

The Last Shot

FREDERICK PALMER

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SYNOPSIS.

At their home on the frontier between the Browns and Grays Marta Galland and 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. He calls on Marta, who is visiting in the Gray capital. She 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. On the march with the 53d 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 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 sentiment in army and people and strike before declaring war. Parlow, Brown chief of staff, and Lanstron, made vice, discuss the trouble, and the Browns defenses. Parlow 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 the Gray artillery fire. Stransky is killed by a splinter. He goes berserk and fights—"all a man." Marta has her first glimpse of war in its modern, cold, scientific, murderous brutality. The Browns fall back to the Galland house. Stransky forges.

CHAPTER XI—Continued.

She was at the door of her mother's room, which was like an antique shop. Old plates lay on top of old tables, with vases on the floor under the tables. Surrounded by her treasures, Mrs. Galland awaited the attack; not as a soldier awaits it, but as that venerable Roman senator of the story faced the barbarous Gauls—neither disputing the power of their spears nor yielding the self-respect of his own mind and soul. She had lain down in her wrapper for the night, and the light from a single candle—she still favored candles—revealed her features calm and philosophical among the pillows. Yet the magic of war, reaching deep into hidden emotions, had her also under its spell. Her voice was at once more tender and vital.

"Marta, I see that you are all on wires!"
"Yes; jangling wires, every one, jangling every second out of tune," Marta acquiesced.
"Marta, my father"—her father had been a premier of the Browns—"always said that you may enjoy the luxury of fussing over little things, for they don't count much one way or another; but about big things you must never fuss or you will not be worthy of big things. Marta, you cannot stop a railroad train with your hands. This is not the first war on earth and we are not the first women who ever thought that war was wrong. Each of us has his work to do and you will have yours. It does no good to tire yourself out and fly to pieces, even if you do know so much and have been around the world."

She smiled as a woman of sixty, who has a secret heart-break that she had never given her husband a son, may smile at a daughter who is both son and daughter to her, and her plump hand, all curves like her plump face and her plump body, spread open in appeal.

Marta, who, in the breeding of her generation, felt sentiment as more or less of a lure from logic, dropped beside the bed in a sudden burst of sentiment and gathered the plump hand in hers and kissed it.

"Mother, you are wonderful!" she said. "Mother, you are great!"
After a time, her ear becoming accustomed to the hring as a city dweller's to the distant roar of city traffic, Mrs. Galland slept. But Marta could not follow her advice. If, transiently at least, she had found something of the peace of the confessional, the vigor of youth was in her arteries; and youth cannot help remaining awake under some conditions. She slipped across the hall into her own room and seated herself by the window. The symbol of what the ear had heard the eye saw—war, working in tones of the landscape by day with smokeless powder; war, revealed by its tongues of flame at night. Ugly bursts of fire from the higher hills spread to the heavens like an aurora borealis and broke their messengers in sheets of flame over the lower hills—the batteries of the Browns sprinkling death about the heads of the gunners of the Grays embracing their batteries. Staccato flashes from a single point counted so many bullets from an automatic, which directed by the beams of the search-lights, found their targets in sections of advancing infantry. Hill crests, set off with flashes running back and forth, demarcated infantry lines of the Browns assisting the automatics.

There were lulls between the crashes of the small arms and the heavy, throaty speech of the guns; lulls that seemed to say that both sides had paused for a breathing spell; lulls that allowed the battle in the distance to be heard in its pervasive undertone. In one of them, when even the undertone had ceased for a few seconds, Marta caught faintly the groans of a wounded man—one of the

crew of a Gray dirigible burned by an explosion and brought in his agony softly to earth by a billowing piece of envelope which acted as a parachute.

Fighting proceeded in La Tir in stages of ferocity and blank silence. The upper part of the town, which the Browns still held, was in darkness; the lower part, where the Grays were, was illuminated.

"Another one of Lanny's plans!" thought Marta. "He would have them work in the light, while we fire out of obscurity!"

Soon all the town was in darkness, for the Grays had cut the wire in the main conduit shortly after she had heard the groans of the wounded man. There the automatics broke out in a mad storm, voicing their feelings at getting a company in close order in a street for the space of a minute, before those who escaped could plaster themselves against doorways or find cover in alleys. Then silence from the automatics and a cheer from the Browns that rasped out its triumph like the rubbing together of steel files.

