

The Last Shot

BY

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SYNOPSIS.

At their home on the frontier between the Browns and Grays, Marta Galland and her mother, entertaining Colonel Westering, chief intelligence officer of the Browns, are surprised 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 53d of the Browns Private Stransky, anarchist, doctor, war and played-up 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. Westering and the Gray premier plan to use a trivial international affair to foment warlike patriotism in army and people and strike before declaring war. Parlow, Brown chief of staff, and Lanstron, made vice, discuss the trouble, and the Brown defenses. Parlow reveals his plans to Lanstron.

CHAPTER VIII—Continued.

Now Dellarme disposed his men in fine back of the ridge of fresh earth that they had dug in the night, ready to rush to their places when he blew the whistle that hung from his neck, but he did not allow them a glimpse over the crest.

"I know that you are curious, but powerful glasses are watching for you to show yourselves; and if a battery turned loose on us you'd understand," he explained.

Thus the hours wore on, and the church clock struck nine and ten.

"Never a movement down there!" called the sergeant from the crest to Dellarme. "Maybe this is just their final bluff before they come to terms about Bodlapoo"—that stretch of African jungle that seemed very far away to them all.

"Let us hope so!" said Dellarme seriously.

Choosing to go to town by the castle road rather than down the terrace to the main pass road, Marta, starting for the regular Sunday service of her school, as she emerged from the grounds, saw Feller, garden-shears in hand, a figure of stone watching the approach of some field-batteries. The question of allowing him to undertake his part as a spy had drifted into the background of her mind under the distressing and ever-present pressure of the crisis. He was to remain until there was war. She was almost past him before he realized her presence, which he acknowledged by a startled movement and a step forward as he took off his hat. She paused. His eyes were glowing like coals under a blower as he looked at her and again at the batteries, seeming to include her with the guns in the spell of his fervid abstraction.

"Frontier closed last night to prevent intelligence about our preparations leaking out—Lanny's plan all alive—the guns coming," he said, his shoulders stiffening, his chin drawing in, his features resolute and beaming with the ardor of youth in action—"troops moving here and there to their places—engineers preparing the defenses—automatics at critical points with the infantry—field-wires laid—field-telephones set up—the wireless spitting—the caissons full—planes and dirigibles ready—search-lights in position—"

There the torrent of his broken sentences was checked. A shadow passed in front of him. He came out of his trance of imagines of activities, so vividly clear to his military mind, to realize that Marta was abruptly leaving.

"Miss Galland!" he called urgently. "Firing may commence at any minute. You must not go into town!"

"But I must!" she declared, speaking over her shoulder while she passed. It was clear that no warning would prevail against her determined mood.

"Then I shall go with you!" he said, starting toward her with a light step.

"It is not necessary, thank you!" she answered, more coldly than she had ever spoken to him. This had a magically quick effect on his attitude.

"I beg your pardon! I forgot!" he explained in his old man's voice, his head sinking, his shoulders drooping in the humility of a servant who recognizes that he has been properly rebuked for presumption. "Not a gunner any more—I'm a spy!" he thought, as he shuffled off without looking toward the batteries again, though the music of wheels and hoofs was now close by.

Marta had a glimpse of him as she turned away. "He is what he is because of the army; a victim of a cult, a habit," she was thinking. "Had he been in any other calling his fine qualities might have been of service to the world and he would have been happy."

A company of infantry resting among their stacked rifles changed the color of the square in the distance from the gray pavement to the brown

listened, spread and increased in volume.

"Go on—on to the end of the oath! It will take only a moment," said Marta resolutely. "It isn't much, but it's the best we can do!"

CHAPTER IX.

The Baptism of Fire.

All the landscape in front of Fracasse's company seemed to have been deserted; no moving figures were anywhere in sight; no sign of the enemy's infantry.

Faintly the town clock was heard striking the hour. From eight to nine and nine to ten Fracasse's men waited; waited until the machine was ready and Westering should throw in the clutch; waited until the troops were in place for the first move before he hurled his battalions forward. They did not know how the captain at their back received his orders; they only heard the note of the whistle, with a command familiar to a trained instinct on the edge of anticipation. It released a spring in their nerve-centers. They responded as the wheels respond when the throttle is opened. Jumping to their feet they broke into a run, bodies bent, heads down, like the peppered silhouette that faced Westering's desk. What they had done repeatedly in drills and maneuvers they were now doing in war, mechanically as marionettes.

"Come on! The bullet is not made that can get me! Come on!" cried the giant Eugene Aronson.

