

The Last Shot

BY
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SYNOPSIS.

At their home on the frontier between the Browns and Grays Marta Gailand and her mother, entertaining Colonel Westerling of the Grays, see Captain Lanstron, staff intelligence officer of the Browns, injured by a fall in his aeroplane. Ten years later, Westerling, nominal vice but real chief of staff, reinforces South La Tir, meditates on war, and speculates on the comparative ages of himself and Marta, who is visiting in the Gray capital. Westerling calls on Marta. She tells him of her teaching children the follies of war and martial patriotism, begs him to prevent war while he is chief of staff, and predicts that if he makes war against the Browns he will not win. On the march with the Ed of the Browns Private Stranisky, anarchist, desires war and played-out patriotism and is placed under arrest. Colonel Lanstron overhearing, begs him off. Lanstron calls on Marta at her home. He talks with Feller, the gardener. Marta tells Lanstron that she believes Feller to be a spy. Lanstron confesses it is true.

CHAPTER VI—Continued.

"Oh, it's you, Lanny—Colonel Lanstron!" he exclaimed thickly. "I saw that some one had come in here and naturally I was alarmed, as nobody but myself ever enters, and Miss Gailand!" He removed his hat deferentially and bowed; his stoop returned and the lines of his face drooped. "I was so stupid; it did not occur to me that you might be showing the tower to Colonel Lanstron."

"We are sorry to have given you a fright!" said Marta very gently.

"Eh? Eh?" queried Feller, again deaf. "Fright? Oh, no, no fright. It might have been some boys from the town marauding."

He was about to withdraw, in keeping with his circumspect adherence to his part, which he played with a sincerity that half-convinced even himself at times that he was really deaf, when the fire flickered back suddenly to his eyes and he glanced from Lanstron to the stairway in desperate inquiry.

"Wait, Feller! Three of us share the secret now. These are Miss Gailand's premises. I thought best that she should know everything," said Lanstron.

"Everything!" exclaimed Feller. "Everything—the word caught in his throat. "You mean my story, too?" He was neither young nor old now. "She knows who I am?" he asked.

"His story!" exclaimed Marta, with a puzzled look to Lanstron before she turned to Feller with a look of warm sympathy. "Why, there is no story! You came with excellent recommendations. You are our very efficient gardener. That is all we need to know. Isn't that the way you wish it, Mr. Feller?"

"Yes, just that!" he said softly, raising his eyes to her. "Thank you, Miss Gailand!"

He was going after another "Thank you!" and a bow; going with the slow step and stoop of his part, when Lanstron, with a masculine roughness of impulse which may be sublime gentleness, swung him around and seized his hands in a firm caress.

"Forgive me, Gustave!" he begged. "Forgive the most brutal of all injuries—that which wounds a friend's sensibilities."

"Why, there is nothing I could ever have to forgive you, Lanny," he said, returning Lanstron's pressure while for an instant his quickening muscles gave him a soldierly erectness. Then his attitude changed to one of doubt and inquiry. "And you found out that I was not deaf when you had that fall on the terrace?" he asked, turning to Marta. "That is how you happened to get the whole story? Tell me, honestly!"

"Yes."

"You saw so much more of me than the others, Miss Gailand," he said with a charming bow, "and you are so quick to observe. I am sorry—he paused with head down for an instant—very sorry to have deceived you."

"But you are still a deaf gardener to me," said Marta, finding consolation in pleasing him.

"Eh? Eh?" He put his hand to his ear as he resumed his stoop. "Yes, yes," he added, as a deaf man will when understanding of a remark which he failed at first to catch comes to him in an echo. "Yes, the gardener has no past," he declared in the gentle old gardener's voice, "when all the flowers die every year and he thinks only of next year's blossoms—of the future!"

Now the air of the room seemed to be stifling him, that of the roofless world of the garden calling him. The bent figure disappeared around a turn in the path and they listened without moving until the sound of his slow, dragging footsteps had died away.

"When he is serving those of his own social station I can see how it would be easier for him not to have me know," said Marta. "Sensitive, proud and intense—and a look of horror appeared in her eyes. "As he came across the room his face was transformed. I imagine it was like that of a man giving no quarter in a bayonet charge!"

Feller had won the day for himself where a friend's pleas might have failed. This was as it should be, Lanstron thought.