From the line of defense, that included the first terrace of the Galland grounds as the angle of a redoubt, not a shot, not a sound; silence on the part of officers and men as profound as Mrs. Galland's slumber, while one of the Browns' search-lights, like some great witch's slow-turning eye in a narrow radius, covered the lower terraces and the road.

Marta gave intermittent glances at the garden; the glances of a guardian. She happened to be looking in that direction when figures sprang across the road, crouching, running with the short, quick steps of no body movement accompanying that of the legs. The search-light caught them in mercurial silhouette and the automatic and the rifles from behind the sandbags on the first terrace let go. Some of the figures dropped and lay in the road and she knew that she had seen men hit for the first time. Others, she thought, got safely to the cover of the gutter on the garden side. Of those on the road, some were still and some she saw were moving slowly back on their stomachs to safety. Now the search-light laid its beam steadily on the road. Again silence. From the upper terrace came a great voice, like that of the guns, from a human throat:

"Why didn't we level those terraces? They'll creep up from one to the other!" It was Stransky.
In answer was another voice—Dellarme's.
"Perhaps there wasn't time to do everything. If they get as far as the first terrace—well, in case of a crisis, we have hand grenades. But, God knows, I hope we shall not have to use them."

After an interval, more figures made a rush across the road. They, too, in Stransky's words, paid a price for seeing the garden. But the flashes from the rifles and the automatic provided a target for a Gray battery. The blue spark that flies from an overhead trolley or a third rail, multiplied a hundredfold, broke in Marta's face. It was dazzling, blinding as a bolt of lightning a few feet distant, with the thunder crash at the same second, followed by the thrashing hum of bullets and fragments against the side of the house.

"I knew that this must come!" something within her said. If she had not been prepared for it by the events of the last twelve hours she would have jumped to her feet with an exclamation of natural shock and horror. As it was, she felt a convulsive, nervous thrill without rising from her seat. A pause. The next shell burst in line with the first, out by the linden-tree; a third above the veranda.

"We've got that fange, all right!" thought the Gray battery commander, who had judged the distance by the staff map. This was all he wanted to know for the present. He would let loose at the proper time to support the infantry attack, when there were enough dribbles across the road to make a charge. The dribbles kept on coming, and, one by one, the number of dead on the road was augmented.

Marta was diverted from this process of killing by piecemeal by a more theatrical spectacle. A brigade commander of the Grays had ticked an order over the wires and it had gone from battery to battery. Not only many field-guns, which are the terrors of the artillery, but some guns of siege caliber, the mastiffs, in a sudden outburst started a havoc of tumbling walls and cornices in the upper part of the town.

Then an explosion greater than any from the shells shot a hemisphere of light heavenward, revealing a shadowy body flying overhead, and an instant later the heavens were illuminated by a vast circle of flame as the dirigible that had dropped the dynamite received its death-blow. But already the Brown infantry was withdrawing from the town, destroying buildings that would give cover for the attack in the morning as they went. Two or three hours after midnight fell a silence which was to last until dawn.

The combatants rested on their arms, Browns saying to Grays, "We shall be ready for the morrow!" and Grays replying: "So shall we!"

Marta, at her window, her eyes following the movements of the display, now here, now there, found herself thinking of many things, as in the intermissions between the acts of a drama. She wondered if the groaning, wounded man were crying for water or if he were wishing that some one at home were near him. She thought of her talk with Lanstron and how feminine and feeble it must have sounded to a mind working in the inexorable processes of the clash of millions of men. She saw his left hand twitching in his pocket, his right hand gripping it to hold it still, on that afternoon when, for the first time, she had understood his injury in the aeroplane accident as the talisman of his feelings—his controlled feelings! Always his controlled feelings!

She saw Westerling, so conscious of his strength, directing his chessmen in a death struggle against Parlow. And he was coming to this house as his headquarters when the final test of the strength of the Titans was made.

