

# PEARL of the ARMY

By GUY W. McCONNELL



A Story of "America First," Unmasking America's Secret Foes

Novelized From the Motion Picture Serial of the Same Name Released by Pathe

## SYNOPSIS.

Capt. Ralph Payne, U. S. A., is given secret plans of defense to deliver to Panama. He attends a ball at the home of his sweetheart, Colonel Dares' daughter, Pearl. As a climax to a series of mysterious incidents he is arrested for treason. The ambassador of Granada is found dead and the plans missing from Payne's coat.

## SECOND EPISODE

### Found Guilty.

The ball at the Granadian embassy continued without interruption until a late hour. Orders from no less important personage than the president forbade making known to the public, for the time being at least, the sudden and mysterious death of Ambassador De Mira—attributed to suicide—until after the preliminaries of an investigation could be arranged; and so closely was the secret guarded that only a few of the attaches were cognizant of the ambassador's fate. The absence of Colonel Dare, his daughter and his unfortunate young colleague, Capt. Ralph Payne, if noted at all, occasioned no comment among the assembly now wholly absorbed in the pleasure of the moment.

Major Thornton Brent, it is true, having seen his party's hasty exit, may have wondered what sudden notion took them off without telling him about it. He was, however, in a measure relieved and glad to be alone. Two things had occurred to disturb his equanimity. He had lost the incriminating note from Bertha Bonn sent to him at the Dare residence earlier in the evening. This was enough to throw him into a panic of apprehension. And the girl had, after all, appeared at the ball. He had seen and been forced covertly to talk with her.

Free to pursue an appointment with her at his apartment, Brent slipped away from the embassy unobserved and strode to the Wilton, cast in a gloom of reflections upon his early army life after leaving West Point.

A mere chit then, was this simple, meek-eyed daughter of the old frontier post sergeant, who came twice a week with his linens and darning, and to whose childish adoration, in the great isolation of his life, his heart of youth hungry to love, succumbed.

For years he had wondered whether she was alive or dead. Then, one day shortly after his commission as major and transfer to Colonel Dare's regiment, he was somewhere with Pearl at an afternoon tea dance or something. Already had his subtlety in the art of love gained for him a place in the heart of the colonel's daughter. Her glowing eyes and the rich color mantling her cheeks told him that on this occasion he was fascinating her and that, for the moment, his rival was not in her thoughts. He was on the point of proposing, knowing that the idea was not entirely repellent.

Then came the shock that put a stop to his matrimonial calculations for the present. For Bertha Bonn, accompanied by an amiable bon vivant, had entered the room and, taking an adjoining table, observed and adroitly flaunted recognition into his startled eyes.

Similar encounters followed. Then came letters containing requests for money. Brent, always extravagant, began to find himself head over heels in debt. His position made refusal of her demands impossible.

He reached the "F" street side of the Wilton in a fever. Unnoticed by him at the curb stood the Dare automobile. Toko sat at the wheel quietly smoking a cigarette.

At that hour the hotel lobby was practically deserted. When Brent passed through the partly darkened lounge he stepped back as if to conceal his person. In the descending cage were Colonel Dare and Pearl, with Payne and Major Steele of the intelligence bureau close behind.

Distress was stamped upon their features and he was grimly aware that the bulge in Major Steele's right coat pocket was caused by a revolver tightly clenched in his concealed fist. Colonel Dare, noticing Brent, quickly drew him aside.

He spoke bluntly, "Payne is—under arrest. The Panama defense plans and the chemical wafers necessary to their interpretation have—" he looked at Brent meaningly—"disappeared. Wait here for instructions."

A curious calm enveloped Brent and a faint smile played upon his thin lips as he approached his apartment.

Bertha Bonn was there, waiting.

"Howdy!" she exclaimed, familiarly. He merely touched her outstretched fingers. "Well! You know why I am here. Must I go to Captain Payne for the funds I need, or are you prepared to be magnanimous in your own interest?"

He met her challenge frankly. "I told you the truth. I am broke and facing ruin. A little later, perhaps—" Out of the tail of his eye he saw her cynical smile and changed his tactics. "I am heartily sorry for the shadows which I cast upon your early life, Bertha. But why have you reopened that painful chapter at this late date? Isn't there some way by which we can keep it closed and forget each other?"

