

THE LAST SHOT

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by FREDERICK PALMER



SYNOPSIS

CHAPTER I—At their home on the frontier between the Browns and Grays Marta Galland and her mother, entertaining Colonel Westerling of the Grays, see Captain Lanstron, staff intelligence officer of the Browns, injured by a fall in his aeroplane.

CHAPTER II—Ten years later. Westerling, 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.

CHAPTER III—Westerling 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 IV—On the march with the 53rd of the Browns Private Stransky, anarchist, decries war and played-out patriotism and is placed under arrest. Colonel Lanstron over-hearing, begs him off saying the anarchist will fight well when enraged and is "all man."

CHAPTER V—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.

CHAPTER VI—Lanstron shows Marta a telephone which Feller has concealed in a secret passage under the tower for use to benefit the Browns in war emergencies, pointing out its value as being in the center of the fighting zone in case of war. Marta consents for it and Feller to remain for the present. Lanstron declares his love for Marta.

CHAPTER VII—Westerling and the Gray premier plan to use a trivial international affair to form warlike patriotism in army and people and striking before declaring war. Partow, Brown chief of staff, and Lanstron, made vice, discuss the trouble, and the Brown defenses. Partow reveals his plans to Lanstron.

CHAPTER VIII—At the frontier the two armies lie crouched for attack and defense. In the town with the non-combatants fleeing from the danger zone. Martha hears her child pupils recite the peace oath.

CHAPTER IX—The Gray army crosses the boarder line and attacks. The Browns check them. Artillery, infantry, aeroplanes, dirigibles engage. Stransky, rising to make the anarchist speech of his life, draws the Gray artillery fire. Nicked by a shrapnel splinter he goes Berserk and fights—"all a man."

CHAPTER X—Martha has her first glimpse of war in its modern, cold, scientific, murderous brutality. She allows the telephone to remain.

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

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

"No matter if they do get in at first! Back, you men, from under the tree!"

There was not a single rifle-shot. In a silence like that before the word to fire in a duel, all orders were heard and the more readily obeyed because Dellarme's foresight had impressed their sense upon the men in his quiet way.

The sand-bags by the tree were blown up by the Grays. Then, before the dust had hardly settled, came a half score of hand-grenades thrown by the first men of a Gray wedge, scrambling as they were pushed through the breach by the pressure of the mass behind. In that final struggle of one set of men to gain and another to hold a position, guns or automatics or long-range bullets played no part. It was the grapple of cold steel with cold steel and muscle with muscle, in the billowing, twisting mob of wrestlers, with no sound from throats but straining breaths; with no quarter, no distinction of person, and bloodshot eyes and faces hot with the effort of brute strength striving, in primitive desperation, to kill in order not to be killed. The cloud of rocking, writhing arms and shoulders was neither going forward nor backward. Its movement was that of a vortex, while the gray stream kept on pouring through the breach as if it were only the first flood from some gray lake on the other side of the breastwork.

Marta had come to the edge of the veranda, at once drawn and repelled, feeling the fearful suspense of the combat, the savage horror of it, and herself uttering sounds like the straining breaths of the men. What a place for her to be! But she did not think of that. She was there. The dreadful alchemy of war had made her a stranger to herself. She was mad!

they were mad; all the world was mad!

One minute—two, perhaps—not three—and the thing was over. She saw the Grays being crushed back and realized that the Browns had won, while the last details of the lessening tumult fixed her attention with their gladiatorial simplicity. Here, indeed, it was a case of man to man with the weapons nature gave him.

"I thought so!" cried Feller. "Attacks on frontal positions by daylight are going out of fashion!"

It was he who mercifully arrested the shower of hand-grenades that followed the exit of the enemy. Two of the guns of the castle batteries, having changed their position, were making havoc enough at pointblank range, with a choice of targets between the Grays huddled on the other side of the breastwork and those in retreat.

One of the Grays, his cheek bearing the mark of a boot heel, raised himself, and, in defiance and the satisfaction of the thought to his bruises and humiliation, pointing his finger at Feller, Marta heard him say:

"You there, in your straw hat and blue blouse, they've seen you—a man fighting and not in uniform! If they catch you it will be a drumhead and a firing squad at dawn!"

"That's so!" replied Feller gravely. "But they'll have to make a better job of it than you fellows did if they're going to—"

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

"Where is Major Dellarme?"

