

# The Last Shot

BY FREDERICK PALMER

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### SYNOPSIS.

At their home on the frontier between the Browns and Grays, Marta Gailand and her mother, entertaining Colonel Westering, staff intelligence officer of the Browns, injured by a fall in his aeroplane. Ten years later, Westering, nominal vice but real chief of staff, reinforces South La Tir, meditates on war, and speculates on the comparative acts 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.

### CHAPTER III—Continued.

"You think I am joking?" she asked. "Why, yes!" "But I am not! No, no, not about such a ghastly subject as a war today!" She was leaning toward him, hands on knee and eyes burning like coals without a spark. "I—she paused as she had before she broke out with the first prophecy—I will quote part of our children's oath: 'I will not be a coward. It is a coward who strikes first. A brave man even after he receives a blow tries to reason with his assailant, and does not strike back until he receives a second blow. I shall not let a burglar drive me from my house. If an enemy tries to take my land I shall appeal to his sense of justice and reason with him, but if he then persists I shall fight for my home. If I am victorious I shall not try to take his land but to make the most of my own. I shall never cross a frontier to kill my fellowmen.'"

Very impressive she made the oath. Her deliberate recital of it had the quality which justifies every word with an urgent faith.

"You see, with that teaching there can be no war," she proceeded, "and those who strike will be weak; those who defend will be strong."

"Perhaps," he said.

"You would not like to see thousands, hundreds of thousands, of men killed and maimed, would you?" she demanded, and her eyes held the horror of the sight in reality. "You can prevent it—you can!" Her heart was in the appeal.

"The old argument! No, I should not like to see that," he replied. "I only do my duty as a soldier to my country."

"The old answer! The more reason why you should tell the premier you can't! But there is still another reason for telling him," she urged gently.

Now he saw her not at twenty-seven but at seventeen, girlish, the subject of no processes of reason but in the spell of an intuition, and he knew that something out of the blue in a flash was coming.

"For you will not win!" she declared. This struck fire. Square jaw and sturdy body, in masculine energy, resolute and trained, were set indomitably against feminine vitality.

"Yes, we shall win! We shall win!" he said without even the physical demonstration of a gesture and in a hard, even voice which was like that of the machinery of modern war itself, a voice which the aristocratic sniff, the Louis XVI curls, or any of the old gallery-display heroes would have thought utterly lacking in histrionics suitable to the occasion. He remained rigid after he had spoken, handsome, self-possessed.

There was no use of beating feminine fists against such a stone wall. The force of the male was supreme. She smiled with a strange, quivering loosening of the lips. She spread out her hands with fingers apart, as if to let something run free from them into the air, and the flame of appeal that had been in her eyes broke into many lights that seemed to scatter into space, yet ready to return at her command. She glanced at the clock and rose, almost abruptly.

"I was very strenuous riding my hobby against you, wasn't I?" she exclaimed in a flutter of distraction that made it easy for him to descend from his own steeple. "I stated a feeling. I made a guess, a threat about your winning—and all in the air. That's a woman's privilege; one man grant, isn't it?"

"We enjoy doing so," he replied, all urbanity.

"Thank you!" she said simply. "I must be at home in time for the children's lesson on Sunday. My sleeper is engaged, and if I am not to miss the train I must go immediately."

With an undeniable shock of regret he realized that the interview was over. Really, he had had a very good time; not only that, but—

"Will it be ten years before we meet again?" he asked.

"Perhaps, unless you change the rules about officers crossing the frontier to take tea," she replied.

"Even if I did, the vice-chief of staff might hardly go."

"Then perhaps you must wait," she warned him, "until the teachers of peace have done away with all frontiers."

"Or, if there were war, I should come!" he answered in kind. He half wished that this might start another argument and she would miss her train. But she made no reply. "And you may come to the Gray capital again. You are not through traveling!" he added.

This aroused her afresh; the flame was back in her eyes.

It is in the soil of your three acres. I love to feel the warm, rich earth of my own garden in my hands! Hereafter I shall be a stay-at-home; and if my children win," she held out her hand in parting with the same frank, earnest grip of her greeting, "why, you will find that tea is, as usual, at four-thirty."

He had found the women of his high official world—a narrower world than he realized—much alike. Striking certain keys, certain chords responded. He could probe the depths of their minds, he thought, in a single evening. Then he passed on, unless it was in the interest of pleasure or of his career to linger. This meeting had left his curiosity baffled. He understood how Marta's vitality demanded action, which exerted itself in a feminine way for a feminine cause. The cure for such a sad was most clear to his masculine perception. What if all the power she had shown in her appeal for peace could be made to serve another ambition? He knew that he was a great man. More than once he had wondered what would happen if he were to meet a great woman. And he should not see Marta Gailand again unless war came.

