

TREY O' HEARTS OF LOUIS JOSEPH VANCE

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STEEL RIBBONS.
SYNOPSIS—The 3 of Hearts is the "death-sign" employed by Seneca Trine in the private war of vengeance which through the agency of his daughter Judith, a woman of violent passions like his own, he wages against Alan Law, son of the man (now dead) who was unintentionally responsible for the accident which rendered Trine a helpless cripple. Alan is in love with and is in turn loved by Rose, Judith's twin and double, but in all else her opposite. Judith vows to compass Alan's death, but under dramatic circumstances he saves her life and so, unwillingly wins her love. Thereafter Judith is by turns actuated by the old hatred, the new love, and jealousy of her sister, Rose. She earns her father's distrust and is left behind by him when he journeys West, taking Rose with him. In order to lure Alan away from New York, Alan pretenses, Judith accompanying him against his wish, and succeeds in rescuing Rose from Trine's special train.

I—LIGHT ENGINE.
 Toward the close of that summer's day it was the whim of that arch-manger of theatricals whom men call fate to stage an anticlimax in the midst of a vast and illi-expansive of desolate middle-western country—a ruddy and rugged disk of earth which boasted no human tenancy within the circle of its far-reaching horizon and was bisected, not neatly, rather irregularly, by the flowing double line of steel ribbons which marked the railroad's flight of way over the old Santa Fe trail.

So much for the stage: the light effects were provided exclusively by the portentous sunset; the properties employed were simply a special train and what is known as a light engine. It was the engineer of the light engine who started the trouble. After bringing his monster to a full pause, he turned upon his passengers and—without plausible excuse—violently indicted Mr. Alan Law for abuse of his and his fireman's trust-fiducy. This the said fireman (climbing forward over the tender) vigorously applauded.

They had been engaged, both gentlemen asserted vigorously, for nothing more dangerous than a quick run across the prairies, in furtherance of the unspecified plans of Mr. Alan Law and his companion, Miss Judith Trine. After starting out, they had been wickedly and maliciously bribed by the said Law to put on speed and catch up with the special, in order that he might resume from the latter a young lady, his bride-to-be and the sister of Miss Trine.

But—and here was the grievance—they hadn't bargained to be shot at with pistols. And precisely that outrage had been put upon them during and subsequent to the moment of rescue. It was the fireman (to be just) who brought the row to a focus by a slighting reference to that "efficiency and misbegotten dingo."
 He repeated quite promptly. Mr. Barcus jumped for his throat with a bellow of rage. The fireman slipped on nothing, and went over backwards, taking Mr. Barcus with him to the ballast.

At almost the same moment Mr. Law, attempting to restrain the engineer from going to the assistance of his fellow-worker, reached in under a vicious swing for his chin; grasped with him to the ground on the opposite side of the locomotive from that occupied by Mr. Barcus and the fireman.
 For the next several seconds he was very busy indeed keeping his face out of the ballast. The engineer was a heavy man, but active and infuriated. He fought like a demon unchained. It was all very exciting. Mr. Law was even beginning to enjoy it when he heard a woman shriek. At the same instant revolvers began to rattle as quickly as he was released. Both as an outman, to find Judith Trine beside them, a little smile of excitement playing round her lips as she looked up. The track and watched the special slow down to a stop—several persons on the back platform playing trigger-fingers all the while.

As these last threw open the platform gates and dropped to the ballast, still perforating the air with many bullets, Mr. Law, Miss Judith Trine, and that late belligerent the engineer, turned simultaneously and sought the rear of the tender.
 On the opposite side they found Rose Trine and Mr. Barcus standing uncertainly above the body of the fireman, who it appeared had stumped himself in falling and remained insensible.

The appearance of Law and Judith from behind the tender, closely pursued by the engineer, who was in turn closely pursued by gentlemen with revolvers, stirred Barcus and Rose to action. Alan passed him at a round pace, pausing only long enough to call Rose and drag her with him toward the special. Judith sang his

a phrase of well-meant advice in passing.

"Come along, you simpleton—unless you want to be shot down where you stand."
 Mr. Barcus acted on that advice, as immediately as resentfully. Judith Trine was little before him at the steps of the Pullman; Mr. Law had already assisted Rose aboard. Mr. Barcus ungraciously gave place to the lady; his ingracious chivalry sorely strained by bull that kicked among the ballast round his feet.
 Mr. Barcus heaved a heartfelt sigh, sat down heavily on a camp chair, and mopped his heated brow, watching the lights of the locomotive drop swiftly into the gloaming.
 "If any of those guys," he assured Mr. Law presently, "could hit a barn, I wouldn't be proving myself the giddy ass I am by sticking to your heels as they start to because you'd have been snuffed out long ago—with all the chances they've had to blow your fool head off point blank!"

