

PEARL OF THE ARMY

Continued from first page.

Bertha entirely escaped him. He was too busy trying to make a definite impression on Pearl. He knew that the time had come when he must either win or fortify himself to lose in his suit for her hand and he had about reached the end of his rope. Pearl's slighting heed to his veiled coquetry and particular delight in stabbing him when he grew too bold, only made matters more desperate. At such times she openly flirted—but only that—with Adams and appeared to get a good deal of quiet and amused satisfaction out of it, if nothing more. Though Adams may have been flattered, he never once forgot his place. He could not well run the risk of the disciplining his superior officer would be mightily pleased to find an excuse to inflict.

Some time about ten the orderly was sent to the summer house to tell the reporters that the expected statement would be late in forthcoming. This announcement was received in passive silence and the card-playing and storytelling continued as before. They were determined not to budge from the spot until the promised "interview" was delivered; and they settled down to make a night of it if necessary.

Adams' movements after leaving the summer house were very peculiar. He loitered in the gardens a while, chatting with the soldiers and making himself conspicuous. He was in a jovial mood and being popular created many a laugh and more than half succeeded in his effort to relieve the strain on everyone natural in the unusual situation.

He rambled over to the garage, showing a curious interest in the place. It was not often that he or anyone else was free to enjoy the liberty of inspecting the cars for Toko maintained a strict and jealous guard over his jurisdiction.

Adams started a slight conversation with the soldier on guard. "Some d-dump this eh, dough-boy?"

If there is anything an infantryman resents it is this slurring barracks epithet. The guardsman growled in a surly fashion and withdrew into the shadows of the garage apparently to avoid Adams.

Adams followed him in. "No o-offense meant, sonny. Want a little taste of something?" He snatched his lips and produced a bottle.

The guardsman's manner changed. "I don't care if I do," he responded in a mollified tone of voice. And they stepped behind the limousine.

The guardsman took a long pull at the bottle and returned it to Adams and at the same time knocked him senseless with the butt of his rifle. Then he lifted him into the limousine, closed the curtains, shut the door and stuffing the bottle in his hip pocket coolly resumed his sentry duties.

Within the next few moments Toko arrived in the repaired automobile. The sentry stepped aside as he steered the car into the garage. Afterwards he sauntered up and kept his eye on Toko while the chauffeur stalled his machine, climbed out of his seat and began to put everything in order for the night. The most perfunctory kind of greeting was exchanged between the two. Toko's face showed that he resented the presence of the soldier.

After making sure that everything in the garage was as it should be, Toko started for the stairs which led to his private quarters. Whereupon he observed that the blinds in the limousine were drawn. It was a mere detail but, if anything, Toko was a crochety fellow. He had already flashed the light out, so without stopping to put them on again he approached the limousine with the evident intention of raising the blinds.

The guardsman divining his motive struck him just as he had Adams. Toko fell in his arms and he, too, was thrust into the limousine tonneau.

When Major Brent appeared at the garage some time subsequently, he found the sentry pacing back and forth in front of the open doorway.

"I thought I heard Toko return a moment ago," the officer curiously stated with a peculiar stare at the saluting sentry.

"He has gone to bed, sir."

"Have you seen Adams?"

The sentry nodded. "He just left here."

"In which direction?"

"To the house, sir; I saw him enter."

The major seemed to question this statement mentally. "I didn't see him enter!"

"You came one way. He went another. I have been watching both doors," exclaimed the sentry in a cool and deliberate voice.

This seemed to clear the major's mind. He nodded and strode away. The sentry's departing salute was more than a salute. It was finished in an ironical salami.

His shoulders shook with suppressed laughter as when Brent disappeared from sight he sneaked into a dark corner of the garage, raised the whisky flask to his lips and emptied it.

But a strange and swift retribution befell this demon of a guardsman. He was seized by a masked man who seemed to resolve out of the shadows.

The onslaught was so sudden that the guardsman never knew what happened next. He was gagged, blindfolded and bound in a flash and securely tied under the rear axle of the limousine.