Nearly all felt the exhilaration of movement in company. Then came the sound that generations had drilled for without hearing; the sound that summons the imagination of man in the thought of how he will feel and act when he hears it; the sound that is everywhere like the song snatches of bees driven whizzing through the air.

"That's it! We're under fire! We're under fire!" flashed a crooked lightning recognition of the sound through every brain.

There was no sign of the enemy; no telling where the bullets came from.

Whish-whish! Th-pp-whing! The refrain gripped Peterkin's imagination with an unseen hand. He seemed to be suffocating. He wanted to throw himself down and hold his hands in front of his head. While Pilzer and Aronson were not thinking, only running, Peterkin was thinking with the rapidity of a man falling from a high building. He was certain only that he was bound to strike ground.

"An inch is as good as a mile!" He recollected the captain's teaching. "Only one of a thousand bullets fired in war ever kills a man"—but he was certain that he had heard a million already. He looked around to find that he was still keeping up with Eugene and felt the thrill of the bravery of fellowship at sight of the giant's flushed, confident face reveling in the spirit of a charge. And then, just



Pilzer Was Shooting to Kill.

then, Eugene convulsively threw up his arms, dropped his rifle, and whirled on his heel. As he went down his hand clutched at his left breast and came away red and dripping. After one wild backward glance, Peterkin plunged ahead.

"Eugene!" Hugo Mallin had stopped and bent over Eugene in the supreme instinct of that terrible second, supporting his comrade's head.

"The bullet is not made—" Eugene whispered, the ruling passion strong to the last. A flicker of the eyelids, a gurgle in the throat, and he was dead.

"Here, you are not going to get out this way!" Fracasse shouted, in the irritation of haste, slapping Hugo with his sword. "Go on! That's hospital-corp work."

Hugo had a glimpse of the captain's rigid features and a last one of Eugene's, white and still and yet as if he were about to speak his favorite boast; then he hurried on, his side-glance showing other prostrate forms. One form a few yards away half rose to call "Hospital!" and fell back, struck mortally by a second bullet.

"That's what you get if you forget instructions," said Fracasse with no sense of brutality, only professional exasperation. Keep down, you wound-

ed men!" he shouted at the top of his voice.

The colonel of the 128th had not looked for immediate resistance. He had told Fracasse's men to occupy the knoll expeditiously. But by the common impulse of military training, no less than in answer to the whistle's call, in face of the withering fire they dropped to earth at the base of a knoll, where Hugo threw himself down at full length in his place in line next to Peterkin.

"Fire pointblank at the crest in front of you! I saw a couple of men standing up there!" called Fracasse. "Fire fast! That's the way to keep down their fire—pointblank, I tell you! You're firing into the sky! I want to see more dust kicked up. Fire fast! We'll have them out of there soon! They're only an outpost."

Hugo was firing vaguely, like a man in a dream. Pilzer was shooting to kill. His eye had the steely gleam of his rifle sight and the liver patch on his cheek was a deeper hue as he sought to avenge Eugene's death. Drowned by the racket of their own fire, not even Peterkin was hearing the whish-whish of the bullets from Dellarme's company now. He did not know that the blacksmith's son, who was the fourth man from him, lay with his chin on his rifle stock and a tiny trickle of blood from a hole in his forehead running down the bridge of his nose.

Young Dellarme, new to his captain's rank, watching the plain through his glasses, saw the movement of mounted officers to the rear of the 128th as a reason for summoning his men.

"Creep up! Don't show yourselves! Creep up—carefully—carefully!" he kept repeating as they crawled forward on their stomachs. "And no one is to fire until the command comes."

Hugging the cover of the ridge of fresh earth which they had thrown up the previous night, they watched the white posts. Stransky, who had been ruminatively silent all the morning, was in his place, but he was not looking at the enemy. Cautiously, to avoid a reprimand, he raised his head to enable him to glance along the line. All the faces seemed drawn and clayish.

"They don't want to fight! They're just here because they're ordered here and haven't the character to defy authority," he thought. "The heaven is working! My time is coming!"

For Dellarme the minute had come when all his training was to be put to a test. The figures on the other side of the white posts were rising. He was to prove by the way he directed a company of infantry in action whether or not he was worthy of his captain's rank. He smiled cheerily. In order that he might watch how each man used his rifle, he drew back of the line, his slim body erect as he rested on one knee, his head level with the other heads while he fingered his whistle. The instant that Eugene Aronson sprang over the white post a blast from the whistle began the war.

