

The Last Shot

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SYNOPSIS.

At their home on the frontier between the Browns and the Grays, Captain Lanstron, her mother, entertaining Colonel Westerling of the Grays, see Captain Lanstron of the Browns injured by a fall in his aeroplane. Ten years later, Westerling, nominal vice but real chief of staff, re-enforces South La Tir and meditates on war. Marta tells him of her teaching children the follies of war and martial patriotism, and begs him to prevent war while he is chief of staff. Lanstron calls on Marta at her home. She tells Lanstron that she believes Feller, the gardener, to be a spy. Lanstron confesses it is true and shows her 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 trivial international affair to foment warlike patriotism and strike before declaring war. Partow, Brown chief of staff, reveals his plans to Lanstron, made vice chief. The Gray army crosses the border line and attacks. The Browns check them. Artillery, infantry, aeroplanes and dirigibles engage. Marta has her first glimpse of war in its modern, cold, scientific, murderous brutality. The Browns fall back to the Galland house. Marta sees a night attack. The Grays attack in force. Feller leaves his secret telephone and goes back to his guns. Hand to hand fighting. The Browns fall back again. Marta asks Lanstron over the phone to appeal to Partow to stop the fighting. Vandermere in the Galland house. Westerling and his staff occupy the Galland house and he begins to woo Marta, who apparently throws her fortunes with the Grays and offers valuable information. She calls on Lanstron on the secret telephone and plans to give Westerling information that will trap the Gray army. Westerling forms a plan of attack upon what he learns from her. The Grays take Wordir.

CHAPTER XVI—Continued.

"This is like you—like what I want you to be!" he said. "You are right." He caught her hand, inclining it entirely in his grip, and she was sensible, in a kind of dazed horror, of the thrill of his strength. "Nothing can stop us! Numbers will win! Hard fighting in the mercy of a quick end!" he declared with his old rigidity of five against three which was welcome to her. "Then," he added—"and then—"

"Then!" she repeated, averting her glance. "Then—" There the devil ended the sentence and she withdrew her hand and felt the relief of one escaping suffocation, to find that he had realized that anything further during that interview would be banality and was rising to go.

"I don't feel decent!" she thought. "Society turned on Minna for a human weakness, but I—I'm not a human being! I am one of the pawns of the machine of war!"

Walking slowly with lowered head as she left the arbor, she almost ran into Bouchard, who apologized with the single word "Pardon!" as he lifted his cap in overdue courtesy, which his stolid brevity made the more conspicuous.

"Miss Galland, you seem lost in abstraction," he said in sudden loquacity. "I am almost on the point of accusing you of being a poet."

"Accusing!" she replied. "Then you must think that I would write bad poetry."

"On the contrary, I should say excellent—using the sonnet form," he returned.

"I might make a counter accusation, only that yours would be the epic form," answered Marta. "For you, too, seem fond of rambling."

There was a veiled challenge in the hawk eyes, which she met with commonplace politeness in hers, before he again lifted his cap and proceeded on his way.

For the next two weeks Marta's role resolved itself into a kind of routine. Their cramped quarters became a refuge to Marta in the trial of her secret work under the very nose of the staff. With little Clarissa Eileen, they formed the only feminine society in the neighborhood. On sunshiny days Mrs. Galland was usually to be found in her favorite chair outside the tower door; and here Minna set the urn on a table at four-thirty as in the old days.

No member of the staff was more frequently present at Marta's teas than Bouchard, who was developing his social instinct late in life by sitting in the background and allowing others to do the talking while he watched and listened. In his hearing, Marta's attitude toward the progress of the war was sympathetic but never interrogatory, while she shared attention with Clarissa Eileen, who was in danger of becoming spoiled by officers who had children of their own at home. After the reports of killed and wounded, which came with such appalling regularity, it was a relief to hear of the day's casualties among Clarissa's dolls. The chief of transportation and supply rode her on his shoulder; the chief of tactics played hide-and-seek with her; the chief engineer built her a doll house of stones with his own hands; and the chief medical officer was as concerned when she caught cold as if the health of the army were at stake.

