

The Last Shot

By FREDERICK PALMER

CHAPTER XXI—Continued.

"We are going on, I and my guns, on to the best yet—in the pursuit! Nothing can stop us! We shall hit the Grays so fast and hard that they can never get their machine in order again. God bless you! Everything that is fine in me will always think fluently of you! You and Lanny—two fixed stars for me!"

"Truly!" She was radiant. "Truly!" she asked wistfully.

"Yes, yes—a yes as real as the guns!"

"Then it helps! Oh, how it helps!" she murmured almost inaudibly.

"Good-by! God bless you!" he cried as he started to go, adding over his shoulder merrily: "I'll send you a picture post-card from the Grays' capital of my guns parked in the palace square."

She watched him leap the garden wall as lightly as he had come and gallop away, an impersonation of the gay, adventurous spirit of war, counting death and wounds and hardship as the delights of the game. Yes, he would follow the Grays, throwing shells in the irresponsible joy of tossing confetti in a carnival. Pursuit! Was Feller's the sentiment of the army? Were the Browns not to stop at the frontier? Were they to change their song to, "Now we have ours we shall take some of theirs?" The thought was fresh fuel to the live coals that still remained under the ashes.

A brigade commander and some of his staff-officers near by formed a group with faces intent around an operator who was attaching his instrument to a field-wire that had just been reeled over the hedge. Marta moved toward them, but paused on hearing an outburst of jubilant exclamations:

"A hundred thousand prisoners!"

"And five hundred guns!"

"We're coming in on their frontier all along the line!"

"It's incredible!"

"But the word is official—it's right!" From mouth to mouth—a hundred thousand prisoners, five hundred guns—the news was passed in the garden. Eyes dull with fatigue began flashing as the soldiers broke into a cheer that was not led, a cheer unlike any Marta had heard before. It had the high notes of men who were weary, of a terrible exultation, of spirit stronger than tired legs and as yet unsatisfied. Other exclamations from both officers and men expressed a hunger whetted by the taste of one day's victory.

"We'll go on!"

"We'll make peace in their capital!"

"And with an indemnity that will stagger the world!"

"Nothing is impossible with Lanstron. How he has worked it out—baited them to their own destruction!"

"A frontier of our own choosing!"

"On the next range. We will keep all that stretch of plain there!"

"And the river, too!"

"They shall pay—pay for attacking us!"

"Pay, pay for the drudgery, the sleepless nights, the dead and the wounded—for our dead and wounded! No matter about theirs! The officers were too intent in their elation to observe a young woman, standing quite still, her lips a thin line and a deep blaze in her eyes as she looked this way and that at the field of faces, seeking some dissident, some partisan of the right. She was seeing the truth now; the cold truth, the old truth to which she had been untrue when she took Feller's place. There could be no choice of sides in war unless you believed in war. One who fought for peace must take up arms against all armies. Her part as a spy appeared to her clad in a new kind of shame; the desertion of her principles.

Nor did the officers observe a man of thirty-five, wearing the cords of the staff and a general's stars, coming around the corner of the house. Marta's feverish, roving glance had noted him directly he was in sight. His face seemed to be in keeping with the other faces, in the ardor of a hunt unfinished; hand in blouse pocket, his bearing a little too easy to be conventionally military—the same Lanny.

She was dimly conscious of surprise not to find him changed, perhaps because he was unaccompanied by a retinue or any other symbol of his power. He might have been coming to call on a Sunday afternoon. In that first glimpse it was difficult to think of him as the commander of an army. But that he was, she must not forget. She was shaken and trembling; and a mist rose before her, so that she did not see him clearly when, with a gesture of relief, he saw her.

"Lanstron!" exclaimed an officer in the first explosive breath of amazement on recognizing him; then added: "His Excellency, the chief of staff!"

But the one word, Lanstron, had been enough to thrill all the officers to silence and ramrod salute. Marta

noted the deference of their glances as they covertly looked him over.

"I wanted a glimpse of the front as well as the rear," Lanstron remarked in explanation of his presence to the general of brigade as he passed on toward Marta, who was thinking that she, at least, was not in awe of him; she, at least, saw clearly and truly his part.

"Marta! Marta!"

Lanstron's voice was tremulous, as if he were in awe of her, while he drank in the fact that she was there before him at arms' length, safe, alive. She did not offer her hand in greeting. She was incapable of any movement, such was her emotion; and he, too, was held in a spell, as the reality of her, after all that had passed, filled his eyes. He waited for her to speak, but she was silent.

