

The Last Shot

BY
FREDERICK PALMER

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SYNOPSIS.

At their home on the frontier between the Browns and Grays Marta, Galland and her mother, entertaining Colonel Lanstron of the Browns, see Captain Lanstron of the Browns injured by a fall in his aeroplane. Ten years later, Westerling, nominal vice but real chief of staff, re-enforces South La Tir and meditates on war. Marta 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. Lanstron calls on Marta at her home. She tells Lanstron that she believes Feller, the gardener, to be a spy. Lanstron confesses it is true and shows her 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. Westerling and the Gray premier plan to use a trivial international affair to foment warlike patriotism and strike before declaring war. Partow, Brown chief of staff, reveals his plans to Lanstron, made vice chief. The Gray army crosses the border line and attacks. The Browns check them. Artillery, infantry, aeroplanes and dirigibles engage. Marta has her first glimpse of war in its modern, cold, scientific, murderous brutality. The Browns fall back to the Galland house. Marta sees a night attack. The Grays attack in force. Feller leaves his secret telephone and goes back to his guns. Hand to hand fighting. The Browns fall back again. Marta asks Lanstron over the phone to appeal to Partow to stop the fighting. Vandalism in the Galland house. Westerling and his staff occupy the Galland house and he begins to woo Marta, who apparently throws her fortunes with the Grays and offers valuable information. She calls up Lanstron on the secret telephone and plans to give Westerling information that will trap the Gray army.

CHAPTER XV—Continued.

"Yes?" the monosyllable was detached, dismal, labored. "A woman can be that!" she exclaimed in an uncertain tone, which grew into the distraction of clipped words and broken sentences. "A woman play-acting—a woman acting the most revolting hypocrisy—influences the issue between two nations! Her deceit deals in the lives of sons precious to fathers and mothers, the fate of frontiers, of institutions! Think of it! Think of machines costing countless millions—machines of flesh and blood, with their destinies shaped by one little bit of lying information! Think of the folly of any civilization that stakes its triumphs on such a gamble! Am I not right? Isn't it true? Isn't it?"

"Yes, yes, Marta! But—!" If she were weakening it was not his place to try to strengthen her purpose. "It will the sooner end fighting, won't it, Lanny?" she asked in a small, tense voice.

"Yes."

"And the only real end that means real peace is to prove that the weak can hold back the strong from their threshold?"

"Yes."

Even now Westerling might be on the veranda, perhaps waiting for news that would enable him to crush the weak; to prove that the law of five pounds of human flesh against three, and five bayonets against three, is the law of civilization.

"Yes, yes, yes!" The constriction was gone from her throat; there was a drum-beat in her soul. "Depend on me, Lanny!" It was Feller's favorite phrase spoken by the one who was to take his place. "Yes, I'm ready to make any sacrifice now. For what am I? What is one woman compared to such a purpose? I don't care what is said of me or what becomes of me if we can win! Good-by, Lanny, till I call you up again! And God with us!"

"God with us!" as Partow had said, over and over. The saying had come to be repeated by hard-headed, agnostic staff-officers, who believed that the deity had no relation to the efficiency of gun-fire. The Brown infantrymen even were beginning to mutter it in the midst of action.

Waiting on the path of the second terrace for Westerling to come, Marta realized the full meaning of her task. Day in and day out she was to have suspense at her elbow and the horror of hypocrisy on her conscience, the while keeping her wits nicely balanced. When she saw Westerling appear on the veranda and start over the lawn she felt dizzy and uncertain of her capabilities.

"I have considered all that you have said for my guidance and I have decided," she began.

She heard her own voice with the relief of a singer in a debut who, with knees shaking, finds that her notes are true. She was looking directly at Westerling in profound seriousness. Though knees shook, lips and chin could aid eyes in revealing the painful fatigue of a battle that had raged in the mind of a woman who went away for half an hour to think for herself.

"I have concluded," she went on, "that it is an occasion for the sacrifice of private ethics to a great purpose, the sooner to end the slaughter."

"All true!" whispered an inner voice. Its tone was Lanny's, in the old days of their comradeship. It gave her strength. All true!

"Yes, an end—a speedy end!" said Westerling with a fine, inflexible emphasis. "That is your prayer and mine and the prayer of all lovers of humanity."