"We mustn't get too set up over all this attention, Clarissa Eileen, my rival," said Marta to the child. "You are the only little girl and I am the only big girl within reach. If there were lots of others it would be different."

Bouchard was losing flesh; his eyes

were sinking deeper under a heavier frown. His duty being to get information, he was gaining none. His duty being to keep the Grays' secrets, there was a leak somewhere in his own department. He quizzed subordinates; he made abrupt transfers, to no avail.

Meanwhile, the Grays were taking the approaches to the main line of defense, which had been thought relatively immaterial but had been found shoddy placed and their vulnerability overestimated. The thunders of batteries hammering them became a routine of existence, like the passing of trains to one living near a railroad. The guns went on while tea was being served; they ushered in dawn and darkness; they were going when sleep came to those whom they later awakened with a start. Fights as desperate as the one around the house became features of this period, which was only a warming-up practice for the war demon before the orgy of impending assault on the main line.

Marta began to realize the immensity of the chessboard and of the forces engaged in more than the bare statement of numbers and distances. If a first attack on a position failed, the wires from the Galland house repeated their orders to concentrate more guns and attack again. In the end the Browns always yielded, but grudgingly, calculatingly, never being taken by surprise. The few of them who fell prisoners said, "God with us! We shall win in the end!" and answered no questions. Gradually the Gray army began to feel that it was battling with a mystery which was fighting under cover, falling back under cover—a tenacious, watchful mystery that sent sprays of death into every finger of flesh that the Grays thrust forward in assault.

"Another position taken. Our advance continues," was the only news that Westerling gave to the army, his people, and the world, which forgot its sports and murders and divorce cases in following the progress of the first great European war for two generations. He made no mention of the costs; his casualty lists were secret. The Gray hosts were sweeping forward as a slow, irresistible tide; this by Partow's own admission. He announced the loss of a position as promptly as the Grays it taking. He published a daily list of casualties so meager in contrast to their own that the Grays thought it false; he made known the names of the killed and wounded to their relatives. Yet the seeming candor of his press bureau included no straw of information of military value to the enemy.

Westerling never went to tea at the Gallands' with the other officers, for it was part of his cultivation of greatness to keep aloof from his subordinates. His meetings with Marta happened casually when he went out into the garden. Only once had he made any reference to the "And then" of their interview in the arbor.

"I am winning battles for you!" he had exclaimed with the thing in his eyes which she loathed.

To her it was equivalent to saying that she had tricked him into sending men to be killed in order to please her. She despised herself for the way he confided in her; yet she had to go on keeping his confidence, returning a tender glance with one that held out hope. She learned not to shudder when he spoke of a loss of "only ten thousand." In order to rally herself when she grew faint-hearted to her task, she learned to picture the lines of his face hard-set with five-against-three brutality, while in comfort he ordered multitudes to death, and, in contrast, to recall the smile of Deliairne, who asked his soldiers to undergo no risk that he would not share. And after every success he would remark that he was so much nearer Engadir, that position of the main line of defense whose weakness she had revealed.

"Your Engadir!" he came to say. "Then we shall again profit by your information; that is, unless they have fortified since you received it."

"They haven't. They had already fortified!" she thought. She was always seeing the mockery of his words in the light of her own knowledge and her own part, which never escaped her consciousness. One chamber of her mind was acting for him; a second chamber was perfectly aware that the other was acting.

"One position more—the Twin Boulder Redoubt. It is called," he announced at last. "We shall not press hard in front. We shall drive in masses on either side and storm the flanks."

This she was telephoning to Lanstron a few minutes later and having, in return, all the news of the Browns. The sheer fascination of knowing what both sides were doing exerted its spell in keeping her to her part.

"They've lost four hundred thousand men now, Lanny," she said.

"And we only a hundred thousand. We're whitening them down," answered Lanstron.

"Whitening them down! What a ghastly expression!" she gasped. "You

are as bad as Westerling and I am worse than either of you! I—I announced the four hundred thousand as if they were a score—a score in a game in our favor. I am helping, Lanny! All my sacrifice isn't for nothing!" she asked for the hundredth time.

