

# The Last Shot

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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, and his mother, who is chief of staff. 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 128th of the Browns, Private Straneky, anarchist, denounces 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. Lanstron shows Marta a telephone which Feller has concealed in a secret passage under the tower for use to benefit the Browns in war emergencies. Lanstron declares his love for Marta. Westerling and the Gray premier plan to use a rival international affair to foment warlike patriotism in army and people.

### CHAPTER VII—Continued.

"And the press—the mischievous, greedy, but very useful press?" asked the premier.

"It also shall serve; also obey. No lists of killed and wounded shall be given out until I am ready. The public must know nothing except what I choose to tell. I act for the people and the nation."

"That is agreed," said the premier. "For these terrible weeks every nerve and muscle of the nation is at your service to win for the nation. In three or four days I shall know if the public rises to the call. If not—" He shook his head.

"While all the information given out is provocative to our people, you will declare your hope that war may be averted," Westerling continued. "This will screen our purpose. Finally, on top of public enthusiasm will come the word that the Browns have fired the first shot—as they must when we cross the frontier—that they have been killing our soldiers. This will make the racial spirit of every man respond. Having decided for war, every plan is worthy that helps to victory."

"It seems fiendish!" exclaimed the premier in answer to a thought eddying in the powerful current of his brain. "Fiendish with calculation, but merciful, as you say."

"A fast, terrific campaign! A ready machine taking the road!" Westerling declared. "Less suffering than if we went to war carelessly for a long campaign—than if we allowed sentiment to interfere with intellect."

"I like your energy, your will!" said the premier admiringly. "And about the declaration of war? We shall time that to your purpose."

"Declarations of war before striking by nations taking the aggressive, are a disadvantage," Westerling explained. "They are going out of practice. Witness the examples of Japan



"I Stake My Life!" He Cried Hoarsely.

against Russia and the Balkan allies against Turkey. In these days declarations are not necessary as a warning of what is going to happen. They belong to the etiquette of fencers."

"Yes, exactly. The declaration of war and the ambassador's passports will be prepared and the wire that fighting has begun will release them," agreed the premier.

"Yet if we did lose! If when I had given you all you ask your plans went wrong! If our army were broken to pieces on the frontier and then the nation, kept in ignorance of events, learned the truth—the premier enunciated slowly and pointedly while he locked glances with Westerling—that

is the end for us both. You would

hardly want to return to the capital to face public wrath?"

"We must win though we lose a million men!" he answered. "I stake my life!" he cried hoarsely, striking his fist on the table.

"You stake your life!" repeated the premier with slow emphasis.

"I do!" said Westerling. "Yes, my life. We cannot fail!"

"Then it will be war, if the people want it!" said the premier. "I shall not resist their desire!" he added in his official manner, at peace with his conscience.

Partow was a great brain set on an enormous body. Partow's eyes had the fire of youth at sixty-five, but the pendulous flesh of his cheeks was pasty. Jealousy and faction had endeavored for years to remove him from his position at the head of the army on account of age. New governments decided as they came in that he must go, and they went out with him still in the saddle.

Let officers apply themselves with conspicuous energy and they heard from a general Partow; let officers only keep step and free of courts martial, and they heard from a merciless taskmaster. Peculiarly human, peculiarly dictatorial, dynamic, and inscrutable was Partow, who never asked any one under him to work harder than himself.

Lanstron appeared in the presence of Jove shortly after eight o'clock the next morning after he left La Tir. Jove rolled his big head on his short neck in a nod and said:

"Late!"

"The train was late, sir," Lanstron replied, "and I have some news about our thousandth chance."

"Hm-m! What is it?" asked Partow. When Lanstron had told his story, Partow worked his lips in a way he had if he were struck by a passing reflection which might or might not have a connection with the subject in hand. "Strange about her when you consider who her parents were!" he said. "But you never know. Hm-m! Why don't you sit down, young man?"

