

The Last Shot

By
FREDERICK PALMER

CHAPTER XX—Continued.

In the inner room, whose opening door gave glimpses of Lanstron and the division chiefs, a magic of secret council which the juniors could not quite understand had wrought the wonder. Lanstron had not forgotten the dead. He could see them; he could see everything that happened. Had not Partow said to him: "Don't just read reports. Visualize men and events. Be the artillery, be the infantry, be the wounded—live and think in their places. In this way only can you really know your work!"

His elation when he saw his plans going right was that of the instrument of Partow's training and Marta's service. He pressed the hands of the men around him; his voice caught in his gratitude and his breaths were very short at times, like those of a spent, happy runner at the goal. Feeding on victory and growing greedy of more, his division chiefs were discussing how to press the war till the Grays sued for peace; and he was silent in the midst of their talk, which was interrupted by the ringing of the tunnel telephone. When he came out of his bedroom, Lanstron's distress was so evident that those who were seated arose and the others drew near in inquiry and sympathy. It seemed to them that the chief of staff, the head of the machine, who had left the room had returned an individual.

"The connection was broken while we were speaking!" he said blankly. "That means it must have been cut by the enemy—that the enemy knows of its existence!"

"Perhaps not. Perhaps an accident—a chance shot," said the vice-chief.

"No, I'm sure not," Lanstron replied. "I am sure that it was cut deliberately and not by her."

"The 53d Regiment is going forward in that direction—the same regiment that defended the house—and it can't go any faster than it is going," the vice-chief continued, rather incoherently. He and the others no less felt the news as a personal blow. Though absent in person, Marta had become in spirit an intimate of their hopes and counsils.

"She is helpless—in their power!" Lanstron said. "There is no telling what they might do to her in the rage of their discovery. I must go to her! I am going to the front!"

A young officer of the Grays who was with the signal-corps section, trying to keep a brigade headquarters in touch with the staff during the retreat, two or three miles from the Galland house, had seen what looked like an insulated telephone wire at the bottom of a crater in the earth made by the explosion of a heavy shell. The instructions to all subordinates from the chief of intelligence to look for the source of the leak in information to the Browns made him quick to see a clue in anything unusual. He jumped down into the crater and not only found his pains rewarded, but that the wire was intact and ran underground in either direction. Who had laid it? Not the Grays. Why was it there? He called for one of his men to bring a buzzer, and it was the work of little more than a minute to cut the wire and make an attachment. Then he heard a woman's voice talking to "Lanny." Who was Lanny? He waited till he had heard enough to know that it was none other than Lanstron, the chief of staff of the Browns, and the woman must be a spy. An orderly dispatched to the chief of intelligence with the news returned with the order:

"Drop everything and report to me in person at once."

"For this I have made my sacrifice!" Marta thought. "The killing goes on by Lanny's orders, not by Westerling's, this time."

Leaving her mother to enjoy the prospect, a slow-moving figure, trance-like, she went along the first terrace path to a point near the veranda where the whole sweep of landscape with its panorama of retreat magnetized her senses. Like the gray of lava, the Gray soldiery was erupting from the range; in columns, still under the control of officers, keeping to the defiles; in swarms and batches, under the control of nothing but their own emotions. Mostly they were hugging cover, from instinct if not from direction, but some relied on straight lines of flight and speed of foot for escape. Coursing aeroplanes were playing a new part. Their wireless was informing the Brown gunners where the masses were thickest. This way and that the Brown artillery fire drove retreating bodies, prodding them in the back with the fearful shepherdry of their shells. Officers' swords flashed in the faces of the bolters or in holding rear-guards to their work. Officers and orderlies were galloping hither

and thither with messages, in want of wires. Commanders had been told to hold, but how and where to hold? They saw neighboring regiments and brigades going and they had to go. The machine, the complicated modern war machine, was broken; the machine, with its nerves of intelligence cut, became a thing of disconnected parts, each part working out its own salvation. Authority ceased to be that of the bureau and army lists. It was that of units racked by hardship, acting on the hour's demand.

