

## PEARL OF THE ARMY

(Continued from first page)

Holding both sheets before him, his own eyes could not distinguish any difference in the penmanship. Amazed and troubled beyond expression, he thrust the original and duplicate into his pocket and hastened out of the room. While waiting for the elevator he looked at his timepiece. It was exactly 3:59 p. m. Ten minutes later he stood pale and tense before the secretary of war and his fellow members of the general army staff, extending the scrolls for their inspection while he recited the circumstances in short sentences.

"The thing itself, sir, is incredible!" he exclaimed, shrilly. "But my own handwriting! That caps the climax!"

"It does, indeed, cap the climax," uttered the secretary of war, dryly.

Some hours later Payne recalled the singular emphasis upon these words.

"The disappearance of the paralyzed man just reported has something to do with this," quickly interposed Colonel Dare, placing a kindly hand upon the shoulder of his perturbed young officer. "We will nip this plot in the bud, for a plot it must be. Let Captain Payne have every freedom of action from now until the departure of his train for New Orleans tonight and we will have him shadowed by the entire secret service force if necessary." Then he outlined a procedure which was faithfully adhered to by Payne in every detail.

He returned immediately to his room in the hotel. Closing the transom over the door and drawing the window blinds he telephoned in a hurry for his full-dress uniform and another suit which that morning had been sent to the valet for pressing, for the Dare dinner hour was near. He removed his coat, hanging it on a clothes tree directly in front of the window. Into one of the pockets he dropped the locket, laying his watch and chain upon the bureau. In a little while the valet arrived, carrying clothing on both arms. Smoothing the trousers of Payne's two suits upon the bed as directed by the captain, he secured the coats to the pins of the tree, while Payne was diving his hands in his pockets for a tip. Presently, completely attired for the evening, Payne put in a call for a cab and, approaching the window, threw up the blinds.

He smiled faintly as he looked through the window. As had been planned, on the ninth floor of the building on the opposite side of the street were numbers of men of the secret service staring into his room, every detail of which was visible to their location. Payne significantly tapped the left shoulder strap of the coat upon the tree, assuring himself that the document was hidden there. He put his hand into the coat pocket, took the locket out, held it in the light so that it could be seen by the watchers, and replaced it. He turned to see if they had observed his action. They gestured in the affirmative. Then he departed, locking the door.

In rooms across the corridor and in those adjoining his own also were secret service men, who noticed his departure with significant interest.

Payne left the hotel quite at ease, eager to be with Pearl. The secrets left behind in his uniform were surrounded by an impregnable cordon of protection.

Pearl's dinner passed off without af-

ter stood an instant undecided. Then, dismissing the boy without a reply, he crushed the note in his fist and, mumbling apologies, joined his companions in the waiting automobile.

The ball at the Granadian embassy was in full motion when they arrived.

Pearl was easily the apex of all vision in the assemblage. Wherever she moved men petitioned the favor of a dance and when she waltzed with De Mira, the gray-haired Granadian ambassador, even the women begrudgingly admitted her superior graces and charms.

During a one-step, in which Brent's good fortune paired him with Pearl, Payne for a moment encountered alone in the conservatory the Granadian ambassador. They chatted briefly.

"Who is the beautiful brunette, your excellency?" inquired Payne, motioning toward a girl standing somewhat apart and alone. She was tall and beautiful, with an indefinable something hard, while pathetic, in her mobile countenance.

The ambassador shook his head and, calling his secretary, put Payne's question. Payne's eyes were at that instant looking at the girl's neck, where lay, attached to a thin gold chain, a locket identical with the one containing the hidden wafers.

"Curious," he mumbled, half aloud, while the secretary admitted reluctantly that he did not know her name and went off to ascertain it. Just then Brent, with a laughing girl on each arm, swept by, and Payne, as he turned to seek Pearl, for his dance with her was now due, imagined that he was mistaken when he thought he saw the mysterious woman accost Brent and be snubbed by him.

When Pearl and her now happy escort stepped upon the floor the dancing was at its height. Everybody was in a gay and indulgent humor. He led, she followed in perfect step and rhythm to the music, which was a selection from Strauss. No more splendidly matched couple graced the floor of a ballroom. Half a head taller than she and straight as an arrow, every inch a soldier in fact, he looked the part. Many an old and admiring couple in the room that night commented upon Pearl's suitability to be a soldier's wife and hoped among themselves that Payne would be the lucky fellow. She was youth, health and vitality incarnate, indeed. Her developing figure was strong and supple; there was something boyish about it, too. In her sparkling blue eyes merriment vied with girlish tenderness. A coat of summer tan only partly hid the clarity of her complexion. A faint natural odor from her golden hair during that ecstatic dance permeated the senses of Payne, fairly intoxicating him.

"Pearl," he whispered, tenderly, "I am leaving you tonight for a long and indefinite absence. What does that mean to you?"

The girl made no reply. He could feel the wild beating of her heart.

"Is there not some token of you I may take along with me and treasure in the loneliness and uncertainty of the life to which I am bound? Some—love token?"