It was a signal, too, for Stransky to play the part he had planned; to make the speech of his life. His six feet of stature shot to its feet with a Jack-in-the-box abruptness, under the impulse of a mighty and reckless passion.

"Men, stop firing!" he howled thunderously. "Stop firing on your brothers! Like you, they are only the pawns of the ruling class, who keep us all pawns in order that they may have champagne and caviare. Comrades, I'll lead you! Comrades, we'll take a white flag and go down to meet our comrades and we'll find that they think as we do! I'll lead you!"

The appeal was drowned in the cracking of the rifles working as regularly as punching-machines in a factory. Every soldier was seeing only his sight and the running figures under it. Mechanically and automatically, training had been projected into action, anticipation into realization. A spectator might as well have called to a man in a hundred-yard dash to stop running, to an oarsman in a race to jump out of his shell.

The company sergeant sprang for Stransky with an oath. But Stransky was in no mood to submit. He felled the sergeant with a blow and, recklessly defiant, stared at Dellarme, while the men, steadily firing, were still oblivious of the scene. The sergeant, stunned, rose to his knees and reached for his revolver. Dellarme, bent over to keep his head below the crest, had already drawn his as he hastened toward them.

"Will you get down? Will you take your place with your rifle?" demanded Dellarme.

Stransky laughed thunderously in scorn. He was handsome, titanic, and barbaric, with his huge shoulders stretching his blouse, which fell loosely around his narrow hips, while the fist that had felled the sergeant was still clenched.

"No!" said Stransky. "You won't kill much if you kill me and you'd kill less if you shot yourself! God Almighty! Do you think I'm afraid? Me—afraid!"

His eyes in a bloodshot glare, as uncompromising as those of a bull in an arena watching the next move of the red cape of the matador, regarded Dellarme, who hesitated in admiration of the picture of human force before him. But the old sergeant, smarting under the insult of the blow, his sandstone features mottled with red patches, had no compunctions of this order. He was ready to act as executioner.

"If you don't want to shoot, I can! An example—the law! re's no other way of dealing with him! Give the word!" he said to Dellarme.

Stransky laughed, now in strident cynicism. Dellarme still hesitated, recollecting Lanstron's remark. He pictured Stransky in a last stand in a redoubt, and every soldier was as precious to him as a piece of gold to a miser.

"One ought to be enough to kill me if you're going to do it to slow music," said Stransky. "You might as well kill me as the poor fools that your poor fools are trying to—"

Another breath finished the speech; a breath released from a ball that seemed to have come straight from hell. The fire control officer of a regiment of Gray artillery on the plain, scanning the landscape for the origin of the rifle-fire which was leaving many fallen in the wake of the charge of the Gray infantry, had seen a figure on the knoll. "How kind! Thank you!" his thought spoke faster than words. No need of range-finding! The range to every possible battery or infantry position around La Tir was already marked on his map. He passed the word to his guns.

The burst of their first shrapnel-shell blinded all three actors in the scene on the crest of the knoll with its ear-splitting crack and the force of its concussion threw Stransky down beside the sergeant. Dellarme, as his vision cleared, had just time to see Stransky jerk his hand up to his temple, where there was a red spot, before another shell burst, a little to the rear. This was harmless, as a shrapnel's shower of fragments and bullets carry forward from the point of explosion. But the next burst in front of the line. The doctor's period of idleness was over. One man's rifle shot up as his spine was broken by a jagged piece of shrapnel jacket. Now there were too many shells to watch them individually.

"It's all right—all right, men!" Dellarme called again, assuming his cheery smile. "It takes a lot of shrapnel to kill anybody. Our batteries will soon answer!"

His voice was unheard, yet its spirit was felt. The men knew through their training that there was no use of dodging and that their best protection was an accurate fire of their own.

Stransky had half risen, a new kind of savagery dawning on his features as he regained his wits. With inverted eyes he regarded the red ends of his fingers, held in line with the bridge of his nose. He felt of the wound again, now that he was less dizzy. It was only a scratch and he had been knocked down like a beef in an abattoir by an unseen enemy, on whom he could not lay hands! Deafeningly, the shrapnel jackets continued to crack with "ukung-s-sh-ukung-s-sh" as the swift breath of the shrapnel missiles spread. The guns of one battery of that Gray regiment of artillery, each firing six 14-pound shells a minute methodically, every shell loaded with nearly two hundred projectiles, were giving their undivided attention to the knoll.