"It is little that I know, but such as it is you shall have it," she began, conscious of his guarded scrutiny. When she told him of Bordir, the weak point in the first line of the

Browns' defense, she noted no change in his steady look; but with the mention of Engadir in the main line she detected a gleam in his eyes that had the merciless delight of a cutting edge of steel. "I have made my sacrifice to some purpose? The information is worth something to you?" she asked wistfully.

"Yes, yes! Yes, it promises that way," he replied thoughtfully.

Quietly he began a considerate catechism. Soon she was subtly understanding that her answers lacked the convincing details that he sought. She longed to avert her eyes from his for an instant, but she knew that this would be fatal. She felt the force of him directed in professional channels, free of all personal relations, beating a strong light on her bare statements. How could a woman ever have learned two such vital secrets? How could it happen that two such critical points as Bordir and Engadir should go undefended? No tactician, no engineer but would have realized their strategic importance. Did she know what she was saying? How did she get her knowledge? These, she understood, were the real questions that underlay Westerling's polite indirection.

"But I have not told you the sources of my information! Isn't that like a woman's!" she exclaimed. "You see, it did not concern me at all at the time I heard it. I didn't even realize its importance and I didn't hear much," she proceeded, her introduction giving time for improvisation. "You see, Partow was inspecting the premises with Colonel Lanstron. My mother had known Partow in her younger days when my grandfather was premier. We had them both to luncheon."

"Yes?" put in Westerling, betraying his eagerness. Partow and Lanstron! Then her source was one of authority, not the gossip of subalterns!

"And it occurs to me now that, even while he was our guest," she interjected in sudden indignation—"that even while he was our guest Partow was planning to make our grounds a redoubt!"

"After luncheon I remember Partow saying, 'We are going to have a look at the crops,' and they went for a walk out to the knoll where the fighting began."

"Yes! When was this?" Westerling asked keenly.

"Only about six weeks ago," answered Marta.

"Later, I came upon them unexpectedly after they had returned," she went on. "They were sitting there on that seat concealed by the shrubbery. I was on the terrace steps unobserved

and I couldn't help overhearing them. Their voices grew louder with the interest of their discussion. I caught something about appropriations and aeroplanes and Bordir and Engadir, and saw that Lanstron was pleading with his chief. He wanted a sum appropriated for fortifications to be applied to building planes and dirigibles. Finally, Partow consented, and I recall his exact words: 'They're shockingly archaically defended, especially Engadir,' he said, 'but they can wait until we get further appropriations in the fall!' She was so far under the spell of her own invention that she believed the reality of her words, reflected in her wide-open eyes which seemed to have nothing to hide.

"That is all," she exclaimed with a shudder—"all my eavesdropping, all my breach of confidence! If—if it"—and her voice trembled with the intensity of the one purpose that was shining with the light of truth through the murk of her deception—"it will

only help to end the slaughter!" She held out her hand convulsively in parting as if she would leave the rest with him.

"I think it will," he said soberly. "I think it will prove that you have done a great service," he repeated as he caught both her hands, which were cold from her ordeal. His own were warm with the strong beating of his heart stirred by the promise of what he had just heard. But he did not prolong the grasp. He was as eager to be away to his work as she to be alone. "I think it will. You will know in the morning," he added.

His steps were sturdier than ever in the power of five against three as he started back to the house. When he reached the veranda, Bouchard, the saturnine chief of intelligence, appeared in the doorway of the dining-room; or, rather, reappeared, for he had been standing there throughout the interview of Westerling and Marta, whose heads were just visible, above the terrace wall, to his hawk eyes.

"A little promenade in the open and my mind made up," said Westerling, clapping Bouchard on the shoulder.

"Something about an attack tonight?" asked Bouchard.

"You guess right. Call the others."

Five minutes later he was seated at the head of the dining-room table with his chiefs around him waiting for their chairman to speak. He asked some categorical questions almost functorially, and the answer to each was, "Ready!" with, in some instances, a qualification—the qualification made by regimental and brigade commanders that, though they could take the position in front of them, the cost would be heavy. Yes, all were willing and ready for the first general assault of the war, but they wanted to state the costs as a matter of professional self-defense.

