

The Last Shot

FREDERICK PALMER

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SYNOPSIS.

At their home on the frontier between the Browns and Grays, Marta Galloway and her mother, entering Colonel Westering of the Grays, see Captain Lanstron, staff intelligence officer of the Browns, injured by a fall in the aeroplane. Ten years later, Westering, nominal vice but real chief of staff, reinforces South La Tir, meditates on war, and speculates on the comparative ages of himself and Marta, who is visiting in the Gray capital. Westering calls on Marta. She tells him of her teaching children the follies of war and martial patriotism, begs him to prevent war while he is chief of staff, and predicts that if he makes war against the Browns he will not win. On the march with the aid of the Browns Private Stransky, anarchist, declares war and plays-out patriotism and is placed under arrest. Colonel Lanstron overhearing, begs him off. Lanstron calls on Marta at her home. He talks with Feller, the gardener. Marta tells Lanstron that she believes Feller to be a spy. Lanstron confesses it is true. Lanstron shows Marta a telephone which Feller has concealed in a secret wall in the tower for use to benefit the Browns in war emergencies. Lanstron declares his love for Marta. Westering and the Gray premier plan to use a trivial international affair to foment warlike patriotism in army and people and strike before declaring war. Parlow, Brown chief of staff, and Lanstron, vice, discuss the trouble, and the Browns defenses. Parlow reveals his plans to Lanstron.

CHAPTER VIII—Continued.

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

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

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

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

"Let us hope so!" said Dellarme seriously.

Choosing to go to town by the stable road rather than down the terrace to the main pass road, Marta, starting for the regular Sunday service of her school, as she emerged from the grounds, saw Feller, garden-shears in hand, a figure of stone watching the approach of some field-batteries. The question of allowing him to undertake his part as a spy had drifted into the background of her mind under the distressing and ever-present pressure of the crisis. He was to remain until there was war. She was almost past him before he realized her presence, which he acknowledged by a startled movement and a step forward as he took off his hat. She paused. His eyes were glowing like coals under a blower as he looked at her and again at the batteries, seeming to include her with the guns in the spell of his fervid abstraction. "Frontier closed last night to prevent intelligence about our preparations leaking out—Lanny's plan all alive—the guns coming," he said, his shoulders stiffening, his chin drawing in, his features resolute and beaming with the ardor of youth in action—"troops moving here and there to their places—engineers preparing the defenses—automatics at critical points with the infantry—field-wires laid—field-telephones set up—the wireless spitting—the caissons full—planes and dirigibles ready—search-lights in position—"

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

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

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

"Then I shall go with you!" he said, starting toward her with a light step. "It is not necessary, thank you!" she answered, more coldly than she had ever spoken to him. This had a magically quick effect on his attitude.

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

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

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

of a mass of uniforms. In the middle of the main street a major of the brigade staff, with a number of junior officers and orderlies, was evidently waiting on some signal. Sentries were posted at regular intervals along the curb. The people in the houses and shops from time to time stopped packing up their effects long enough to go to the doors and look up and down apprehensively, asking bootless, nervous questions.

"Are they coming yet?"

"Do you think they will come?"

"Are you sure it's going to be war?"

"Will they shell the town?"

"There'll be time enough for you to get away!" shouted the major. "All we know is what is written in our instructions, and we shall act on them when the things start. Then we are in command. Meanwhile, get ready!"

Then the major became aware of a young woman who was going in the wrong direction. Her cheeks were flushed from her rapid walk, her lips were parted, showing firm, white teeth, and her black eyes were regarding him in a blaze of satire or amusement; an emotion, whatever it was, that thoroughly centered his attention.

"Mademoiselle, I am very sorry, but unless you live in this direction," he said very politely, "you may not go any farther. Until we have other orders they attack every one is supposed to remain in his house or his place of business."

"This is my place of business!" Marta answered, for she was already opposite a small, disused chapel which was her schoolroom, where a half dozen of the faithful children were gathered around the masculine importance of Jacky Werther, one of the older boys.

"Then you are Miss Galloway!" said the major, enlightened. His smile had an appreciation of the irony of her occupation at that moment. "Your children are very loyal. They would not tell me where they lived, so we had to let them stay there."

"Those who have homes," she said, identifying each one of the faithful with a glance, "have so many brothers and sisters that they will hardly be missed from the flock. Others have no homes—at least not much of a one"—here her temper rose again—"taxes being so high in order that you may organize murder and the destruction of property."

"Now really, Miss Galloway," he began solicitously, "I have been assigned to move the civil population in case of attack. Your children ought—"

"After school! You have your duty this morning and I have mine!" Marta interrupted pleasantly, and turned toward the chapel.

"They are putting sharpshooters in the church tower to get the aeroplanes, and there are lots of the little guns that fire bullets so fast you can't count 'em—and little spring wagons with dynamite to blow things up—and—"

"Jacky Werther ran on in a series of vocal explosions as Marta opened the door to let the children go in.

"Yet you came!" said Marta with a hand caressingly on his shoulder.

"It looks pretty bad for peace, but we came," answered Jacky, round-eyed, in loyalty. "We'd come right through bullets 'cause we said we would if we wasn't sick, and we wasn't sick."

"My seven disciples—seven!" exclaimed Marta as she counted them.

"And you need not sit on the regular seats, but around me on the platform. It will be more intimate."

"That's grand!" came in chorus. They did not bother about chairs, but seated themselves on the floor around Marta's skirts.