She shrugged contemptuously. "How can I forget! You refused me honest love and a clean name."

Her voice chilled him. "In a few months," he fenced, weakly; "I shall probably be able to settle upon you a sufficient sum to make you always independent. Won't that suffice?"

There was a note of jealousy in the nervous laugh which followed. "So you expect to marry the Dare millions? Is that it?"

"That's it!" he admitted, after a defiant silence.

Her manner swiftly changed. The mask of the worldly woman disappeared from her face, flushed and revealing an outraged heart. She started from the sofa and then for the first time his widening eyes saw a plain gold locket attached to a chain at her throat.

For a few disturbing seconds Brent confounded it with the one in which the government chemicals had been secreted and given to his unfortunate brother officer.

He sprang to his feet just as she wrenched the locket from its fastening and pressing a spring disclosed its contents to him.

The locket contained his miniature signed, dated and inscribed:

"To My Darling Wife."

He drew back uttering an oath. She turned away, snapping the lid shut. "If I were you, Thornton," she drawled with studied irony; "I wouldn't calculate on those Dare millions to provide me with an income."

Brent sprang up on her in swift and uncontrollable rage, his vision blurred, seeing only that forgotten inscription of a half-impulsive and sentimental moment of years ago.

The locket rolled on the floor and out of the clutch. Bertha was about to shriek when a knock on the door brought Brent to his senses. Bertha recovered the locket while he reluctantly answered the summons.

At the threshold, saluting, stood an orderly from the war office. "Compliments of the chief of staff and instructions to headquarters: full dress uniform, sir," said he from a respectful distance.

"Wait below!" Brent shut the door in his face to avoid the eyes of Bertha, who, taking advantage of the situation, slipped out when a safe exit was assured.

She immediately went to the hotel office. Here she deposited the locket with the clerk for safe keeping. The clerk gave her the usual duplicate receipt, numbered and in blank, on which her signature in her own handwriting was a necessary requirement. She put this in her purse and turned away with a feeling of security. Incidentally she served the orderly from the war office awaiting the major. Then she went to her own room. Hardly had she entered when from the pavement rose the shrill cry of excited boys.

The hoarse, bellowing voices in the light air rudely jarred upon her overwrought nerves. Straining her ears she was unable to catch any meaning or even an intelligible word in this sudden vocal outburst. She took a dive out of her purse and going downstairs to see what the clamor was about, purchased a paper. It contained a brief account of the tragedy at the Granadian embassy.

The hotel lobby was seething with excited people. Bertha did not escape the thrill of the moment. In awed silence she re-entered the elevator. As it went upward it passed Brent ready to descend. He ignored her passing smile of mocking sweetness. She laughed to herself.

She opened her purse to put the change away and discovered, to her amazement, that the duplicate invoice for her locket, which she had placed there but a few moments ago, was

gone! Instead was a gold locket! Unable to believe her eyes, she opened it at once—her priceless miniature of Thornton Brent was missing!

Fumbling again through her purse she found this explanatory note penned on the private stationery of Capt. Ralph Payne:

Guard the packet in your travelling case. Fly to the Paso del Norte on the Granadian frontier. There further instructions await you. Wear the locket for identification and Brent's miniature will be yours again.

It was some minutes before she gathered that an inexplicable turn of events was injecting her, whether she willed or not, into the affairs of the man whom Major Brent had set out to remove, if possible, from the life of Pearl Dare.

Bertha opened her traveling case. There lay a neat, oblong package resembling a silken envelope. It was sealed and unaddressed. She looked at it thoughtfully.

For one thousand dollars in crisp new bills, held together by a rubber band, also lay in a conspicuous place in the case.

Still smiling, she went downstairs and paid her account out of this mysteriously acquired wealth.

"Have you ever had anything forged on you?" she queried of the cashier, unable to resist the fling, for she was filled with no little curiosity concerning the locket mystery.

"Never," said he, glancing appraisingly at her through his horn-rimmed spectacles. He was stoop-shouldered and bald-headed.