"The right view—the view that you were bound to take!" he said.

"And yet, I don't know your plans for him, Lanny. There is another thing to consider," she replied, with an abrupt change of tone. "But first let us leave Feller's quarters. We are intruders here."

"A man playing deaf; a secret telephone installed on our premises without our consent—this is all I know so far," said Marta, seated opposite Lanstron at one end of the circular seat in the arbor of Mercury.

"Of course, with our 3,000,000 against their 5,000,000, the Grays will take the offensive," he said. "For us, the defensive. La Tir is in an angle. It does not belong in the permanent tactical line of our defenses. Nevertheless, there will be hard fighting here. The Browns will fall back step by step, and we mean, with relatively small cost to ourselves, to make the Grays pay a heavy price for each step—just as heavy as we can."

"You need not use euphonious terms," she said without lifting her lashes or any movement except a quick, nervous gesture of her free hand. "What you mean is that you will kill as many as possible of the Grays, isn't it? And if you could kill five for every man you lost, that would be splendid, wouldn't it?"

"I don't think of it as splendid. There is nothing splendid about war," he objected; "not to me, Marta."

"And after you have made them pay five to one or ten to one in human lives for the tangent, what then? Go on! I want to look at war face to face, free of the will-o'-the-wisp glamour that draws on soldiers."

"We fall back to our first line of defense, fighting all the time. The Grays occupy La Tir, which will be out of the reach of our guns. Your house will no longer be in danger, and we happen to know that Westerling means to make it his headquarters."

"Our house Westerling's headquarters!" she repeated. "With a start that brought her up erect, alert, challenging, her lashes flickering, she recalled that he should see her if war came. This corroborated Lanstron's information. One side wanted a spy in the garden; the other a general in the house. Was she expected to make a choice? He had ceased to be Lanny. He personified war. Westerling personified war. "I suppose you have spies under his very nose—in his very staff offices?" she asked.

"And probably he has in ours," said Lanstron, "though we do our best to prevent it."

"What a pretty example of trust among civilized nations!" she exclaimed. "You say that Westerling, who commands the killing on his side, will be in no danger. And Lanny, are you a person of such distinction in the business of killing that you also will be out of danger?"

She did not see, as her eyes poured her hot indignation into his, that his maimed hand was twitching or how he bit his lips and flushed before he replied:

"Each one goes where he is sent, link by link, down from the chief of staff. Only in this way can you have that solidarity, that harmonious efficiency which means victory."

"An autocracy, a tyranny over the lives of all the adult males in countries that boast of the ballot and self-governing institutions!" she put in.

"But I hope," he went on, with the quickening pulse and eager smile that used to greet a call from Feller to "set things going" in their cadet days, "that I may take out a squadron of dirigibles. After all this spy business, that would be to my taste."

"And if you caught a regiment in close formation with a shower of bombs, that would be positively heavenly, wouldn't it?" She bent nearer to him, her eyes flaming demand and satire.

"No! War—necessary, horrible, hellish!" he replied. "Something in her seemed to draw out the brutal truth she had asked for in place of euphonious terms."

"When I became chief of intelligence I found that an underground wire had been laid to the castle from the Eighth division headquarters, which will be our general staff headquarters in time of war. The purpose was the same as now, but abandoned as chimerical. All that was necessary was to install the instrument, which Feller did. I, too, saw the plan as chimerical, yet it was a chance—the one out of a thousand. If it should happen to succeed we should play with our cards concealed and theirs on the table."

"The rest of Feller's part you have guessed already," he concluded. "You can see how a deaf, inoffensive old gardener would hardly seem to know a Gray soldier from a Brown; how it might no more occur to Westerling to send him away than the family dog or cat; how he might retain his quarters in the tower; how he could judge the atmosphere of the staff, whether elated or depressed, pick up scraps of conversation, and, as a trained officer, know the value of what he heard and report it over the phone to Partow's headquarters."

"But what about the aeroplanes?"

she asked. "I thought you were to depend on them for scouting."

"We shall use them, but they are the least tried of all the new resources," he said. "A Gray aeroplane may cut a Brown aeroplane down before it returns with the news we want. At most, when the aviator may descend low enough for accurate observation he can see only what is actually being done. Feller would know Westerling's plans before they were even in the first steps of execution. This—playing the thought happily—this would be the ideal arrangement, while our planes and dirigibles were kept over our lines to strike down theirs. And, Marta, that is all," he concluded.

