

# The Last Shot

FREDERICK PALMER

(Copyright, 1914, by Charles Scribner's Sons)

### SYNOPSIS.

At their home on the frontier between the Browns and Grays, Marta Galland and her mother, entertaining Colonel Lanstron of the Grays, see Captain Lanstron of the Browns injured by a fall in his scarp. Two years later, Westering, lieutenant of the Grays, returns from the South La Tir and meditates on war. He calls on Marta, who is visiting in the Gray capital. She tells him of her teaching children the folk of war and martial patriotism, and begs him to prevent war while he is chief of staff. On the mesa with the 6th of the Browns Private Stransky, anarchist, is placed under arrest. Colonel Lanstron 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 she uses to cross the border line and international affair to foment warlike patriotism in army and people and strike before declaring war. Lanstron, chief of staff, and Lanstron, made vice, discuss the trouble and the Brown defense. Partow reveals his plans to Lanstron. The Gray army crosses the border line and attacks. The Browns check them. Artillery, infantry, aeroplanes and dirigibles engage. Stransky, rising to make the anarchist speech of his life, draws a Gray artillery fire. Nicked by a shrapnel splinter, he goes berserk and fights—all eyes. Marta has her first glimpse of war in its stern, cold, scientific, merciless brutality. The Browns fall back to the Gelbad house. Stransky foregoes. Marta sees a night attack. The Grays attack in force.

and the more readily obeyed because Dellarme's foresight had impressed their sense upon the men in his quiet way. The sand-bags by the tree were blown up by the Grays. Then, before the dust had hardly settled, came a half score of hand-grenades thrown by the first men of a Gray wedge, scrambling as they were pushed through the breach by the pressure of the mass behind. In that final struggle of one set of men to gain and another to hold a position, guns or automatics or long-range bullets played no part. It was the grapple of cold steel with cold steel and muscle with muscle, in the following, twisting mob of wrestlers, with no sound from throats but straining breaths; with no quarter, no distinction of person, and bloodshot eyes and faces hot with the effort of brute strength striving, in primitive desperation, to kill in order not to be killed. The cloud of rocking, writhing arms and shoulders was neither going forward nor backward. Its movement was that of a vortex, while the gray stream kept on pouring through the breach as if it were only the first flood from some gray lake on the other side of the breastwork.

Marta had come to the edge of the veranda, at once drawn and repelled, feeling the fearful suspense of the combat, the savage horror of it, and herself uttering sounds like the straining breaths of the men. What a place for her to be! But she did not think of that. She was there. The dreadful alchemy of war had made her a stranger to herself. She was mad; they were mad; all the world was mad!

One minute—two, perhaps—not three—and the thing was over. She saw the Grays being crushed back and realized that the Browns had won, while the last details of the lessening tumult fixed her attention with their gladiatorial simplicity. Here, indeed, it was a case of man to man with the weapons nature gave him.

"I thought so!" cried Feller. "Attacks on frontal positions by daylight are going out of fashion!"

It was he who mercifully arrested the shower of hand-grenades that followed the exit of the enemy. Two of the guns of the castle batteries, having changed their position, were making havoc enough at pointblank range, with a choice of targets between the Grays huddled on the other side of the breastwork and those in retreat. One of the Grays, his cheek bearing the mark of a boot heel, raised himself, and, in defiance and the satisfac-



"You, There, in Your Straw Hat and Blue Blouse."

tion of the thought to his bruises and humiliation, pointing his finger at Feller, Marta heard him say: "You there, in your straw hat and blue blouse, they've seen you—a man fighting and not in uniform! If they catch you it will be a drumhead and a firing squad at dawn!" "That's so!" replied Feller gravely. "But they'll have to make a better job of it than you fellows did if they're going to—"

"I was very fond of him! He was in school when I was teaching there. But a good death—a soldier's death!" he said. "I'll write to his mother myself." Then the voice of the machine spoke. "Who is in command?" "I am, sir!" said the callow lieutenant, coming up. But the men of the company spoke.

"Bert Stransky!" they roared. "It was not according to military etiquette, but military etiquette meant nothing to them now. They were above it in veteran superiority. 'Where's Stransky?' demanded the staff-officer.

"You're looking at him!" replied Stransky with a benign grin. Seeing that Stransky was only a private, the officer frowned at the anomaly when a lieutenant was present, then smiled in a way that accorded the company parliamentary rights, which he thought that they had fully earned.

"Yes, and he gets one of those iron crosses!" put in Tom Fragin. "Yes—the first cross for Bert of the Reds!"