"Immeasurably. You have saved us many lives!" he replied.

"And cost them many?" she asked.

"Yes, Marta, no doubt," he admitted; "but no more than they would have lost in the end. It is only the mounting up of their casualties that can end the war. Thus the lesson must be taught."

"And I can be of most help when the attack on the main defense is begun?"

"Yes."

"And when Westerling finds that my information is false about Engadir—then—"

She had never put the question to him in this way before. What would Westerling do if he found her out?

"My God, Marta!" he exclaimed. "If I'd had any sense I would have thought of that in the beginning and torn out the phone! I've been mad, mad with the one thought of the nation—inhuman in my greedy patriotism. I will not let you go any further!"

It was a new thing for her to be rallying him; yet this she did as the strange effect of his protest on the abnormal sensibilities that her acting had developed.

"Thinking of me—little me!" she called back. "Of one person's comfort when hundreds of thousands of other women are in terror; when the destiny of millions is at stake! Lanny, you are in a blue funk!" and she was laughing forcedly and hysterically. "I'm going on—going on like one in a trance who can't stop if he would. It's all right, Lanny. I undertook the task myself. I must see it through!"

After she had hung up the receiver her buoyancy vanished. She leaned against the wall of the tunnel weakly. Yes, what if she were found out? She was thinking of the possibility seriously for the first time. Yet, for only a moment did she dwell upon it before she dismissed it in sudden reaction.

"No matter what they do to me or what becomes of me!" she thought. "I'm a lost soul, anyway. The thing is to serve as long as I can—and then I don't care!"

CHAPTER XVII.

Thumbs Down for Bouchard.

Haggard and at bay, Bouchard faced the circle of frowns around the polished expanse of that precious heirloom, the dining-room table of the Gallands. The dreaded reckoning of the apprehensions which kept him restlessly awake at night had come at the next staff council after the fall of the Twin Boulder Redoubt. With the last approach to the main line of defense cleared, one chapter of the war was finished. But the officers did not manifest the elation that the occasion called for, which is not saying that they were discouraged. They had no doubt that eventually the Grays would dictate peace in the Browns' capital. Exactly stated, their mood was one of repressed professional irritation. Not until the third attempt was Twin Boulder Redoubt taken. As far as results were concerned, the nicely planned first assault might have been a stroke of strategy by the Browns to drive the Grays into an impassable fire zone.

"The trouble is we are not informed!" exclaimed Turcas, opening his thin lips even less than usual, but twisting them in a significant manner as he gave his words a rasping emphasis. The others hastened to follow his lead with equal candor.

"Exactly. We have no reports of their artillery strength, which we had greatly underestimated," said the chief of artillery.

"Our maps of their forts could not be less correct if revealed to us for purposes of deceit. Again and again we have thought that we had them surprised, only to be surprised ourselves. In short, they know what we are doing and we don't know what they are doing!" said the tactical expert.

There the chief of the aerostatic division took the defensive.

"They certainly don't learn our plans with their planes and dirigibles!" he declared energetically.

"Hardly, when we never see them over our lines."

"The Browns are acting on the defensive in the air as well as on the earth!"

"But our own planes and dirigibles bring little news," said Turcas. "I mean, those that return," he added pungently.

"And few do return. My men are not wanting in courage!" replied the chief aerostatic officer. "Immediately we get over the Brown lines the Browns, who keep cruising to and fro, are on us like hawks. They risk anything to bring us down. When we descend low we strike the fire of their high-angle guns, which are distributed the length of the frontier. I believe both their aerial fleet and their high-angle artillery were greatly underestimated. Finally, I cannot reduce my force too much in scouting or they might take the offensive."

"Another case of not being informed!" concluded Turcas, returning grimly to his point.

