

PEARL OF THE ARMY

Continued from first page

in utter distress.

He flew to her side to support her, for she was tottering. Whether conscious of her action or not, she placed an arm around his neck and leaned against his shoulder wearily.

"Pearl!" he breathed softly, stirred to the depths of his being. "Pearl, my love!"

She broke into tears. "Who are you?" she sobbed, clinging in a helpless fashion to his sleeve. "Who are you?"

He freed himself gently and placed Toko's sealed letter in her trembling hands. "I will leave you alone to read whatever this letter may contain," he said with a bright smile. "Even though I was not positive about Toko, he was from the very first informer of my true character and identity. See whether this does not so turn out. May I use one of your automobiles?"

She looked at the envelope. Then she looked at him. "You will return?" she hesitated.

"I give you my solemn word to return very soon," he assured her.

All of a sudden Pearl felt at ease concerning this nameless and mysterious lover of hers and desired to be alone to read Toko's letter.

"I shall be waiting for you," she murmured, all of her tenderness reviving, raising her lips for the kiss he so plainly desired to give and receive in return.

A few minutes later he drove out of the garage in her new runabout and raced toward.

He stopped the machine in front of the home of a prominent trust company official and attorney, asking the man who answered the doorbell for Mr. Bainbridge.

He was immediately ushered into a private library office. Here, alone, sat a thin, gray-haired, keen-eyed attorney, who rose and bowed, ransacking his brain to recall where he had seen this visitor before, if ever.

"You are Mr. Bainbridge, the senator?" questioned the visitor, taking the proffered chair on the other side of the lawyer's desk.

Mr. Bainbridge inclined his head politely. "I did not get your name?"

"No," grimly. Then: "You do not recognize my face?"

"I do and I don't," confessed the embarrassed attorney.

His visitor suddenly picked up pencil and paper and scribbled a name. This he shoved under the lawyer's eyes.

"What!" ejaculated Mr. Bainbridge, leaping out of his chair, his eyes popping, his face white and drawn. "Impossible, sir! That man is dead and buried!"

His visitor laughed heartily. "He is very much alive, Bainbridge," he chuckled. "For I am he. Come with me. I will prove it."

But Mr. Bainbridge drew back in alarm, and looked as though he intended to call for help to put an insane person out of his house.

"You don't believe me?" queried his caller, rising.

"I can't!" groaned the confused attorney. "Yet I must confess there are certain resemblances, but only in your speech and about the eyes. I fear that you must bring me conclusive proof, for this is no trifling matter."

"Suppose, Bainbridge, you call Miss Pearl Dare on the telephone and inquire about me," the caller suggested, now a trifle impatient. "I want to ask several important questions which you doubtless won't answer unless you are convinced of my identity."

"A good idea!" exclaimed Mr. Bainbridge, and he hastened from the room to do the talking, elsewhere.

When he returned he grasped his visitor by the hand in a tight grip. He was visibly agitated and deeply apologetic. "God bless you for this moment, my boy!" he cried, choking back an inclination to tears. "I now know you, and does she. Why, she is nearly wild! You are to hasten back!"

His visitor laughed unrestrainedly, returning the handclasp until the elderly gentleman winced in pain.

"How was it done? What a wizard! There is so much that I must hear!" Bainbridge exclaimed, over and over.

"I found it a very easy thing to do. In the first place I shaved my beard and donned the clothes of my physical double, a chap by name T. O. Adams," his visitor rapidly explained, between bursts of merriment. "Then I initiated him and assumed his identity. Furthermore, everybody really thought me to be the dead man whom I attired in my clothes, even to my finger rings, the man you actually buried in my family cemetery lot—I went out there one day and saw the grave. There was plenty of time to make this transfer. Everyone at the wreck was too greatly excited to pay any particular heed to anyone; it was night, and a very dark one at that. I did it all in less than half an hour, shaving, actually, by moonlight. It was my only chance and I took it for patriotic as well as personal reasons. I succeeded, as you will shortly learn. My innocence is established, Bainbridge. I can look every

man and woman squarely in the eyes and assume my name, on which there is no blot!" He paused amid a dramatic silence. "The deepest mysteries, Bainbridge, are the simplest of deception, and also solution. On this premise I fooled even my sweetheart, Nerve, Bainbridge, nerve—that's it, and your wits about you every minute."