Westerling could pose when it served his purpose. Now he rose and, going to one of the wall maps, indicated a point with his forefinger.

"If we get that we have the most vital position, haven't we?"

Some uttered a word of assent; some only nodded. A glance or two of curiosity was exchanged. Why should the chief of staff ask so elementary a question? Westerling was not unconscious of the glances or of their meaning. They gave dramatic value to his next remark.

"We are going to mass for our main attack in front at Bordir!"

"But," exclaimed four or five officers at once, "that is the heart of the position! That is—"

"I believe it is weak—that it will fall, and tonight!"

"You have information, then, information that I have not?" asked Bouchard.

"No more than you," replied Westerling. "Not as much if you have anything new."

"Nothing!" admitted Bouchard wryly. He lowered his head under Westerling's penetrating look in the consciousness of failure.

"I am going on a conviction—on putting two and two together!" Westerling announced. "I am going on my experience as a soldier, as a chief of staff. If I am wrong, I take the responsibility. If I am right, Bordir will be ours before morning. It is settled!"

"If you are right, then," exclaimed Turcas—"well, then it's genius or—!" He did not finish the sentence. He had been about to say coincidence; while Westerling knew that if he were right all the rising skepticism in certain quarters, owing to the delay in his program, would be silenced. His prestige would be unassailable.

CHAPTER XVI.
Marking Time.

Soon after dark the attack began. Flashes from gun mouths and glowing sheets of flame from rifles made ugly revelry, while the beams of search-lights swept hither and thither. This kept up till shortly after midnight, when it died down and, where hell's concert had raged, silent darkness shrouded the hills. Marta knew that Bordir was taken without having to ask Lanstron or wait for confirmation from Westerling.

She was seated in the recess of the arbor the next morning, when she heard the approach of those regular, powerful steps whose character had become as distinct to her as those of a member of her own family. Five against three! Five against three! they were saying to her; while down the pass road and the castle road ran the stream of wounded from last night's slaughter.

Posted in the drawing-room of the Galland house were the congratulations of the premier to Westerling, who had come from the atmosphere of a staff that accorded to him a military insight far above the analysis of ordinary standards. But he was too clever a man to vaunt his triumph. He knew how to carry his honors. He accepted success as his due, in a matter-of-course manner that must inspire confidence in further success.

"You were right," he said to Marta easily, pleasantly. "We did it—we did it—we took Bordir with a loss of only twenty thousand men!"

Only twenty thousand! Her revulsion at the bald statement was relieved by the memory of Lanny's word over the telephone after breakfast that the Browns had lost only five thousand. Four to one was a wide ratio, she was thinking.

"Then the end—then peace is so much nearer?" she asked.

"Very much nearer!" he answered earnestly, as he dropped on the bench beside her.

He stretched his arms out on the back of the seat and the relaxed attitude, unusual with him, brought into relief a new trait of which she had



"I'm Going on My Experience as a Soldier."

she felt his breath on her cheek burning hot, and she was sickeningly conscious that he was looking her over in that point-by-point manner which she had felt across the tea-table at the hotel. This horrible thing in his glance she had sometimes seen in strangers on her travels, and it had made her think that she was wise to carry a little revolver. She wanted to strike him.

"Confess! Confess!" called all her own self-respect. "Make an end to your abasement!"

"Confession, after the Browns have given up Bordir! Confession that makes Lanny, not Westerling, your dupe!" came the reply, which might have been telegraphed into her mind from the high, white forehead of Partow bending over his maps. "Confession, betraying the cause of the right against the wrong; the three to the conquering five! No! You are in the thing. You may not retreat now."

For a few seconds only the duel of argument thundered in her temples—seconds in which her lips were parted and quivering and her eyes dilated with an agitation which the man at her side could interpret as he pleased. A prompting devil—a devil roused by that thing in his eyes—urging a finesse in double-dealing which only devils understand, made her lips hypnotically turn in a smile, her eyes soften, and sent her hand out to Westerling in a trancelike gesture. For an instant it rested on his arm with telling pressure, though she felt it burn with shame at the point of contact.

"We must not think of that now," she said. "We must think of nothing personal; of nothing but your work until your work is done!"