"If there is war, the moment that Feller's ruse is discovered he will be shot as a spy," she asked.

"I warned him of that," said Lanstron. "He is a soldier, with a soldier's fatalism. He sees no more danger in this than in commanding a battery in a crisis."

"Suppose that the Grays win? Suppose that La Tir is permanently theirs?"

"They shall not win! They must not!" Lanstron exclaimed, his tone as rigid as Westerling's toward her second prophecy.

"Yet if they should win and Westerling finds that I have been party to this treachery, as I shall be now that I am in the secret, think of the position of my mother and myself!" she continued. "Has that occurred to you, a friend, in making our property, our garden, our neutrality, which is our only defense, a factor in one of your plans without our permission?"

Her eyes, blue-black in appeal and reproach, revealed the depths of a wound as they had on the terrace steps before luncheon, when he had been apprised of a feeling for him by seeing it dead under his blow. The logic of the chief of intelligence withered. He understood how a friendship to her was, indeed, more sacred than patriotic passion. He realized the shame of what he had done now that he was free of professional influences.

"You are right, Marta!" he replied. "It was beastly of me—there is no excuse."

He looked around to see an orderly from the nearest military wireless station.

"I was told it was urgent, sir," said the orderly, in excuse for his intrusion, as he passed a telegram to Lanstron. Immediately Lanstron felt the touch of the paper his features seemed to take on a mask that concealed his thought as he read:

"Take night express. Come direct from station to me. Partow."

This meant that he would be expected at Partow's office at eight the

next morning. He wrote his answer; the orderly saluted and departed at a rapid pace; and then, as a matter of habit of the same kind that makes some men wipe their pens when laying them down, he struck a match and set fire to one corner of the paper, which burned to his fingers' ends before he tossed the charred remains away. Marta imagined what he would be like with the havoc of war raging around him—all self-possession and mastery; but actually he was trying to reassure himself that he ought not to feel petulant over a holiday cut short.

"I shall have to go at once," he said. "Marta, if there were to be war very soon—within a week or two weeks—what would be your attitude about Feller's remaining?"

"To carry out his plan, you mean?"

"Yes."

"There was a perceptible pause on her part."

"Let him stay," she answered. "I shall have time to decide even after war begins."

"But instantly war begins you must go!" he declared urgently.

"You forget a precedent," she reminded him. "The Gailand women have never deserted the Gailand house!"

"I know the precedent. But this time the house will be in the thick of the fighting."

"It has been in the thick of the fighting before," she said, with a gesture of impatience.

"Marta, you will promise not to remain!" he urged.

"Isn't that my affair?" she asked.

"Aren't you willing to leave even that to me after all you have been telling how you are to make a redoubt of our lawn, inviting the shells of the enemy into our drawing-room?"

What could he say? Only call up from the depths the two passions of his life in an outburst, with all the force of his nature in play.

"I love this soil, my country's soil, ours by right—and I love you! I would be true to both!"

"Love! What mockery to mention that now!" she cried chokingly. "It's monstrous!"

"I—I—" He was making an effort to keep his nerves under control.

This time the stiffening elbow failed. With a lurching abruptness he swung his right hand around and seized the wrist of that trembling, injured hand that would not be still. She could not fall to notice the movement, and the sight was a magic that struck anger out of her.

"Lanny, I am hurting you!" she cried miserably.

"A little," he said, will finally dominant over its servant, and he was smiling as when, half stunned and in agony—and ashamed of the fact—he had risen from the debris of cloth and twisted braces. "It's all right," he concluded.

She threw back her arms, her head raised, with a certain abandon as if she would bare her heart.

"Lanny, there have been moments when I would have liked to fly to your arms. There have been moments when I have had the call that comes to every woman in answer to a desire. Yet I was not ready. When I really go it must be in a flame, in answer to your flame!"

"You mean—I—"

But if the flame were about to burst forth she smothered it in the spark.

"And all this has upset me," she went on incoherently. "We've both been cruel without meaning to be, and we're in the shadow of a nightmare; and next time you come perhaps all the war talk will be over and—oh, this is enough for today!"

She turned quickly in veritable flight and hurried toward the house.