How long could his company endure this? Dellarme might well ask. He knew that he would not be expected to withdraw yet. With a sense of relief he saw Fracasse's men drop for cover at the base of the knoll and then, expectation fulfilled, he realized that rifle-fire now reinforced the enemy's shell fire. His duty was to remain while he could hold his men, and a feeling toward them such as he had never felt before, which was love, sprang full-fledged into his heart as he saw how steadily they kept up their fusillade.

Stransky, eager in response to a new passion, sprang forward into place and picked up his rifle.

"If you will not have it my way, take it yours!" said the best shot in the company, as he began firing with resolute coolness.

"They have a lot of men down," said Dellarme, his glasses showing the many prostrate figures on the wheat stubble. "Steady! steady! We have plenty of batteries back in the hills. One will be in action soon."

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

TELLS OF TENSE MOMENTS

Man of Prominence Had Two, and Their Causes Were of Widely Different Beginnings.

I heard a prominent Cambridge man tell of the two most tense moments of his life yesterday, says a correspondent of the Boston Journal. But the tension in each case was different.

"I doubt if I ever shall forget either occasion," he said, reflectively. "They were big moments."

"The first was when I was in college. I was captain of the baseball team that year. We came to the end of the ninth. We needed one run to tie the score and another to win the game. Two men down and two on the sacks when I came to bat. And for once in my career I did it. I lined out a three-bagger, right over the railroad track. When I felt it go—well, that was one occasion."

"And the other," he chuckled, but a slow flush crept over his cheeks. "It was thirty years ago, soon after I left college. I went over to see a girl I thought was pretty nice and to meet her folks for the first time. I went on a Sunday. All the men were away. And they had duck for dinner." He stopped. "Ever carve a duck?" he asked meaningly. "No, neither had I before. Nor have I since." His blush deepened. "I never even went to see that girl again," he added plaintively.

One Viewpoint.

Hemmandhaw—Kangaroo farming is a very important industry in Australia. Mrs. Hemmandhaw—Fancy hoing a kangaroo.—Youngstown Telegram.

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NOT THE TIME FOR A SMOKE

Old Lady, Filled Up With "Cartridges," Was in Natural Fear of an Explosion.

A robust old woman in the mountains of north Georgia was ill for the first time in her life and a doctor was sent for. Partly by persuasion and partly by force, the physician induced his patient to swallow some big quinine capsules—a simple enough operation, which, however, scared the old woman almost to death. She was soon able to sit up and her daughter thought she would give the convalescent a treat. She took her mother's cornoc pipe from the "shelf" or mantel, filled it with tobacco, and picking up a live coal between two sticks, started with it toward the bed. "Ma," she said, brightly, "jes' look what I got fer ye."

"Git away from me, Sary," she screamed in terror. "Take away dat fire! Take hit away! Don't yer know I's done plum filled up w' cartridges?"—Chicago Ledger.

STOP EATING MEAT IF KIDNEYS OR BACK HURT

Take a Glass of Salts to Clean Kidneys if Bladder Bothers You—Meat Forms Uric Acid.

Eating meat regularly eventually produces kidney trouble in some form or other, says a well-known authority, because the uric acid in meat excites the kidneys, they become overworked; get sluggish; clog up and cause all sorts of distress, particularly backache and misery in the kidney region; rheumatic twinges, severe headaches, acid stomach, constipation, torpid liver, sleeplessness, bladder and urinary irritation.

The moment your back hurts or kidneys aren't acting right, or if bladder bothers you, get about four ounces of Jad Salts from any good pharmacy; take a tablespoonful in a glass of water before breakfast for a few days and your kidneys will then act fine. This famous salt is made from the acid of grapes and lemon juice, combined with lithia, and has been used for generations to push clogged kidneys and stimulate them to normal activity; also to neutralize the acids in the urine so it no longer irritates, thus ending bladder disorders.

Jad Salts cannot injure anyone; makes a delightful effervescent lithia water drink which millions of men and women take now and then to keep the kidneys and urinary organs clean, thus avoiding serious kidney disease.—Adv

No Room for a Third.

Ex-President Taft was on one occasion in consultation with Senator Penrose of Pennsylvania. Now, as everybody knows, Mr. Taft is gigantic and the senator is taller and weighs more than any other member of the senate.

While the two were in earnest conversation an aggressive politician endeavored to enter the room, but an alert secretary politely interfered.

"What are they doing in there?" asked the politician, inquisitively.

This pertinent question nettled the secretary and he answered tersely: "Holding a mass meeting, I presume."

Should Tarry.

"The Climblis tell me they are going to move into a better neighborhood."

"That's queer."

"Why so?"

"They haven't made good yet in the neighborhood they're leaving."

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