The prompting devil had not permitted a false note in her voice. Her very pallor, in fixity of idea, served her purpose. Westerling drew a deep breath that seemed to expand his whole being with greater appreciation of her. Yet that harried hunger, the hunger of a beast, was still in his glance.

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SAVING THE VENUS OF MILO

Extraordinary Precautions Taken to Guard Art Treasure Improbable to Replace.

When, during the war of 1870, the German army drew near the French capital, one of the first measures the Parisians took was to place the art treasures of the Louvre in safety. The paintings of Raphael, Titian, Paolo Veronese, Rembrandt and Rubens were carefully packed and shipped to Brest. There they could, if necessary, be put on shipboard and taken from the country.

It was not so easy to save the pieces of marble statuary, for their weight and fragility made them difficult to handle; but the French determined that the famous Venus of Milo, at least, should not fall into the hands of the Prussians.

So they took her down from her pedestal and laid her in a casket carefully padded and wrapped. At night the casket was taken out through a secret door and hidden secretly in the cellar of the police prefecture, at the end of a certain passageway.

They walled in the casket and cleverly gave the wall an appearance of great age and dilapidation. In front of this wall they laid a number of valuable public documents, so that if they should happen to be found their importance would lead the discoverers to think there was nothing else hidden there. In front of the papers they built another wall. Here the Venus of Milo remained, much to the distress of those patriotic Parisians who did not know where she was and supposed that she had been stolen, through the siege of the city by the Germans and through the disorders of the commune.

One day the prefecture caught fire and was pretty completely destroyed. The distress of those who knew that the Venus was concealed there can be imagined. As soon as the fire was extinguished they hastened to the sinking ruins and after some digging found the casket, buried in heaps of dirt and stones, but unharmed.

It is understood that the Venus has gone into hiding again this year, not to reappear until peace is restored and Paris is free from danger of the invader.—Youth's Companion.

Activities of Women.

Fifteen women are seeking seats in the Washington legislature.

The former sultan of Zanzibar is stranded in Paris with his 15 wives.

Baku, Caucasus, has a population of 117,853, of whom 93,982 are women.

Under the provisions of the will of Mrs. Emily Zoller of New York city, her pet dog is left \$200 for his keep during the rest of his life.

Textile workers in Japan threaten to go on a strike unless the 32 women who were discharged from one of the mills are reinstated.

To avoid the use of the name of a German town a Paris magazine has opened a competition asking French girls to find a new name for Cologne.

Helping the Youngsters.

One of the Chicago municipal court judges has established a library for foreign boys in the boys' court. Arrangements have been made by him with the public library to furnish books written in the native tongues of the nationalities most frequently represented in the court.—The Living Church.

Interrupted Communication.

"You don't mean to say that this is the first you've heard of it?"

"Absolutely."

"Why, it's the talk of the neighborhood."

"Yes, but my wife is away on a visit."

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THE SOUL'S TRIBUTE

Testimony of the Christian Who Recognizes the Goodness of His Maker.

How weak human words appear when I try to tell what my Lord is to me, what he has done for me and what I owe to him.

He brought me into being and his love has surrounded me and upheld me since first my eyes beheld the light.

He gave me large liberty, the power to choose in accord with inclination and desire; yet it seems to me at times as if irresistible forces had shaped the main course of my life.

Through the tender years of childhood and the uncertain, crucial years of youth he did not forsake me. He walked with me and talked with me and yearned over me with more than a mother's love.

When I forgot him, he did not forget me. When I wandered away foolishly into forbidden paths and committed sins for which there is no excuse, he did not forsake me. I know the meaning of the poet's line, "O Love that will not let me go."

I know what it means to suffer from his rebuke. How unerringly and completely his eye searches the soul of man! How like a sharp two-edged sword is his word of condemnation for wrongdoing! My Master hates sin, though he has a wondrous compassion for the sinner.

I thank him for the chastening that has awakened me out of the dullness of spiritual indifference, that has convicted me of sin and led me to repentance, that has weaned me away from life tendencies and habits that were hurtful, that has taught me to distrust self and trust the Savior and that has drawn me close to his side.

His Infinite Mercy.