She hoped that her mother was still sleeping; and she had seconds when she was startled by her own calmness. Again, the faces of the children in her school were as clear as in life. She breathed her gratitude that the procession in which they moved to the rear was hours ago out of the theater of danger. In the simplicity of big things, her duty was to teach them, a future generation, no less than Feller's duty was the pursuing shadow of his conscience. She should see war, alive, naked, bloody, and she would tell her children what she had seen as a warning.

Silence, except an occasional rifle shot—silence and the darkness before dawn which would, she knew, concentrate the lightnings around the house. She glanced into her mother's room and marveled as at a miracle to find her sleeping. Then she stole downstairs and opened the outer door of the dining-room. A step or two brought her to the edge of the veranda. There she paused and leaned against one of the stone pillars. Dellarme himself was in a half-reclining position, his back to a tree. He seemed to be nodding. Except for a few on watch over the sandbags, his men were stretched on the earth, moving restlessly at intervals, either in an effort to sleep or waking suddenly after a spell of harassed unconsciousness.

CHAPTER XII.

Hand to Hand.

With the first sign of dawn there was a movement of shadowy forms taking position in answer to low-spoken commands. The search-light yielded its vigil to the wide-spread beam out of the east, and the detail of the setting where Marta was to watch the play of one of man's passions, which he dares not permit the tender flesh of woman to share, grew



The Searchlight Caught Them in Mercurial Silhouette.

distinct. Bayonets were fixed on the rifles that lay along the parapet of sand-bags in front of the row of brown shoulders. Back of them in the yard was a section of infantry in reserve, also with bayonets fixed, ready to fill the place of any who fell out of line, a doctor and stretchers to care for the wounded, and a detachment of engineers to mend any breaches made in the breastwork by shell fire.

The gunner of the automatic sighted his barrel, slightly adjusted its elevation, and swung it back and forth to make sure that it worked smoothly, while his assistant saw that the fresh belts of cartridges which were to feed it were within easy reach.

In straw hat and blue blouse, shuffling with his old man's walk, Feller came along the path from the gate. He was in retreat from the enticing picture of the regiment of field-guns in front of the castle that was ready for action. As the infantry had never interested him, he would be safe from temptation in the yard.

"This is no place for you!" said one of the engineers.

"No, and don't waste any time, either, old man!" said another. "Back to your bulbs!"

Feller did not even hear them. For the moment he was actually deaf. "Fire!" said Dellarme's whistle. "Thur-r-r!" went the automatic in soulless, mechanical repetition, its tape spinning through the cylinder, while the rifles spoke with the human irregularity of steel-tipped fingers pounding at random on a drumhead. All along the line facing La Tir the volume of fire spread until it was like the concert of a mighty loom.

The Gray batteries having tried out their range by the flashes of the automatic the previous evening, were making the most of the occasion. "Uk-ung-ng!" the breaking jackets whipped out their grists. The reserves, the hospital-corps men and the engineers hugged the breastwork for cover. The leaves clipped from the trees by bullets were blown aside with the hurricane breaths of shrapnel bursts; bullets whistled so near Marta that she heard their shrillness above every other sound. She was amazed that the houses still remained standing—that anyone was alive. But she had a glimpse of Dellarme maintaining his set smile and another of Feller, who had crept up behind the automatic, making impatient "come-on! come-on! what-is-the-matter-with-you?" gestures in the direction of the batteries in front of the castle.

"Thur-eeeh—thur-eeeh!" As the welcome note swept overhead he waved his hands up and down in mad rapture and then peeped over the breastwork to ascertain if the practice were good. The Brown batteries had been a little slow in coming into action, but they soon broke the precision of the opposing fire.

Now shells coming frequently fell short or went wide. The air cleared. Then a chance shell, striking at the one point which the man who fired it six thousand yards away would have chosen as his bull's-eye, obscured Feller and the automatic and its gunners in the havoc of explosion. Feller must have been killed. The dust settled; she saw Dellarme making frantic gestures as he looked at his men. They were keeping up their fusillade with unflinching rapidity. Through the breach left in the breastwork she had glimpses, as the dust was finally dissipated, of gray figures, bayonets fixed, pressing together as they came on fiercely toward the opening. The Browns let go the full blast of their magazines. Had that chance shell turned the scales? Would the Grays get into the breastwork?