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

"I was very fond of him! He was at school when I was teaching there. But a good death—a soldier's death!"

"I'll write to his mother myself." Then the voice of the machine spoke. "Who is in command?"

"I am, sir!" said the callow lieutenant, coming up. But the men of the company spoke.

"Bert Stransky!" they roared.

It was not according to military etiquette, but military etiquette meant nothing to them now. They were above it in veteran superiority.

"Where's Stransky?" demanded the staff-officer.

"You're looking at him!" replied Stransky with a benign grin.

Seeing that Stransky was only a private, the officer frowned at the anomaly when a lieutenant was present, then smiled in a way that accorded the company parliamentary rights which he thought that they had fully earned.

"Yes, and he gets one of those iron crosses!" put in Tom Fragin.

"Yes—the first cross for Bert of the Reds!"

"And we'll let him make a dozen anarchist speeches a day!"

"Yes, yes!" roared the company.

"The eyes have it!" the officer announced cheerfully. He lifted his cap to Marta. With tender regard and grave reverence for that company, he took extreme care with his next remark lest a set of men of such dynamic spirit might repulse him as an invader. "The lieutenant is in command for the present, according to regulations," he proceeded. "You will retire immediately to positions 48 and 49 A—J by the castle road. You have done your part. Tonight you sleep and tomorrow you rest."

Sleep! Rest! Where had they heard those words before? Oh, yes, in a distant day before they went to war! Sleep and rest! Better far than an iron cross for every man in the company! They could go now with something warmer in their hearts than consciousness of duty well done; but this time they need not go until their dead as well as their wounded were removed.

Feller started to pass around the corner of the house; he was confronted by Marta, who had come to the end of the veranda. There, within hearing of the soldiers, the dialogue that followed was low-toned, and it was swift and palpitant with repressed emotion.

"Mr. Feller, I saw you at the automatic. I heard what the wounded private of the Grays said to you and realized how true it was."

"He is a prisoner. He cannot tell."

"I feel that I have no right to let you go to your death by a firing squad," she interrupted hurriedly, "and I shall not! For I decide now not to allow the telephone to remain!"

"I—he looked around at the automatic ravenously and fearfully—"

"It is all simply arranged. There is time for me to use the telephone before the Grays arrive. I shall tell Lanny why you took charge of the gun."

"I've changed my mind! Exit gardener! Enter summer! I'm going

you!" he cried in a jubilant voice that arrested the attention of every one on the grounds.

CHAPTER XIII

From Brown to Gray.

"You, Marta—you are still there!" Lanstron exclaimed in alarm when he heard her voice over the tunnel telephone. "But safe!" he added in relief. "Thank God for that! It's a mighty load off my mind. And your mother?"

"Safe, too."

"Well, you're through the worst of it. There won't be any more fighting around the house, and certainly Westerling will be courteous. But where is Gustave?"

"Gone!"

"Gone!" he repeated dismally.

"Wait until you hear how he went," Marta said. With all the vividness of her impressions, a partisan for the moment of him and Dellarme, she sketched Feller's part with the automatic.

As he listened, Lanstron's spirit was twenty again.

"I can see him," he said. "It was a full breath of fresh air to the lungs of a suffocating man. I—"

Marta was off in interruption in the full tide of an appeal.

"You must—I promised—you must let him have the uniform again!" she begged. "You must let him keep his automatic. To take it away would be like separating mother and child; like separating Minna from Clarissa Eileen."

"Better than an automatic—a battery of guns!" replied Lanstron. "This is where I will use any influence I have with Partow for all it is worth. Yes, and he shall have the iron cross. It is for such deeds as his that the iron cross was meant."

"Thank you," she said. "It's worth something to make a man as happy as you will make him. Yes, you are real flesh and blood to do this, Lanny."

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

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

"Forgotten already, like the many other thousandth chances that have failed," he replied cheerfully. "One of the virtues of Partow's steel automatons is that, being tearless as well as passionless, they never cry over split milk. And now," he went on soberly, "we must be saying good-by."

"Good-by, Lanny? Why, what do you mean?" She was startled.

"Till the war is over," he said, "and longer than that, perhaps, if La Tir remains in Gray territory."

"You speak as if you thought you were going to lose!"