Gorged was the pass road, overflowing with the struggling tumult of men and vehicles. Self-preservation breaking the bonds of discipline was in the ascendant, and it sought the highway, even as water keeps to the river bed. Like specks on the laboring tide was the white of bandages. An ambulance trying to cut out to one side was overturned. The frantic chauffeur and hospital-corps orderly were working to extricate the wounded from their painful position. A gun was overturned against the ambulance. A melee of horses and men was forming at the foot of the garden gate in front of the narrowing bounds of the road into the town, as a stream banks up before a jam of driftwood. The struggle for right of way became in-



An Insulated Telephone Wire at the Bottom of a Crater.

creasingly wild; the dam of men, horses, and wagons grew. A Brown dirigible was descending toward the great target; but on closer view its commander forbore, the humane impulse outweighing the desire for retribution for colleagues in camp and mess who had gone down in a holocaust in the aerial battles of the night.

Under the awful spell of the panorama, she did not see Westerling, who had stopped only a few feet distant with his aide and his valet, nor did he notice her as the tumult glared his eyes. He was as an artist who looks on the ribbons of the canvas of his painting, or the sculptor on the fragments of his statue. Worse still, with no faith to give him fortitude except the materialistic, he saw the altar of his god of military efficiency in ruins. He who had not allowed the word retreat to enter his lexicon now saw a rout. He had laughed at reserve armies in last night's feverish defiance, at Turcas's advocacy of a slower and surer method of attack. In those hours of smiting at a wall with his fists and forehead, in denial of all the truth so clear to average military logic, if he had only even a few conventional directions all this disorder would have been avoided. His army could have fallen back in orderly fashion to their own range. The machine out of order, he had attempted no repair; he had allowed it to thrash itself to pieces.

The artillery's maceration of the human jam suddenly ceased; perhaps because the gunners had seen the Red Cross flag which a doctor had the presence of mind to wave. Westerling turned from a sight worse to him than the killing—that of the flowing retreat along the road pressing frantically over the dead and wounded in growing disorder for the cover of the town. Near by were Bellini, the chief of intelligence, and a subaltern who had arrived only a minute before. The subaltern was dust-covered. He seemed to have come in from a hard ride. Both were watching Marta, as if waiting for her to speak. She met Westerling's look steadily, her eyes dark and still and in his reflection of the vague realization of more than he had guessed in her relations with him.

"Well," she breathed to Westerling, "the war goes on!"

"That's it! That's the voice!" exclaimed the subaltern in an explosion of recognition.

A short, sharp laugh of irony broke from Bellini; the laugh of one whose suspicions are confirmed in the mixture of the sublime and the ridiculous. Marta looked around at the interruption, alert, on guard.

"You seem amused," she remarked curiously.

"No, but you must have been," replied Bellini hoarsely. "Early this morning, not far from the castle, this young officer found in the crater made by a ten-inch shell a wire that ran in a conduit underground. The wire was intact. He tapped it. He heard a voice thanking some one for her part in the

victory, and it seems that the woman's voice that answered is yours, Miss Galland. So, General Westerling, the leak in information was over this wire from our staff into the Browns' headquarters, as Bouchard believed and as I came to believe."

So long had Marta expected this moment of exposure that it brought no shock. Her spirit had undergone many subtle rehearsals for the occasion.

"Yes, that is true," she heard herself saying, a little daintily, but very quietly and naturally.

Westerling fell back as from a blow in the face. His breath came hard at first, like one being strangled. Then it sank deep in his chest and his eyes were blood-shot, as a bull's in his final effort against the matador. He raised a quivering, clenched fist and took a step nearer her.

But far from flinching, Marta seemed to be greeting the blow, as if she admitted his right to strike. She was without any sign of triumph and with every sign of relief. Lying was at an end. She could be truthful.

"Do you recall what I said in the reception-room at the hotel?" she asked.

The question sent a flash into a hidden chamber of his mind. Now the only thing he could remember of that interview was the one remark which hitherto he had never included in his recollection of it.

"You said I could not win." He drew out the words painfully.

"When you said that you brought on this war to gratify your ambition, I chose to be one of the weapons of war; I fought for civilization, for my home, with the only means I had against the wickedness of a victory of conquest—the precedent of it in this age—a victory which should glorify such trickery as you practised on your people."

"I should like to shoot you dead!" cried Bellini.

"And you let me make love to you!" Westerling said in a dazed, groping monotone to Marta.

Such a wreck was he of his former self that she found it amazing that she could not pity him. Yet she might have pitied him had he plunged into the fight; had he tried to rally one of the broken regiments; had he been able to forget himself.