II—PULLMAN.
 "Come inside," Law suggested, "and introduce me to the brakeman. I presume I've got to fix things up with him."
 "If there's really any doubt in your mind as to that," Barcus said, rising, "I don't mind telling you you're right."
 He paused as Alan entered the car before him and was greeted by a storm of vituperation that fairly splattered the panels of the Pullman. Mr. Seneca Trine, helpless in his invalid chair, thus celebrated his introduction to the young man whom he had never before seen but whose life he had schemed to take these many years.

Alan made no effort to respond but listened with his head critically to one side and an exasperating expression of deep interest informing his countenance until Mr. Trine was out of breath and vitriol; when the younger man bowed with the slightest shade of mockery in his manner and waved a tolerant hand to Barcus.
 "He has, no doubt," Alan inquired, "his own private cell aboard this car?"

"Yes, sah!" Barcus agreed, aping well the manner of his apparent caste and color. "Ain't dat de troof?" he chuckled.
 "Take him away then," Alan requested wearily. "If you please."
 "Yes, sah!" Barcus replied, with nimble alacrity seizing the back of the wheeled chair and swinging it round for a spin up the length of the car.
 Before Trine had recovered enough to curse him properly, the door to his drawing room was closed and Barcus was ambling back down the aisle.

His grin of relief at this turning of the tables on the monomaniac proved, however, short-lived. It erased itself in a twinkling when Judith shouldered roughly past him, wearing a sullen and forbidding countenance, and flung herself into the drawing room, where her father was. "Storm signals," mused Mr. Barcus. "What possessed our dear friend to bring that tigress along. I'd like to know? He might as well have loaded himself down with a five-gallon nitroglycerin."

The cause of her temper was not far to seek; at the far end of the car Alan was bending solicitously over the chair in which Rose was resting. One of his arms was round her shoulder. Her face was lifted confidently to his.
 Barcus mused morosely on his expression of trouble above, simmering over the waxing fire of that strange woman's jealousy. If only there had not been that light engine in pursuit—as Barcus firmly believed it must be—loaded to the galleys with Trine's unscrupulous firebrand!

No telling where they might catch up!
 The fear of this last catastrophe worked together with his fears of Judith to render that night a sleepless one for Barcus. He spent it in a chair whence he could watch both the door to the compartment Judith had chosen for her own (formerly Marrophi's quarters) and the endless ribbons of steel that swept beneath the trucks.
 But nothing happened. He napped uneasily from time to time, waking with a start of fright, but always finding nothing amiss. Even Judith stopped behind that closed door, and even the track behind was innocent of the glare of a pursuing headlight.

Nor did anything untoward mark the progress of the morning—unless, indeed, Judith's protracted sessions with her father behind the closed door of the drawing room were to be counted ominous.
 Ever since lunch time the girl had been closeted with her father; Barcus had been getting somewhat nervous and sorely needed rest in his quarters; Alan standing watch on the observation platform, in company with Rose; and the train booming along through an unsmooth wilderness of arid mountains, barren mesas and 22,000-foot flats given over to the desolate genius of sagebrush.

Whatever had been the tenor of the conversation between the father and daughter, Judith eventually emerged from the drawing room in an unmitigated temper. Barcus, coming drowsily away from his compartment, at the same time, was jarred wide awake by sight of the forbidding countenance she wore and after a moment of doubt followed her back to the lounge at the rear of the car.
 He got there in time to see her at right standstill, staring steadfastly at the two figures so close together on the observation platform. But on his appearance Judith shook herself together, snatched up a magazine, and plumped wrathfully into an easy chair.

Barcus, however, had learned the lesson of bitter experience to the effect that the outward bearing of Miss Judith Trine was no sure index to her inward humor—unless, that is, it might be taken to indicate the direct contrary of its semblance; though even this was no reliable rule. Reminding himself of this, he therefore invented a morbid interest in another magazine.

For all her exasperation, Judith contained herself longer than might have been expected. Her continued show of placidity, indeed, lulled Barcus into a dangerous feeling of security. He was roused by the sudden flight of a magazine across the car, missing his head by a bare two inches, and the bang of a chair overturned by Judith as she jumped up and flung herself furiously toward the door.
 Just what had happened on the observation platform Barcus didn't know, but he could readily believe that the lovers had just indulged in some especially provoking and long-drawn-out carousal.

He overhauled Judith none too soon. In another moment she would have had her sister by the throat—if her purpose had not been to throw Rose bodily overboard, as Barcus suspected. Happily, he was as quick on his feet as Judith on her's, and almost before he had grasped the situation, he had grasped her—had seized her arms and drawn them forcibly behind her back at the same time swinging her round and endeavoring to propel her back through the doorway.

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It was a man size job. For the ensuing five minutes he had his hands full of violently resentful and superbly absconded young woman. Only with the greatest difficulty did he succeed in wresting her up the aisle and to the door of her compartment, where an even more furious resistance for some additional minutes precluded the ultimate closing of the door upon the maddened Judith.
 Waving aside Alan's proffer of assistance, he acidly advised that gentleman to return to his post of duty and not let his infatuation blind him to what might at any moment loom up on the track behind them. Barcus stoutly held the door against the girl's attempt to pull it open and, through another period when she occupied herself with kicking its panels as if hopeful of breaking a way out. A long pause followed. He heard no sounds from within. And warping, he wondered what the devil she was up to. Then her voice penetrated the barrier. "My accents calm and not unamiable!"

