

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 Westering of the Grays, see Captain Lanstron, star intelligence officer of the Browns, injured by a fall in his aeroplane. Ten years later, Westering, 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. Westering 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 3d of the Browns Private Stransky, anarchist, declares war and played-out patriotism and is placed under arrest. Colonel Lanstron overbearing, begs him to

CHAPTER IV—Continued.

Then impulse broke through the restraint that seemed to characterize the Lanstron of thirty-five. The Lanstron of twenty-five, who had met catastrophe because he was "wool-gathering," asserted himself. He put his hand on Stransky's shoulder. It was a strong though slim hand that looked as if it had been trained to do the work of two hands in the process of its owner's own transformation. Thus the old sergeant had seen a general remonstrate with a brave veteran who had been guilty of bad conduct in Africa. The old colonel gasped at such a subversion of the dignity of rank. He saw the army going to the devil. But young Dellarme, watching with eager curiosity, was sensible of no familiarity in the act. It all depended on how such a thing was done, he was thinking.

"We all have minutes when we are more or less anarchists," said Lanstron in the human appeal of one man to another. "But we don't want to be judged by one of those minutes. I got a hand mashed up for a mistake that took only a second. Think this over tonight before you act. Then, if you are of the same opinion, go to the colonel and tell him so. Come, why not?"

"All right, sir, you're so decent about it!" grumbled Stransky, taking his place in the ranks.

Hep-hep-hep! The regiment started on its way, with Grandfather Fragini keeping at his grandson's side.

"Makes me feel young again, but it's darned solemn beside the Hussars, with their horses' bits a-jingling. Times have certainly changed—officers' hands in their pockets, saying 'if you don't mind' to a man that's insulted the flag! Kicking ain't good enough for that traitor! Ought to hang him—yes, sir, hang and draw him!"

Lanstron watched the marching column for a time.

"Hep-hep-hep! It's the brown of the infantry that counts in the end," he mused. "I liked that wall-eyed giant. He's all man!"

Then his living glance swept the heavens inquiringly. A speck in the blue, far away in the realms of atmospheric infinity, kept growing in size until it took the form of the wings with which man flies. The plane volplaned down with steady swiftness, till its racing shadow lay large over the landscape for a few seconds before it rose again with beautiful ease and precision.

"Bully for you, Etsel!" Lanstron thought, as he started back to the aeroplane station. "You belong in the corps. We shall not let you return to your regiment for a while. You've a cool head and you'd charge a church tower if that were the orders."

CHAPTER V.

A Sunday Morning Call.

As a boy, Arthur Lanstron had persisted in being an exception to the influences of both heredity and environment. Though his father and both grandfathers were officers who believed theirs to be the true gentleman's profession, he had preferred any kind of mechanical toy to arranging the most gayly painted tin soldiers in formation on the nursery floor; and he would rather read about the wonders of natural history and electricity than the campaigns of Napoleon and Frederick the Great and my Lord Nelson. Left to his own choice, he would miss the parade of the garrison for inspection by an excellency in order to ask questions of a man wiping the oil off his hands with cotton-waste, who was far more entertaining to him than the most spick-and-span ramrod of a sergeant.

Upon being told one day that he was to go to the military school the following autumn, he broke out in open rebellion.

"I don't want to go to the army!" he said.

"Why?" asked his father, thinking that when the boy had to give his reasons he would soon be argued out of the heresy.

"It's drilling a few hours a day, then nothing to do," Arthur replied. "All your work waits on war and you don't know that there will ever be any war. It waits on something nobody wants to happen. Now, if you manufacture something, why, you see wool come out cloth, steel come out an automobile. If you build a bridge you see it rising little by little. You're getting your results every day; you see your

mistakes and your successes. You're making something, creating something; there's something going on all the while that isn't guesswork. I think that's what I want to say. You won't order me to be a soldier, will you?"

The father, loath to do this, called in the assistance of an able pleader then, Eugene Partow, lately become chief of staff of the Browns, who was an old friend of the Lanstron family. Partow turned the balance on the side of filial affection. He kept watch of the boy, but without favoring him with influence. Young Lanstron, who wanted to see results, had to earn them. He realized in practice the truth of Partow's saying that there was nothing he had ever learned but what could be of service to him as an officer.

"Finding enough work to do?" Partow would ask with a chuckle when they met in these days; for he had made Lanstron both chief of intelligence and chief aeroplane officer. Young Colonel Lanstron's was the duty of gaining the secrets of the Gray staff and keeping those of the Brown and organizing up-to-the-moment efficiency in the new forces of the air.

