

PEARL OF THE ARMY

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soft, purring voice in foreign accents whispered in his ear:

"Do not turn, señor. It would be dangerous. You desire to efface Bertha Bonn from your life; eh, señor? Ah! That will be easy and at no inconvenience to the major. It will happen tonight, if the señor officer, who desires the colonel's daughter to forget forever about Captain Payne will follow the written directions."

The voice ceased. The shadow faded. Brent sat as still as stone for a second. When he looked about no one was within immediate talking distance.

He put on his hat, paid his bill, and stepped outdoors. Here he almost ran over a little halfbreed girl, who, to his surprise, thrust into his hand a nosegay and quickly disappeared around the corner of the building.

A note was fastened to the stem. "Send Pearl Dare alone in the twilight to the pass before Bertha Bonn arrives at Fort Gordon," the note read, "who must wear the belt of Orderly Adams. She will return unarmed and be yours forever. Meanwhile, Bertha Bonn will disappear."

Brent leaped upon his horse and sent for Adams as soon as he arrived at the fort.

"Let me have your belt, sir," he demanded when the latter appeared.

There was nothing to do but obey the superior officer.

When he was alone Brent scrutinized the belt with great care. It did not seem to differ in any respect from the common article. Afterwards he sent for Pearl, with whom he had a long and serious talk.

That evening Pearl set out alone on horseback, laughingly refusing an escort and stating that she did not intend to go far or be absent long. In the holster of Adams' belt, which Major Brent insisted upon adjusting around her waist, was a loaded revolver. To go was to fetch Bertha Bonn about the hour fixed for her return.

Twilight deepened into darkness. She dug the spurs into the flanks of her mare so as to reach her destination quickly for she was eager to accomplish her errand. Suddenly the mare stumbled and fell, throwing her. She rose unhurt. The mare, however, lay writhing with a broken leg. Pearl drew her revolver and shot the mare.

She realized that she was alone in an unknown country. Yet she was not alarmed, even when, after discharging her revolver in the air, no sign of assistance appeared. Presently there did appear a light moving rapidly and drawing nearer every second. After an interval, an automobile hove in sight. To go was at the wheel; in the rear sat Miss Bonn.

In that same instant Orderly Adams rode toward her like mad, and there loomed out of the shadows a body of horsemen intent upon doing harm. Pearl was lifted by two powerful arms and tossed upon a saddle in front of a huge and evil-eyed foreigner. A fusillade of shots followed, a blanket was thrown over her head, and she could neither see nor hear more.

At the end of a half-hour of hard riding she was seized from the horse, carried an interminable distance through an underground passage, and flung into a corner in a damp cellar.

A tall, heavily built and altogether stunning Granadian leaped upon her, lashing her arms to her waist and binding her ankles together. He jerked Adams' belt from her. Coarseness and brutality, and that he was a grandiloquent and cunning type, were stamped upon his features as he stood over her.

She crouched back, disheveled, unafraid, searching her brain to account for his audacity in kidnapping her that night on American soil and right under the eyes and ears of an American border garrison.

He seemed to be mustag over the belt with his back partly toward her. Just behind him a cluster of electric lights from some unknown and fitful current burned in the ceiling, reflecting a shadow against the farther wall. There was something unusual about this shadow, for while Bolero—for it was he—stood like stone, the shadow was animated.

Although Pearl had never heard Bolero's voice, she was quick to recognize something odd in the Granadian accents which were now spoken.

"Señor has badly blundered. This is not the girl, although this is the belt. Señor will hide the belt somewhere. The girl must be released at once. She is the American colonel's daughter and Captain Payne was to have been her husband."

Pearl not only heard this speech in surprise, for she could not see Bolero's lips move at all, but what was more confusing was the disappearance of the shadow though Bolero had not changed his position.

His meditation, if such it was, came to an end. He concealed the belt in a cache and approached her.

"Ze Mees Dare—her pardon! La Bolero, he make 'an meesake. She shall be—what is it you say—set loose, yes!"

He was stooping, as if to free her, when her fingers touched his revolver, clutched it; and she held him at bay before he quite comprehended what had transpired.