"Not while many of our soldiers are alive, if they continue to show the spirit that they have shown so far; not unless two men can crush one man in the automatic-gun-recoil age. But La Tir is in a tangent and already in the Grays' possession, while we act on the defensive. So I should hardly be flying over your garden again."

"But there's the telephone, Lanny, and here we are talking over it this very minute!" she expostulated.

"You must remove it," he said. "If the Grays should discover it they might form a suspicion that would put you in an unpleasant position."

The telephone had become almost a familiar institution in her thoughts. Its secret had something of the fascination for her of magic.

"Nonsense!" she exclaimed. "I am going to be very lonely. I want to learn how Feller is doing—I want to chat with you. So I decide not to let it be taken out. And, you see, I have the tactical situation, as you soldiers call it, all in my favor. The work of removal must be done at my end of the line. You're quite helpless to enforce your wishes. And, Lanny, if I ring the bell you'll answer, won't you?"

"I couldn't help it!" he replied.

"Until then! You've been fine about everything today!"

"Until then!"

When Marta left the tower she knew only that she was weary with the mind-weariness, the body-weariness, the nerve-weariness of a spectator who has shared the emotion of every actor in a drama of death and finds the excitement that has kept her tense no longer a sustaining force.

As she went along the path, steps uncertain from sheer fatigue, her sensibilities livened again at the sight of a picture. War, personal war, in the form of the giant Stransky, was knocking at the kitchen door. His two-day-old beard was matted with dust and there were dried red matters on his

cheek. War's furnace flames seemed to have tanned him; war seemed to be breathing from his deep chest; his big nose was war's promontory. But the unexpressed space of his forehead seemed singularly white when he took off his cap as Minna came in answer to his knock. Her yielding lips were parted, her eyes were bright with inquiry and suspicion, her chin was firmly set.

"I came to see if you would let me kiss your hand again," said Stransky, squinting through his brows wistfully.

"I see your nose has been broken once. You don't want it broken a second time. I'm stronger than you think!" Minna retorted, and held out her hand carelessly as if it pleased her to humor him.

He was rather graceful, despite his size, as he touched his lips to her fingers. Just as he raised his head a burst of cheering rose from the yard.

"So you've found that we have gone, you brilliant intellects!" he shouted, and glared at the wall of the house in the direction of the cheers.

"Quick! You have no time to lose!" Minna warned him.

"Quick! quick!" cried Marta. Stransky paid no attention to the urgings. He had something more to say to Minna.

"I'm going to keep thinking of you and seeing your face—the face of a good woman—while I fight. And when the war is over, may I come to call?" he asked.

His feet were so resolutely planted on the flags that apparently the only way to move them was to consent.

"Yes, yes!" said Minna. "Now, hurry!"

"Say, but you make me happy! Watch me poke it into the Grays for you!" he cried and bolted.

Within the kitchen Mrs. Galland was already slumbering soundly in her chair. Overhead Marta heard the exclamations of male voices and the tread of what was literally the heel of the conqueror—guests that had come without asking! Intruders that had entered without any process of law! Would they overrun the house, her mother's room, her own room?

Indignation brought fresh strength as she started up the stairs. The head of the fight gave on to a dark part of the hall. There she paused, held by the scene that a score or more Gray soldiers, who had riotously crowded into the dining-room, were enacting. They were members of Fracasse's company of the Grays whom Marta had seen from her window the night before rushing across the road into the garden.

When, finally, they burst into the redoubt after it was found that the Browns had gone, all even the judge's son, were the war demon's own. The veneer had been warped and twisted and burned off down to the raw animal flesh. Their brains had the fever itch of callouses forming. Not a sign of brown there in the yard; not a sign of any tribute after all they had endured! They had not been able to lay hands on the murderous throwers of hand-grenades. Far away now was barrack-room geniality; in oblivion were the ethics of an inherited civilization taught by mothers, teachers and church.

But here was a house—a house of the Browns; a big, fine house! They would see what they had won—this was the privilege of baffled victory. What they had won was theirs! To the victor the spoils: Pell-mell they crowded into the dining-room, Hugo with the rest, feeling himself a straw on the crest of a wave, and Pilzer, most bitter, most ugly of all, his short, strong teeth and gums showing and his liver patch red, lumpy, and trembling. In crossing the threshold of privacy they committed the act that leaves the deepest wound of war's inheritance, to go on from generation to generation in the history of families.