"Marta—that bandage! You have been hurt!" he exclaimed.

"It's the fashion to be wounded," she said, eyebrows lifted and lashes lowered, with a nervous smile. "I played Florence Nightingale, the natural woman's part, I believe. We should never protest; only nurse the victims of war. After helping to send men to death I went under fire myself, and—and that helped."

"Yes, that would help," he agreed, wincing as from a knife thrust.

Her old taunt: sending men to death and taking no risk himself! She saw that he winced; she realized that she had stayed words that were about to come in a flood. She was marshaling her thoughts to begin when the brittle silence was broken by a rumbling of voices, a stirring of feet, and a cheer.

"Lanstron! Lanstron! Hurrah for Lanstron!"

The soldiers in the garden did not bother with any "Your Excellency, the chief of staff" formula when word had been passed of his presence. Marta looked around to see their tempestuous enthusiasm as they tossed their caps in the air and sent up their spontaneous tribute from the depths of their lungs. Conqueror and hero to the living, but the dead could not speak, whispered some fiend in her heart.

Lanstron uncovered to the demonstration impulsively, when the conventional military acknowledgment would have been a salute. He always looked more like the real Lanny to her with his forehead bare. It completed the ensemble of his sensitive features. She saw that he was blinking almost boyishly at the compliment and noted the little deprecatory shake of his head, as much as to say that they were making a mistake.

"Thank you!" he called, and the cheeriness of his voice, she thought, expressed his real self; the delight of victory and the glowing anticipation of further victories.

"Thank you!" called the private with a big voice.

"Yes, thank you!" repeated some of the officers in quick appreciation of a compliment as real as human courage.

He stood smiling for a moment in reply to their smiles; then, still smiling, but in a different way, he said to Marta:

"As you say, that helps!" with a nod toward the bandage on her forearm, and hurriedly turned away.

She saw him involuntarily clutch the wrist above the pocket of his blouse to

still the twitching; but beyond that there was no further sign of emotion as he went to the telephone. Instantly he was through he started toward the pass road, not by the path to the steps, but by leaping from terrace to terrace and waving his hand gaily to the soldiers as he went. The officers stared at the sight of a chief of staff breaking away from his communications in this unceremonious fashion. They saw him secure a horse from a group of cavalry officers on the road and gallop away.

Marta having been the object of Lanstron's attention now became the object of theirs. It was good to see a woman, a woman of the Browns, after their period of separation from feminine society. She found herself holding an impromptu reception. She heard some other self answering their polite questions; while a fear, a new kind of fear, was taking hold of her real self: a fear inexplicable, in-

stiduously growing. Lanstron was still in the officers' minds after his strange appearance and stranger departure. They began to talk of him, and Marta listened.

"He said something about being a free man now!"

"Yes, he looked as eager as a terrier after rats."

"He knows what he is doing. He sees so far ahead of what we are thinking that it's useless to guess his object. We'll understand when it's done."

"How little side he has! So perfectly simple. He hardly seems to realize the immensity of his success. In fact, none of us realizes it; it's too enormous, overwhelming, sudden!"

"And no nerves!"

Of course, they guessed nothing of Marta's part in his success. The very things they were saying about him built up a figure of the type whose character she had keenly resented a few minutes before.

"But, Miss Galloway, you seem to know him far better than we. This is not news to you," remarked the brigade commander.

"Yes, I saw the accident of his first flight when his hand was injured," she said, and winced with horror. Never had the picture of him as he rose from the wreck appeared so distinct. She could see every detail of his looks; feel his twinges of pain while he smiled. Was the revelation the more vivid because it had once occurred to her since the war began? It shut out the presence of the officers; she no longer heard what they were saying. Black fear was enveloping her. Vaguely she understood that they were looking away at something. She heard the roar of artillery not far distant and following their gaze toward the knoll where Dellarme's men had received their baptism of fire, now under a canopy of shrapnel smoke.

"That's about their last stand in the tangent, their last snarl on our soil," remarked the brigade commander.

"And we're raining shells on it!" said his aide. "With our glasses we'll be able to watch the infantry go in."

"Yes, very well."

"We're all used to how it feels, now we'll see how it looks at a distance," piped one of the soldiers.

Not until he had shouted to them did they notice a division staff-officer who had come up from the road. He had a piece of astounding news to impart before he mentioned official business.

"What do you think of this?" he cried. "Nothing could stop him! Lanstron—yes, Lanstron has gone into that charge with the African Braves!"