### CHAPTER IV.

Times Have Changed. The 53d of the Browns had started for La Tir on the same day that the 125th of the Grays had started for South La Tir. While the 125th was going to new scenes, the 53d was returning to familiar ground. It had returned in the capital of the province from which its ranks had been recruited. After a steep incline, there was a welcome bugle note and with shouts of delight the centipede's legs broke apart! Bankers, laborers, doctors, valets, butchers, manufacturers and judges' sons threw themselves down on the greensward of the embankment to rest. With their talk of home, of relatives whom they had met at the station, and of the changes in the town was mingled talk of the crisis.

Meanwhile, an aged man was approaching. At times he would break into a kind of trot that ended, after a few steps, in shortness of breath. He was quite withered, his bright eyes twinkling out of an area of moth patches, and he wore a frayed uniform coat with a medal on the breast.

"Is this the 53d?" he quavered to the nearest soldier.

"It certainly is!" some one answered. "Come and join us, veteran!"

"Is Tom—Tom Fragni here?"

The answer came from a big soldier, who sprang to his feet and leaped toward the old man.

"It's grandfather, as I live!" he called out, kissing the veteran on both cheeks. "I saw sister in town, and she said you'd be at the gate as we marched by."

"Didn't wait at no gate! Marched right up to you!" said grandfather. "Marched up with my uniform and medal on! Stand off there, Tom, so I can see you. My word! You're bigger your father, but not bigger I was! No, sir, not bigger I was in my day before that wound sort of bent me over. They say it's the lead in the blood. I've still got the bullet!"

The old man's trousers were threadbare but well darned, and the holes in the uppers of his shoes were carefully patched. He had a merry air of optimism, which his grandson had inherited.

"Well, Tom, how much longer you got to serve?" asked grandfather.

"Six months," answered Tom.

"One, two, three, four—" grandfather counted the numbers off on his fingers. "That's good. You'll be in time for the spring ploughing. My, how you have filled out! But, somehow, I can't get used to this kind of uniform. Why, I don't see how a girl'd be attracted to you fellows, at all!"

"They have to, for we're the only kind of soldiers there are nowadays. Not as gay as in your day, that's sure, when you were in the Hussars, eh?"

"Yes, I was in the Hussars—in the Hussars! I tell you with our sabres gleaming, our horses' bits a-jingling, our pennons a-flying, and all the color of our uniform—I tell you, the girls used to open their eyes at us. And we went into the charge like that—yes, sir, just that gay and grand. Colonel Gailand leading!"

Military history said that it had been a rather foolish charge, a fine example of the vainglory of unreasoning bravery that accomplishes nothing, but no one would suggest such skepticism of an immortal event in popular imagination in hearing of the old man as he lived over that intoxicated rush of horses and men into a battery of the Grays.

"Well, didn't you find what I said was true about the lowlanders?" asked grandfather after he had finished the charge, referring to the people of the southern frontier of the Browns, where the 53d had just been garrisoned.

"No, I kind of liked them. I made a lot of friends," admitted Tom. "They're very progressive."

"Eh, eh? You're joking!" To like the people of the southern frontier was only less conceivable than liking the people of the Grays. "That's because you didn't see deep under them. They're all on the outside—a flighty lot! Why, if they'd done their part in that last war we'd have licked the Grays until they cried for mercy! If their army corps had stood its ground at Volmer—"

"So you've always said," interrupted Tom.

"And the way they cook tripe! I couldn't stomach it, could you? And if there's anything I am partial to it's a good dish of tripe! And their light beer—like drinking froth! And their

bread—why, it ain't bread! It's chips! 'Taint fit for civilized folks!"

"But I sort of got used to their ways," said Tom.

"Eh, eh?" Grandfather looked at grandson quizzically, seeking the cause of such heterodoxy in a northern man. "Say, you ain't been falling in love?" he hazarded. "You—you ain't going to bring one of them southern girls home?"

"No!" said Tom, laughing. "Well, I'm glad you ain't, for they're naturally light-minded. I remember 'em well." He wandered on with his questions and comments. "Is it a fact, Tom, or was you just joking when you wrote home that the soldiers took so many baths?"

"Yes, they do."