"The way that the Grays gave out our dispatch convinces me of their intentions," Partow said. "Their people are rising to it and ours are rising in answer. The Grays have been transferring regiments from distant provinces to their frontier because they will fight better in an invasion. We are transferring home regiments to our frontier because they will fight for their own property. By Thursday you will find that open mobilization on both sides has begun."

"My department is ready," said Lanstron, "all except your decision about press censorship."

"A troublesome point," responded Partow. "I have procrastinated because two definite plans were fully worked out. It is a matter of choice between them: either publicity or complete secrecy. You know I am no believer in riding two horses at once. My mind is about made up; but let me hear your side again. Sometimes I get conviction by probing another man's."

Lanstron was at his best, for his own conviction was intense.

"Of course they will go in for secrecy; but our case is different," he began.

Partow settled himself to listen with the gift of the organizer who draws from his informant the brevity of essentials.

"I should take the people into our confidence," Lanstron proceeded. "I should make them feel that we were one family fighting for all who hold dear against the invader. If our losses are heavy, if we have a setback, then the inspiration of the heroism of those who have fallen and the danger of their own homes feeling the foot of the invader next will impel the living to greater sacrifices. For the Grays are in the wrong. The moral and the legal right is with us."

"And the duty of men like you and me, chosen for the purpose," said Partow, "is worthily to direct the courage that goes with moral right. The overt act of war must come from them by violating our frontier, not in the African jungle but here. Even when the burglar fingers the window-sash we shall not fire—no, not until he enters our house. When he does, you would have a message go out to our people that will set them quivering with indignation?"

"Yes, and I would let the names of our soldiers who fall first be known and how they fell, their backs to their frontier homes and their faces to the foe."

Our very liberality in giving news will help us to cover the military secrets which we desire to preserve," Partow said, with slow emphasis. "We shall hold back what we please, confident of the people's trust. Good policy that, yes! But enough! Your orders are ready, in detail, I believe. You have nothing to add?"

"No, sir, nothing; at least, not until war begins."

"Very well. We shall have the orders issued at the proper moment," concluded Partow. "And Westerling

is going to find," he proceeded after a thoughtful pause, "that a man is readier to die fighting to hold his own threshold than fighting to take another man's. War is not yet solely an affair of machinery and numbers. The human element is still uppermost. Give me your hand—no, not that one, not the one you shake hands with—the one wounded in action!"

Partow inclosed the stiffened fingers in his own with something of the caress which an old bear that is in very good humor might give to a promising cub.

"I have planned, planned, planned for this time. The world shall soon know, as the elements of it go into the crucible test, whether it is well done or not. I want to live to see the day when the last charge made against our trenches is beaten back. Then they may throw this old body onto the rubbish heap as soon as they please—it is a fat, unworldly behemoth of an old body!"

"No, no, it isn't!" Lanstron objected hotly. He was seeing only what most people saw after talking with Partow for a few minutes, his fine, intelligent eyes and beautiful forehead.

"All that I wanted of the body was to feed my brain," Partow continued, heedless of the interruption. "I have watched my mind as a navigator watches a barometer. I have been ready at the first sign that it was losing its grip to give up. Yet I have felt that my body would go on feeding my brain and that to the last moment of consciousness, when suddenly the body collapses, I should have self-possession and energy of mind. Under the coming strain the shock may come, as a cord snaps. At that instant my successor will take up my work where I leave it off."

"The old foggy who has aimed to join experience to youth chooses youth. You took your medicine without grumbling in the disagreeable but vitally important position of chief of



"It is All There, My Life, My Dreams, My Ambitions."

intelligence. Now you—there, don't tremble with stage fright!" For Lanstron's hand was quivering in Partow's grasp, while his face was that of a man stunned.

"You are to be at the right hand of this old body," continued Partow. "You are to go with me to the front; to sleep in the room next to mine; to be always at my side, and, finally, you are to promise that if ever the old body fails in its duty to the mind, if ever you see that I am not standing up to the strain, you are to say so to me and I give you my word that I shall let you take charge."