"Why?" Marta heard the officers around her asking after their exclamations of amazement at the news that Lanstron was going in the charge. "Why should the chief of staff risk his life in this fashion?"

Marta knew. All her taunts about sending others to death from his office chair, uttered as the fugitive sarcasm of a mood, recurred in the merciless hammerbeat of recollection. For a moment she was aghast, speechless. Then the officers, occupied with the startling news, heard a voice, wrenched from a dry throat in anguish, saying:

"The telephone! Try to reach him! Tell him he must not!"

"We can hardly say 'must not' to a chief of staff," said the general automatically.

"Tell him I ask him not to! Try to reach him—try—you can try!"

"Yes, yes! Certainly!" exclaimed the general, turning to the telephone operator.

He had seen now what the younger men had seen at a glance. They were recalling Lanstron's relief at seeing her; how he had passed them by to speak to her; the intensity of the two in their almost wordless meeting. Her bloodless lips, the imploring passion in her eyes, her quivering impatience told the rest.

"Division headquarters!" called the operator. "They're getting brigade headquarters," he added while he waited in silence. "Brigade headquarters says the Braves have no wire. It's too late. The charge is starting."

"So it is!" cried one of the subalterns. "Look! Look!"

Marta looked toward the rising ground this side of the knoll in time to see bayonets flash in the waning afternoon sunlight and disappear as they descended the slope.

"There! They're up on the other slope without stopping!" exclaimed the general. "Quick! Don't you want to see?" He offered his glasses to Marta.

"No, I can see well enough," she murmured, though the landscape was moving before her eyes in giddy waves.

"The madness of it! The whole slope is peppered with the fallen!"

"What a cost! Magnificent, but not war. Carrying their flag in the good old way, right at the front!"

"Heavens! I hope they do it!"

"The flag's down!"

"Another man has it—it's up!"

"Now—now—splendid! They're in!"

"So they are! And the flag, too!"

"Yes, what's left are in!"

"And Lanstron was there—in that!"

"What if—"

"Yes, the chief of staff, the head of the army, in an affair like that!"

"The mind of the army—the mind that was to direct our advance!"

"When all the honors of the world are his!"

His words were acid-tipped needles knitting back and forth through Marta's brain. Was Lanny one of those black specks that peppered the slope? Was he? Was he?

"Telephone and—and see if Lanny is killed!" she begged.

"I'll go—I'll go out there where he

is!" she said incoherently, still looking toward the knoll with glazed eyes. She thought she was walking fast as she started for the garden gate, but really she was going slowly, stumblingly.

"I think you had better stop her if you can," said the general to his aide. The aide overtook her at the gate.

"We shall know about his excellency before you can find out for yourself," he said; and, young himself, he could put the sympathy of youth with romance into his tone. "You might miss the road, even miss him, when he was without a scratch, and be for hours in ignorance," he explained. "In a few minutes we ought to have word."

Marta sank down weakly on the tongue of a wagon, overturned against the garden wall in the melee of the retreat, and leaned her shoulder on the wheel for support.

"If the women of the Grays waited four weeks," she said with an effort at stoicism, "then I ought to be able to wait a few minutes."

"Depend on me. I'll bring news as soon as there is any," the aid con-



Marta Sank Down Weakly.

cluded, and, seeing that she wished to be alone, he left her.

For the first time she had real oblivion from the memory of her deceit of Westering, the oblivion of dream, heart-pulling suspense. All the good times, the sweetly companionable times, she and Lanny had had together; all his flashes of courtship, his outburst in their last interview in the arbor, when she had told him that if she found that she wanted to come to him she would come in a flame, passed in review under the hard light of her petty ironies and sarcasms, which had the false ring of coquetry to her now, genuine as they had been at the time. Through her varying moods she had really loved him, and the thing that had slumbered in her became the drier fuel for the flame—perhaps too late.

Without him—what then? It seemed that the fatality that had let him escape miraculously from the aeroplane accident, made him chief of staff, and brought him victory, might well choose to ring down the curtain of destiny for him in the charge that drove the last foot of the invader off the soil of the Browns. . . . A voice was calling. . . . She heard it giddily, with a sudden access of giddy fear, before it became a cheerful, clarion cry that seemed to be repeating a message that had already been spoken without her understanding it.

"He's safe, safe, safe, Miss Galloway! He was not hit! He is on his way back and ought to be here very soon!"

She heard herself saying "Thank you!" But that was not for some time. The aide was already gone. He had had his thanks in the effect of the news, which made him think that a chief of staff should not receive congratulations for victory alone.