The church clock boomed out its deliberate strokes through ten, the hour set for the lesson, and all counted them—one—two—three. Marta was thinking what a dismal little effort theirs was, and yet she was very happy, tremblingly happy in her distraction and excitement that they had not waited for her at the door of the chapel in vain.

She announced that there would be no talk this morning; they would only say their oath. Repeating in concert the pledge to the boys and girls of other lands, the childish voices peculiarly sweet and harmonious in contrast to the raucous and uneven sounds of foreboding from the street, they came in due course to the words of the concession that the oath made to militancy:

"If an enemy tries to take my land—"

"Children—I—" Marta interrupted with a sense of wonder and shock. They paused and looked at her questioningly. "I had almost forgotten that part!" she breathed confusedly.

"That's the part that makes all we're doing against the Grays right!" put in Jacky Werther promptly.

"As I wrote it for you! I shall appeal to his sense of justice and reason with him—"

Jaws dropped and eyes bulged, for above the sounds of the street rose from the distance the unmistakable crackling of rifle fire which, as they

listened, spread and increased in volume.

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

CHAPTER IX.

The Baptism of Fire.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



Plizer Was Shooting to Kill.

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

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

"The bullet is not—made—"

Eugene whispered, the ruling passion strong to the last. A flicker of the eyelids, a gurgle in the throat, and he was dead.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

TELLS OF TENSE MOMENTS

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

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

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

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

"And the other?" He chuckled, but a slow flush crept over his cheeks.

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

One Viewpoint.

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

"CASCARETS" ACT ON LIVER, BOWELS

No sick headache, biliousness, bad taste or constipation by morning.

Get a 10-cent box.

Are you keeping your bowels, liver, and stomach clean, pure and fresh with Cascarets, or merely forcing a passage every few days with Salts, Cathartic Pills, Castor Oil or Purgative Waters?

Stop having a bowel wash-day. Let Cascarets thoroughly cleanse and regulate the stomach, remove the sour and fermenting food and fowl gases, take the excess bile from the liver and carry out of the system all the constipated waste matter and poisons in the bowels.

A Cascaret to-night will make you feel great by morning. They work while you sleep—never gripe, sicken or cause any inconvenience, and cost only 10 cents a box from your store. Millions of men and women take a Cascaret now and then and never have Headache, Biliousness, Coated Tongue, Indigestion, Sour Stomach or Constipation. Adv.

Willie Knew.

Some time ago the teacher of a public school was instructing a class in geography, and when it came time to hand out a few questions she turned to Willie Smith.

"Willie," she said, "can you tell me what is one of the principal products of the West Indies?"

"No, ma'am," frankly answered Willie, after a moment's hesitation.

"Just think a bit," encouragingly returned the teacher; "where does the sugar come from that you use at your house?"

"Sometimes from the store," answered Willie, "and sometimes we borrow it from the next-door neighbor."

A WARNING TO MANY

Some Interesting Facts About Kidney Troubles.

Few people realize to what extent their health depends upon the condition of the kidneys.

The physician in nearly all cases of serious illness, makes a chemical analysis of the patient's urine. He knows that unless the kidneys are doing their work properly, the other organs cannot readily be brought back to health and strength.

When the kidneys are neglected or abused in any way, serious results are sure to follow. According to health statistics, Bright's disease, which is really an advanced form of kidney trouble, caused nearly ten thousand deaths in 1913 in the state of New York alone. Therefore, it behooves us to pay more attention to the health of these most important organs.

An ideal herbal compound that has had remarkable success as a kidney remedy is Dr. Kilmer's Swamp-Root, the great Kidney, Liver and Bladder Remedy. The mild and healing influence of this preparation in most cases is soon realized, according to sworn statements and verified testimony of those who have used the remedy.

If you feel that your kidneys require attention, and wish a sample bottle, write to Dr. Kilmer & Co., Binghamton, N. Y. Mention this paper, enclose ten cents and they will gladly forward it to you by Parcel Post.

Swamp-Root is sold by every druggist in bottles of two sizes—50c and \$1.00. Adv.

His Regular Cue.

Many a man who permits himself to be led forth to musical entertainments he does not care for will appreciate the following:

"What made you start clapping your hands when that woman stepped on your foot in the tramcar?"

"I was dozing," answered Mr. Cumrox. "I thought mother and the girls were having a musicale at home and one of them was signaling that it was time to applaud."

GIRLS! GIRLS! TRIM & BEAUTIFY YOUR HAIR

Make It Thick, Glossy, Wavy, Luxuriant and Remove Dandruff—Real Surprise for You.

Your hair becomes light, wavy, fluffy, abundant and appears as soft, lustrous and beautiful as a young girl's after a "Dandarine hair cleanse." Just try this—moisten a cloth with a little Dandarine and carefully draw it through your hair, taking one small strand at a time. This will cleanse the hair of dust, dirt and excessive oil and in just a few moments you have doubled the beauty of your hair.

Besides beautifying the hair at once, Dandarine dissolves every particle of dandruff; cleanses, purifies and invigorates the scalp, forever stopping itching and falling hair.

But what will please you most will be after a few weeks' use when you will actually see new hair—fine and downy at first—yes—but really new hair—growing all over the scalp, you care for pretty, soft hair and lo of it, surely get a 25 cent bottle Knowlton's Dandarine in any store and just try it. Adv.

The most common form of pessimism is the belief that a good beginning makes a bad ending.