He looked at Bouchard, and every one began looking at Bouchard. If the Gray tacticians had been outplayed by their opponents, if their losses for the ground gained exceeded calculations, then it was good to have a scapegoat for their professional mistakes. Bouchard was Westerling's choice for chief of intelligence. His blind loyalty was pleasing to his superior, who, hitherto, had promptly silenced any

suggestion of criticism by repeating that the defensive always appeared to the offensive to be better informed than itself. But this time Westerling let the conversation run on without a word of excuse for his favorite.

Each fresh reproach from the staff, whose opinion was the only god he knew, was a dagger thrust to Bouchard. At night he had lain awake worrying about the leak; by day he had sought to trace it, only to find every clew leading back to the staff. Now he was as confused in his shame as a sensitive schoolboy. Vaguely, in his distress, he heard Westerling asking a question, while he saw all those eyes staring at him.

"What information have we about Engadir?"

"I believe it to be strongly fortified!" stammered Bouchard.

"You believe! You have no information?" pursued Westerling.

"No, sir," replied Bouchard. "Nothing—nothing new!"

"We do seem to get little information," said Westerling, looking hard at Bouchard in silence—the combined silence of the whole staff.

This public reproof could have but one meaning. He should soon receive a note which would thank him politely for his services, in the stereotyped phrases always used for the purpose, before announcing his transfer to a less responsible post.

"Very little, sir!" Bouchard replied doggedly.

"There is that we had from one of our aviators whose machine came down in a smash just as he got over our infantry positions on his return," said the chief aerostatic officer. "He



Bouchard Faced the Circle of Frowns.

was in a dying condition when we picked him up, and, as he was speaking with the last breaths in his body, naturally his account of what he had seen was somewhat incoherent. It would be of use, however, if we had plans of the forts that would enable us to check off his report intelligently."

"Yet, what evidence have we that Partow or Lanstron has done more than to make a fortunate guess or show military insight?" Westerling asked. "There is the case of my own belief that Bordir was weak, which proved correct."

"Last night we got a written telegraphic staff message from the body of a dead officer of the Browns found in the Twin Boulder Redoubt," said the vice-chief, "which showed that in an hour after our plans were transmitted to our own troops for the first attack they were known to the enemy."

"That looks like a leak!" exclaimed Westerling, "a leak, Bouchard, do you hear?" He was frowning and his lips were drawn and his cheeks mottled with red in a way not pleasing to see. Stiffening in his chair, a flash of desperation in his eye, Bouchard's bony, long hand gripped the table edge. Every one felt that a sensation was coming.

"Yes, I have known that there was a leak!" he said with hoarse, painful deliberation. "I have sent out every possible tracer. I have followed up every sort of clew. I have transferred a dozen men. I have left nothing undone!"

"With no result?" persisted Westerling impatiently.

"Yes, always the same result: That the leak is here in this house—here in the grand headquarters of the army under our very noses. I know it is not the telegraphers or the clerks. It is a member of the staff!"

"Have you gone out of your head?" demanded Westerling. "What staff officer? How does he get the information to the enemy? Name the persons you suspect here and now! Explain, if you want to be considered sane!"

Here was the blackest accusation that could be made against an officer! The chosen men of the staff, tested through many grades before they reached the inner circle of cabinet secrecy, lost the composure of a council. All were leaning forward toward Bouchard breathless for his answer.

"There are three women on the grounds," said Bouchard. "I have been against their staying from the first."

He got no further. His words were drowned by the outburst of one of the younger members of the staff, who had either to laugh or choke at the picture of this deep-eyed, spectral sort of man, known as a woman-hater, in his revelation of the farcical source of his suspicions.

"Why not include Clarissa Eileen?" some one asked, starting a chorus of satirical exclamations.

"How do they get through the line?"

"Yes, past a wall of bayonets?"

"When not even a soldier in uniform is allowed to move away from his command without a pass?"

"By wireless?"

"Perhaps by telepathy!"

"Unless," said the chief of the aerostatic division, grinning, "Bouchard lends them the use of our own wires through the capital and around by the neutral countries across the Brown frontier!"

"But the correct plans and location of their forts and the numbers of their heavy guns and of their planes and dirigibles—your failure to have this information is not the result of any leak from our staff since the war began," said Turcas in his dry, penetrating voice, clearing the air of the smoke of scattered explosions.

