

# The Trey O' Hearts

A Novelized Version of the Motion Picture Drama of the Same Name  
Produced by the Universal Film Co.

By LOUIS JOSEPH VANCE

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Illustrated with Photographs from the Picture Production

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## CHAPTER XVIII.

### Stranded.

Mr. Thomas Barcus picked himself up from the bottom of the lifeboat, where he had been violently precipitated by the impact of grounding, blinked and wiped tears of pain from his eyes, solicitously tested his nose and seemed to derive little if any comfort from the discovery that it was not broken, opened his mouth and remembered the presence of a lady.

"Poor Mr. Barcus!" she said gently. "I'm so sorry. Do forget I'm here—and say it out loud!"

Mr. Barcus dropped his hands and dropped his head at the same time. "It can't be did," he complained in embittered resignation; "the words have never been invented."

In the bows Mr. Law (who had barely saved himself a headlong plunge overboard when the shoal took fast hold of the keel) felt tenderly of his excoriated shins, then, rising, compassed the sea, sky and shore with an anxious gaze.

In the offing there was nothing but the flat, limitless expanse of the night-bound tide, near at hand vaguely silvered with the moonlight, in the distances blending into shadows; never a light or shadowy, stealing sail in that quarter to indicate pursuit.

"Where are we?" he wondered aloud. "Ask me an easy one," Barcus replied; "somewhere on the south shore of the cape—unless somebody's been tampering with the lay of this land. That's a lighthouse over yonder."

Alan took soundings from the bows. "Barely two feet," he announced, withdrawing the car from the water, "and cel-grass no end."

"Oh!" Barcus ejaculated with the accent of enlightenment; and leaving the motor, turned to the stern, over which he draped himself in highly undecorative fashion while groping under water for the propeller.

"That's the answer," he repeated; "there's a young bale of the said cel-grass wrapped round the wheel. Which, I suppose, means I've got to go overboard and clear it away."

Like Mr. Law, he wore neither shoes nor other garments that could be more damaged by salt water than they had been—but only shirt, trousers and a belt.

"If you've nothing better to do, my critical friend," he observed as he stooped to hack and tear at the mass of weed embarrassing the propeller, "you might step out and give us a trial shove. Don't strain yourself—just see if you can move her."

The boat budged not an inch—but Mr. Law's feet did, slipping on the treacherous mud bottom with the upshot of his downfall; with a mighty splash he disappeared momentarily beneath the surface—and left his temper behind him when he emerged.

As for Mr. Barcus, he suffered like loms within five minutes; when, with much pains and patience having freed the wheel, he climbed aboard and sought to restart the motor. After a few affecting coughs it relapsed into stubborn silence.

Stodious examination at length brought out the fact that the gasoline tank was empty.

"Not so much as a smell left," Barcus reported.

"You bet your life they is—right here in this depot. An' I'm shuttin' it up, too."

"Has the operator gone for the night?"

"He's going. I'm the op'rator. No business transacted after office hours. Call round at eight o'clock tomorrow mornin'. Now if you'll jest step out of that door, I'll say g'd-night to you."

"But I must send a telegram," Alan protested. "I tell you, I must. It's a matter of life and death."

"Sure, young feller. It always is—after business hours."

"Won't you open up again?"

"Well, what then?"

"We can carry her, can't we?"

## CHAPTER XIX.

"Gee!" he grunted frankly, when after a toilsome progress from the boat, Rose at length slipped from the seat formed by the clasped hands of the two men. "And it was me who suggested this!"

The girl responded with a quiet laugh of the most natural effect imaginable—until it ended in a sigh, and without the least warning she crumpled upon herself, and would have fallen heavily, in a dead faint, but for Alan's quickness.

"Good Lord!" Barcus exclaimed, as Alan gently lowered the inert body of the girl to the sands. "And to think I didn't understand she was so nearly all in—chaffing her like that! I'd like to kick myself!"

"Don't be impatient," Alan advised grimly; "I'm busy just at present, but meantime, you might fetch some water to revive her."

It was an order by no means easy to fill; Barcus had only his cupped hands for a vessel, and little water remained in them by the time he had dashed from the shallows back to the spot where Rose lay unconscious, while the few drops he did manage to sprinkle into her face availed nothing toward rousing her from the trance-like slumbers of exhaustion into which she passed from her fainting fit.

In the end Alan gave up the effort. "She's all right," he reported, releasing the wrist whose pulse he had been timing. "She fainted, right enough, but now she's just asleep—and needs it, God knows! It would be kinder to let her rest, at least until I see what sort of a reception that lighthouse is inclined to offer us."

"You'll go, then?" Barcus inquired. "I'd just as lief, myself."

"No; let me," Alan insisted. "It's not far—not more than a quarter of a mile. And she'll be safe enough here, in your care, the little time I'm gone."

Barcus nodded. His face was drawn and gray in the moon-glare. "Thank God!" he breathed brokenly, "you're able. I'm not."

He sat down suddenly and rested his head on his knees. "Don't be longer than you can help," he muttered thickly.

He had come to the headland of the lighthouse itself before the ground began to shelve more gently to the beach; and was on the point of addressing himself to the dark and silent cottage of the light-keeper when he paused, struck by sight of what till then had been hidden from him.

The promontory, he found, formed the eastern extremity of a wide-armed if shallow harbor where rode at moorings a considerable number of small craft—pleasure vessels assorted about equally with fishing boats. And barely an eighth of a mile on, long-legged wharves stood knee-deep in the water, like tentacles flung out from the sleepy little fishing village that dotted the rising ground—a community of perhaps two hundred dwellings.

Nor was this all—even as Alan hove in view of the village he heard a series of staccato snorts, the harsh tolling of a brazen bell, the rumble of a train pulling out from a station. And then he saw its jewel-string of lights flash athwart the landscape and vanish as its noise died away diminuendo.

