

The Last Shot

BY
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SYNOPSIS.

At their home on the frontier between the Browns and Grays, Marta Galloway and her mother, entertaining Colonel Westering of the Grays, see Captain Lanstron of the Browns in a fall in his airplane. Ten years later, Westering, 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 aid 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. 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. Partow, Brown chief of staff, and Lanstron, made vice, discuss the trouble and the Brown defenses. 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 the Gray artillery fire. Nicked by a sharpshooter, 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 Galloway house. Stransky forages. Marta sees a night attack. The Grays attack in force.

CHAPTER XII—Continued.

But she hurried on, impelled by she knew not what, through the dining-room, and, coming to the veranda, stopped short, with dilating eyes and a cry of grievous shock. Two of his men were carrying Dellarme back from the breastwork, where they had caught him in their arms as he fell. They laid him gently on the sward with a knapsack under his head. His face grew whiter with the flow of blood from the red hole in the right breast of his blouse. Then he opened his lips and whispered to the doctor: "How is it?" Something in his eyes, in the tone of that faint question, required the grace of a soldier's truth in answer.

"Bad!" said the doctor. "Then, good-by!" And his head fell to one side, his lips set in his cheery smile. His company was a company with his smile out of its heart and in its place blank despair. Many of the men had stopped firing. Some had even run back to look at him and stood, caps off, backs to the enemy, alsearable in their grief. Others leaned against the parapet, rifles out of hand, staring and dazed. "They have killed our captain!" "They've killed our captain!"—still a captain to them. A general's stars could not have raised him a cubit in their estimation.

"And once we called him 'Baby Dellarme,' he was so young and bashful! Him a baby? He was a king!" "Men, get to your places!" cried the surviving lieutenant rather hopelessly, with no Dellarme to show him what to do; and Marta saw that few paid any attention to him.

In that minute of demoralization the Grays had their chance, but only for a minute. A voice that seemed to speak some uncontrollable thought of her own broke in, and it rang with the authority and leadership of a mature officer's command, even though coming from a gardener in blue blouse and crownless straw hat.

"Your rifles, your rifles, quick!" called Feller. "We're only beginning to fight!"

And then another voice in a bull roar, Stransky's:

"Avenge his death! They've got to kill the last man of us for killing him! Revenge! Revenge!"

That cry brought back to the company all the fighting spirit of the cheery smile and with it another spirit—for Dellarme's sake!—which he had never taught them.

Stransky picked up one of several cylindrical objects that were lying at his feet.

"He wouldn't use this—he was too soft-hearted—but I will!" he cried, and flung a hand-grenade, and then a second, over the breastwork. The explosions were followed by agonized groans from the Grays hugging the lower side of the terrace. For this they had crawled across the road at the night—to find themselves unable to move either way and directly under the flashes of the Browns' rifles.

Feller's and Stransky's shouts rose together in a peculiar unity of direction and full of the fellowship they had found in their first exchange of glances.

"You engineers, make ready!" "Hand-grenades to the men under the tree! That's where they're going to try for it—no wall to climb over there!"

"You engineers, take your rifles—and bayonet into anything that wears gray!"

"Get back, you men by the tree, to avoid their hand-grenades! Form up behind them, everybody!"

"No matter if they do get in at first! Back, you men, from under the tree!" There was not a single rifle-shot. In a silence like that before the word to fire in a duel, all orders were heard

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 billowing, 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—"

He turned away abruptly but did not move far. His shoulders relaxed into the gardener's stoop, and he pulled his hat down over his eyes and lowered his head as if to hide his face. He was thus standing, inert, when a division staff-officer galloped into the grounds.

"Where is Major Dellarme?"

When he saw Dellarme's still body he was dumfounded and in a tide of feeling which, for the moment, submerged all thought of the machine, stood, head bowed and cap off, looking down at Dellarme's face.

"I was very fond of him! He was at 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 Fraglin.

"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 ayes 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 what 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—you are 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!" 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 Elleen."

"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."

Her point won with surprising ease, when she had feared that military form and law could not be circumvented, she leaned against the wall in reaction. For twenty-four hours she had been without sleep. The interest of her appeal for Feller had kept up her strength after the excitement of the fight for the redoubt was over. Now there seemed nothing left to do.

"That's fine of you, Lanny!" she said. "You've taken it like a good stoic, this loss of your thousandth chance. You really believed in it, didn't you?"

"Forgotten already, like the many other thousandth chances that have failed," he replied cheerfully. "One of the virtues of Partow's steel automatons is that, being tearless as well as passionless, they never cry over spilt 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 livened 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-days-old beard was matted with dust and there were dried red spatters on his cheek. War's furnace flames seemed to have tanned him; war seemed to be breathing from his deep chest; his big nose was war's promontory. But the unexposed 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, your 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 boited.

Within the kitchen Mrs. Galloway 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 Fracasse'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 fever itch of callouses 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 geniality; in oblivion were the ethics of an inherited civilization taught by mothers, teachers and church,

But here was a house—a house of 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! Pell-mell they crowded into the dining-room, Hugo with the rest, feeling himself a straw on the crest of a wave, and Pilzer, most bitter, most ugly of all, his short, strong teeth and gums showing and his liver patch red, lumpy, and trembling. 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 Pilzer. 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



They Saw Pilzer Go Down.

law, joined in. Pilzer 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!" Pilzer added, starting toward the hall.

"Stop!" cried Hugo, forcing his way in front of Pilzer.

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!"

"Out of the way, you white-livered little rat!" cried Pilzer, "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 catapultic lunge, mesmeric in its swiftness, and they saw Pilzer go down, his leg twisted under him and his head banging the floor. Hugo stood, half ashamed, half frightened, yet ready for another encounter.

Fracasse, 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 Pilzer, 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."

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It Puzzled Him.

Silas—I hear your son left that small town and went to the city to have a larger field for his efforts. Hiram—Yes; and that's what gets me. When Hank was home a two-acre potato patch was too big a field for him.—Judge.

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