"Well, that beats me! It's a wonder you didn't all die of pneumonia!" He paused to absorb the phenomenon. Then his half-childish mind, prompted by a random recollection, flitted to another subject which set him to giggling. "And the little crawlers—did they bother you much, the little crawlers?"

"The little crawlers?" repeated Tom, mystified.

"Yes, everybody used to get 'em just from living close together. Had to comb 'em out and pick 'em out of your clothes. The chase we used to call it."

"No, grandfather, crawlers have gone out of fashion. And no more epidemics of typhoid and dysentery either," said Tom.

"Times have certainly changed!" scumbled Grandfather Fragni.

Interested in their own reunion, they had paid no attention to a group of Tom's comrades nearby, sprawled around a newspaper containing the latest dispatches from both capitals.

"Five million soldiers to our three million!"

"Eighty million people to our fifty million!"

"Because of the odds, they think we are bound to yield, no matter if we are in the right!"

"Let them come!" said the butcher's son. "If we have to go, it will be on a wave of blood."

"And they will come some time," said the judge's son. "They want our land."

"We gain nothing if we beat them back. War will be the ruin of business," said the banker's son.

"Yes, we are prosperous now. Let well enough alone!" said the manufacturer's son.

"Some say it makes wages higher," said the laborer's son, "but I am thinking it's a poor way of raising your pay."

"There won't be any war," said the banker's son. "There can't be without credit. The banking interests will not permit it."

"There can always be war," said the judge's son, "always when one people determines to strike at another people—even if it brings bankruptcy."

"It would be a war that would make all others in history a mere exchange of skirmishes. Every able-bodied man in line—automatics a hundred shots a minute—guns a dozen shots a minute

—and aeroplanes and dirigibles!" said the manufacturer's son.

"To the death, too!"

"And not for glory! We of the 53d who live on the frontier will be fighting for our homes."

"If we lose them we'll never get them back. Better die than be beaten!" Herbert Stransky, with deep-set eyes, slightly squinting inward, and a heavy jaw, an enormous man who was the best shot in the company when he cared to be, had listened in silence to the others, his rather thick but expressive lips curving with cynicism. His only speech all the morning had been in the midst of the reception in the public square of the town when he said:

"This home-coming doesn't mean much to me. Home? Hell! The hedgerows of the world are my home!" He appeared older than his years, and hard and bitter, except when his eyes would light with a feverish sort of fire which shone as he broke into a lull in the talk.

"Comrades," he began.

"Let us hear from the Socialist!" a Tory exclaimed.

"No, the anarchist!" shouted a Socialist.

"There won't be any war!" said Stransky, his voice gradually rising to the pitch of an agitator relishing the sensation of his own words. "Patriotism is the played-out trick of the ruling classes to keep down the proletariat. There won't be any war! Why? Because there are too many enlightened men on both sides who do the world's work. We of the 53d are a provincial lot, but throughout our army there are thousands upon thousands like me. They march, they drill, but when battle comes they will refuse to fight—my comrades in heart, to whom the flag of this country means

no more than that of any other country!"

"Hold on! The flag is sacred!" cried the banker's son.

"Yes, that will do!"

"Shut up!"

Other voices formed a chorus of angry protest.

"I knew you thought it; now I've caught you!" This from the sergeant, who had seen hard fighting against a savage foe in Africa and therefore was particularly bitter about the Bodlapoo affair. The welt of a scar on the gaunt, fever-yellowed cheek turned a deeper red as he seized Stransky by the collar of the blouse.

Stransky raised his free hand as if to strike, but paused as he faced the company's boyish captain, slender of figure, aristocratic of feature. His indignation was as evident as the sergeant's, but he was biting his lips to keep it under control.

"You heard what he said, sir?"

"The latter part—enough!"

"It's incitement to mutiny! An example!"

"Yes, put him under arrest."

The sergeant still held fast to the collar of Stransky's blouse. Stransky could have shaken himself free, as a mastiff frees himself from a puppy, but this was resistance to arrest and he had not yet made up his mind to go that far. His muscles were weaving under the sergeant's grip, his eyes glowing as with volcanic fire waiting on the madness of impulse for eruption.

"I wonder if it is really worth while to put him under arrest?" said some one at the edge of the group in amiable inquiry.