The masked man tiptoed to the limousine door, opened it, shot one glance inside and closed it softly. He crept up the stairs. Toko's quarters were apparently not unfamiliar to him for although it was quite dark he went straight to the wardrobe and proceeded to divest himself of his own clothes in exchange for a new suit of the chauffeur's. He even stopped to cleanse his face and hands, comb his hair and put on fresh linen, for his size was near enough to Toko's to make this possible. He hid the thick black muffler, constituting his mask, in his coat pocket, jammed the chauffeur's uniform cap over his ears and stepped to a window.

It was one of those rare and brilliant summer nights when objects are clear and even a letter may be read without the aid of artificial light. Bathed in the moon rays, the bold masquerader at the window bore a striking resemblance to the man whose clothes he had donned. He was indeed sufficiently deceiving to be taken for Toko's twin brother.

Before leaving the room he placed a card on Toko's bureau. The card read: "Toko, the clothes I leave behind contain the price of the suit necessity has forced me to take."

It was signed—"The Silent Menace," under the usual silhouette.

He went downstairs laughing softly, crossed the lawn in a perfect mimic of Toko's gait, and going to the front doorsteps, sat down, lighted a cigarette and began to blow rings. The sentry, who took him to be Toko, did not even look at him twice.

Presently he threw the cigarette stub away, entered the house and went upstairs.

Brent came into the hall and saw his back. "I thought you had retired for the night?" was Brent's pleasant greeting.

Toko's well-imitated accents floated down to the major as the ascending man proceeded without pausing: "I go get Colonel Dare's automobile goggles. Forget all about them. He want new pair to match." And he continued without further questioning and entered the colonel's bedroom.

Here he pretended to search for the colonel's automobile goggles. But none of the conversation in the library escaped him.

"I can't imagine what has become of Adams," he heard Major Brent remark. "I saw him a moment or two ago, I think," responded Miss Dare.

"I haven't seen him since he went to the summer house with the colonel's message to the newspaper men," declared Brent. "Have you, Miss Bonn?"

A noise on the front steps interrupted Bertha's reply and the sentry dragged a Western Union telegraph messenger into the hall. The masquerader tiptoed out of the colonel's room and peeped down the stairs.

"I know who you are," the snickering lad said to Pearl. "I seen your picture in the paper. I guess what I brought is for this 'un. I seen her picture too," and he handed a message to Bertha Bonn. "Sign here," he said, handing her a receipt book.

Bertha took the yellow envelope and dismissed the messenger. "Excuse me, please," said she, stepping back a pace or two.

"Of course." And Pearl returned to the library not very curious.

Brent, however, remained in the hall and eyed Bertha uneasily while she read the message. It began:

Miss Bonn: Force Major Brent to be silent concerning the man he thinks is Toko and he will be rewarded. ADAMS.

Bertha shot an apprehensive glance at the major.

"You know the rules of the house tonight," he insinuated, coming close. "May I read it?"

Bertha slowly shook her head. She started to destroy the note then and there. He made a protesting motion. Suddenly she handed the note to Brent.

He read it and the color left his face, returning it with a palsied hand. Their eyes met in one long silent question.

"It's up to you, major," whispered Bertha in a manner to conceal that she was at last putting the man on trial and the hope that he placed his duty above all personal desire.

"And my reward? The locket, its contents and your everlasting silence?"

"Will you keep silent?"

"I will protect you if you give me entire freedom."

Bertha's eyes filled with tears of self-pity. "It's up to you, major," she repeated, "and the impersonator." And with flashing eyes and curling lips she joined Pearl in the library.

Glancing up the stairs Brent caught a fleeting glimpse of the man at the top moving off in the direction of Colonel Dare's bedroom. After a hesitation he followed Bertha.

Bertha gave a little laugh in which there was a touch of the despair she fought to master. She waved the telegram. "One of my arts," she feigned. "I have just had an offer to return to the stage. It's from abroad." Concluding with a sigh: "I may take it up. I'm about broke and must find some means of replenishing my income which has lately ceased."

Pearl gave Bertha a politely approving and admiring smile. Then she turned to the major with a question about the missing Adams.

"I sent him on—an errand," replied the evasive and greatly troubled major.

Pearl sat down at the piano and began to sing.

To the man in Colonel Dare's bedroom the sound of the piano and Pearl's voice came most opportunely for at that moment he was binding one of the secret guards, who had shown himself. The noise of the scuffle was drowned by the music and the masquerader continued his search.