Lanstron was too stunned to speak for a moment. The arrangement seemed a hideous joke; a refinement of cruelty inconceivable. It was expecting him to tell Atlas that he was old and to take the weight of the world off the giant's shoulders.

"Have you lost your patriotism?" demanded Partow. "Are you afraid? Afraid to tell me the truth? Afraid of duty? Afraid in your youth of the burden that I bear in age?"

His fingers closed in on Lanstron's with such force that the grip was painful.

"Promise!" he commanded.

"I promise!" Lanstron said with a sob.

"That's it! That's the way! That's the kind of soldier I like," Partow declared with change of tone, and he rose from his chair with a spring that was a delight to Lanstron in its proof of the physical vigor so stoutly denied. "We have a lot to say to each other today," he added; "but first I am going to show you the whole bag of tricks."

His arm crooked in Lanstron's, they went along the main corridor of the staff office and entered a vault having a single chair and a small table in the center and lined by sections of numbered pigeonholes, each with a combination lock. At the base of one section was a small safe. It was not the first time that Lanstron had been in this vault. He had the combination of two of the sections of pigeonholes, aerostatics and intelligence. The rest belonged to other divisions.

which he laid on the table. "There you have all that is in my brain—the whole plan. The envelope contains the combinations of all the pigeonholes, if you wish to look up any details."

"Thank you!" Lanstron half whispered. It was all he could think of to say.

"And you will find that there is more than you thought, perhaps; the reason why I have fought hard to remain chief of staff; why—" Partow continued in a voice that had the sepulchral uncanniness of a threat long nursed now breaking free of the bondage of years within the sound-proof walls. "But—" he broke off suddenly as if he distrusted even the security of the vault. "Yes, it is all there—my life's work, my dream, my ambition, my plan!"

Lanstron heard the lock slide in the door as Partow went out and he was alone with the army's secrets. As he read Partow's firm handwriting, many parts fell together, many moves on a chessboard grew clear. His breath came faster, he bent closer over the table, he turned back pages to go over them again. Every sentence dropped home in his mind like a bolt in a socket. Unconscious of the passage of time, he did not need the door open or realize Partow's presence until he felt Partow's hand on his shoulder.

"I see that you didn't look into any of the pigeonholes," the chief of staff observed.

Lanstron pressed his finger-tips on the manuscript significantly.

"No. It is all there!"

"The thing being to carry it out!" said Partow. "God with us!" he added devoutly.

### CHAPTER VIII.

#### Close to the White Posts.

On Saturday evening the 128th regiment of the Grays was mustered in field accoutrements and a full supply of cartridges. In the darkness the first battalion marched out at right angles to the main road that ran through La Tir and South La Tir. At length Company B, deployed in line of skirmishers, lay down to sleep on its arms.

"We wait here for the word," Fracasse, the captain, whispered to his senior lieutenant. "If it comes, our objective is the house and the old castle on the hill above the town."

The tower of the church showed dimly when a pale moon broke through a cloud. By its light Hugo Mallin saw on his left the pinched and characterless features of Peterkin. A few yards ahead was a white stone post.

"That's their side over there!" whispered the banker's son, who was next to Peterkin.

"When we cross war begins," said the manufacturer's son.

"I wonder if they are expecting us!" said the judge's son a trifle huskily, in an attempt at humor, though he was not given to humor.

"Just waiting to throw bouquets!" whispered the laborer's son. He, too, was not given to humor and he, too, spoke a trifle huskily.

"And we'll fix bayonets when we start and they will run at the sight of our steel!" said Eugene Aronson. He and Hugo alone, not excepting Piltzer, the butcher's son, spoke in their natural voices. The others were trying to make their voices sound natural, while Piltzer's voice had developed a certain ferocity, and the liver patch on his cheek twitched more frequently. "Why, Company B is in front! We have the post of honor, and maybe our company will win the most glory of any in the regiment!" Eugene added. "Oh, we'll beat them! The bullet is not made that will get me!"

"Your service will be over in time for you to help with the spring planting," Eugene, whispered Hugo, who was apparently preoccupied with many detached thoughts.