"A swell dining-room! I like the chandeliers!" roared Pilzer.

With his bayonet he smashed the only globe left intact by the shell fire. There was a laugh as a shower of glass fell on the floor. Even the judge's son, the son of the tribune of law, joined in. Pilzer then ripped up the leather seat of a chair. This introductory havoc whetted his appetite for other worlds of conquest, as the self-chosen leader of the increasing crowd that poured through the doorway.

"Maybe there's food!" he shouted.

"Maybe there's wine!"

"Food and wine!"

"Yes, wine! Women's thirty!"

"And maybe women! I'd like to kiss a pretty maid servant!" Pilzer added, starting toward the hall.

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

He was like no one of the Hugos of the many parts that his comrades had seen him play. His blue eyes had become an inflexible gray. He was standing half on tiptoe, his quivering muscles in tune with the quivering pitch of his voice:

"We have no right in here! This is a private house!"

"Out of the way, you white-livered little rat!" cried Pilzer, "or I'll prick the tummy of mamma's darling!"

What happened then was so sudden and unexpected that all were vague about details. They saw Hugo in a catapulsive lunge, mesmeric in its swiftness, and they saw Pilzer go down, his leg twisted under him and his head banging the floor. Hugo stood, half ashamed, half frightened, yet ready for another encounter.

Fracasse, entering at this moment, was too intent on his mission to consider the rights of a personal difference between two of his company.

"There's work to do! Out of here, quick! We are losing valuable time!"

He announced, rounding his men toward the door with commanding gestures. "We are going in pursuit!"

Marta, who had observed the latter part of the scene from the shadows of the hall, knew that she should never forget Hugo's face as he turned on Pilzer, while his voice of protest struck a singing chord in her jangling nerves. It was the voice of civilization, of one who could think out of the orbit of a whirlpool of passionate barbarism. She could see that he was about to spring and her prayer went with his leap. She gloried in the impact that



They Saw Pilzer Go Down.

felled the great brute with the liver patch on his cheek, which was like a birthmark of war.

Then a staff-officer appeared in the doorway. When he saw a woman enter the room he frowned. He had ridden from the town, which was empty of women, a fact that he regarded as a blessing. If she had been a maid servant he would have kept on his cap. Seeing that she was not, he removed it and found himself in want of words as their eyes met after she had made a gesture to the broken glass on the floor and the lacerated table top, which said too plainly:

"Do you admire your work?"

The fact that he was well groomed and freshly shaven did not in any wise dissipate in her feminine mind his connection with this destruction. He had never seen anything like the smile which went with the gesture. Her eyes were two continuing and challenging flames. Her chin was held high and steady, and the pallor of exhaustion, with the blackness of her hair and eyes, made her strangely commanding. He understood that she was not waiting for him to speak, but to go.

"I did not know that there was a woman here!" he said.

"And I did not know that officers of the Grays were accustomed to enter private houses without invitations!" she replied.

(To be continued)

TIMES FOR HOLDING Common Pleas Courts, A. D. 1915

State of Ohio.

Fourth Judicial District.

It is ordered that the terms of the Common Pleas Court of the several counties in said judicial district, for the year 1915 be fixed as follows to-wit:

Lucas County on the 4th day of January, and the 5th day of April, and the 13th day of September.

Ottawa County on the 11th day of January, and the 12th day of April, and the 13th day of September.

Sandusky County on the 11th day of January, and the 12th day of April, and the 13th day of September.

Errie County on the 11th day of January, and the 12th day of April, and the 13th day of September.

Huron County on the 11th day of January, and the 12th day of April, and the 13th day of September.

Lorain County on the 11th day of January, and the 12th day of April, and the 13th day of September.

Medina County on the 11th day of January, and the 12th day of April, and the 13th day of September.

Summit County on the 11th day of January, and the 12th day of April, and the 13th day of September.

It is further ordered that the Hon. Dayton A. Doyle be designated as Supervising Judge.

Stephen M. Young
John T. Garver
John P. Morton
Bernard F. Brough
Ralph Emery
Curtis T. Johnson
Horace G. Redington
Dayton A. Doyle
W. J. Ahern, Jr.
S. G. Rogers

Judges Fourth Judicial District Dated at Norwalk, Ohio, this 20th day of October, A. D. 1914.