What a wonderful Redeemer is my Master! He bought me with the price of his most precious blood. Under the shadow of his cross I found peace. He was infinitely merciful to me, a sinner. He looked upon me and in his eyes there was a compassion wider and deeper than the sea.

And when he drew me to himself I became conscious of a growing hatred toward the things that he hates and of an increasing love for the things he loves. At his feet I learned the truths that reveal the deeper meanings of life. Under the guidance of the sanctifying power of his Holy Spirit I gained victory after victory and from height after height I was blessed with new visions of the glory of God.

There have been days of trouble, of deep perplexity, of heartbreaking sorrow. In these testing-times I have found in him a friend unflinching. I have told him my griefs and he has touched my wounded spirit with a marvelous reviving power. He has taught me the blessedness of submission to the all-wise will and he has made the future bright with hope.

He has given me work to do in this world. O I thank him for that! He has honored me by calling me to be a co-laborer with himself. How tremendously attractive is the task! The petty vexations, the small disappointments and trials are easily forgotten in the thought that I am talking with him and with those that love him and that the day is coming when the kingdoms of this world shall be the kingdoms of our Lord.

Through the years there has been an ever increasing consciousness of the presence of the Master. More and more have I come to know him as companion, to realize the exceeding great and precious promise, "Lo, I am with you always." And the more I see him and know him, the more do I desire to be like him and to do his will.

I cannot think lightly of the final hour of the earthly life. It is a most solemn thing to die. But I shall hold to his hand. I shall commit myself, a sinner saved by grace, to his keeping. And I shall not fear, for my Master is the conqueror of death and the Lord of life.—United Presbyterian

Cultivate Gentleness.

Let our temper be under the rule of the love of Jesus. He cannot alone curb it, he can make us gentle and patient. Let the vow, that not an unkind word of others shall ever be heard from our lips, be laid trustfully at his feet. Let the gentleness that refuses to take offense, that is always ready to excuse, to think and hope the best, mark our intercourse with all. Let our life be one of self-sacrifice, always studying the welfare of others, finding our highest joy in blessing others. And let us, in studying the divine art of doing good, yield ourselves as obedient learners to the guidance of the Holy Spirit. By his grace, the most commonplace life can be transfigured with the brightness of a heavenly beauty, as the infinite love of the divine nature shines out through our frail humanity.—Andrew Murray.

The Garments We Wear.

The future is but the unwoven threads upon the loom of time. Unceasingly does the web move on, for the loom never stops. We must be alert, and with clear vision and steady hand endeavor to follow the Divine pattern, as with the swiftly-flying shuttle we weave these varicolored strands into the fabric of today to become the finished garment of our yesterdays, whether beautiful and adding to our joy, or marred and increasing our regret will depend upon the weaving of today.—George C. Elvin.

"I'm Not a Human Being."

His tone held more than gratitude. It had the elation of discovery.

"He is going to make it harder than I ever guessed!" echoed her own thought, in a flutter of confusion.

"Yes, it was strange our meeting on the frontier in peace and then in war!" she exclaimed at random. The sound of the remark struck her as too subdued; as expectant, when her purpose was one of careless deprecation.

"I have met a great many women, as you may have imagined," he proceeded. "They have passed in review. They were simply women, witty and frail or dull and beautiful, and one meant no more to me than another. Nothing meant anything to me except my profession. But I never forgot you. You planted something in mind: a memory of real companionship."

"Yes, I made the prophecy that came true!" she put in. This ought to bring him back to himself and his ambitions, she thought.

"Yes!" he exclaimed, his body stiffening free of the back of the seat. "You realized what was in me. You foresaw the power which was to be mine. The fate that first brought us together made me look you up in the capital. Now it brings us together here on this bench after all that has passed in the last twenty-four hours."

She realized that he had drawn perceptibly nearer. She wanted to rise and cry out: "Don't do this! Be the chief of staff, the conqueror, crushing the earth with the tread of five against three!" It was the conqueror whom she wanted to trick, not a man whose earnestness was painting her deceit blacker. Far from rising, she made no movement at all; only looked at her hands and allowed him to go on, conscious of the force of a personality that mastered men and armies now warm and appealing in the full tide of another purpose.