The place suddenly filled with Boleroists, one of whom knocked the weapon to the floor, too greatly excited to pay further heed to her. The flying revolver fell near where was flung and tied a hit to unobserved second prisoner. He rolled over and covered it with his writhing body. It was Adams. He also was bound.

The newcomers crowded around their leader, shouting and gesticulating. "Tha Gringos—they are upon us!" In their haste and fright they literally dragged the protesting Bolero into a narrow tunnel.

The eyes of Pearl and Adams met. Even in that tense moment he was smiling whimsically.

She laughed in spite of herself. He had a sense of humor and somehow she was glad.

He eyed her dubiously. "Miss Dare—hey y-you still got my belt on?"

"Your belt?" she echoed.

He nodded. "Yes'm, my belt—the one Major Brent gave you to wear tonight."

A worried look appeared in Pearl's eyes. The matter of the belt had puzzled her, but she had not associated it or her seizure in any way with Major Brent. Adams, awaiting her reply, noted her sudden abstraction.

With increasing vehemence she swiftly reviewed the night's occurrences. She had explained rather blushing to herself that the major's visible embarrassment in sending her on her secret mission was accounted for in the rivalry which had existed between Payne and himself and that he did not want to appear in an ambiguous light. She recalled now his insistence that she wear the belt so as to be armed, in spite of his assurances that she need have no fear. It was only natural that she should wonder about the source of Major Brent's apparently sudden news in the Payne case, whether the Bonn woman was not in some way linked in it, and just where her father's orderly came in, if the belt was really his. She concluded that the belt itself would have to answer these questions.

Adams, who had not removed his gaze from her face, caught something of the working of her mind when she quickly raised her head and fixedly regarded a spot on the wall.

"They hev t-taken the belt from you, he-hey they? Huh! They hev hid it away, hev they? Huh!"

The man's divination startled her. "Yes!" she exclaimed, motioning with her hand. "It's up there! What is there about your belt, Adams? I demand to know!"

He appeared to be on the point of telling her when further conversation was made impossible for the time being by what appeared to be an apparition emerging from the wall.

It was Bolero, however, and his movements indicated haste. Without glancing at either, he opened the cache and took out the belt. A pistol shot rang out and the belt dropped. Completely surprised, Bolero stared open-mouthed into the barrel of a revolver in the corded hands of Adams. In the next second he leaped aside, howling. A second shot had grazed his scalp. A third followed in quick succession and he disappeared like a shadow actually melting away.

"How m-much nerve hev you got?" Adams now inquired of Pearl in a reassuring manner. "I g-got one shot left. I kin cut your wrist cords if you keep still as stone. I'd let you try it on me if I w-was sure I could toss the gun to you. I'm a straight shot. We've g-got to do something quick."

The confidence that he meant to instill in Pearl came without hesitation. Her alarm of Adams came later.

"Quick!" she responded. If she felt fear of consequences she did not reveal it.

Adams' eyes shone. "Some girl!" he murmured, deliriously being.

The look upon her countenance as with freed hands she released herself was well worth the dangerous exhibition of his skill.

"Some shot!" was all she said, now releasing him.

She offered the belt to him, velling her intense interest in it.

He fitted it snugly around his waist, feigning indifference to it.

"This here t-thing ain't any good any more," he stammered in his cool, drawing way, regarding the empty revolver. But Pearl noticed that he put it in the holster.

Then began search for a way to escape. A hasty inspection brought out the fact that they were in no ordinary place of confinement. It was clear at once that Bolero must have arrived and departed by a secret passage and that they were unable to locate.

Liberation, therefore, might be possible only through the tunnel.

The area of the tunnel was narrow and cramped. They were obliged to stop and pick their way along an un-

even footing. There was no light ahead, and after proceeding a short distance complete darkness enveloped them. The atmosphere reeked of foul water somewhere near. Water itself was trickling toward them, and they came to a sudden stop, startled by rumbling noises. The earth quivered.

Was that an earthquake shock?" asked Pearl, trembling.

