

PEARL OF THE ARMY

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Avoiding Pearl's questioning eye, Senora Vendre—so styled by herself—delicately suggested that she proceed to make haste.

When Pearl was fully reattired, Senora Vendre uttered an exclamation and held up a mirror so that she might inspect herself. Her eyes sparkled in honest delight. She stood the image of a handsome Granadian youth of the nineteenth century.

"Have no fear, Senorita Dare. Senor Vendre will keep you from harm. For he loves you."

"Why, then, does he act so mysteriously and create so much trouble? I cannot believe what you say, Senora Vendre."

A whimsical smile illuminated the Castilian's face. "He has his own way of doing everything, the senor. He is reposing great confidence in you. I trust that you will not misplace it. You know more of his terrible secret than anyone else on earth save myself."

"I will not see him connive to destroy my country!" exclaimed Pearl, wondering at the woman's strange words. "I will do everything to prevent that, even to sacrificing his life and my own."

"The latter, my dear, will not be necessary," rejoined Senora Vendre, warmly. "But promise me one thing. Weigh well your thoughts and actions concerning Senor Vendre—give him every benefit of the doubt."

Something that rang true in the woman's voice prompted Pearl to make that promise.

Shortly thereafter Adams arrived with two ponies, and they bade the Castilian a reluctant farewell.

"Where are we going?" were Pearl's first words.

"To regain the canal defense plans before it is too late," responded her companion in Granadian.

"Oh!" exclaimed she, satirically, likewise in Granadian. "How am I to address you? 'Senor Vendre' or 'T. O. Adams of Monk's Corner, Nebraska?'"

He laughed a bit awkwardly. "'Senor Vendre' for the time being, Miss Dare," he responded, assuming a humble manner.

"And who am I?"

"You are Senor Vendre's little brother."

"Oh!" she exclaimed again, a trifle disconcerted. "So after all you are not T. O. Adams of Monk's Corner, Nebraska!"

"Of course, I am," he stuttered in plain American, unable, however, to keep back the laugh in his voice.

"You must admit, though, that you have grossly imposed upon the credulity of the United States government and a number of persons, including my father and myself, for you certainly are not the traveling tinker and ignorantus you represented yourself in the beginning to be."

"I am everything I represented myself to be," he declared.

"I give you up!" exclaimed Pearl, hotly, making an impatient gesture.

Thus began a long and eventful journey, one destined to become pivotal in her life.

Together they foraged for things to eat. He was always putting her in the way of exhibiting her skill with the rod, rifle and gun, making her feel that she was doing her part and getting diversion out of it.

Little personal conversation actually ensued between them. He really avoided her. She could not account for this, and was inclined to a sort of uppishness with him. For Pearl was a girl whom men never lost a favorable opportunity to cultivate. His indifference irritated her vanity and hurt her pride more than she cared to admit. Once, when she hinted that some information concerning their ultimate destination might not be amiss, he was so gruff and unconsidering that she concluded never again to endeavor to break into his aloofness.

Seldom in the night rides did they see a human face or sign of human habitation in the ever-changing country through which they traveled. Thus time passed all the more monotonously for the girl accustomed to mingling with many different people in all sorts of conditions and places.

She fell into a reflective and often morbid mood, and at times became bitter and sharp. It was then that she tried to make her taciturn companion's life a horror in anticipation of the punishment to be inflicted in due time upon him by her father, the colonel, if not by the entire United States army. These threats never even phased his uniformly calm disposition.

She had long since postponed the hope of an early rescue by any searching party which she felt sure must be somewhere in the territory. Adams' knowledge and mode of moving through that wild land of plain, jungle and desert combined, rendered an ambush well-nigh impossible, even by the keenest of the pack of army hounds back at Fort Gordon.

Their rough life in that baked and primeval country made startling changes in their appearances. They began to look like peons or half-breeds rather than Americans. And Pearl was altogether deceiving in her assumed role.