"The victory that I was thinking of last night was not the taking of Bordir. It was finer than any victory in war. It was selfish—not for army and country, but born of a human weakness triumphant; a human weakness, of which my career had robbed me," he continued. "It gave me a joy that even the occupation of the Browns' capital could not give. I had come as an invader and I had won your confidence."

"In a cause!" she interrupted hurriedly, wildly, to stop him from going further, only to find that her intonation was such that it was drawing him on.

"That fatality seemed to be working itself out to the soldier so much older than yourself in renewed youth, in another form of ambition. I hoped that there was more than the cause that led you to trust me. I hoped—"

Was he testing her? Was he playing a part of his own to make certain that she was not playing one? She looked up swiftly for answer. There was no gainsaying what she saw in his eyes. It was beating into hers with the power of an overwhelming masculine passion and a maturity of intellect as his egotism admitted a comrade to his throne. Such is ever the way of a man in the forties when the clock strikes for him. But who could know better the craft of courtship than one of Westerling's experience? He was fighting for victory; to gratify a desire.

"I did not expect this!—" the words escaped tumultuously and chokingly.

He was bending so close to her that

she felt his breath on her cheek burning hot, and she was sickeningly conscious that he was looking her over in that point-by-point manner which she had felt across the tea-table at the hotel. This horrible thing in his glance she had sometimes seen in strangers on her travels, and it had made her think that she was wise to carry a little revolver. She wanted to strike him.

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I know what it means to suffer from his rebuke. How unerringly and completely his eye searches the soul of man! How like a sharp two-edged sword is his word of condemnation for wrongdoing! My Master hates sin, though he has a wondrous compassion for the sinner.

I thank him for the chastening that has awakened me out of the dullness of spiritual indifference, that has convicted me of sin and led me to repentance, that has weaned me away from life tendencies and habits that were hurtful, that has taught me to distrust self and trust the Savior and that has drawn me close to his side.

His Infinite Mercy.

What a wonderful Redeemer is my Master! He bought me with the price of his most precious blood. Under the shadow of his cross I found peace. He was infinitely merciful to me, a sinner. He looked upon me and in his eyes there was a compassion wider and deeper than the sea.

And when he drew me to himself I became conscious of a growing hatred toward the things that he hates and of an increasing love for the things he loves. At his feet I learned the truths that reveal the deeper meanings of life. Under the guidance of the sanctifying power of his Holy Spirit I gained victory after victory and from height after height I was blessed with new visions of the glory of God.

There have been days of trouble, of deep perplexity, of heartbreaking sorrow. In these testing-times I have found in him a friend unflinching. I have told him my griefs and he has touched my wounded spirit with a marvelous reviving power. He has taught me the blessedness of submission to the all-wise will and he has made the future bright with hope.

He has given me work to do in this world. O I thank him for that! He has honored me by calling me to be a co-laborer with himself. How tremendously attractive is the task! The petty vexations, the small disappointments and trials are easily forgotten in the thought that I am talking with him and with those that love him and that the day is coming when the kingdoms of this world shall be the kingdoms of our Lord.

Through the years there has been an ever increasing consciousness of the presence of the Master. More and more have I come to know him as companion, to realize the exceeding great and precious promise, "Lo, I am with you always." And the more I see him and know him, the more do I desire to be like him and to do his will.

I cannot think lightly of the final hour of the earthly life. It is a most solemn thing to die. But I shall hold to his hand. I shall commit myself, a sinner saved by grace, to his keeping. And I shall not fear, for my Master is the conqueror of death and the Lord of life.—United Presbyterian

Cultivate Gentleness.

Let our temper be under the rule of the love of Jesus. He cannot alone curb it, he can make us gentle and patient. Let the vow, that not an unkind word of others shall ever be heard from our lips, be laid trustfully at his feet. Let the gentleness that refuses to take offense, that is always ready to excuse, to think and hope the best, mark our intercourse with all. Let our life be one of self-sacrifice, always studying the welfare of others, finding our highest joy in blessing others. And let us, in studying the divine art of doing good, yield ourselves as obedient learners to the guidance of the Holy Spirit. By his grace, the most commonplace life can be transfigured with the brightness of a heavenly beauty, as the infinite love of the divine nature shines out through our frail humanity.—Andrew Murray.