Harsh physics react, weaken the bowels, will lead to chronic constipation. Doan's Regulents operate easily 25c a box at all stores.

LOOK AT THE LABEL ON YOUR PAPER. PLEASE RENEW.

VALLEY CITY

Mr. and Mrs. O. F. Murray of Cleveland, Mr. John Sailer of Akron and Mrs. Sanford and son of Elyria spent Thanksgiving at Mr. J. A. Sailer's.

Mr. and Mrs. Ora Zacharias spent Thanksgiving with Mr. George Zacharias.

Miss Florence Obermiller of Mineral City spent the past week with her parents, Mr. and Mrs. John Obermiller.

Miss Edith Wolfe and Miss Warner of Kent Normal spent Thanksgiving with their respective parents.

Mr. and Mrs. Richard of Elyria spent several days last week at Emil Platz's.

Miss Stella Yost of Medina visited her parents last week.

Mr. and Mrs. P. J. Beitt entertained company from Medina on Thursday and from Cleveland on Friday.

Mr. J. A. Sailer spent Thanksgiving with his mother and sister at Mansfield.

Miss Phoebe Heath of Hardscrabble was the guest of Mrs. George Hammon last week.

Mr. Wert Hastings spent Thanksgiving with his mother at Grafton.

Mr. George Krebs has returned to the Soldiers' Home at Sandusky.

Mr. and Mrs. A. Grabenstetter and Mrs. Bertha Hasel spent Sunday with Mr. and Mrs. Huer in Cleveland.

Dr. and Mrs. Herbert Bennett of Lisbon spent Sunday at Mr. E. D. Bennett's.

Miss Gertrude Bishop of Medina spent Sunday with Mrs. Wm. Hoppe.

Mr. Richard Sargent and family of Cleveland spent Thanksgiving day with Mrs. Sam Deitrich and family.

The infant son of Mr. Fred Gayer died November 24.

Mr. Otto Roth and gentleman friend of Cleveland and Rev. Carl Roth and Misses Emma and Helen Roth of Monroeville, spent Thanksgiving with Rev. and Mrs. Roth.

Miss Bertha Strosacker spent several days last week in Cleveland.

Mr. John Kreuger and family, Mr. Wm. Koenig and family, Mr. J. Walters and family, Mr. Adam Dangle and Mr. Keisler of Cleveland were the guests of Mr. George Mack on Sunday for a rabbit dinner.

Miss Alivine Muntz spent Sunday at home. Her brother, who was spending several days in Cleveland returned with her.

Miss Mabel Nobles and Mr. Walter Richmond, both of Columbia, were married at the Columbia Center church, November 30.

Mr. Wm. Reutter and family spent Thanksgiving with Mrs. Joe Levit.

Mr. and Mrs. Fred Hasel spent Thanksgiving at Grafton. They also called on their cousins, Roy Zacharias, who is at the Elyria hospital.

Miss Rose Weber spent several days last week in Canal Fulton.

Prof. S. W. Partridge, wife and daughter of Cortland, O., were the guests of Prof. Troxell and family over Thanksgiving.

Mrs. Maier of Grand Ledge, Mich., and Mrs. Swarney of Lansing, are spending several weeks with Mrs. Joe Levit. Mr. and Mrs. Jac. Smith of Bebetown spent Sunday with Mrs. Levit.

Much credit must be given Miss Appleby and her pupils for the good work they are doing in the line of music; which certainly was shown at the recital last Friday night.

Miss Sue Herring of Mineral Ridge is spending several weeks with Mr. and Mrs. Troxell.

Mrs. Wm. Hoppe accidentally fell from a chair while lowering a window last Saturday and broke two ribs; her mother, Mrs. Jos. Stebel, tried to help her and in doing so fell herself, bruising her back; Mrs. Stebel was not able to walk very well, for about a year ago she fell and broke her hip.

Mrs. L. C. Prescher is taking the place of Mrs. Wm. Hoppe as assistant postmistress until the latter recovers.

Mr. G. F. Messmer is canvassing for McLean Black & Co., of Boston.

Miss Viola Piper of Cleveland spent several days last week with Mrs. Geo. Hasel.

Mr. George Deimling,