One night Adams called a sudden halt. He went head alone to reconnoiter. Possibly an hour passed before his return.

"How's your n-nerve?" he asked, bluntly, appearing from behind a sharp bend in the road. "We've about caught up with the main army."

"Our army?"

"No-no, I'm sorry to say. I wish it was our boys in khaki. It's just the other way round. Little brother—" his eyes twinkled humorously—"don't forget your name is Vendre. We're about to join the revolutionary army o-of Granada and strike up a personal acquaintance w-with some particular friends of yours."

"Friends? Mine? Don't be ridiculous!"

"That there Foreign Alliance o-of yours," concluded he, deliberately.

In a little while they fell in line with some thousands of Granadians on horse, who straggled in irregular files out of the night shadows.

In a thick cloud of dust a horseman advanced and scrutinized the faces of the two newcomers.

"The wolf hounds run wild under the stars while the gringos dance, senors," Bolero remarked casually, for it was he.

"The red fox is hiding in his hole," declared Adams, indicating to his dumbfounded companion to keep silent.

"It is enough," grunted Bolero, seeing that Adams knew the countersign. Is this the—"

"My brother."

"My masters will meet you when we reach Eaglita. The gringos are somewhere in the neighborhood." He spurred his horse and dashed toward the head of the column.

At daybreak camp was pitched at Eaglita, a western stronghold of the Boleroistas. By this time Pearl's excitement had begun to subside and she to keep her ears and eyes wide open.

"You're all t-there, kid," commented Adams during a moment when they could speak freely to each other with out being overheard. "I'm goin' to tell your d-dad what a sport you are."

"Do you think I'll ever get away from here safely?" she inquired, anxiously dropping her reserve for the once.

"Rest easy," he responded, mysteriously. Then he whispered: "I kinda expect your d-dad almost any hour now." But he would not explain. And a messenger from Bolero now arrived.

"The general desires to see you at headquarters—Senor Vendre, isn't it?" the messenger politely inquired, doffing his sombrero.

The moment for which Adams had traveled far with his brave little companion was at last at hand. A slight pallor crept into his tanned features. Pearl looked at him wonderingly. "The brother will wait," he said, brusquely. And that was all he said.

The messenger directed Adams to a tower on the north wall. Here he met and exchanged greetings with the chieftain, who immediately led the way to a narrow passage and down a winding staircase into a dungeon room.

Here, as anticipated, was a group of masked men. It was the Foreign Alliance.

"The Senor Vendre of Denmark has arrived messieurs," announced the spokesman.

Adams bowed, acknowledging the introduction.

"His brother is with him?"

"Yes," responded Adams, briefly. "In the camp."

"The senor will fetch him."

Adams went for Pearl without raising the slightest objection. He found her at the top of the staircase.

"G-girl," he whispered, keeping his composure well; "they want you d-down there. Promise me that no matter w-what happens you'll trust me."

Pearl, who saw that a crisis was near, in which a part was expected of her, she knew not what, showed her matchless grit. Whether he meant to trick her, use her to gain his own ends or to substantiate himself in her eyes, now was not the time to stop and question, but to learn. So she forced a fearless smile and motioned him to proceed.

When they entered the dungeon room, side by side, a paper which had been spread on a circular table around which the Foreign Alliance sat, was hastily folded and passed to Bolero—too late, however, for both Pearl and Adams not to see and recognize the canal defense plans.

How did the document get there? Through Adams? Or had he, after all, told her the truth when denying that he had stolen the document and asserting that it was for the purpose of recovering it that the long journey had been undertaken? Those questions flashed into the girl's troubled mind while the spokesman of the For-

eign Alliance rose and addressed his conferees.

"This is Senor Vendre's brother, messieurs," explained he in an extremely polite manner. "Is it not so?" turning to Adams.

"It is so, milord," stated Adams, very respectfully.