He had remarked truly enough that the injury to his left hand served as a better reminder against the folly of wool-gathering than a string, even a large red string, tied around his finger. Thanks to skilled surgery, the fingers, incapable of spreading much, were yet serviceable and had a firm grip of the wheel as he rose from the aeroplane station on the Sunday morning after Marta's return home for a flight to La Tir.

He knew the pattern weaving under his feet as one knows that of his own garden from an overlooking window. Every detail of the staff map, ravines, roads, buildings, battery positions, was stitched together in the flowing reality of actual vision. No white posts were necessary to tell him where the boundary between the two nations lay. The line was drawn in his brain.

Now that Lanstron was the organizer of the aviation corps his own flights were rare. Mostly they were made to La Tir. His visits to Marta were his holidays. All the time that she was absent on her journey around the world they had corresponded. Her letters, so revealing of herself and her peculiar angles of observation, formed a bundle sacredly preserved. Her mother's joking reference about her girlish resolution not to marry a soldier often recurred to him. There, he sometimes thought, was the real obstacle to his great desire.

When he alighted from the plane he thrust his left hand into his blouse pocket. He always carried it there, as if it were literally sewn in place. In moments of emotion the scarred nerves would twitch as the telltale of his sensitiveness; and this was something he would conceal from others no matter how conscious he was of it himself. He found the Gailand veranda deserted. In response to his ring a maid came to the open door. Her face was sad, with a beauty that had prematurely faded. But it lighted pleasantly in recognition. Her hair was thick and tawny, lying low over the brow; her eyes were a softly luminous brown and her full lips sensitive and yielding. Lanstron, an intimate of the Gailand household, knew her story well and the part that Marta had played in it.

Some four years previously, when a baby was in prospect for Minna, who wore no wedding ring, Mrs. Gailand had been inclined to send the maid to an institution, "where they will take good care of her, my dear. That's what such institutions are for. It is quite scandalous for her and for us—never happened in our family before!"

Marta arched her eyebrows.

"We don't know!" she exclaimed softly.

"How can you think such a thing, let alone saying it—you, a Gailand!" her mother gasped in indignation.

"That is, if we go far back," said Marta. "At all events, we have no precedent, so let's establish one by keeping her."

"But for her own sake! She will have to live with her shame!" Mrs. Gailand objected. "Let her begin afresh in the city. We shall give her a good recommendation, for she is really an excellent servant. Yes, she will readily find a place among strangers."

"Still, she doesn't want to go, and it would be cruel to send her away."

"Cruel! Why, Marta, do you think I would be cruel? Oh, very well, then we will let her stay!"

"Both are away at church. Mrs. Gailand ought to be here any minute, but Miss Gailand will be later because of her children's class," said Minna. "Will you wait on the veranda?"

He was saying that he would stroll in the garden when childish footsteps were heard in the hall, and after a curly head had nestled against the mother's skirts its owner, reminded of the importance of manners in the world where the stork had left her, made a courtesy. Lanstron shook a small hand which must have lately

been on intimate terms with sugar or jam.

"How do you do, flying soldier man?" chirruped Clarissa Eileen. It was evident that she held Lanstron in high favor.

"Let me hear you say your name," said Lanstron.

Clarissa Eileen was triumphant. She had been waiting for days with the revelation when he should make that old request. Now she enunciated it with every vowel and consonant correctly and primly uttered; indeed, she repeated it four or five times in proof of complete mastery.

"A pretty name. I've often wondered how you came to give it to her," said Lanstron to Minna.

"You do like it!" exclaimed Minna with girlish eagerness. "I gave her the most beautiful name I could think of because"—she laid her hand caressingly on the child's head and a madonna-like radiance stole into her face—"because she might at least have a beautiful name when—the dull blaze of a recollection now burning in her eyes—when there wasn't much prospect of many beautiful things coming into her life; though I know, of course, that the world thinks she ought to be called Maggie."

Proceeding leisurely along the main path of the first terrace, Lanstron followed it past the rear of the house to the old tower. Long ago the moat that surrounded the castle had been filled in. The green of rows of grape vines lay against the background of a mat of ivy on the ancient stone walls, which had been cut away from the loopholes set with window glass. The door was open, showing a room that had been closed in by a ceiling of boards from the walls to the circular stairway that ran aloft from the dungeons. On the floor of flags were cheap rugs. A number of seed and nursery catalogues were piled on a round table covered with a brown cloth.

"Hello!" Lanstron called softly. "Hello!" he called louder and yet louder.