Adams gave her hand a quick pressure. "No'm." The phenomenon was a familiar one to him. "Them's s-shells burstin'. There's an artillery action over our heads, wherever that may be. Gosh! They're shelling the Granadians outa America!"

"I wish they would shell us out of here!" exclaimed Pearl, impatiently. "What's that I see in front of us?"

"That's the only way we'll ever g-git out," was his blunt rejoinder. Then he uttered an exclamation. A rising stream of water was flooding toward them. "Doggone! I know where we be—we're under t-the river at the old waterworks near the d-dam. A cannon ball or something has broken the pipes and turned the water this way. B-back fire, miss, back fire!"

They faced each other resolutely as it dawned upon each that they were cornered as the rapid inflow reached their waists.

"T. O. Adams," began Pearl very earnestly, as the light flickered and died;



Orderly Adams, Who Has Secured the Defense Plans and Concealed Them in His Belt.

"Will you answer one question? What is the secret of the belt you wear?"

She had unconsciously clasped her arms about his neck and they were treading water. Before he could frame an answer a faint light appeared from a crack following a terrific crash. It widened and a side of the wall fell in.

Adams lifted Pearl to his shoulders, shoved her through the aperture, and she scrambled nimbly to open air and ground. She helped to extricate him.

They stood dangerously near the ruins of the hotel, in the midst of a battle between the revolutionists of Granada under Bolero and a detachment of regulars from Fort Gordon. The garrison guns were raining shrapnel and shell everywhere about them.

It was a never-to-be-forgotten scene. The hotel and entire town of Paso del Norte was on fire. The boom of cannon half a mile away, explosions in midair and almost at their feet, weird and spasmodic illuminations in the sky, the crack of the rifle distinguishable in the rattle and rain of bullets from machine guns, swiftly moving platoons of men in khaki on foot and on horse, the shriek of flying missiles commingling in the uproar with human cries, and above all the cool and deliberate voices of officers held Adams and Pearl spellbound.

They might have remained indefinitely in that position, forgetful of its dangers, had not a cavalryman, in the act of dashing by, been shot clean out of his saddle, his body falling with a thud. This brought Adams to his senses. He caught the bridle of the dead man's mount, lifted Pearl into the saddle, flung himself behind her, and galloped away, heading anywhere.

There was nothing thick-headed and stupid about Adams. Pearl secretly marveled at his poise, dexterity and, above everything else, his presence of mind; and somehow it seemed to her that this was no new experience for the recruit.

She was chilled through from the wetting she had received. Clutching the pommel of the saddle, she stared straight ahead, leaving her salvation entirely to the man behind her.

By a curious twist of things they were being driven away from their friends into the territory of foes. Adams, with the inborn sense of a sol-

dier, knew this the moment he succeeded in establishing their exact whereabouts and the movements of the contending forces. Once started, however, he saw the folly of endeavoring to change their course.

In a little while they were somewhere in the Granadian foothills.

The crash of guns and the shouting of men now ceased. The crack of the rifle of some sniper on either side was heard at longer intervals. The lurid light began to fade from the sky. There came upon the two silent fugitives in the Granadian woods the supernatural stillness that follows a clash of arms. Queer sounds arose and shadows crept toward them.

They had reached the edge of a steep precipice down which led a rough trail to a ravine. Pearl came out of her reverie.

"Are we followed?" she asked, uneasily.

Adams started her by leaping to the ground. He drew from the saddlebag a revolver and handed it to her. Then he took the trooper's carbine in his own hands. The soft patter of the shoeless hoofs of Granadian ponies was unmistakable.

"We're t-trapped," he said, bluntly. "It's sure trouble for us t-to turn and go back. You've got to take a chance on that incline! I'll s-stay here and hunt 'em off. If they k-ketch me, all the better for you." He indicated a blanket and a pup-tent in the trooper's outfit on the horse. "You'll git good and warm wrapped up in them things."

She laid a small, icy hand in his warm one. "The belt?" she interrogated. "Will you give it to me?" (END OF FIFTH EPISODE.)

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