Shortly thereafter Major Brent was called into Colonel Dare's study. The conference was ready to be adjourned. The tentative mobilization plans had been completed and a statement for the newspapers was ready. It was, of course, in abbreviated form and intended wholly—and so worded—to satisfy an inquisitive public, withholding any discouraging facts on the unpreparedness question. These latter were drawn in memoranda form in lead pencil on sheets of paper which the secretary of war placed in his portfolio along with the data from which the compilation was made.

"Well, Major Brent, our evening's task is ended," announced Colonel Dare, rising and stretching himself. And with a humorous twist of the tongue: "Has that there Silent Menace, as Orderly Adams speaks of our silent foe, put in an appearance tonight?"

Brent smiled and shook his head. "Kindly send this statement to the newspaper men, Brent," interposed the secretary of war. He handed the long-awaited-for "interview" to the dapper officer.

"Where is Adams?" the colonel inquired, for that was his duty, not Brent's.

"Gone to the barracks, sir," replied Brent, easily. "I took the liberty of using him on a matter for one of the ladies."

The colonel signified no objections and turned with a smile to his daughter and Bertha, who looked in from the doorway. And a pleasant social chat ensued.

Brent slipped out of the room and sent a messenger with the statement to the newspaper men. In the hall he ran into the man presumed to be Toko and was about to stop him when the fellow disclosed Bertha Bonn's locket and placed it in the palm of Brent's hand.

At that moment Colonel Dare, seeing the chauffeur's back, called out: "The car, Toko! We will all take a ride and get a breath of air."

The masquerader, grinning at Brent, hastened to the garage and in due time the whole party was driving toward.

The chief of staff, Colonel Dare and the major sat behind the ladies. The secretary of war occupied the seat beside the chauffeur. His portfolio rested on the cushion between them. In another automobile in front and one behind were guardsmen.

They dropped the chief of staff off at his home and later the secretary of war with the portfolio. The newspaper men had driven off in another car. The soldiers proceeded to the barracks and the Dare party to the roof garden of the Wilton for a light supper. At the hotel entrance they told the chauffeur not to leave the car as they expected to be gone but a little while.

But hardly had they entered than the chauffeur left the car, strolled across the street and entered Shomacher's saloon. At one of the green

tables in the rear a party of foreigners were seated. The chauffeur passed quite close to the table. In fact he brushed against one of the men, apologized and stooping, picked a portfolio from the floor and handed it to him with a bow.

"You dropped this—I beg pardon!" The foreigner accepted the portfolio and the chauffeur disappeared.

"This portfolio," murmured the gentleman in question to his companions, speaking in Russian, "contains the secretary of war's data on the question of the country's preparedness to meet the president's call for a million volunteers—thanks to the Silent Menace."

He raised his glass to his lips. "A toast," he suggested merrily. The others followed suit. "America Prepare!"

When the Dare party returned to the automobile Toko was missing and after waiting and speculating among themselves awhile, Pearl took the wheel, for they were anxious to get home. She drove straight into the garage on their arrival.

Here they heard groans and presently found the sentry tied to the rear axle of the limousine. He was in a bad way from the effects of his bonds and also the liquor he had consumed and they could get nothing out of him.

"Toko!" called Pearl up the stairs. "Toko!"

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More groans were now heard from within the limousine tonneau. Brent leaped to the limousine door and threw it wide open, starting back with smothered exclamations. On the floor, huddled together, their scalps bleeding, were the unconscious forms of Toko and Adams.

"Colonel Dare!" cried a voice in the doorway of the garage. They turned and saw the secretary of war in his own runabout with two other automobiles containing soldiers in the drive behind him. "Your chauffeur—Toko—the mobilization data—my portfolio—it's gone! He left this behind!" And he held up a portfolio of like size and leather.

That night a knock fell on Brent's bedroom door and Adams admitted himself.

Brent leaped out of bed with a loud oath. But Adams held up his hand and ordered him to get back in bed.

"You g-got the locket didn't you, Major?" he asked, quietly.

"Yes, damn you, Adams!"

"Let me have it!"

Brent threw it at him.

(END OF ELEVENTH EPISODE.)

His Condition.

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