Receiving no answer, he retraced his steps and seated himself on the second terrace in a secluded spot in the shadow of the first terrace wall, where he could see anyone coming up the main flight of steps from the road. When Marta walked she usually came from town by that way. At length the sound of a slow step from another direction broke on his ear. Some one was approaching along the path that



A Speck in the Blue Far Away.

ran at his feet. Around the corner of the wall, in his workman's Sunday clothes of black, but wearing his old straw hat, appeared Feller, the gardener. He paused to examine a rose bush and Lanstron regarded him thoughtfully.

As he turned away he looked up, and a glance of definite and unflinching recognition was exchanged between the two men. They had the garden to themselves.

"Gustave!" Lanstron exclaimed under his breath.

"Lanny!" exclaimed the gardener, turning over a branch of the rose bush. He seemed unwilling to risk talking openly with Lanstron.

"You look the good workman in his Sunday best to a T!" said Lanstron.

"Being stone-deaf," returned Feller, with a trace of drollery in his voice, "I hear very well—at times. Tell me—his whisper was quivering with eagerness—"shall we fight? Shall we fight?"

"We are nearer to it than we have ever been in our time," Lanstron replied.

The hat still shaded Feller's face, his stoop was unchanged, but the branch in his hand shook.

"Honest?" he exclaimed. "Oh, the chance of it! The chance of it!"

"Gustave!" Lanstron's voice, still low, came in a gust of sympathy, and the pocket which concealed his hand gave a nervous twitch as if it held something alive and distinct from his own being. "The trial wears on you! Do you want to go?"

"No!" Feller shot back irritably. "No!" he repeated resolutely. "I don't want to go! I mean to be game—I—" He shifted his gaze from the bush which he still pretended to examine and suddenly broke off with: "Miss Gailand is coming!"

Lanstron started toward the steps that Marta was ascending. She moved leisurely, yet with a certain springy energy that suggested that she might have come on the run without being out of breath or seeming to have made an effort.

"Hello, stranger!" she called as she saw him, and quickened her pace.

"Hello, pedagogue!" he responded.

As they shook hands they swung their arms back and forth like a pair of romping children for a moment.

"We had a grand session of the school this morning, the largest class ever!" she said. "And the points we scored off you soldiers! You'll find disarmament already in progress when you return to headquarters. We're irresistible, or at least," she added, with a flash of intensity, "we're going to be some day."

"So you put on your war-paint!"

"It must be the pollen from the hydrangeas!" She flicked her handkerchief from her belt and passed it to him. "Show that you know how to be useful!"

He performed the task with deliberate care.

"Heavens! You even have some on your ear and some on your hair; but I'll leave it on your hair; it's rather becoming. There you are!" he concluded.

"Oh my hair, too!"

"Very well. I always obey orders."

"I oughtn't to have asked you to do it at all!" she exclaimed with a sudden change of manner as they started up to the house. "But a habit of friendship, a habit of liking to believe in one's friends, was uppermost. I forgot. I oughtn't even to have shaken hands with you!"

"Marta! What now, Marta?" he asked.

He had known her in reproach, in anger, in laughing mockery, in militant seriousness, but never before like this. The pain and indignation in her eyes came not from the sheer hurt of a wound but from the hurt of its source. It was as if he had learned by the signal of its loss that he had a deeper hold on her than he had realized.

"Yes, I have a bone to pick with you," she said, recovering a grim sort of fellowship. "A big bone! If you're half a friend you'll give me the very marrow of it."

"I am ready!" he answered more philosophically than he felt.

"There's not time now; after luncheon, when mother is taking her nap," she concluded as they came to the last step and saw Mrs. Gailand on the veranda.

After luncheon Mrs. Gailand kept battling with her nods until nature was victorious and she fell fast asleep. Marta, grown restless with impatience, suggested to Lanstron that they stroll in the garden, and they took the path past the house toward the castle tower, stopping in an arbor with high hedges on either side around a statue of Mercury.

"Now!" exclaimed Marta narrowly. "It was you, Lanny, who recommended Feller to us as a gardener, competent though deaf! I have proved him to be a man of most sensitive hearing. I didn't let him know that he was discovered. You brought him here—you, Lanny, you are the one to explain."

"True, he is not deaf!" Lanstron replied.

"He is a spy?" she asked.

"Yes, a spy. You can put things in a bright light, Marta!" He found words coming with difficulty in face of the pain and disillusion of her set look.

"Using some man as a pawn; setting him as a spy in the garden where you have been the welcome friend!" she exclaimed. "A spy on what—on my mother, on Minna, on me, on the flowers, as a part of this monstrous game of trickery and lies that you are playing?"