All Marta's faculties and emotions were frozen in her stare of suspense at the breach. Then her heart leaped, a cry in a gust of short breaths broke from her lips as the Browns let go a rasping, explosive, demoniacal cheer. The first attack had been checked!
After triumph, terror, faintness, and a closing of her eyes, she opened them to see Feller, with his old straw hat—brim torn and crownless now—still on his head, rise from the debris and shake himself like a dog coming ashore from a swim. While the engineers hastened to repair the breach he assisted Stransky, who had also been knocked down by the concussion, to lift the overturned automatic off the gunner. The doctor, putting a hand on the gunner's head, shook his head, and two hospital-corps men removed the body to make room for the engineers.

For once Dellarme's cheery smile deserted him. There was no one left to man the automatic, so vital in the defense, and even if somebody could be found the gun was probably out of commission. As he started toward it his smile, already summoned back, was shot with surprise at sight of the gun in place and a stranger in blue blouse, white hair showing through a crownless straw hat, trying out the mechanism with knowing fingers. Dellarme stared. Feller, unconscious of everything but the gun, righted the cartridge band, swung the barrel back and forth, and then fired a shot.

"You—you seem to know rapid-firers!" Dellarme exclaimed in blank incomprehension.
"Yes, sir!" Feller raised his finger, whether in salute as a soldier or as a gardener touching his hat it was hard to say.

"But how—where?" gasped Dellarme.
This time the movement of the finger was undoubtedly in salute, in perfect, swift, military salute, with head thrown back and shoulders stiff. Feller the gardener was dead and buried without ceremony.

"Lanstron's class, school for officers, sir. Stood one in ballistics, prize medalist control of gun-fire. Yes, sir, I know something about rapid-firers," Feller replied, and fired a few more shots. "A little high, a little low—right, my lady, right!"

Stransky was back in his place next to the automatic and firing whenever a head appeared. He rolled his eyes in a characteristic squint of scrutiny toward the new recruit.

"Beats spraying rose-bushes for bugs, eh, old man?" he asked.

"Yes, a lead solution is best for gray bugs!" Feller remarked pungently, and their glances meeting, they saw in each other's eyes the joy of hell.

"A pair of anarchists!" exclaimed Stransky, grinning, and tried a shot for another head.

push the enemy had certain preparations to make. He might give his fighting smile a recess and permit himself a few minutes' relaxation. Looking around to ascertain what damage had been done to the house and grounds, he became aware of Marta's presence for the first time.

"Miss Galland, you—you weren't there during the fighting?" he cried as he ran toward her.

"Yes," she said rather faintly.
"If I had known that I should have been scared to death!"

"But I was safe behind the pillar," she explained.

"Miss Galland, you're such a good soldier—please—and I'm sure you have not had your breakfast, and all good soldiers never neglect their rations, not at the beginning of a war! Miss Galland, please—" Yes, as he meant it, please be a good fellow."

She could not resist smiling at the charming manner of his plea. She felt weak and strange—a little dizzy. Besides, her mother's voice now came from the doorway and then her mother's hand was pressing her arm.

"Marta, if you remain out here, I shall!" announced Mrs. Galland.
"I was just coming in."

Dellarme, his cap held before him in the jaunty fashion of officers, bowed, his face beaming his happiness at her decision.

"Come!" Mrs. Galland slipped her hand into Marta's. "Two women can't fight both armies. Come! I prescribe hot coffee. It is waiting; and, do you know, I find a meal in the kitchen very cozy."

Being human and not a heroine fed on lotos blossoms, and being exhausted and also hungry, when she was seated at table, with Minna adroitly urging her, Marta ate with the relish of little Peterkin in the shell crater munching biscuits from his haversack, but the movement of the minute-hand on the clock-face became uncanny and merciless to her eye in its deliberate regularity. Dellarme had been told to hold on until noon, she knew. Was he still smiling? Was Feller still happy in playing a stream of lead from the automatic? Was the second charge of the Grays, which must have come to close quarters when the guns went silent, going to succeed?

Mrs. Galland had settled down conscientiously to play solitaire, a favorite pastime of hers; but she failed to win, as she complained to Marta, because of her stupid way this morning of missing the combination cards.