"If it ever comes," she called, "I'll let you know! I'll fly to you in a chariot of fire bearing my flame—I am that bold, that brazen, that reckless! For I am not an old maid, yet. They've moved the age limit up to thirty. But you can't drill love into me as you drill discipline into armies—no, no more than I can argue peace into armies!"

For a while, motionless, Lanstron watched the point where she had disappeared.

CHAPTER VII.

Making a War.

Hedworth Westerling would have said twenty to one if he had been asked the odds against war when he was parting from Marta Gailand in the hotel reception room. Before he reached home he would have changed them to ten to one. A scarce bulletin about the Bodlappo affair compelling attention as his car halted to let the traffic of a cross street pass, he bought a newspaper thrust in at the car window that contained the answer of the government of the Browns to a dispatch of the Grays about the dispute that had arisen in the distant African jungle. This he had already read two days previously, by courtesy of the premier. It was moderate in tone, as became a power that had 3,000,000 soldiers against its opponent's 5,000,000; nevertheless, it firmly pointed out that the territory of the Browns had been overtly invaded, on the pretext of securing a deserter who had escaped across the line, by Gray colonial troops who had raised the Gray flag in place of the Brown flag and remained defiantly in occupation of the outpost they had taken.

As yet, the Browns had not attempted to repel the aggressor by arms for fear of complications, but were relying on the Gray government to order a withdrawal of the Gray force and the repudiation of a commander who had been guilty of so grave an international affront. The surprising and illuminating thing to Westerling was the inspired statement to the press from the Gray foreign office, adroitly appealing to Gray chauvinism and justifying the "intrepidity" of the Gray commander in response to so-called "pin-pricking" exasperations.

At the door of his apartment, Francois, his valet and factotum, gave Westerling a letter.

"Important, sir," said Francois. Westerling knew by a glance that it was, for it was addressed and marked "Personal" in the premier's own handwriting. A conference for ten that evening was requested in a manner that left no doubt of its urgency.

Curiosity made him a little ahead of time, but he found the premier awaiting him in his study, free from interruption or eavesdropping.

In the shadow of the table lamp the old premier looked his years. From youth he had been in politics, ever a bold figure and a daring player, but now beginning to feel the pressure of younger men's elbows. Ponder even of power, which had become a habit, than in his twenties, he saw it slipping from his grasp at an age when the downfall of his government meant that he should never hold the reins again. He had been called an ambitious demagogue and a makeshift opportunist by his enemies, but the crowd liked him for his ready strategy, his genius for appealing phrases, and for the gambler's virtue which hitherto had made him a good loser.

"You saw our communique tonight that went with the publication of the Browns' dispatch?" he remarked.

"Yes, and I am glad that I had been careful to send a spirited commander to that region," Westerling replied.

"So you guess my intention, I see." The premier smiled. He picked up a long, thin ivory paper-knife and softly patted the palm of his hand with it.

"Certainly!" Westerling replied in his ready, confident manner.

"We hear a great deal about the precision and power of modern arms as favoring the defensive," said the premier. "I have read somewhere that it will enable the Browns to hold us back, despite our advantage of numbers. Also, that they can completely man every part of their frontier and that their ability to move their reserves rapidly, thanks to modern facilities, makes a powerful flanking attack in surprise out of the question."

"Some half-truths in that," answered Westerling. "One axiom, that must hold good through all time, is that the aggressive which keeps at it always wins. We take the aggressive. In the space where Napoleon deployed a division, we deploy a battalion today. The precision and power of modern arms require this. With such immense forces and present-day tactics, the line of battle will practically cover the length of the frontier. Along their range the Browns have a series of fortresses commanding natural openings for our attack. These are almost impregnable. But there are pregnable points between them. Here, our method will be the same that the Japanese followed and that they learned from European armies. We shall concentrate in masses and throw in wave after wave of attack until we have gained the positions we desire. Once we have a tenable foothold on the crest of the range the Brown army must fall back and the rest will be a matter of skillful pursuit."

The premier, as he listened, rolled the paper knife over and over, regarding its polished sides, which were like Westerling's manner of facile statement of a program certain of fulfillment.

"How long will it take to mobilize?"