"And we'll let him make a dozen anarchist speeches a day!" "Yes, yes!" roared the company. "The eyes have it!" the officer announced cheerfully. He lifted his cap to Marta. With tender regard and grave reverence for that company, he took extreme care with his next remark lest a set of men of such dynamic spirit might repulse him as an invader. "The lieutenant is in command for the present, according to regulations," he proceeded. "You will retire immediately to positions 48 and 49 A-J by the castle road. You have done your part. Tonight you sleep and tomorrow you rest."

Sleep! Rest! Where had they heard those words before? Oh, yes, in a distant day before they went to war! Sleep and rest! Better far than an iron cross for every man in the company! They could go now with something warmer in their hearts than consciousness of duty well done; but this time they need not go until their dead as well as their wounded were removed.

Feller started to pass around the corner of the house; he was confronted by Marta, who had come to the end of the veranda. There, within hearing of the soldiers, the dialogue that followed was low-toned, and it was swift and palpitant with repressed emotion.

"Mr. Feller, I saw you at the automatic. I heard that the wounded private of the Grays said to you and realized how true it was."

"He is a prisoner. He cannot tell." "I feel that I have no right to let you go to your death by a firing squad," she interrupted hurriedly, "and I shall not! For I decide now not to allow the telephone to remain!"

"I—he looked around at the automatic ravenously and fearfully—" "It is all simply arranged. There is time for me to use the telephone before the Grays arrive. I shall tell Lanny why you took charge of the gun."

"I've changed my mind! Exit gardener! Enter gunner! I'm going with you!" he cried in a jubilant voice that arrested the attention of every one on the grounds.

### CHAPTER XIII.

From Brown to Gray. "You, Marta—be still there!" Lanstron exclaimed in alarm when he heard her voice over the tunnel telephone. "But safe!" he added in relief. "Thank God for that! It's a mighty load off my mind. And your mother?"

"Safe, too." "Well, you're through the worst of it. There won't be any more fighting around the house, and certainly Westering will be courteous. But where is Gustave?"

"Gone!" "Gone!" he repeated dismally. "Wait until you hear how he went," Marta said. With all the vividness of her impressions, a partisan for the moment of him and Dellarme, she sketched Feller's part with the automatic.

As he listened, Lanstron's spirit was twenty again. "I can see him," he said. "It was a full breath of fresh air to the lungs of a suffocating man. I—"

Marta was off in interruption in the full tide of an appeal. "You must—I promised—you must let him have the uniform again!" she begged. "You must let him keep his automatic. To take it away would be like separating mother and child; like separating Minna from Clarissa Elison."

"Better than an automatic—a battery of guns!" replied Lanstron. "This is where I will use any influence I have with Partow for all it is worth. Yes, and he shall have the iron cross. It is for such deeds as his that the iron cross was meant."

"Thank you," she said. "It's worth something to make a man as happy as you will make him. Yes, you are real flesh and blood to do this, Lanny."

"Forgotten already, like the many other thousand chances that have failed," he replied cheerfully. "One of the virtues of Partow's steel automatics is that, being tearless as well as painless, they never cry over split milk. And now," he went on soberly, "we must be saying good-by."

"Good-by, Lanny! Why, what do you mean?" She was startled. "Till the war is over," he said, "and longer than that, perhaps, if La Tir remains in Gray territory."

"You speak as if you thought you were going to lose!" "Not while many of our soldiers are alive, if they continue to show the spirit that they have shown so far; not unless two men can crush one man in the automatic-gun-recoil age. But La Tir is in a tangent and already in the Grays' possession, while we act on the defensive. So I should hardly be flying over your garden again."

"But there's the telephone, Lanny, and here we are talking over it this very minute!" she expostulated. "You must remove it," he said. "If the Grays should discover it they might form a suspicion that would put you in an unpleasant position."

The telephone had become almost a familiar institution in her thoughts. Its secret had something of the fascination for her of magic. "Nonsense!" she exclaimed. "I am going to be very lonely. I want to learn how Feller is doing—I want to chat with you. So I decide not to let it be taken out. And, you see, I have the tactical situation, as you soldiers call it, all in my favor. The work of removal must be done at my end of the line. You're quite helpless to enforce your wishes. And, Lanny, if I ring the bell you'll answer, won't you?"

"I couldn't help it!" he replied. "Until then! You've been fine about everything today!" "Until then!"

When Marta left the tower she knew only that she was weary with the mind-weariness, the body-weariness, the nerve-weariness of a spectator who has shared the emotion of every actor in a drama of death and finds the excitement that has kept her tense no longer a sustaining force.

