows the details in it. He came on his first and only visit to headquarters merely to lay the matter before the attention of the general army staff. He left upon my request for a few hours time in which to consult with the president

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and secretary of war and to arrange for a subsequent meeting. On leaving he went to his hotel and retired at once to his room. We, of course, had him observed. A few minutes later a bell-hop passing in the hall heard groans from within. He tried to open the door. It was locked. He climbed over the transom. The room was in frightful disorder. The man was lying on the floor mumbling incoherently. The surgeon general of the army himself informs me that he is dying. He has been completely paralyzed and cannot talk, see or, apparently, hear. The mystery about him is that he is not known to Gorschuch by the name he gave us. Nothing in his personal effects throws any light upon his identity.

"In view of all of which," he concluded, tersely, "I have decided not to translate the secret of this document here or run the risk of exposing it to theft or loss. I have, accordingly, requested you to come and determine with me upon the safest manner of forwarding the paper and the locket of chemicals to Major General Gorschuch at Panama, to whom the secret should in all events be made known without delay or knowledge of others than ourselves."

Captain Payne, his eyes bright, leaped impulsively to his feet. "General!" cried he, with animation, "I volunteer. I am now technically on leave. My going at this time would excite no suspicion in any quarter; in fact, it need not be divulged to anyone that my destination is other than I originally intended it should be."

The general looked fixedly at Payne. "Excellent!" he exclaimed, with a pleased smile. The other men nodded their quick approbation.

Then began a general discussion of the whole subject. Several hours later Payne left the room. Colonel Dare and Major Brent remained behind for a long conference with the staff about other vital matters on which their expert views were solicited. In the lining of Payne's coat, under the left shoulder strap, the document had been skillfully sewed, while upon his own watch chain the locket carelessly dangled.

He left the war office outwardly composed, save for a slight flush upon his cheeks and an unwonted light in his eyes. He walked briskly down the path, marveling at the queer turn of things, oblivious entirely of his surroundings. At that hour there were few passersby and all unnecessary traffic had deserted the streets in the scorching heat of the sun. Unobservedly he left the sidewalk and started toward the curb on the other side, when he was startled out of his thoughts by the sharp retort of an automobile horn. At the same moment a large touring car coming at high speed stopped still and he found himself looking into the surprised countenance of Pearl Dare.

Exclamations were mutual, for this was indeed an unexpected meeting.

"Why, Pearl!"

"Of all persons, you, in Washington!" The note of pleasure in her voice thrilled him, and in answer to her inquiring look he started to offer some explanation, when, for the first time, he observed her chauffeur. He was, as usual, Toko.

Toko beamed magnificently upon Payne, who noticed him in a friendly kind of way while grasping Pearl's outstretched hand.

"No!" he protested, when Toko opened the door for him to enter the automobile. "Sorry, I have an immediate engagement. When can I see you?"

"We dine at seven," she replied simply. "I will expect you to come

and be my escort later to a ball at the Granddian embassy."

His eyes sparkled in anticipation and she gave his firm hand a tight, quick pressure as, with a brilliant smile, she turned her face away and Toko, with keen politeness, bowed and started off.

This was exactly at 3:41 p. m. by his watch. He proceeded on his way in an elated mood.

He went at once to the railroad station and engaged his ticket and berth to New Orleans, for he had been instructed to go to Panama by that route. Taking a cab, he stopped several minutes at his club, where he dispatched by messenger an order for Pearl's favorite flowers for the evening. Then he started to walk to his hotel.

He had gone but a few blocks when, in front of a cheap lodging house, he observed an excited crowd in which were several officers of the police and plain clothes men in the federal intelligence service.

One of these men recognized and ran up to him. "Strangest thing that ever happened!" the flustered officer whispered in his ear. "Man layin' upstairs in this dump same as dead with paralysis suddenly disappears and no one knows how or when he went or where. With a trained nurse at that, and she's gone, too!"

"Anything to do with the war department?" demanded Payne quickly. "Yes," replied the officer in the manner of one divulging a secret. "Confidentially, the secretary himself is about to be notified."

A look of quick comprehension flashed into Payne's face as he hurried to the Hotel Wilton, just ahead, and stepped into the elevator. He burst into his room, closing the door behind him with a bang and approached the telephone standing on the writing table. And now occurred the most startling experience of his life. There beside the telephone lay an envelope. His own name was written upon it. It was unsealed. Picking it up, he drew forth, with nervous fingers, a sheet of note paper on which was written this dumbfounding communication:

"The left shoulder strap and the locket reveal the hiding place of the secret. Take the tip in time."

Payne, his senses reeling, wondered deliriously whether he had suddenly become insane. For, the writing was in his own hand and upon his private stationery.

He looked dumbly at his grip on the door, wherein his personal letter paper and envelopes were securely locked. An eternity of moments passed. It seemed to him, before he heard the voice of the secretary of war at the other end of the telephone, into which he found himself shouting, with the receiver jammed against his ear.

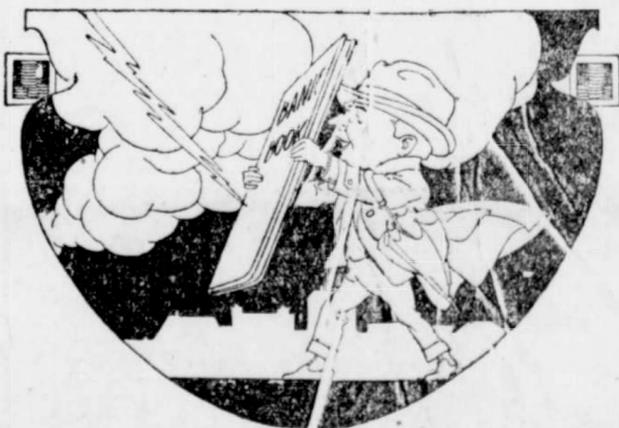
Yes, except himself, every member of the special council of the general army staff was still in secret session! "What is wrong with you, anyhow?" querulously inquired the secretary's voice.

"Hold them! There's a leak!" cried Payne, shoving the telephone aside.

His eyes flashed about the room. The door had been locked. The window screens were securely fastened on the inside. The place seemed not to have been disturbed, nor had the locks on any of his baggage been broken; and an examination revealed everything to be as he had himself packed before leaving the post. He sat down and on an identical sheet of paper copied in a daze the ominous and mysterious language of the original.

Continued on last page.

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THINGS may be going well with you today. You may have a fine position. Your business may be prospering. You may be in the full vigor of youth and health. Of course none cares to look on the dark side. But it always is well to be prepared for a change in the tide. The greatest preparation is a healthy bank account. Drop in and see us about an account. We'll gladly talk it over.

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