Lanny would return through the garden. She remained leaning against the wagon body, still faint from happiness, waiting for him. She was drawing deeper and longer breaths that were velvety with the glow of sunshine. A flame, the flame that Lanny had desired, of many gentle yet passionate tongues, leaping hither and thither in glad freedom, was in possession of her being. When his figure appeared out of the darkness the flame swept her to her feet and toward him. Though he might reject her he should know that she loved him; this glad thing, after all his shame she had endured, she could confess triumphantly.

But she stopped short under the whip of conscience. Where was her courage? Where her sense of duty? What right had she, who had played such a horrible part, to think of self? There were other sweethearts with lovers alive who might be dead on the morrow if war continued. The flame sank to a live coal in her secret heart. Another passion possessed her as she seized Lanstron's hand in both her own.

"Lanny, listen! Not the sound of a shot—for the first time since the war began! Oh, the blessed silence! It's peace, peace—isn't it to be peace?" As they ascended the steps she was pouring out a flood of broken, feverish sentences which per-

NO WAR TAX ON CANADIAN LANDS

Untruthful Reports Circulated by Interested Parties.

Defaming a neighbor at the expense of the truth does not help those who are guilty of the practice, and it may be said that those spreading false reports about Canadian lands, in the hope that they may secure customers for their own, will certainly fall of their purpose. False statements so maliciously circulated will sooner or later be disproved. And, as in the case of the lands of Western Canada, the fertility of which is now so well known to people of every state in the United States, the folly of this work shows an exceeding short sightedness on the part of those guilty of the practice.

The present war has given some of these people the opportunity to exercise their art, but in doing it they are only arousing the curiosity of those who read the statements and a trifling investigation will only reveal their untruthfulness.

A very foolish statement has recently appeared in a number of papers, reading in part as follows:—

"It is believed that as a result of the war tax on land imposed by the Canadian Government a number of former Dakota farmers who went to the British Northwest will be compelled to return to the United States. Information has been received that the tax will amount to about \$500 for each farm of 160 acres, which in the case of many of the former residents of the two Dakotas would practically amount to confiscation."

To show that the public has doubted, hundreds of inquiries have been made the Government at Ottawa, Canada, only to bring out the most emphatic denial. A full-fledged lie of this kind has, of course, only a short life, and will tell in the end against those who forge it and spread it, but, as a Winnipeg paper points out, it is most complimentary to the agricultural possibilities of Western Canada to find that rival farming propositions need audacious mendacity of this description to help them.

What is the truth? The Saskatchewan Government has authorized a levy of \$10 per quarter section on uncultivated lands owned by non-residents. The Alberta Government has imposed a Provincial tax of 10 mills on the assessed value of all uncultivated lands. There are some special applications of these taxes, but the main provisions are as above. Those vacant lands held by non-residents in Western Canada form a grave problem. They are making for poor communities, poor schools and poor social and economic conditions generally. By having them cultivated the owners as well as the districts in which they are located will benefit alike. It is for this reason that the Government has recently asked the co-operation of the non-residents. The high price of grain for some years to come, and the general splendid character of Western Canada land will make the question well worth consideration.—Advertisement.

All Promised.

He—Can't you spare me a kiss?
She—You'll have to ask Fred; I've promised them all to him.

A man must indeed be mighty busy when he hasn't time to stop and watch a dog fight.

Westbrook, Me. — "I was passing through the Change of Life and had pains in my back and side and was so weak I could hardly do my housework. I have taken Lydia E. Pinkham's Vegetable Compound and it has done me a lot of good. I will recommend your medicine to my friends and give you permission to publish my testimonial." — Mrs. LAWRENCE MARTIN, 12 King St., Westbrook, Maine.

Manston, Wis. — "At the Change of Life I suffered with pains in my back and loins until I could not stand. I also had night-sweats so that the sheets would be wet. I tried other medicine but got no relief. After taking one bottle of Lydia E. Pinkham's Vegetable Compound I began to improve and I continued its use for six months. The pains left me, the night-sweats and hot flashes grew less, and in one year I was a different woman. I know I have to thank you for my continued good health ever since." — Mrs. M. J. BROWNELL, Manston, Wis.

The success of Lydia E. Pinkham's Vegetable Compound, made from roots and herbs, is unparalleled in such cases.

If you want special advice write to Lydia E. Pinkham Medicine Co. (confidential) Lynn, Mass. Your letter will be opened, read and answered by a woman, and held in strict confidence.

CHAPTER XXII.