As she went along the path, steps uncertain from sheer fatigue, her sensibilities lived again at the sight of a picture. War, personal war, in the form of the giant Stransky, was knocking at the kitchen door. His two-day-old beard was matted with dust and there were dried red spatters on his cheek. War's tunic flames seemed to have tanned him; war seemed to be breathing from his deep chest; his big nose was war's promontory. But the unexpressed space of his forehead seemed singularly white when he took off his cap as Minna came in answer to his knock. Her yielding lips were parted, her eyes were bright with inquiry and suspicion, her chin was firmly set.

"I came to see if you would let me kiss your hand again," said Stransky, squinting through his brows wistfully. "I see your nose has been broken once. You don't want it broken a second time. I'm stronger than you think!" Minna retorted, and held out her hand carelessly as if it pleased her to humor him.

He was rather graceful, despite his size, as he touched his lips to her fingers. Just as he raised his head a burst of cheering rose from the yard. "So you've found that we have gone, you brilliant intellects!" he shouted, and glared at the wall of the house in the direction of the cheers.

"Quick! You have no time to lose!" Minna warned him. "Quick! quick!" cried Marta. Stransky paid no attention to the urgings. He had something more to say to Minna.

"I'm going to keep thinking of you and seeing your face—the face of a good woman—while I fight. And when the war is over, may I come to call?" he asked.

His feet were so resolutely planted on the flags that apparently the only way to move them was to consent. "Yes, yes!" said Minna. "Now, hurry!"

"Say, but you make me happy! Watch me poke it into the Grays for you!" he cried and bolted.

Within the kitchen Mrs. Galland was already slumbering soundly in her chair. Overhead Marta heard the exclamations of male voices and the tread of what was literally the heel of the conqueror—guests that had come without asking! Intruders that had entered without any process of law! Would they overrun the house, her mother's room, her own room?

Indignation brought fresh strength as she started up the stairs. The head of the flight gave on to a dark part of the hall. There she paused, held by the scene that a score or more Gray soldiers, who had riotously crowded into the dining-room, were enacting. They were members of Fracassee's company of the Grays whom Marta had seen from her window the night before rushing across the road into the garden.

When, finally, they burst into the redoubt after it was found that the Browns had gone, all, even the judge's son, were the war demon's own. The veneer had been warped and twisted and burned off down to the raw animal flesh. Their brains had the feverish of callousness forming. Not a sign of brown there in the yard; not a sign of any tribute after all they had endured! They had not been able to lay hands on the murderous throwers of hand-grenades. Far away now was barrack-room gentility; in oblivion were the ethics of an inherited civilization taught by mothers, teachers and church.

But here was a human touch at the Browns' a big fine house! They would see what they had won—this was the privilege of baffled victory. What they had won was theirs! To the victor the spoils! Fall-meet they crowded into the dining-room, Hugo with the rest, feeling himself a straw on the crest of a wave, and Pilszer, most bitter, most ugly of all, his short, strong teeth and gums showing and his liver patch red, lumpy, and troubling. In crossing the threshold of privacy they committed the act that leaves the deepest wound of war's inheritance, to go on from generation to generation in the history of families.

"A swell dining-room! I like the chandeliers!" roared Pilszer. With his bayonet he smashed the only globe left intact by the shell fire. There was a laugh as a shower of glass fell on the floor. Even the judge's son, the son of the tribune of

law, joined in. Pilszer then ripped up the leather seat of a chair. This introductory havoc whetted his appetite for other worlds of conquest, as the self-chosen leader of the increasing crowd that poured through the doorway.

"Maybe there's food!" he shouted. "Maybe there's wine!" "Food and wine!"

"Yes, wine! We're thirsty!" "And maybe women! I'd like to kiss a pretty maid servant!" Pilszer added, starting toward the hall.

"Stop!" cried Hugo, forcing his way in front of Pilszer. He was like no one of the Hugos of the many parts that his comrades had seen him play. His blue eyes had become an inflexible gray. He was standing half on tiptoe, his quivering muscles in tune with the quivering pitch of his voice:

"We have no right in here! This is a private house!" "Little of the way, you white-livered little rat!" cried Pilszer, "or I'll prick the tummy of mamma's darling!"

What happened then was so sudden and unexpected that all were vague about details. They saw Hugo in a cataplectic lunge, mesmeric in its swiftness, and they saw Pilszer go down, his leg twisted under him and his head banging the floor. Hugo stood, half ashamed, half frightened, yet ready for another encounter.

Fracassee, entering at this moment, was too intent on his mission to consider the rights of a personal difference between two of his company.

"There's work to do! Out of here, quick! We are losing valuable time!" he announced, rounding his men toward the door with commanding gestures. "We are going in pursuit!"