"And you to be at home sucking lollipops!" Piltzer growled to Hugo.

"That would be better than murdering my fellowman to get his property," Hugo answered, so soberly that it did not seem to his comrades that he was joking this time. Piltzer's snarling exclamation of "White feather!" came in the midst of a chorus of indignation.

Captain Fracasse, who had heard only the disturbance without knowing the cause, interfered in a low, sharp tone:

"Silence! As I have told you before, silence! We don't want them to know that we are here. Go to sleep! You may get no rest tomorrow night!"

But little Peterkin, the question in his mind breaking free of his lips, unwittingly asked:

"Shall—shall we fight in the morning?"

"I don't know. Nobody knows!" answered Fracasse. "We wait on orders, ready to do our duty. There may be no war. Don't let me hear another peep from you!"

Now all closed their eyes. In front of them was vast silence which seemed to stretch from end to end of the frontier, while to the rear was the rumble of switching railway trains and the rumble of provision trains and artillery on the roads, and in the distance on the plain the headlight of a locomotive cut a swath in the black night. But the breathing of most of the men was not that of slumber, though Eugene and Piltzer slept soundly. Hours passed. Occasional restless movements told of efforts to force sleep by changing position.

"It's the waiting that's sickening!" exploded the manufacturer's son under his breath, desperately.

"So I say. I'd like to be at it and

done with the suspense!" said the doctor's son.

"They say if you are shot through the head you don't know what killed you—it's so quick. Think of that!" exclaimed Peterkin, huddling closer to Hugo and shivering.

"Yes, very merciful," Hugo whispered, patting Peterkin's arm.

"Sh-h-h! Silence, I tell you!" commanded Fracasse crossly. He was falling into a half doze at last.

In marching order, with cartridge-boxes full, on Saturday night, the 53d of the Browns marched out of barracks to the main pass road. One company after another left the road at a given point, bound for the position mapped in its instructions. Dellarme's, however, went on until it was opposite the Gailand house.

"We are depending on you," the colonel said to Dellarme, giving his hand a grip. "You are not to draw off till you get the flag."

"No, sir," Dellarme replied.

"Mind the signal to the batteries—keep the men screened—warn them not to let their first baptism of shell fire break their nerves!" the colonel added in a final repetition of instructions already indelibly impressed on the captain's mind.

Moving cautiously through a cut, Dellarme's company came, about midnight, to a halt among the stubble of a wheat-field behind a knoll. After he had bidden the men to break ranks, he crept up the incline.

"Yes, it's there!" he whispered when he returned. "On the crest of the knoll a cord is stretched from stake to stake," he said, explaining the reason for what was to be done, as was his custom. "The engineers placed it there after dusk and the frontier was closed, so that you would know just where to use your spades in the dark. Quietly as possible! No talking!" he kept cautioning as the men turned the soft earth, "and not higher than the cord, and lay the stubble side of the sods on the reverse so as to cover the fresh earth on the sky-line."

When the work was done all returned behind the knoll except the sentries posted at intervals on the crest to watch. With the aid of a small electric flash, screened by his hands, Dellarme again examined a section of the staff map that outlined the contour of the knoll in relation to the other positions. After this he wrote in his diary the simple facts of the day's events, concluding with a sentiment of gratitude for the honor shown his company and a prayer that he might keep a clear head and do his duty if war came on the morrow.

"Now, every one get all the sleep he can!" he advised the men.

Straneky slept with his head on his arm, soundly; the others slept no better than the men of the 128th. The night passed without any alarm except that of their own thoughts, and they welcomed dawn as a relief from suspense. There was no hot coffee this morning, and they washed down their rations with water from their

canteens. The old sergeant was lying beside Captain Dellarme on the crest, the sunrise in their faces. As the mist cleared from the plain it revealed the white dots of the frontier posts in the meadow and behind them many gray figures in skirmish order, scarcely visible except through the glasses.

"It looks like business!" declared the old sergeant.

"Yes, it begins the minute they cross the line!" said Dellarme.