Bertha turned away, now laughing outright, and asked the night porter something about early morning trains.

Just before retiring she happened to look down upon the thoroughfare and saw the Dare automobile containing only the familiar visaged Toko rushing by. She wondered why the car was out at that late time and whether it was bound. An hour later the car again passed the Wilton hotel, but by this time Bertha was sound asleep.

The automobile on its return trip was not empty, however. In it were Colonel Dare and Major Brent proceeding to the former's residence from a secretly convened court-martial of Captain Payne.

It was obvious that this was no happy homecoming when the car stopped before the Dare door. Toko stood aside a trifle more deferential than usual while the officers descended. The colonel seemed suddenly to have aged. His eyes lacked luster. In contrast to the extremely unctuous major at his elbow, the proud bearing of this popular regimental commander was not manifest.

Toko, with an air of understanding, unobtrusively preceded them into the house, which for the moment apparently was deserted.

Brent passed into the library. On the wall hung a splendid painting of Payne. His eyes were riveted upon it. But in them there was no pity. A strange uneasiness permeated his senses. Turning, he found Toko, hesitating to approach, yet with an evident question on his lips.

"What is it, Toko?"

Toko pointed to the portrait. His usually inscrutable face was expressive of real regret.

"What was the charge against the captain?"

"He sold a valuable army secret to an enemy country, Toko," Major Brent gruffly replied. "To Granada."

"Will he be shot?"

Brent shook his head. "The proof, while quite conclusive, was circumstantial. He has been sentenced to life imprisonment in the federal penitentiary. He will be dismissed from the army at sunrise."

"I liked Captain Payne," said Toko, after a pause. "He was my friend."

He gave Brent another uncomfortable look. "I don't believe that he was guilty."

Brent became furious for no very explainable reason. He never had liked Toko. His English was too insufferably blunt. He turned away to hide his feelings.

In the hall stood Pearl wringing her hands. The hopelessness of it all was written on her face. It was plain that the colonel had told her everything.

"I must see him—alone," she said pleadingly, approaching the major.

Brent smiled sympathetic.

"The colonel and I must return to the war department at once. Why not wait—"

She interrupted with a determined shake of her head. "Toko will drive me to the barracks after I've drops you off."

And that ended it. She went. It was arranged at the last moment so that Colonel Dare could leave the all-night conference of the staff and accompany her, for the visit was necessarily to be brief and there were some details for him alone to settle at the barracks where at daybreak he was to preside over the formal dismissal scenes of the court-martial of leech.

She felt grateful for her father's support in this trying ordeal, for no sooner had she entered Captain Payne's quarters and found herself alone with him than there came to her the

merciless realization of what the disgrace that had come upon him meant to both and a desire to have the meeting over with quickly.

But never had she so adored him as then. He stood erect, a trifle stiff, smiling easily so that she might not



The Priceless Miniature of Brent Was Missing.

too keenly feel the natural embarrassment. As he held her hand in a reassuring clasp, she knew that he was making the master effort of his life for self-control.

They stood talking briefly, incoherently. Looking into each other's eyes, they saw that something which bind women irrevocably and exalt men.

Yet that this dread thing lay between them Payne as well as she knew, and when without responding to his silent pleading for belief in his innocence Pearl with a sob turned aside, he could not resent the inference that she was not quite sure.

A moment later she was gone. If his heart fluttered when he heard her receding footfalls on the narrow stone passageway, he gave no sign, receiving in an astonishing calm his personal attorneys who were now arriving on some matters of business.

"You'll be out in a jiffy, Payne!" hotly assured Bainbridge, the senior, scarcely before he was inside the door. "Somebody will pay for this damnable outrage. The government seems to have lost its head entirely!"

Payne, bored, motioned them to sit down.

"I want to talk to you about my will," said he briefly. "You can draw it up tomorrow and mail it for my signature."

The lawyers seated themselves heavily. Bainbridge wondered what manner of man this was.

Meanwhile Pearl and her father gloomily returned to town.

When Toko drew up at the war department to permit the latter to alight, he lingered at the side of the machine holding his daughter's hand tightly.

"Be brave, girl. Remember that you are a Dare to whom America stands first." Turning away, he mumbled something about not seeing her until late in the following afternoon. Pearl understood.