The Garments We Wear.

The future is but the unwoven threads upon the loom of time. Unceasingly does the web move on, for the loom never stops. We must be alert, and with clear vision and steady hand endeavor to follow the Divine pattern, as with the swiftly-flying shuttle we weave these varicolored strands into the fabric of today to become the finished garment of our yesterdays, whether beautiful and adding to our joy, or marred and increasing our regret will depend upon the weaving of today.—George C. Elvin.

"I'm Not a Human Being."

His tone held more than gratitude. It had the elation of discovery.

"He is going to make it harder than I ever guessed!" echoed her own thought, in a flutter of confusion.

"Yes, it was strange our meeting on the frontier in peace and then in war!" she exclaimed at random. The sound of the remark struck her as too subdued; as expectant, when her purpose was one of careless deprecation.

"I have met a great many women, as you may have imagined," he proceeded. "They have passed in review. They were simply women, witty and frail or dull and beautiful, and one meant no more to me than another. Nothing meant anything to me except my profession. But I never forgot you. You planted something in mind: a memory of real companionship."

"Yes, I made the prophecy that came true!" she put in. This ought to bring him back to himself and his ambitions, she thought.

"Yes!" he exclaimed, his body stiffening free of the back of the seat. "You realized what was in me. You foresaw the power which was to be mine. The fate that first brought us together made me look you up in the capital. Now it brings us together here on this bench after all that has passed in the last twenty-four hours."

She realized that he had drawn perceptibly nearer. She wanted to rise and cry out: "Don't do this! Be the chief of staff, the conqueror, crushing the earth with the tread of five against three!" It was the conqueror whom she wanted to trick, not a man whose earnestness was painting her deceit blacker. Far from rising, she made no movement at all; only looked at her hands and allowed him to go on, conscious of the force of a personality that mastered men and armies now warm and appealing in the full tide of another purpose.

"The victory that I was thinking of last night was not the taking of Bordir. It was finer than any victory in war. It was selfish—not for army and country, but born of a human weakness triumphant; a human weakness, of which my career had robbed me," he continued. "It gave me a joy that even the occupation of the Browns' capital could not give. I had come as an invader and I had won your confidence."

"In a cause!" she interrupted hurriedly, wildly, to stop him from going further, only to find that her intonation was such that it was drawing him on.

"That fatality seemed to be working itself out to the soldier so much older than yourself in renewed youth, in another form of ambition. I hoped that there was more than the cause that led you to trust me. I hoped—"

Was he testing her? Was he playing a part of his own to make certain that she was not playing one? She looked up swiftly for answer. There was no gainsaying what she saw in his eyes. It was beating into hers with the power of an overwhelming masculine passion and a maturity of intellect as his egotism admitted a comrade to his throne. Such is ever the way of a man in the forties when the clock strikes for him. But who could know better the craft of courtship than one of Westerling's experience? He was fighting for victory; to gratify a desire.

"I did not expect this!—" the words escaped tumultuously and chokingly.

He was bending so close to her that

she felt his breath on her cheek burning hot, and she was sickeningly conscious that he was looking her over in that point-by-point manner which she had felt across the tea-table at the hotel. This horrible thing in his glance she had sometimes seen in strangers on her travels, and it had made her think that she was wise to carry a little revolver. She wanted to strike him.

"Confess! Confess!" called all her own self-respect. "Make an end to your abasement!"

"Confession, after the Browns have given up Bordir! Confession that makes Lanny, not Westerling, your dupe!" came the reply, which might have been telegraphed into her mind from the high, white forehead of Partow bending over his maps. "Confession, betraying the cause of the right against the wrong; the three to the conquering five! No! You are in the thing. You may not retreat now."

For a few seconds only the duel of argument thundered in her temples—seconds in which her lips were parted and quivering and her eyes dilated with an agitation which the man at her side could interpret as he pleased. A prompting devil—a devil roused by that thing in his eyes—urging a finesse in double-dealing which only devils understand, made her lips hypnotically turn in a smile, her eyes soften, and sent her hand out to Westerling in a trancelike gesture. For an instant it rested on his arm with telling pressure, though she felt it burn with shame at the point of contact.