His glance sweeping to the rear to scan the landscape under the light of day, he recognized, with a sense of pride and awe, the tactical importance of his company's position in relation to that of the importance of the other companies. Easily he made out the regimental line by streaks of concealed trenches and groups of brown uniforms; and here and there were the oblong, cloth stretches of waiting hospital litter. On the reverse slope of another knoll was the farmhouse, marked X on his map as the regimental headquarters, where he was to watch for the signal to fall back from his first stand in delaying the enemy's advance. Directly to the rear was the cut through which the company had come from the main pass road, and beyond that the Gailand house, which was to be the second stand.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)



"It Looks Like Business," Declared the Old Sergeant.

Not Ready. "Put on your helmet an' your red shirt, Silas, there's a big fire down the road a piece."

"Shucks! I can't go. My shirt's in the washtub an' the old woman's out in the garden fillin' my helmet with a mess of beans!"—Birmingham Age-Herald.

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When Talk Begins. Hostess—People are very dull to-night. I really can't get them to talk. Host—Play something, dearest.

# TO TILL UNOCCUPIED CANADIAN LANDS

THE CANADIAN GOVERNMENT ASKING FOR INCREASED ACREAGE IN GRAIN, TO MEET EUROPEAN DEMAND.

There are a number of holders of land in Western Canada, living in the United States, to whom the Canadian Government will shortly make an appeal to place the unoccupied areas they are holding under cultivation. The lands are highly productive, but in a state of idleness they are not giving any revenue beyond the unearned increment and are not of the benefit to Canada that these lands could easily be made. It is pointed out that the demand for grains for years to come will cause good prices for all that can be produced. Not only will the price of grains be affected, but also will that of cattle, hogs and horses. In fact, everything that can be grown on the farms. When placed under proper cultivation, not the kind that is often resorted to, which lessens yield and land values, many farms will pay for themselves in two or three years. Careful and intensive work is required, and if this is given in the way it is given to the high-priced lands of older settled countries, surprising results will follow.

There are those who are paying rent, who should not be doing so. They would do better to purchase lands in Western Canada at the present low price at which they are being offered by land companies or private individuals. These have been held for the high prices that many would have realized, but for the war and the financial stringency. Now is the time to buy; or if it is preferred advantage might be taken of the offer of 160 acres of land free that is made by the Dominion Government. The man who owns his farm has a life of independence. Then again there are those who are renting who might wish to continue as renters. They have some means as well as sufficient outfit to begin in a new country where all the advantages are favourable. Many of the owners of unoccupied lands would be willing to lease them on reasonable terms. Then again, attention is drawn to the fact that Western Canada numbers among its most successful farmers, artisans, business men, lawyers, doctors and many other professions. Farming today is a profession. It is no longer accompanied by the drudgery that we were acquainted with a generation ago. The fact that a man is not following a farming life today does not preclude him from going on a Western Canada farm tomorrow, and making a success of it. If he is not in possession of Western Canada land that he can convert into a farm, he should secure some, make it a farm by equipping it and working it himself. The man who has been holding his Western Canada land waiting for the profit he naturally expected has been justified in doing so. Its agricultural possibilities are certain and sure. If he has not realized immediately by making a sale, he should not worry. But to let it lie idle is not good business. By getting it placed under cultivation a greater profit will come to him. Have it cultivated by working it himself, or get some good representative to do it. Set about getting a purchaser, a renter or some one to operate on shares.

The department of the Dominion Government having charge of the Immigration, through Mr. W. D. Scott, Superintendent at Ottawa, Canada, is directing the attention of non-resident owners of Western Canada lands to the fact that money will be made out of farming these lands. The agents of the Department, located at different points in the States, are rendering assistance to this end.—Advertisement.

#### Wonders of Science.

A French scientist says that the billions of cubic feet of heated gas that have been shot into the upper air since the first of August have been displaced by cold air from the north pole, thus causing the early freeze along the battle line. On the same theory it may be that the safe and sane Fourth of July crusade was to blame for our hot summer.