Marta, who had observed the latter part of the scene from the shadows of the hall, knew that she should never forget Hugo's face as he turned on Pilszer, while his voice of protest struck a singing chord in her jangling nerves. It was the voice of civilization, of one who could think out of the orbit of a whirlpool of passionate barbarism. She could see that he was about to spring and her prayer went with his leap. She gloried in the impact that felled the great brute with the liver patch on his cheek, which was like a birthmark of war.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

Seeing vs. Photographing. The relative sensitiveness of the photographic plate and the human eye has been the subject of recent interesting experiments by Professor P. G. Nutting, of Rochester. An extra rapid plate was used for the tests. A source of light that could be "dimmed" at will and to any degree was placed twenty feet away from the plate and from the eye. The professor found that a light so dim that it required three hours to produce a just perceptible image on the extremely sensitive plate was easily visible to the human eye after resting the latter for three minutes in total darkness. "In other words," adds Professor Nutting, "an image on the retina just visible after partial adaptation to darkness would just produce an image on a photographic plate after an exposure of one hour. The retina fully adapted to darkness is still a thousand times more sensitive than this."

## TALK ON WESTERN CANADA.

### You Don't Have to Lie About Canada—The Simple Truth is Enough.

The natural resources of the country are so vast that they cannot be told in mere figures. Man can only tell of what tiny portions have done. He can only say, "I am more prosperous than I ever expected to be." And yet if a farmer expects to succeed on land that he has been forced to pay \$50 to \$100 an acre for he ought to feel assured of attaining prosperity when he finds the richest prairie soil at his disposal absolutely free. If he has a little capital, let him invest it, all in live stock and farm implements—he will find himself ten years ahead of the game. Some day such a chance will not be found anywhere on the face of the globe. But now the same opportunities await you as awaited the pioneer and not one hundredth part of the difficulties he encountered and overcome. Success in Canada is made up of two things, natural resources and human labor. Canada has the one and you the other. A postal card stands between you and the Canadian government agent. If you don't hold these two forces and enjoy the fruits of the result it is your own fault.

Debt and Canada Will Not Stand Hitched.

You want a cozy home, a free life, and sufficient income. You want education for your children, and some pleasure for your wife. You want independence. Your burden has been heavy, and your farm hasn't paid. You work hard and are discouraged.

You require a change. There is a goal within sight, where your children will have advantages. You can get a home in Western Canada, freedom, where your ambitions can be fulfilled. If the Prairie Provinces of Canada are full of Successful Farmers why should you prove the exception? Haven't you got brains, experience, courage? Then prove what these are capable of when put on trial. It is encouraging to know that there is one country in the world where poverty is no barrier to wealth; own your own car; own yourself; be somebody.

For facts write to any Canadian government agent. Advertisement.

Not a Can-nibal. Little Dorothy, whose father owned a cannery, went to Sunday school for the first time, but soon came running home screaming at the top of her voice. "Why, Dorothy," said the father, "what is the matter?" "O, daddy!" she cried. "Don't let them do it, will you?" "Do what, my child?" "Don't let them can me!" she sobbed. "Can you? What do you mean?" "Why, the teacher said for everybody to sing 'Can a little child like me,' and then I ran away 'fore they did it!"

### SALTS IF BACKACHY OR KIDNEYS TROUBLE YOU

Eat Less Meat If Your Kidneys Aren't Acting Right or If Back Hurts or Bladder Bothers You.

When you wake up with backache and dull misery in the kidney region it generally means you have been eating too much meat, says a well-known authority. Meat forms uric acid which overworks the kidneys in their effort to filter it from the blood and they become sort of paralyzed and loquacious. When your kidneys get sluggish and clog you must relieve them like you relieve your bowels; removing all the body's urinous waste, else you have backache, sick headache, dizzy spells; your stomach sours, tongue is coated, and when the weather is bad you have rheumatic twinges. The urine is cloudy, full of sediment, channels often get sore, water scalds and you are obliged to seek relief two or three times during the night.

Either consult a good, reliable physician at once or get from your pharmacist about four ounces of Jad Salts; 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 clean and stimulate sluggish kidneys, also to neutralize acids in the urine so it no longer irritates, thus ending bladder weakness. Jad Salts is a life saver for regular meat eaters. It is inexpensive, cannot injure and makes a delightful, effervescent lithia-water drink.—Adv.

Next Gentleman, Please! Said He—Mrs. Threemtimes is a widow, is she not? Said She—Yes, temporarily.

From Man's Standpoint. "What is chaos, pa?" "It is about the third stage in that disease known as housecleaning."

YOUR OWN PROGRESS WILL TELL YOU. If you are not getting on, you are not getting on. Write for Book of the Month. Write for Book of the Month. Write for Book of the Month.

A man who works at the gas plant is not necessarily light-headed. Goats generally means taking two and two and making three.