"Put, my boy! Why have you kept this secret so closely guarded? Why did you not come to me?" cried his attorney and long-time friend.

"I took no chances against defeat," was the illuminating explanation. "Remember, Bainbridge, the charge against me had to be proven false. This could be done only by exposing the true criminal and obtaining his confession of guilt. I—"

"Have you got that?" interjected Mr. Bainbridge, eagerly.

"Miss Dare has it. At least I think she has it!" replied his visitor, suddenly troubled. He picked up his hat. "Come! We will go to Miss Dare!" And he hurried out of the room, followed by the excited trust officer.

On the ride to the Dares, the man beside Mr. Bainbridge asked the questions originally in his mind.

"My estate—has it ever been distributed?"

"No. Your legatee refused to touch the money. Through an order of court I have held your entire fortune in trust. Every penny can be accounted for—and more," replied the attorney, smiling mysteriously.

"What do you mean by those last words?"

"I transferred your real estate holdings to stocks and bonds of a very high grade. They have increased astonishingly in value, at least by one hundred thousand, if not more."

"How's that?" was the sharp question. "Stocks and bonds of what nature?"

"War brides!"

The man at the wheel turned to his attorney quickly. "Sell out, Mr. Bainbridge, at once!" he exclaimed, with a show of irritation. "I couldn't touch that money. As to the surplus—"

he paused, smiling peculiarly. "Suppose you make a draft, payable to bearer, for one hundred thousand. I have immediate use for that exact amount!"

The lawyer looked at him in astonishment, shaking his head sadly. The man surely had changed. "That's a very large sum," he ventured.

"Oh, yes," smiled the other, blandly. "It will make a substantial wedding gift to two needy unfortunates who have just been married."

"Wedding gift!" mumbled Mr. Bainbridge, under his breath; and there the conversation ended, for they had reached the Dares.

Mr. Bainbridge was dropped off at the house and his companion proceeded with the car, as usual, to the garage. He seemed to take a longer time than necessary in putting the car away. Indeed, now that the end and a new beginning of things was about to come to pass, he showed a reluctance to hasten the change.

He sat down on the running board of the big limousine, resting his chin in an upturned palm, and fell into a brown study.

Meanwhile, in the Dare library Lawyer Bainbridge and the colonel were shaking hands with more vigor than either had shown for many a day. The house was agog with expectation. Major Brent and his wife had arrived, the latter proceeding at once to the suite she had so long occupied. Bertha was now a happy and serene woman. Pearl Dare came running in and the two, as women do at such times, fell into each other's arms, weeping hysterically.

"Isn't it wonderful?" cried Pearl, amid her ecstasies. "I know it, Bertha. I knew that he was different. All along I felt a strange, fanciful something in our relations, something which was not clear but which drew me to him, even when I doubted him the most!"

"Where is he now?" asked Bertha Brent, almost as excited as Pearl.

Pearl led her by the hand to a window overlooking the garage. There, in the shadows inside the wide-open door, they saw the man of the hour seated on the running board of the big limousine.

"Have you talked with him?"

Pearl shook her head, unable to remove her loving and beaming eyes from the figure.

"He is waiting for you, Pearl."

"I cannot go to him," she breathed, her voice catching. "This is the most profound moment of his life. I must wait until he is ready."

Together they went down the stairs arm in arm, and joined the group in the library. Here they found Lawyer Bainbridge, the colonel and Major Brent engrossed in the communication to T. O. Adams found in Toko's room. It was a paper of an altogether startling nature. Pearl, by whom every word had been memorized, found herself once more absorbed in its revelations as she sat beside her father, clinging close. Bertha sat on the arm of her husband's chair. Brent, in whose features a new manliness and

latent strength of character was now revealed, listened gravely and with evident self-reproach.

The lawyer was reading aloud. The communication was without date. It was addressed to Adams and signed, simply "Toko." It was in the English language. Its phrasing gave evidence of the cultured mind of the writer.

Monsieur Adams: The Canal Defense plans lie in the bottom of the canal. Their inventor is dead, for I know that you are not that person, even though you have assumed his name. His body occupies the grave supposed to be yours. From the very beginning I have known who you are, but I have not unmasked you because to have done so would have deprived me of many a timely alibi. And who was there to cast suspicion upon other than yourself?

I congratulate you, Monsieur Adams. But I do not crave your pardon, nor the pardon of anyone concerned in my work.