After a long intermission came another outburst from Dellarme's men, which she interpreted as the response to another rush by the Grays; and this yelping of the demon was not that of the hound after the hare, as in the valley, but of the hare with his back to the wall. When it was over there was no cheer. What did this mean? Without warning to her mother she bolted out of the kitchen. Mrs. Galland sprang up to follow, but Minna barred the way.

"One is enough!" she said firmly, and Mrs. Galland dropped back into her chair.
In the front rooms Marta found havoc beyond her imagination. A portion of the ceiling had been blown out by a shell entering at an up-stairs window; the hardwood floors were littered with plaster and window-glass and ripped into splinters in places.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

SIMPLE ENGLISH NOT NEEDED

Cub Reporter Got Something of a Jolt in His Interview With Educated Chinaman.

Two San Francisco reporters were assigned to call on Chinamen and interview them on an immigration measure pending in congress. One of the reporters was a cub and an Easterner, while the other, an experienced man, assumed the management of the assignment.

"Gates," he said, after they had invaded several Chinese shops without any important result, "yonder is a tea-store. Beat it over by there and talk to the boss about Chinese voting. I'll go in next door. Remember to use the very simplest English you got."

The cub went inside the tea-shop and thus addressed the proprietor:

"John, how? Me—me—Telegraph, John! Newspaper—savvy, John? Newspaper—print things. Un'stan? We want know what John think about Chinaman—vote—all same Melican man. What John think—Chinaman—vote, see? Savvy, John? Vote? What think?"

The Chinaman listened to all this with profound gravity and then replied:

"The question of granting the right of suffrage to Chinese citizens who have come to the United States with the avowed intention of making this country their permanent home is one that has occupied the attention of thoughtful men of all parties for years, and it may in time become of paramount importance. At present, however, it seems to me that there is no exigency requiring an expression of opinion from me upon this subject. You will please excuse me."

The cub went outside and leaned against a lamp-post to rest and recover from a sudden faintness. His fellow reporter had purposely steered him against one of the best educated Chinamen in the United States.

For China Stand.

When one has a china umbrella stand it is a wise plan to place a sponge in the bottom of the jar to keep it from being cracked or broken. The sponge not only prevents it from being broken, but also absorbs the water which drips from the umbrella.

OLD SOLDIER WISHES TO HELP SUFFERERS FROM KIDNEY, LIVER AND BLADDER TROUBLES.

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Dr. Kilmer's Swamp-Root has done me so much good that I feel if any words of mine will be the means of relieving any poor sufferers, that you are at liberty to use this letter as you see fit.

Yours very truly,
GEORGE W. ATCHLEY,
1786 Walker St.,
Des Moines, Iowa.
State of Iowa }
Poke County } ss.

A. R. Hansen, a retail druggist of this city, being first duly sworn deposes and says, that he is well acquainted with George W. Atchley, who gave the above testimonial; that said Atchley made and signed said testimonial in my presence and that I have sold said Atchley a part of the Swamp-Root referred to in above testimonial. Affiant further says that George W. Atchley is a well known citizen of this city and an honorable man, and that it was Mr. Atchley's desire to give said testimonial.

A. R. HANSEN,
Subscribed to in my presence, and sworn to before me, this 23rd of March, 1908.

E. J. FRISK, Notary Public.

Letter to Dr. Kilmer & Co., Binghamton, N. Y.
Prove What Swamp-Root Will Do For You. Send ten cents to Dr. Kilmer & Co., Binghamton, N. Y., for a sample size bottle. It will convince anyone. You will also receive a booklet of valuable information, telling about the kidneys and bladder. When writing, be sure and mention this paper. Regular fifty-cent and one-dollar size bottles for sale at all drug stores. Adv.

Heartless Prophets.
"Harold says that after we are married he will want me to dress like a queen."

"Yes," replied Miss Cayenne. "And for a while he will be as proud as a king. After that he will grumble like a taxpayer."

In Mineralogy.
Professor—Name the largest known diamond.
Mr. A.—The ace.

Matchless Conceit.
Stranger—Have you a match, sir?
Vain Individual—No, I don't think so.—Boston Evening Transcript.

WOMAN IN BAD CONDITION

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