There was no trace of anger in her tone. It was that of one mortally hurt. Anger would have been easier to bear than the measuring, penetrating wonder that found him guilty of such a horrible part. Those eyes would have confused Partow himself with the steady, willing intensity of their gaze. She did not see how his left hand was twitching and how he stilled its movement by pressing it against the bench.

"You will take Feller with you when you go!" she said, rising.

Lanstron dropped his head in a kind of shaking throbb of his whole body and raised a face white with appeal.

"Marta!" He was speaking to a profile, very sensitive and yet like ivory. "I've no excuse for such an abuse of hospitality except the obsession of a loathsome work that some man must do and I was set to do. My God, Marta! I cease to be natural and human. I am a machine. I keep thinking, what if war comes and some error of mine let the enemy know where to strike the blow of victory; or if there were information I might have gained and failed to gain that would have given us the victory—if, because I had not done my part, thousands of lives of our soldiers were sacrificed needlessly!"

At that she turned on him quickly, her face softening.

"You do think of that—the lives?"

"Yes, why shouldn't I?"

"Of those on your side!" she exclaimed, turning away.

"Yes, of those first," he replied. "And, Marta, I did not tell you why Feller was here because he did not want me to."

CHAPTER VI.

A Crisis Within a Crisis.

Following the path to the tower leisurely, they had reached the tower. Feller's door was open. Marta looked into the room, finding in the neat arrangement of its furniture a new significance. He was absent, for it was the dinner hour.

"On my recommendation you took him," Lanstron said.

"Yes, on yours, Lanny, on a friend's! You"—she put a cold emphasis on the word—"you wanted him here for your plans! And why? You haven't answered that yet. What purpose of the war game does he serve in our garden?"

His look pleaded for patience, while he tried to smile, which was rather difficult in face of her attitude.

"Not altogether in the garden; partly in the tower," he replied. "You are to be in the whole secret and in such a way as to make my temptation clear. I hope. First, I think you ought to see the setting. Let us go in."

Impelled by a curiosity that Lanstron's manner accentuated, she entered the room. Apparently Lanstron was familiar with the premises. Passing through the sitting-room into the room adjoining, where Feller stored his tools, he opened a door that gave on to the circular stone steps leading down into the dungeon tunnel.

"I think we had better have a light," he said, and when he had fetched one from the bedchamber he descended the steps, asking her to follow.

They were in a passage six feet in height and about three feet broad, which seemed to lead on indefinitely into clammy darkness. The dewy walls sparkled in fantastic and ghostly iridescence under the rays from the lantern. The dank air lay moist against their faces.

"This is far enough." He paused and raised the lantern. With its light full in her face, she blinked. "There, at the height of your chin!"

She noted a metal button painted gray, set at the side of one of the stones of the wall, which looked unreal. She struck the stone with her knuckles and it gave out the sound of hollow wood, which was followed, as an echo, by a little laugh from Lanstron. Pressing the button, a panel door flew open, revealing a telephone mouthpiece and receiver set in the recess.

"Like a detective play!" were the first words that sprang to her lips. "Well!" As she faced around her eyes glittered in the lantern rays. "Well, have you any other little tricks to show me? Are you a sleight-of-hand artist, too, Lanny? Are you going to take a machine gun out of your hat?"

"That is the whole bag," he answered. "I thought you'd rather see it than have it described to you."

"Having seen it, let us go!" she said, in a manner that implied further reckoning to come.

"If out of a thousand possible sources one source succeeds, then the cost and pains of the other nine hundred and ninety-nine are more than repaid," he was saying urgently, the soldier uppermost in him. "Some of the best service we have had has been absurd in its simplicity and its audacity. In time of war more than one battle has been decided by a thing that was a trifle in itself. No matter what your preparation, you can never remove the element of chance. An hour gained in information about your enemy's plans may turn the tide in your favor. A Chinese peasant spy, because he happened to be intoxicated, was able to give the Japanese warning in time for Kuroki to make full dispositions for receiving the Russian attack in force at the Sha-ho. There are many other incidents of like nature in history. So it is my duty to neglect no possible method, however absurd."

By this time he was at the head of the steps. Standing to one side, he offered his hand to assist Marta. But she seemed not to see it. Her aspect was that of downright antagonism.

"However absurd! Yes, it is absurd to think that you can make me a party to any of your plans, for—" She broke off abruptly with staring eyes, as if she had seen an apparition.

Lanstron turned and through the door of the toolroom saw Feller entering the sitting-room. He was not the best, deferential gardener. His features were hard-set, a fighting rage burning in his eyes, his sinews taut as if about to spring upon an adversary. When he recognized the intruders he turned limp, his head dropped, hiding his face with his hat brim, and he staid himself by resting a hand on the table edge.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

OVERSIGHT THAT WAS FATAL

Light-Fingered Gentleman Might Have Got Away With the Coat But for One Thing.