"Rather, you made love to yourself through me," she answered, not harshly, not even emphatically, but merely as a statement of passionless fact. "If you dared to endure what you ordered others to endure for the sake of your ambition; if—"

She was interrupted by a sharp zip in the air. Westerling dodged and looked about wildly.

"What is that?" he asked. "What?"

Five or six zips followed like a charge of waxz flying at a speed that made them invisible. Marta felt a brush of air past her cheek and Westerling went chalky white. It was the first time he had been under fire. But these bullets were only strays. No more came.

"Come, general, let us be going!" urged the aide, touching his chief on the arm.

"Yes, yes!" said Westerling hurriedly.

Francols, who had picked up the coat that had fallen from Westerling's shoulders with his start at the buzzing, held it while his master thrust his hands through the sleeves.

"And this is wiser," said the aide, unfastening the detachable insignia of rank from the shoulders of the great-coat. "It's wiser, too, that we walk," he added.

"Walk? But my car!" exclaimed Westerling petulantly.

"I'm afraid that the car could not get through the press in the town," was the reply. "Walking is safer."

The absence in him of that quality which is the soldier's real glory, the picture of a machine who had been crushed by his machine, his very lack of stoicism or courage—all this suddenly appealed to Marta's quick sympathies. They had once drunk tea together.

"Oh, it was not personal! I did not think of myself as a person or of you as one—only of principles and of thousands of others—to end the killing—to save our country to its people! Oh, I'm sorry and, personally, I'm horrible—horrible!" she called after him in a broken, quivering gust of words which he heard confusedly in tragic mockery.

He made no answer; he did not even look around. Head bowed and hardly seeing the path, he permitted the aide to choose the way, which lay across the boundary of the Galland estate.

CHAPTER XXI.

The Retreat.

Marta remained where Westerling had left her, rooted to the ground by the monstrous spell of the developing panorama of seemingly limitless movement. With each passing minute there must be a hundred acts of heroism which, if isolated in the glare of a day's news, would make the public thrill. At the outset of the war she had seen the Browns, as part of a pre-conceived plan, in cohesive rear-guard resistance, with every detail of personal bravery a utilized factor of organized purpose. Now she saw defense, inchoate and fragmentary, each part acting for itself, all deeds of personal bravery lost in a swirl of disorganization. That was the pity of it, the helplessness of engineers and of levers when the machine was broken; the warning of it to those who undertake war lightly.

The Browns' rifle flashes kept on steadily weaving their way down the slopes, their reserves pressing close on the heels of the skirmishers in greedy swarms. A heavy column of Brown infantry was swinging in toward the myriad-legged, writhing gray caterpill-

lar on the pass road and many field-batteries were trotting along a parallel road. Their plan developed suddenly when a swath of gun-fire was laid across the pass road at the mouth of the defile, as much as to say: "Here we make a gate of death!" At the same time the head of the Brown infantry column flashed its bayonets over the crest of a hill toward the point where the shells were bursting. These men minded not the desperate, scattered rifle-fire into their ranks. Before their eyes was the prize of a panic that grew with their approach. Kinks were out of legs stiffened by long watches. The hot breath of pursuit was in their nostrils, the fever of victory in their blood.

In the defile, the impulse of one Gray straggler, who shook a handkerchief aloft in fatalistic submission to the inevitable, became the impulse of all. Soon a thousand white signals of surrender were blossoming. As the firing abruptly ceased, Marta heard the faint roar of the mighty huzzas of the bunters over the size of their bag.

Some doctors of different regiments thrown together in the havoc of remnants of many organizations, with the help of hospital-corps men, were trying to extricate the wounded from among the dead. They heard a woman's voice and saw a woman's face. They did not wonder at her presence, for there was nothing left in the world for them to wonder at. Had an imp from hell or an angel from heaven appeared, or a shower of diamonds fallen from the sky, they would not have been surprised. Their duty was clear; there was work of their kind to do, endless work. Units of the broken machine, in the instinct of their calling they struggled with the duty nearest at hand. They begged her to go back to the house; this was no place for her.