It was during the short homeward drive, alone, that there dawned upon Pearl the grim significance of the offense for which her lover had been convicted. Already had the cause and predicament of this brilliant young American officer been noised about. The streets were unusually alert with people. At corners under lamp-posts men and women were grouping around news boys. The name of Ralph Payne was on everybody's lips. To her shame Pearl heard her own linked with his by a knot of workmen at a culvert over which her car bounded.

"In these perilous times, there ain't no tellin' who's a traitor and who's not. Even she—"

The words stung her. Toko suddenly increased his speed and the car was quickly out of earshot.

But Pearl well knew that the times, indeed, were perilous, for she could not have been in her father's household and remained ignorant of national affairs. The time had come when men had ceased to speak in jest of the Turle bay incident, the Haitian uprising, the Mexican brawl and of our perplexities with all Latin-America. It was well known that foreign men of war, in fighting trim, had for some time been mysteriously patrolling the Caribbean and the Pacific; and the financial and commercial intimacy of the southern hemisphere, with Europe and the Orient, lately had assumed a new and

disturbing aspect. Every day some unexpected development in our foreign relations was arising, exacting a keener finesse, a more sharp finality, a greater precaution, harbingering no one knew what form of disputation yet to come in the preservation of national independence.

The hour had arrived when something more than the craft of our statesmen was necessary to avert national disaster. Agencies hostile, mysterious, unrecognizable, eluding detection, defying effacement, infested the land, lurking in every byway of public life. Even trivial events in ordinary times now took on a sinister meaning to those upon whose vigilance the protection of a country and its people depended. It was a time when sober-minded men were beginning to practice with a rifle in the back yard and women to gaze upon their stalwart sons with tenderness born in fear of sacrifice. The bosom of America, among young and old, was inspired in a new and solemn patriotism.

Pearl in her motor car reflected upon these things soberly. She sighed.

They rode past the celebrated central railroad depot where the quick eyes of both perceived that the stage of the night's drama had temporarily shifted. Half a score of foreign diplomats and a handful of railroad employees were surrounding a hearse. A glance told them that in it was the dead body of the Granadian ambassador. Pearl marveled at the haste displayed in getting it out of the country.

On reaching her residence she found the house shut up for the night. The missing Toko, who proceeded at once toward the garage in the rear of the premises, she admitted herself. While closing the door, she observed a taxicab on the opposite side of the thoroughfare. The driver was huddled in his seat, apparently asleep. She wondered who might be having a nap at such an hour, for in none of the houses in the neighborhood were there any lights.

In her own home a supernatural quietude prevailed. With a little shiver she quickly turned on the electric lights. Then she slowly mounted the stairs to her bedroom.

In the act of switching off the current at the top of the stairs, she halted, listening, attracted by the sound of stealthy movement. Now followed by a faint groan. She drew down the steps and into the library whence the sound had come. Here she scented the odor of chloroform. Simultaneously she stumbled over the unconscious person of one of her maids lying on the floor and detected short, quick flashes of light in the colonel's stride.

She stole to the curtains which separated the two rooms, pushing the folds aside. She stepped backwards, startled. A strangely garbed man, his back toward her, was fumbling over some papers on the desk.

Pearl must have gasped aloud in her sudden excitement or given some evil



An Episode in Major Brent's Past.

dence of her presence, for the intruder skillfully hiding his face turned immediately and leaped through an open window, making off in the shadows.

She was after him in a second, but when she reached the ground he had disappeared. Then the throbbing of a motor attracted her to the street, just in time to discover a taxicab racing away.

Her eyes now fell upon the car still waiting in front of the house opposite. The driver was fooling with the magneto. She ran to him, gesturing dramatically in the direction of the fast fading red lights.

"Quick, please, follow that car. I'll pay you any price. I'm Miss Dare!"

The driver shifted into gear before she was fairly inside. She swung her swaying body into the tonneau closing the door with a bang, only to find herself pinioned by a pair of steel-cold hands. Her outcry was unheard save by the mysterious man into whose arms she had unexpectedly fled.

Then again Pearl smelled chloro-

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