She pressed his hand very, very tenderly. Still she did not speak, but something told him that her heart was full.

"Pearl?" She looked up timidly, adoringly.

"Will you be my wife?"

Pearl no longer hesitated. Long since, her heart had told her what her response to that question would be.



Capt. Ralph Payne is Arrested for Treasonable Conspiracy.

Payne, avoiding Pearl's inquiring eyes, felt, turned to Pearl to excuse himself; but she insisted upon accompanying him.

Here Major Steele interposed an objection, which she would not hear. She had her own way. In spite of Major Steele's cold and forbidding attitude she followed him into the library on the arm of her now uneasy lover.

At first neither comprehended the tragic scene upon which their attention fell. Major Steele closed and locked the door, standing rigidly, his hand on the knob. By a massive writing stand, alone, was the tall and melancholy figure of the colonel. The Granadian ambassador sat in a chair, his head bowed in one arm as though he were sleeping. In his other hand, resting on the stand, he held a pen, the ink on which was still fresh. Under it lay an unfinished letter.

Payne, as if in a horrible nightmare, saw that this letter was addressed to none other than himself. A groan of abject horror escaped his lips.

"Dear Payne," the terrifying language began;

"My country thanks you, but too late. There is no alternate for me but to die. Farewell, my—"

"Why—" he glared wildly about the room. In that moment his heart seemed to have stopped beating. His eyes fell upon the ambassador. He saw that he was dead.

Colonel Dare now spoke, mechanically. "Major Steele," he said, turning to that grim officer, "for the time being, at least, absolute secrecy of this frightful affair must be kept. Place your most trusted men in charge." He turned to his half hysterical daughter, "Pearl," said he, with infinite sadness, "I will ask you to go with us, now that you are a witness here, to Captain Payne's quarters at the Wilton."

Pearl often wondered afterwards how she summoned the courage to go through the remainder of this ordeal of her life. She did not cry, neither did she, but for the one moment, lose her splendid composure. Her mind became a blank. Her blood seemed to have frozen in her veins. During the seemingly interminable ride to the hotel she sat on the front seat by Toko in a terrible calm. Her feelings seemed to have left her entirely as, when they stepped from the elevator on the ninth floor of the Wilton, the party proceeded to Payne's rooms.

Only once did any flicker of hope revive, and that was when Major Steele was informed by the secret service men awaiting Payne's return that no one had approached his room during his absence, which was corroborated by the men posted across the street.

On entering Payne's room and fastening the door, Payne laughed a little. There, on the clothes tree, hung the coat just as he had left it!

The colonel lifted the coat from the tree and passed it to Pearl, handing her also a penknife. "Rip open the sleeve under the left shoulder strap," he requested, hardly able to conceal his own feelings.

Pearl obeyed, smiling, for under her fingers she felt something secreted in the cloth. Triumphant she extracted a sheet of paper and handed it to her father, while from the coat pocket she drew the locket.

"Thank God!" cried Payne with an excess of relieved emotions.

But upon Colonel Dare's countenance there crept, as he examined the paper, an expression of astonishment and unbelief, mixed with contempt. For the paper was not the army document; it was a piece of ordinary newspaper. His nervous fingers opened the locket. He stared at an empty interior. The wafers were gone!

A pin drop might have been heard in the ensuing silence. Colonel Dare, drawing himself to full height, turned imperiously to Major Steele.

"Captain Payne!" exclaimed the lat-

ter, frigidly. "I arrest you on the charge of treasonable conspiracy with Granada against the United States."

"The look of dumb anguish passed from Payne's pale features. 'I am not guilty!' he said solemnly, yet not without resentment and bitterness. (END OF FIRST EPISODE.)

Queered Himself.

"What spoiled Archie's chances with Miss Millyuns?"

"She told him she disliked compliments."

"I see, and he persisted in paying them?"

"No. He was stupid enough to take her at her word and stop."—Boston Transcript.

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Bertha Donn is Snubbed by Major Brent.

fording Payne an opportunity for a mutually desired tete-tete, for both the colonel and Major Brent were, to his disappointment, present.

It was while the party were assembling in the hall that occurred an incident which noticeably affected Brent and caused Payne at least a few seconds of wonder. A messenger arrived with a letter addressed to Brent on the Hotel Wilton stationery. Excusing himself and retiring somewhat apart from the others, Brent broke the seal and, with rising anger, read:

Dear Thornton: I am at your hotel. I need a large sum of money. I am sure your rival for Pearl Dare, Captain Payne, would pay me handsomely for what I could tell him. I may be at the ball. BERTHA DONN.

She knew that she loved Ralph Payne.

"Let us go into the conservatory," she murmured softly.

Then, as they made their exit, appeared Major Brent, beckoning to Payne.

"A messenger is looking for you, Captain!" he called over his shoulder as, with the wife of the chief of staff, he entered the ballroom. "From Colonel Dare, I believe!"

Hardly had these words been spoken when Major Steele of the army intelligence bureau stepped up to Payne. "Colonel Dare, in the ambassador's library, desires to see you—alone," he said, with quiet composure, looking at