The Last Shot.

"Miss Galloway!"

Blinking as she came out of the darkness into the bright light, with a lock of her dew-sprinkled dark hair free and brushing her flushed cheek, Marta saw the division chiefs of the Browns, after their start when Lanstron spoke her name, all stand at the salute, looking at her rather than at him. The reality in the flesh of the woman who had been a comrade in service, sacrificing her sensibilities for their cause, appealed to them as a true likeness of their conceptions of her. In their eyes she might read the finest thing that can pass from man's to woman's or from man's to man's. These were the strong men of her people who had driven the burglar from her house with the sword of justice. Their tribute had the steadfast loyalty of soldiers who were craving to do anything in the world that she might ask, whether to go on their knees to her or to kill dragons for her.

"I may come in?" she asked.

"Who if not you is entitled to the privilege of the staff council!" exclaimed the vice-chief.

The others did not propose to let him do all the honors. Each murmured words of welcome on his own account.

"We are here, thanks to you!"

"And, thanks to you, our flag will float over the Gray range!"

She must be tired, was their next thought. Four or five of them hurried to place a chair for her, the vice-chief winning over his rivals, more through the exercise of the rights of rank than by any superior alacrity.

"You are appointed actual chief of staff and a field marshal!" said the vice-chief to Lanstron. "The premier says that every honor the nation can bestow is yours. The capital is mad. The crowds are crying: 'On to the Gray capital!' Tomorrow is to be a public holiday and they are calling it Lanstron Day. The thing was so sudden that the speculators who depressed our securities in the world's markets have got their due—ruin! And we ought to get an indemnity that will pay the cost of the war."

Seated at one side, Marta could watch all that passed, herself unobscured. She noted a touch of color come to Lanstron's cheeks as he made a little shrug of protest.

Then she saw their faces grow businesslike and keen, as they gathered around the table, with Lanstron at the head. They were oblivious of her presence, immured in a man's world of war.

"Your orders were obeyed. We have not passed a single white post yet!" said the vice-chief impatiently. "As the Grays never expected to take the defensive, their fortresses are inferior. Every hour we wait means more time for them to fortify, more time to recover from their demoralization. Our dirigibles having command of the air—we had a wireless from one reporting all clear half-way to the Gray capital—why, we shall know their concentrations while they are ignorant of ours. It's the nation's great opportunity to gain enough provinces to even the balance of population with the Grays. With the unremitting offensive, blow on blow, using the spirit of our men to drive in mass attacks at the right points, the Gray range is ours!"

Marta scanned the faces of the staff for some sign of dissent only to find nothing but the ardor of victory calling for more victory, which reflected the feeling of the courting crowds in the capital. Though Lanny wished to stop the war, he was only a chip on the crest of a wave. Public opinion, which had made him an idol, would discard him as soon as he ceased to be a hero in the likeness of its desires. She saw him aloof as the others, in preoccupation, bent over the map outlining the plan of attack that they had worked out while awaiting their chief's return from the charge. He was taking a paper from his pocket and looking from one to another of his colleagues studiously; and she was conscious of that determination in his smile which she had first seen when he rose from the wreck of his plane.

"This is from Partow; a message for you and the nation!" he announced, as he spread a few thin, typewritten pages out on the table. "I was under promise never to reveal its contents unless our army drove the Grays back across the frontier. The original is in the staff vaults. I have carried this copy with me."

At the mention in an arresting tone of that name of the dead chief, to which the day's events had given the prestige of one of the heroes of old, there was grave attention.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

A Common Failing.

A couple of visitors from a rural district were in the strangers' gallery in the house of commons trying to recognize their member on the floor. "I can't distinguish him," said one, after a hopeless visual observation. "Of course not," was the honest reply. "He can't even distinguish himself." —Tit-Bits.



"You Have Been Hurt," He Exclaimed.

still the twitching; but beyond that there was no further sign of emotion as he went to the telephone. Instantly he was through he started toward the pass road, not by the path to the steps, but by leaping from terrace to terrace and waving his hand gaily to the soldiers as he went. The officers stared at the sight of a chief of staff breaking away from his communications in this unceremonious fashion. They saw him secure a horse from a group of cavalry officers on the road and gallop away.

Marta having been the object of Lanstron's attention now became the object of theirs. It was good to see a woman, a woman of the Browns, after their period of separation from feminine society. She found herself holding an impromptu reception. She heard some other self answering their polite questions; while a fear, a new kind of fear, was taking hold of her real self: a fear inexplicable, in-

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