"All were staring at Bouchard again. What answer had he to this? He was in the box, the evidence stated by the prosecutor. Let him speak!"

He was fairly beside himself in a paroxysm of rage and struck at the air with his clenched fist.

"Lanstron!" he cried.

"There's no purpose in that. He can't hear you!" said Turcas, dryly as ever.

"He might, through the leak," said the chief aerostatic officer, who considered that many of his gallant subordinates had lost their lives through Bouchard's inefficiency. "Perhaps Clarissa Eileen has already telepathically wiggled it to him."

To lose your temper at a staff council is most unbecoming. Turcas would have kept his hit in the back by a fool automobilist. Westerling had now recovered his. He was again the superman in command.

"It is for you and not for us to locate the leak; yes, for you!" he said. "That is all on the subject for the present," he added in a tone of mixed pity and contempt, which left Bouchard freed from the stare of his colleagues and in the miserable company of his humiliation.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

NOTHING NEW IN JOKE LINE

Foolish is the Humorist Who Would Insist That This "Has Never Been Sprung Before."

A reader of the Docket in New York city cut out the item relating to the dissolution of partnership, in which one partner makes the statement that "those who owe the firm will settle with him, and those that the firm owes will settle with Mose," and sends it back to us with this notation: "This was an old chestnut when I lived in —, which was in 1855."

To this charge we enter a plea of confession and avoidance. We contend that the courts will take judicial notice of the fact that there is nothing new under the sun, and in our judgment the jokesmith is well within his rights in resurrecting a joke which was old in 1855.

The incident brings to mind the following story: "The editor of a Minnesota newspaper back in the '80s concocted the following: 'Yon Yonson put four sticks of dynamite in the stove last Sunday to thaw them out. The handles were nickel plated and only cost \$10.'" A professor of English literature in an eastern university wrote a very interesting article on this joke, claiming that it represented a distinctly American brand of humor, and that it could not have happened in any other country or at any other time.

But alas for the professor of English literature—for there is nothing new under the sun. Reference to *H. Chronicles*, Chapter 16, Verses 12 and 13, produces the following:

12. And Asa in the thirty and ninth year of his reign was diseased in his feet, until his disease was exceedingly great; yet in his disease he sought not to the Lord, but to the physicians.

13. And Asa slept with his fathers. —West's Docket.

Would Handle Wheat in Bulk.

Australian wheat, at the present time, is transported in bags, a system which involves not only a considerable cost, but is also uneconomical in the use of labor. In consequence, the governments of New South Wales and Victoria are considering proposals for handling it in bulk, based upon the reports of engineers, who made inquiries as to this method in Canada, the United States and South Africa. The experts also say that the change would result in a large extension of the growing areas. It is understood, however, that the steamship lines, which have been approached on the subject, are not agreed that under existing circumstances the shipment of grain in bulk is practicable, though it is believed that if adequate supplies were guaranteed the necessary space would be readily forthcoming.

Arrest for Debt.

While imprisonment for debt as it at one time existed in English and American law, by which a debtor might be arrested and imprisoned for mere liability to pay his creditor, no longer exists in the United States, the statutes of the majority of the states provide for the arrest of a defendant in a civil action under certain conditions, such as fraud, or torts, or embezzlement, etc.

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Even dogs can eat too much meat. Certainly many people "dig their graves with their teeth." Few get enough exercise to justify a meat diet, for meat brings uric acid. The kidneys try hard to get rid of that poison, but often a backache, or some other slight symptom will show that the kidneys need help. The time-tried remedy, then, is Doan's Kidney Pills.

A Nebraska Case

C. T. Evans, Third St. and Third Cor., Nebraska City, Neb., says: "I was in bed five months from kidney complaint, unable to move hand or foot. My limbs and body swelled terribly and my head was badly wrecked. Three doctors failed to help me. Finally I took Doan's Kidney Pills and they put me on my feet. The swelling and pain went away and my kidneys were fixed up in good shape."

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