Where one train ran another must. He need only now secure something to revive Rose, help her somehow up the beach, and in another hour or two, of a certainty, they would be speeding northwards, up the cape, toward Boston and the land of law and order.

Such thoughts as these, at least, made up the texture of his hopes; the outcome proved them somewhat too presumptuous. He jogged down a quiet village street and into the railroad station just as the agent was closing up for the night.

A surly citizen, this agent, ill-pleased to have his plans disordered by chance-strangers. He greeted Alan's breathless query with a grunt of ingrained churlishness.

"Nah," he averred, "they ain't no more trains till mornin'. Can't y' see I'm shuttin' up?"

"But surely there must be a telegraph station—"

"You bet your life they is—right here in this depot. An' I'm shuttin' it up, too."

"Has the operator gone for the night?"

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Two Men Shadowed Him.

"Let's see your dollar," the other returned with no less craft—open incredulity informing his countenance. And, surely enough, Alan brought forth an empty hand.

"Make a light," he said sharply. "My money's in a belt round my waist. Open your office. You'll get your dollar, all right."

"All right," he grumbled, reopening the door of the telegraph booth and making a second light inside. "There's blanks and a pencil. Write your message. It ain't often I do this—but I'll make an exception for you."

Alan delayed long enough only to make a few inquiries, drawing out the information that, for one who had not patience to wait the morning train northbound, the quickest way to any city of importance was by boat across Buzzard's bay to New Bedford.

Boats, it was implied, were plentiful, readily to be chartered. A time-table supplied all other useful advice. Alan wrote his message swiftly.

Addressed to Digby, his man of business in New York, it required that gentleman to arrange for a motor-car to be held in waiting on the waterfront of New Bedford from 2:00 a. m. until called for in the name of Mr. Law, as well as for a special train at Providence, on similar provisions.

But now, though he was all unconscious of the fact, he went no more alone.

His shadow in the moonlight kept him company upon the sands; and above, on the edge of the bluffs, another shadow moved on parallel course and at a pace sedulously patterned after his.

He found his sweetheart and his friend much as he had left them, with this difference—that Mr. Barcus now lay flat on his back and snoring lustily.

He was awakened quickly enough, however, by Alan's news.

But when it was the turn of Rose—they faltered. She lay so still, betrayed her exhaustion so patently in every line of her unconscious posture, as well as in the sharp pallor of her face upturned to the moon, that it seemed scarcely less than downright inhumanity to disturb her.

None the less, it had to be done. Alan hardened his heart with the reminder of their urgent necessity, and eventually brought her to with the aid of a few drops of brandy.

Between them, they helped her up the beach, past the point, and at length to the door of the hotel, where—reanimated by the mere promise of food—Rose disengaged their arms and entered without more assistance; while Barcus was deterred from treading her heels in his own famished eagerness, by the hand of Alan falling heavily upon his arm.

"Wait!" the latter admonished in a half-whisper. "Look there!"

Barcus followed the direction of his gesture—and was transfixed by the sight of a rocket spearing into the night-draped sky from a point invisible beyond the headland of the lighthouse.

The two consulted one another with startled and fearful eyes.

As with one voice they murmured one word: "Judith!" To this Alan added gravely: "Or some spy of hers!"

Then rousing, Alan released his friend, with a smart shove urging him across the threshold of the hotel.

"Go on," he insisted, "Join Rose and get your supper. I'll be with you as soon as I can arrange for a boat. Tell her nothing more than that—that I thought it unwise to wait until everybody was abed before looking round."

He turned to find his landlord approaching from the direction of the hotel barroom. And for the time it seemed that the wind of their luck must have veered to a favoring quarter; for the question was barely uttered before the landlord lifted a willing voice and hailed a fellow townsman idling nearby.

"Hey, Jake—come here!"

Introduced as Mr. Breed, Jake pleaded guilty to ownership of the fastest and stanchest power-cruiser in the adjacent waters, which he was aviciously keen to charter.

They observed haste religiously; within ten minutes they stood upon a boat at the foot of a flight of wooden steps down the side of the town wharf, while the promised rowboat of Mr. Breed drew in, at most leisurely pace, to meet them.

Aboard and away from the wharf, the burden of Alan's solicitude seemed to grow lighter with every squeal of the greaseless carlocks, with every dip and splash of the blades which, wielded by a crew of villainous countenance, brought them nearer the handsome motorboat which Mr. Breed designated as his own. It was not until Alan looked up suddenly to find Mr. Breed covering him with a revolver of most vicious character that he had the least apprehension of any danger nearer than the offing, where Judith's schooner might be lurking, waiting for its prey to come out and be devoured.

"I'll take that money-belt of yours, young feller," Mr. Breed announced, "and be quick about it—not forgetting what's in your trousers pocket!"

In the passion of his indignation Alan neglected entirely to play the game by the rules. The indifference he displayed toward the weapon was positively unprofessional—for he knocked it aside as if it had been nothing more dangerous than a straw. And in the same flutter of an eyelash he launched himself like a wildcat at the throat of Mr. Breed.

Before that one knew what was hap-

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Dug into His Money Belt.

"It's no use," he conceded at length.

"Why not wade ashore?" Rose Trine suggested mildly from the place she had taken in the stern in order to lighten the bows. "It isn't far—and what's one more wetting?"

"That's the only sensible remark that's been uttered by any party to this lunatic enterprise since you hove within earshot of me, Mr. Law," said Mr. Barcus. "Respectfully submitted."

"The verdict of the lower court stands approved," Alan responded gravely.

"But there's no sense in Miss Trine wading," Barcus suggested. "We're web-footed as it is, and she's too tired."

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