But Marta did not want safety. Danger was sweet; it was explanation. She was helping, actually helping; that was enough. She envied the peaceful dead—they had no nightmares—as she aided the doctors in separating the bodies that were still breathing from those that were not; and she steeled herself against every ghastly sight save one, that of a man lying with his legs pinned under a wagon body. His jaw had been shot away. Slowly he was bleeding to death, but he did not realize it. He realized nothing in his delirium except the nature of his wound. He was dipping his finger in the cavity and, dab by dab, writing "Kill me!" on the wagon body. It sent reeling waves of red before her eyes. Then a shell burst near her and a doctor cried out:

"She's hit!"

But Marta did not hear him. She heard only the dreadful crack of the splitting shrapnel jacket. She had a sense of falling, and that was all.

The next that she knew she was in a long chair on the veranda and the vague shadows bending over her gradually identified themselves as her mother and Minna.

"I remember when you were telling of the last war that you didn't swoon at the sight of the wounded, mother," Marta whispered.

"But I was not wounded," replied Mrs. Galland.

Marta ceased to be only a consciousness swimming in a haze. With the



He Was Dipping His Fingers in the Cavity and Writing, "Kill Me!"

return of her faculties, she noticed that both her mother and Minna were looking significantly at her forearm; so she looked at it, too. It was bandaged.

"A cut from a shrapnel fragment," said a doctor. "Not deep," he added. "Do I get an iron cross?" she asked, smiling faintly. It was rather pleasant to be alive.

"All the crosses—iron and bronze and silver and gold!" he replied.

All firing except occasional scattered shots had now ceased in the immediate vicinity, though in the distance could be heard the snarl of the former resistance that the Grays were making at some other point. The Galland house, for the time being, was isolated—in possession of neither side.

"Isn't there something else I can do to help with the wounded?" Marta asked. She longed for action in order to escape her thoughts.

"You've had a terrible shock—when you are stronger," said the doctor.

"When you have had something to eat and drink," observed the practical Minna authoritatively.

Marta would not have the food brought to her. She insisted that she was strong enough to accompany Minna to the tower. While Minna urged mouthfuls down Marta's dry throat as she sat outside the door of the sitting-room with her mother a number of weary dust-streaked faces, with feverish energy in their eyes, peered over the hedge that bounded the garden on the side toward the pass. These scout skirmishers of Stransky's men of the 53d Regiment of the Browns made beckoning gestures as to a crowd, before they sprang over the hedge and ran swiftly, watchfully, toward the linden stumps, closely followed by their comrades. Soon the whole garden was overrun by the lean, businesslike fellows, their glances all ferret-like to the front.

"Look, Minna!" exclaimed Marta. "The giant who carried the old man in pickaback the first night of the war!"

Minna was flushing, but the flush dissipated and she drew up her chin when Stransky, looking around, recognized her with a merry, confident wave of his hand.

"See, he's a captain and he wears an iron cross!" said Marta as Stransky hastened toward them.

"He acts like it!" assented Minna grudgingly.

Eager, levithan, his cap doffed with a sweeping gesture as he made a low bow, Stransky was the very spirit of retributive victory returning to claim the ground that he had lost.

"Well, this is like getting home again!" he cried.

"So I see!" said Minna equivocally.

Stransky drew his eyes together, sighting them on the bridge of his nose thoughtfully at this dubious reception.

"I came back for the chance to kiss a good woman's hand," he observed with a profound awkwardness and looking at Minna's hand. "Your hand!" he added, the cast in his eyes straightening as he looked directly at her appealingly.

She extended her finger-tips and he pressed his lips to them.

"I kept seeing the way you looked when you belted me one in the face," he went on, "and knocked any anarchism out of me that was left after the shell burst. I kept seeing your face in my last glimpse when the Grays made me run for it from your kitchen door before I had half a chance for the oration crying for voice. You were in my dreams! You were in battle with me!"

"This sounds like a disordered mind," observed Minna. "I've heard men talk that way before."

"Oh, I have talked that way to other women myself!" said Stransky.

"Yes," said Minna bitterly. His candor was rather unexpected.

"I have talked to others in passing on the high road," he continued. "But never after a woman had struck me in the face. That blow sank deep—deep—deep as what Lanstron said when I revolted on the march. I say it to you with this—he touched the cross—'on my breast. And I'm not going to give you up. It's a big world. There's room in it for a place for you after the war is over and I'm going to make the place. Good-by till I'm back—back to stay! Good-by, little daughter!' he added with a wave of his hand to Clarissa as he turned to go. "Maybe we shall have our own automobile some day. It's no stranger than what's been happening to me since the war began."