A fellow stole a coat hanging in front of a clothing store the other afternoon. But the proprietor was on the job, and before the thief was half a block away he had the police and most of the neighbors on his trail. The poor fellow who had taken the coat was really coatless before the crime. And as he ran he struggled into the abstracted article, which fitted him pretty well, all things considered. And when he was apprehended, about four blocks from the starting point, he protested his innocence stoutly.

"What d'ye mean I stole the coat?" he said. "I've had this coat all summer. Why, I ain't had it off my back for a week!"

"You ain't, ain't you?" sneered the policeman. "An' have you wore that there coat hanger inside it across yer shoulders all that time?"

Saying that the arm of the law grasped the iron hook projecting above the collar, dragged the victim to the corner and called the wagon.

Parlor Tricks.

Bill—Did you ever take part in any parlor magic?
Jill—Oh, yes; that's how my wife hypnotized me into marrying her.

MANITOBA'S AGRICULTURAL INDUSTRY

REMARKABLE DEVELOPMENT IN THAT PROVINCE DURING THE PAST FEW YEARS.

The past year has shown that the Province of Manitoba, the Premier Province of Western Canada, stands out prominently in point of wealth in her agricultural productions. Manitoba had an excellent yield of wheat in 1914, the oat crop was not so good, and with the high price received, every farmer was placed in a good financial position.

For some years, as is probably the case in all new countries, Manitoba went largely into the growing of grain, and while this paid well for a time, it was found that having to purchase his meat, his milk and a number of other daily requisites, the farm did not pay as it should. Now, there is another side to it. Fodder crops are grown, cattle are being raised, cheese factories and creameries are established, and the result is that the financial position of the farmers of Manitoba is as strong as that of those in any other portion of the continent. Scarcely a farmer today but has realized that the growing of grains alone has a precarious side, and that positive security can only be assured by diversified farming, and securing the latest modern and most economic methods. Therefore timothy, clover, alfalfa, rye grass and fodder corn are universally grown. Most wonderful success meets the efforts of the farmers in the cultivation of these grasses, and the yields compare favorably with those of many older countries, while in many cases they exceed them.

It is worth while recording the acreage of these crops this season as compared with last, because the figures reflect the remarkable progress that is being made in dairying and in the beef and pork industry. In 1913 bromegrass was sown on 24,912 acres, rye grass on 21,917 acres, timothy on 118,712 acres, clover on 5,328 acres, alfalfa on 4,709 acres and fodder corn on 20,223 acres. In 1914 the respective acreage under those crops were 25,444 acres, 27,100 acres, 165,990 acres, 7,212 acres, and 10,250 acres and 30,430 acres. Alfalfa particularly is coming into its own, the acreage having been more than doubled last year.

It is simply the natural process of evolution from the purely grain farming which Manitoba knew as the only method twenty years ago to the more diversified forms of agriculture that is responsible for the development along these other lines in this Province. Alberta is coming to it at an earlier stage than did Manitoba. Saskatchewan, too, is following rapidly in the same direction.

Then, as her fodder crop and root crop acreage indicate, there have been increases in the holdings of all kinds of live stock during the past twelve months, according to the correspondent of the Toronto Globe. Beef cattle number 42,000 head this year, as against 37,000 last year; milch cows are 160,474 head, as against 157,963 head; pigs number 325,000 as against 248,000; sheep number 75,000, as against 52,000; and there are 325,000 horses, as compared with 300,000 at this time last year. These are the latest Provincial figures, and they show that despite the great efflux of live stock to the United States since the opening of that market to Canada, the capital amount of live animals has increased instead of having decreased through the extra demand.

Dairying the Principal Industry.

Dairying is the industry, however, which is making dollars for the Manitoba farmer. It is developing at a rapid rate in this Province for that particular reason. The output of creamery butter last year was 4,000,000 pounds, at an average price of 27.5 cents per pound, which was an increase over the previous year of a million pounds. The output of dairy butter was recorded last year at 4,288,276 pounds. The Government department says that again this year a substantial increase in the dairy output will be shown from this Province. From this same source of information one finds that through the splendid growth in winter dairying, Winnipeg now, for the first time in years, is able to obtain a sufficient supply of milk and sweet cream from its city dairies to satisfy its demand throughout the year without having to import large quantities of these products from the United States as was done not longer than two years ago.—Advertisement.

The loud smack is not always the sweetest kiss.

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