"Less than a week after the railroads are put entirely at our service, with three preceding days of scattered movements," answered Westerling. "Deliberate mobilizations are all right for a diplomatic threat that creates a furor in the newspapers and a depression in the stock market, but which is not to be carried out. When you mean war, all speed and the war fever at white heat."

"You would have made a good politician, Westerling," the premier remarked, with a twitching uplift of the brows and a knowing gleam in his shrewd old eyes.

"Thank you," replied Westerling, "a man who is able to lead in anything must be something of a politician."

"Very true, indeed. Perhaps I had that partly in mind in making you vice-chief of staff," responded the premier.

"Then it all goes back to the public—that that enormous body of humanity out there!" He swung the paper knife around with outstretched arm toward the walls of the room. "To public opinion—as does everything else in this age—to the people—our masters, your and mine! For no man can stand against them when they say no or yes."

"You know the keys to play on, though," remarked Westerling with a complimentary smile. "No one knows quite so well."

"And you are sure—sure we can win?" the premier asked with a long, tense look at Westerling, who was steady under the scrutiny.

"Absolutely!" he answered. "Five millions against three! It's mathematics, or our courage and skill are not equal to theirs. Absolutely! We have the power, why not use it? We do not live in a dream age!"

From a sudden, unwitting exertion of his strength the knife which had been the recipient of his emotions snapped in two. Rather carefully the premier laid the pieces on the table before he rose and turned to Westerling, his decision made.

"If the people respond with the war fever, then it is war," he said. "I take you at your word that you will win!"

"A condition!" Westerling announced. "From the moment war begins the army is master of all intelligence, all communication, all resources. Everything we require goes into the crucible!"

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

Save the Dog.

The Oregon state board of health bulletin says wisely with reference to mad dogs, "never kill the animal that bit you, save it with the greatest care," for the condition that dog develops is of the greatest consequence to the person bitten. If the dog is killed, the negro bodies, which are of importance in the diagnosis, may not be developed and no one will ever know whether the dog was or was not rabid. But if the dog is saved he will show himself within a week or ten days slow whether or not he is rabid. If he proves himself clear of rabies the man bitten need give the matter no further consideration from that side, and if it prove that he be rabid, there is still plenty of time for the man to take the proper remedies. If a dog bites you, save the dog.

Qualified Rebuke.

Five-year-old Marie likes to see the funny pictures. She had the paper spread out on the floor looking at it when her father turned out the light. Mary was angry at this, and said, "You've got your nerve," but as she realized immediately whom she was talking to she hastily added, "But you know your rights."

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PROBABLY COULD DO WORK

Soldier's Occupation in Civil Life Certainly Should Have Fitted Him for the Job.

"Real war conditions sometimes give rude shocks to the professional soldier trained to arms in the well-ordered days of peace. Here is a case in point. A Prussian Landwehr company was being mustered into service and there were many things to be done. Uniforms, equipment, rifles, were to be distributed, rolls prepared, reports made out, and quartermaster's lists checked up. The captain had his hands full. He ordered his first sergeant to find a noncom. who could write neatly and figure a little. The first sergeant was equal to the emergency. Corporal Kammermeyer was promptly summoned the crisply detailed for duty as company clerk. The corporal reported to the captain, who looked him over with a mixture of wonder and distrust.

"So you can figure, corporal," he said.

"A little, sir, at your service." "The captain still looked dubious.

"What is your trade in civil life, anyway?" he said.

"I am professor of mathematics, captain," was the reply.

Travesty on Real Falstaff.

Yarmouth has a claim upon all Englishmen quite independently of its associations with the breakfast bloater, remarks a writer in St. Nicholas. For it was the home of Shakespeare's Falstaff, who appears to have been a man of exemplary piety. The Falstaffs were an old Yarmouth family.

"A Falstaff or Falstaff," writes John Richard Green, "was bailiff of Yarmouth in 1281. Another is among the first of its representatives in parliament, and from that the members of that family filled the highest municipal offices. John Falstaff, a man of considerable account in the town, purchased lands at the close of the fourteenth century in Calster, and became the father of Sir John Falstaff, who, after a distinguished military career, was luckless enough to give his name to Shakespeare's famous character. In Yarmouth, however, he was better known as a benefactor to the great church of St. Nicholas.

Quite Old Fashioned.

"Did she marry well?" "No; it was a case of true love."—Harvard Lampoon.

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