Captain Payne was innocent; this you know and I know. The secret he carried under his left shoulder strap and in his watch fob locket I suspected the moment he appeared on the war office sidewalk and accosted Miss Dare and myself on the drive.

I knew from the inventor of the existence of the Canal Defense plans and the chemical wafers I knew that some trusted army officer would be delegated to

waters in a side pocket of his coat in accordance with directions which I had heard discussed privately between Colonel Dare and Major Brent.

It will be recalled that on leaving his room in the Wilton, Payne examined the coat on the tree, pinching the paper concealed under the left shoulder strap so that secret service men stationed across the street might see this action. He also took the locket out of the pocket and held it in the light. This, too, they saw.

Had Captain Payne opened and examined the locket the success of my ruse might not have been so simply accomplished. For it was, of course, empty. He did not do this, however.

This were the Canal Defense plans and the wafers necessary to interpret them stolen, Monsieur Adams.

Now, as to Miss Bertha Bonn, I had never heard of her before that night, but a message from her to Major Brent received during the dinner at the Dares slipped out of the major's pocket during the ride to the Granadian embassy ball and fell unwittingly into my hands. I saw Miss Bonn at the ball several minutes before I murdered the Granadian ambassador when he was about to weaken in our plot and expose it. I observed that she wore a locket similar to the one containing the chemical wafers. On one occasion she opened it and I caught sight of Major Brent's miniature and the inscription thereupon proclaiming her to be his wife. This gave me an inspiration. Desiring to draw another high army officer in my power and needing an emissary to convey the defense plans and the chemical wafers to the Granadian border to Bolero, the revolutionist in our employ, I effected the transfer of the lockets in Miss Bonn's hotel apartment and left the packet containing the plans in her suitcase with the assistance of the valet, while she was absent from the room in quest of a newspaper containing the first accounts of the ambassador's supposed suicide.

The Granadian ambassador died from the effects of a powder which I dissolved in a glass of water. I wrote the note found under his dead hand addressed to Captain Payne.

I impersonated myself on the night the army mobilization data was stolen from the secretary of war. I think you know



"Pearl, My Love!"

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Then I saw the locket dangling on his watch chain. It was brand new. Knowing that Captain Payne would wear no locket that had not been presented to him by Miss Dare and seeing her eyes suspiciously cast upon it, I inferred that here was the hiding place of the wafers. But I did not know these things to be facts when I hastened to the Hotel Wilton and through a valet in my employ gained entrance to the captain's rooms, opened his luggage, took out his private stationery and, imitating his handwriting, left the note of warning as a bait.

The bait took, Monsieur Adams. I myself, hidden in an adjoining room, heard Captain Payne telephone to the war secretary that someone had leaked, proving to me that my calculations and intuitions were correct.

The rest was very simple. I had handled the captain's clothes too often not to be aware of the size of his coat. To procure a duplicate was an easy matter—and also a duplicate locket. The valet sewed the newspaper under the left shoulder strap in the substitute coat and cleverly left this coat on the tree, taking Captain Payne's in exchange, under his very eyes, when he returned the captain's evening clothes from the pressing room.

The substitute locket was in the substitute coat when the valet hung it on the clothes tree. Payne had thrown his watch and chain in the bureau, having detached and concealed the locket containing the

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that. And now, Monsieur Adams, I take leave of you, never to return. For having failed, my life is worthless to the cause to which it has been dedicated. Why should I tell you who I am or even intimate a sphere of existence other than the lonely chauffeur occupied?

With you it is different. You can now drop the name of Adams, monsieur, and assume your own, Captain Ralph Payne!

As Lawyer Bainbridge finished, a shadow darkened the doorway. Every-one rose. Pearl advanced with eyes bright and arms outstretched.

Stiffening in the doorway at attention, his heels clicked sharply together, and facing Colonel Dare, the figure spoke.

"I have the honor to report for duty, sir," said the colonel's orderly.

Then he turned hesitatingly to Pearl. Both were pale and trembling.

"Captain Payne!" she murmured, amid the stillness, flying into his arms. "Pearl," he whispered, gathering her in a tight embrace. "Pearl of the Army and my life forever!"

(THE END.)

A Full Hand. "John," said Mrs. Norton as she seated herself at the hotel breakfast table, "did you call a waiter?"

"Yes," said Norton, looking up from his paper. "I called him, and he had a tray full."

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