The voice came from an officer of about thirty-five, who apparently had strolled over from a near-by aeroplane station to look at the regiment. From his shoulder hung the gold cords of the staff. It was Col. Arthur Lanstron, whose plane had skimmed the Gallands' garden wall for the "easy bump" ten years ago. There was something more than mere titular respect in the way the young captain saluted—admiration and the diffident, boyish glance of recognition which does not presume to take the lead in recalling a slight acquaintance with a man of distinction.

"Dellarme! It's all of two years since we met at Miss Gailand's, isn't it?" Lanstron said, shaking hands with the captain.

"Yes, just before we were ordered south," said Dellarme, obviously pleased to be remembered.

"I overheard your speech," Lanstron continued, nodding toward Stransky. "It was very informing."

A crowd of soldiers was now pressing around Stransky, and in the front rank was Grandfather Fragni.

"Said our flag was no better'n any other flag, did he?" piped the old man. "Beat him to a pulp! That's what the Hussars would have done."

"If you don't mind telling it in public, Stransky, I should like to know your origin," said Lanstron, prepared to be as considerate of an anarchist's private feelings as of anybody's.

Stransky squinted his eyes down the bony bridge of his nose and grinned sardonically.

"That won't take long," he answered. "My father, so far as I could identify him, died in jail and my mother of drink."

"That was hardly to the purple!" observed Lanstron thoughtfully.

"No, to the red!" answered Stransky savagely.

"I mean that it was hardly inclined to make you take a roseate view of life as a beautiful thing in a well-ordered world where favors of fortune are evenly distributed," continued Lanstron.

"Rather to make me rejoice in the hope of a new order of things—the recreation of society!" Stransky uttered the sentiment with the triumphant pride of a pupil who knows his text-book thoroughly.

By this time the colonel commanding the regiment, who had noticed the excitement from a distance, appeared, forcing a gap for his passage through the crowd with sharp words. He, too, recognized Lanstron. After they had shaken hands, the colonel scowled as he heard the situation explained, with the old sergeant, still holding fast to Stransky's collar, a capable and insistent witness for the prosecution; while Stransky, the fire in his eyes dying to coals, stared straight ahead.

"It is only a suggestion, of course," said Lanstron, speaking quite as a spectator to avoid the least indication of interference with the colonel's authority, "but it seems possible that Stransky has clothed his wrongs in a garb that could never set well on his nature if he tried to wear it in practice. He is really an individualist. Enraged he would fight well. I should like nothing better than a force of Stransky's if I had to defend a redoubt in a last stand."

"Yes, he might fight." The colonel looked hard at Stransky's rigid profile, with its tight lips and chin as firm as if cut out of stone. "You never know who will fight in the pinch, they say. But that's speculation. It's the example that I have to deal with."

"He is not of the insidious, plotting type. He spoke his mind openly," suggested Lanstron. "If you give him the limit of the law, why, he becomes a martyr to persecution. I should say that his remarks might pass for barracks-room rassing."

"Very well," said the colonel, taking the shortest way out of the difficulty. "We will excuse the first offense."

"Yes, sir!" said the sergeant mechanically as he released his grip of the offender. "We had two anarchists in my company in Africa," he observed in loyal agreement with orders. "They fought like devils. The only trouble was to keep them from shooting innocent natives for sport."

Stransky's collar was still crumpled on the nape of his neck. He remained stock-still, staring down the bridge of his nose. For a full minute he did not vouchsafe so much as a glance upward over the change in his fortunes. Then he looked around at Lanstron glowering.

"I know who you are!" he said. "You were born in the purple. You have had education, opportunity, position—everything that you and your kind want to keep for your kind. You are smarter than the others. You would hang a man with spider webs instead of hemp. But I won't fight for you! No, I won't!"

He threw back his head with a determination in his defiance so intense that it had a certain kind of dignity that freed it of theatrical affectation.

"Yes, I was fortunate; but perhaps nature was not altogether unkind to you," said Lanstron. "In Napoleonic times, Stransky, I think you might even have carried a marshal's baton in your knapsack."

"You—what rot!" A sort of triumph played around Stransky's full lips and his jaw shot out challengingly. "No, never against my comrades on the other side of the border!" he concluded, his dogged stare returning.

Now the colonel gave the order to fall in; the bugle sounded and the centipede's legs began to assemble on the road. But Stransky remained a statue, his rifle untouched on the sward. He seemed of a mind to let the regiment go on without him.

"Stransky, fall in!" called the sergeant.

Still Stransky did not move. A comrade picked up the rifle and fairly thrust it into his hands.

"Come on, Bert, and knead dough with the rest of us!" he whispered. "Come on! Cheer up!" Evidently his comrades liked Stransky.