"If you don't marry him, Minna, I'll—I'll—" Mrs. Galland could not find words for the fearful thing that she would do.

"Marry him! I have only met him three times for about three minutes each time!" protested Minna. She was as rosy as a girl and in her confusion she busied herself retying the ribbon on Clarissa Eileen's hair. "He called you little daughter!" she said softly to the child as she withdrew into the tower.

Marta remained in the chair by the doorway of the tower, weak and listless. Now her lashes were closed; again they opened slightly as her gaze roved the semicircle of the horizon. A mounted officer and his orderly galloping across the fields to the pass road caught her desultory attention and held it, for they formed the most impetuous object on the landscape. When the officer alighted at the foot of the garden and tossed his reins to the orderly, she detected something familiar about him. He leaped the garden wall at a bound and, half running, came toward the tower. Not until he lifted his cap and waved it did she associate this lithe, dapper artilleryman with a stooped old gardener in blue blouse and torn straw hat who had once shuffled among the flowers at her service.

"Hello! Hello!" he shouted in clarion greeting at sight of her. "Hello, my successor!"

Only in the whiteness of his hair was he like the old Feller. His tone, the boyish sparkle of his black eyes, those full, expressive lips playing over the brilliant teeth, his easy grace, his quick and telling gestures—they were of the Feller of cadet days.

"Wonderful—wounded! Wonderful! Was there ever such a woman?" he cried. "Destiny has played with us. It sent a spy to your garden. It put you in my place. A strange service, ours—yes, destiny is in it!"

"Yes," she breathed painfully, his suggestion striking deep.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

Daily Thought.

Men imagine that they communicate their virtue or their vice only by overt actions, and do not see that virtue or vice emits a breath every moment.—R. W. Emerson.

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Wife of Former County Attorney Finds Quick Relief at First Dose—Thousands Are Restored.

David G. Hines, former county attorney of Dundy County, Neb., and now an attorney of prominence in Benkelman, is one of the many who have discovered the astonishing merits of Mayr's Wonderful Remedy.

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Crooked Dipper Saves Life.

Charles Gise, a building contractor of York, Pa., resorted to a novel method to save himself from choking to death when a piece of meat lodged in his throat. Realizing that he would choke before a physician could arrive, Gise grasped a dipper with a curved handle and dislodged the impediment, but lacerated his throat considerably.

IMMENSE QUANTITY OF WHEAT TIED UP

There Will Still, However, Be a Heavy Deficit of the World's Normal Crop.

A grain expert who has been watching the grain markets and the world's grain fields for a number of years, says:—

"There is at the present time about two billion bushels of wheat, the production of the countries at war, tied up. This is about one-half the world's total production of wheat, which is four billion bushels. One writer argues that, granting that the warring nations produce a one-half crop in the coming year, a deficit of one billion bushels will still be shown. The three countries upon which the filling of this deficit of one billion bushels will rest are the United States, Canada, and Argentina. The combined output of these three countries is only 1,249,000,000, their exportable surplus would of course be much less, so it can easily be seen that the question is not one to be easily solved and it behooves all the above countries to increase their respective productions as much as they possibly can, for when the war is over and trade begins to re-establish itself and the nations undergo a process of rehabilitation, the demand for all breadstuffs will be enormous.

"During the three years following the declaration of peace the farmers of all neutral wheat-producing countries will have ample opportunity to market their wheat at good prices, and it may safely be assumed that the demand will be heavy. Canada has an unusual opportunity in that she has the natural environment for wheat production; she is under the protection of the British flag, and she will not be molested upon the water to any great extent; she can increase her acreage and greatly enhance her production. In other words, she can become a far greater wheat-producing country than she is at the present time."

If the summing-up as made by this expert be correct, is there not the very best reason for the continued effort that is being made by the Government of the Dominion of Canada to secure settlers on the productive vacant lands of the country? Not only are these lands capable of producing high class wheat in large quantities, but cattle, pigs, sheep and horses also do well. The climate is admirably suited.—Advertisement.

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"He is helping to take a census of the birds."

"Oh, that accounts for his being constantly on the wing."

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Nothing is more painful than the antics of a fat woman trying to act kittenish.

Women are supposed to be vain, but no man is as handsome as he thinks he is.