"He seems to be a mere boy to be so celebrated a chemist," reflected the spokesman, dubiously.

Pearl saw them appraise her, and assumed an indifferent demeanor.

"He is old for his years and so famed."

"Has he brought the chemical formula necessary to decipher the invisible ink in the—the military document?"

Like a shot it dawned on Pearl that for some inexplicable reason Adams was posing her as an invisible ink expert.

"He has not, your excellency," Adams responded in an apologetic way.

"He must first see and examine the character of paper in which the invisible writing is hidden."

A murmur of disappointment ran through the group, and silent objections were registered when Bolero was commanded to exhibit the paper in question.

But Pearl coolly took the paper before any protest could be voiced, and



Adams Stood Like Stone.

pretended to inspect it with a professional eye, not knowing what else to do.

It was a great moment. The canal defense plans were in her hands. Her temptation was to tear it into little bits.

"My brother must make some tests," the unruffled voice of Adams now was heard to say. "The composition of the paper is most unusual. How long, milord, is the ink supposed to remain visible after the proper solution is applied?"

"For forty-eight hours, I believe," the spokesman of the Foreign Alliance quietly informed him. He had drawn quite near to Pearl. Their shoulders almost touched. "Will your tests consume any great length of time?" he asked, addressing her.

"Some days, I fear," answered Pearl, speaking for the first time in a now fully composed manner. "I should like to take this paper to—" eyeing Adams, "—to the house of my aunt, where I am stopping. My apparatus is there."

The spokesman took the document from her and returned it to Bolero. "Impossible!" he growled.

Then without the slightest warn-

ing or indication of his purpose, he placed one hand on Pearl's shoulder. With the other he tore open her jacket, exposing the fair and delicate outlines of feminine shoulders.

The Foreign Alliance leaped from their chairs and surrounded the so-called Vendres'. Pearl never uttered a cry. Adams stood like a stone.

"The senor's brother, eh? The voice told me that such could not be the case. The Senor Vendre has been duped!" cried the masked gentleman to his apparently astonished audience.

"Messieurs, this is Miss Pearl Dare of the United States army, a secret agent. She will be shot immediately. Bolero will lead the gun to avoid any blunder. Senor Vendre will prove his fidelity to our cause by becoming her executioner!"

He turned on his heels with a grim laugh, and strode out of the dungeon room, followed by his cohorts. Adams and Pearl were left alone with Bolero.

Then Adams proved himself to the dumbstricken girl. He drew his revolver, aimed it at Bolero and fired a bullet through his heart. Following which Pearl snatched the coveted prize from the dead revolutionist's hands and pandemonium broke loose as Adams flung himself upon her and they fell in a sudden, blinding dark-

ness on the stone floor out of the path of a rain of bullets.

When they opened their eyes, after an interminable suspense, the dungeon room was ablaze with light and crowded with men in khaki, whose sabers and bayonets glistened and clashed in the good, old-fashioned American way.

Bewildered, Pearl Dare leaped into her father's arms, thrusting the canal defense plans into his hand. Adams struggled to his feet and staggered up to the colonel, faint and ready to topple.

"Senora Vendre d-delivered my note, colonel?" He smiled and made an effort to salute.

Brent rushed up. "The deserter and spy, colonel!"

"It's Adams!" ejaculated Toko, appearing from somewhere, followed by Miss Bertha Bonn.

The dazed colonel looked from Pearl to his orderly. Then his glance rested on the lifeless body of Bolero. Now they fell on the canal defense plans, tightly clutched in his hand. Suddenly they stared at a thick black muffer at Adams' feet.

"Senora Vendre delivered your note, sir," Colonel Dare acknowledged, formally. "You appear to be something of a hero. Perhaps you are not the Silent Menace, after all. Kindly place yourself under arrest!"

Pearl stooped and picked up the muffer. "Does this belong to you, Major Brent?" she inquired in a cutting voice.

(END OF SEVENTH EPISODE.)

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