"No!" roared Stransky, bringing the rifle down on the ground with a heavy blow.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)



TAKES HIS REST INDOORS

Hubby Has Given Up His Porch Bunk and Wife is at a Loss to Understand Why.

"But I Won't Fight for You!"

—and aeroplanes and dirigibles!" said the manufacturer's son.

"To the death, too!"

"And not for glory! We of the 53d who live on the frontier will be fighting for our homes."

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TOOK AWAY HIS APPETITE

Lover of Mince Pie Had Decided Objection to Sharing the Delicacy With Restaurant Cat.

Until recently Detective Sergeant Tim Bailey was a lover of mince pie. Today if anyone offered him a bakery full of mince pies he would turn on his heel and do a quick countermarch. Figuratively he has had his fill of the good old pastry.

At dinner time one day not long ago Bailey went into a little restaurant near the Hall of Justice. "Three boiled eggs, a cup of Java and a 12 by 14 wedge of mince pie," he told the waiter.

Bailey polished off the eggs and coffee in great shape, and then attacked the pie. He had just begun when a big black cat that had been reposing on the counter a few feet away awoke, stretched, struck at a vagrant fly with a chubby paw, and then leaped into the display window of the place. The window was laden with delicacies to allure the hungry passerby.

The first thing that Tabby made for was the remains of the pie that had been cut for Bailey. Kitty's first bite was Bailey's last. He dropped his fork with a bang, reached for his hat and rushed up to the counter.

"Sa-a-y," he cried, "what are you running here, a restaurant or a kennel club?" He paid his bill, and was away down the street before the dazed keeper of the place could catch his breath.—New York Times.

Sharpens the Appetite.

Jokeleigh (visiting Subbubs)—"And you have a grindstone, too. Will it put an edge on a dull appetite?" Subbubs—"Certainly! If you turn the handle long enough."

On the other hand, with eggs at one cent a dozen, the ordinary shad would be a millionaire?

## Farmers' Educational and Co-Operative Union of America

Matters of Especial Moment to the Progressive Agriculturist

Don't forget the meetings of the farmers' clubs.

High priced land is justified only by high-class farming.

It's a perfectly safe marketing rule to sell on the rise.

"Refusing to speak" is the small one's idea of "kettling even."

For every bale of cotton the farmer sells he should hold one bale.

A desirable husband is known by the size of his wife's woodpile.

A pessimist is one who sees only the rotten speck in the pumpkin.

The buy-a-bale movement has saved the cotton producer from the speculator.

No farmer should grow so much of any crop that he must grow it carelessly.

If you get through a day without a laugh, you ought to back up and try it over.

Every living creature is the product of two sets of forces—environmental and hereditary.

Progressiveness means not being caught standing still when everything else is moving.

A farmer is known by the banker he keeps—and the best possible bank is a well-stocked farm.

A real scientist is one who can describe a complicated situation so that a plowman can understand it.

It is said that we get in life just what we expect. The man who expects low wages will get them.

There are no failures in life more pitiable perhaps than those which result from too much success.

A good dairy herd is rather to be chosen than great riches, because it may easily lead to the latter.

When it comes to a showdown, wouldn't the average man rather give up his virtues than his faults?

There are sheep-killing dogs and sheep-killing men; if all dogs should be killed why not all men jailed?

The war will drain Europe of its best horses. Is your barnyard ready for the opportunity this will create?

Modern farming is an occupation which calls for the highest type of intelligence, pride, and systematized industry.

### COTTON WILL REPLACE JUTE

More General Use of Raw Material for Manufacture of Twine and Bagging Will Aid Demand.

A more general use of cotton instead of jute for the manufacture of twine and bagging, it is believed, will be the result of an investigation made by a number of public-spirited people who endeavored to learn if there were not other uses to which cotton-made goods could be put in this country, thereby creating a demand for cotton which formerly has been sent abroad.

When the bottom dropped out of the foreign demand for American cotton one of the first thoughts that passed through the minds of the people of the South was to promote the use of more cotton by the home manufacturers. Appeals were made to all of the mills in the United States and in Canada to buy as much cotton as possible.

As jute is imported, principally from Germany, and the conflict on the continent has virtually blocked all importation to this country, the supply of jute in the United States began to greatly diminish. The price of cotton began to drop at the same time, with the result that shortly after the war began cotton was placed on a competitive basis with jute.

An important result of this campaign for the greater use of raw cotton in this country is an inquiry being made by the United States post office department