"Hello!" he replied, startled. "What is it, Miss Judith?"
 "Please let me out."
 "Not much."
 "Oh, please!"
 "Will you be good if I let you out?"
 "Perfectly."
 "No more shenanigans?"
 "I promise."
 "Word of honor?"
 "If my word of honor means anything to you—you have it."
 "Well, . . ." he said dubiously.
 In the same humor he turned and released the knob; promptly Judith opened it wide and swept out into the corridor, her mood now one of really fetching mockery.

"Thank you so much!" she laughed into his face of discomfiture; and dropping him an ironic curtsy, she turned forward and swung into the drawing room occupied by Trine.
 "Wonder what she put that on for?" an speculator with reference to the ankle-long Pullman wrapper which Judith had seen fit to don during her period of captivity. "Heaven knows it's not enough without wearing more clothing than decency demands. . . . But you never can tell about a woman. . . . I bet a dollar I've made a blithering ass of myself—letting her loose at all!"

He took his doubts art, communicating them to Alan and Rose. And his long conference with Alan and Rose on the observation platform afforded Judith ample opportunity in which undetected to suborn the train crew to treachery.
 Whether she did or no, this is what happened in the course of the next hour: the Special was forced to take a siding to make way for the California Limited, eastbound; and when this had passed, the engine of the special coughed apologetically and pulled swiftly out, leaving the Pullman stalled on the siding.
III—HAND CAR
 "Well!" Mr. Barcus broke a silence whose eloquence may not be translated in print—"can you beat it?"
 "Not with this outfit," Alan admitted gloomily.
 "All the same, we can't stop here like bumps on a log, waiting for that gang of thugs to sail up in the light engine and cut our blessed throats!"
 Mr. Law answered this unanswerable contention only with a shrug. Then, stepping out on the forward platform of the Pullman, he cast a hopeless eye over the landscape.
 He lowered his gaze to the tracks and siding—and started sharply.
 "Eh—what now?" Barcus inquired with interest.
 "Some theatrical body has left an

old hand car over there in the ditch. Alan replied. "Maybe it isn't beyond service. Come along and lend me a hand."
 "Half a minute," Barcus answered, dodging suddenly back into the car.
 When he reappeared, after some five minutes, Rose accompanied him, and Barcus was smiling as brilliant as though nothing whatever was wrong with his world.

Sorry to keep you waiting, old top," he explained, "but I was unlit with an inspiration. There didn't seem to be any sense in letting the amiable Judith loose upon this fair land, so I found a coil of wire in the porter's closet and wired the bands of the drawing room door fast to the bars across the aisle. I'll take her some time to get out, now, without assistance."
 Ten minutes more had passed before the two grimy and perspiring gentlemen succeeded in placing the hand car upon the tracks.
 "It's a swell little hand car," Barcus observed grimly; "no wonder they throw it away."
 "What's the difference how it looks, as long as it will go?"
 "But will it?" Barcus doubted.
 "Somewhere far back along the line a locomotive hooted mournfully.
 "It's got to!" Alan replied, helping Rose aboard.
 "Don't worry," Barcus advised; "that's a freight whistle."
 "Maybe you can distinguish the whistle of a freight from that of a passenger train—I don't say you can't; but I'll take no chances on your judgment being good. Hey aboard here if you're coming with us!"

Slowly the hand car stirred on its greasy-hungry and complaining axles; slowly it gathered momentum and surged noisily up the tracks as Alan and Barcus, on opposite sides of the hand-car, alternately rose and fell back.
 Behind it the thunder of an approaching train drew momentarily in volume, lending color to the theory of Mr. Barcus that what they had heard had been the whistle of a freighter rather than of the light engine. But

just as Alan was about to advocate leaving the tracks and taking the hand car with them, to clear the way for the train, its rumble began to diminish, grew less and beautifully less, and was stilled.
 "What do you make of that?" Alan panted across the racking bar.
 "The obvious," Barcus returned. "The freight has taken the siding to wait for some other through train to pass. We'll have to look sharp and be ready to jump."
 The grade became a trace more steep; the car moved with less reluctance.
 "Let go," Alan advised; "it'll coast down the balance of this incline—and we'd better save our strength."
 But they had barely regained their breath and mopped the streaming sweat away from their eyes when a second whistle, of a different tone, started both back to their task.
 Catching the eye of Barcus Alan nodded despairingly.
 "Afraid it's all up with us now," he groaned; "that whistled precisely like the whistle of the light engine."
 A little grace was granted them, however, through the circumstance (as they afterward discovered) that the light engine had stopped at the siding long enough to couple up Trine's Pullman.

It was fully a quarter of an hour before the growing rumble of the latter wagged the trio on the hand car, just as it gained the end of the grade and addressed itself to a level

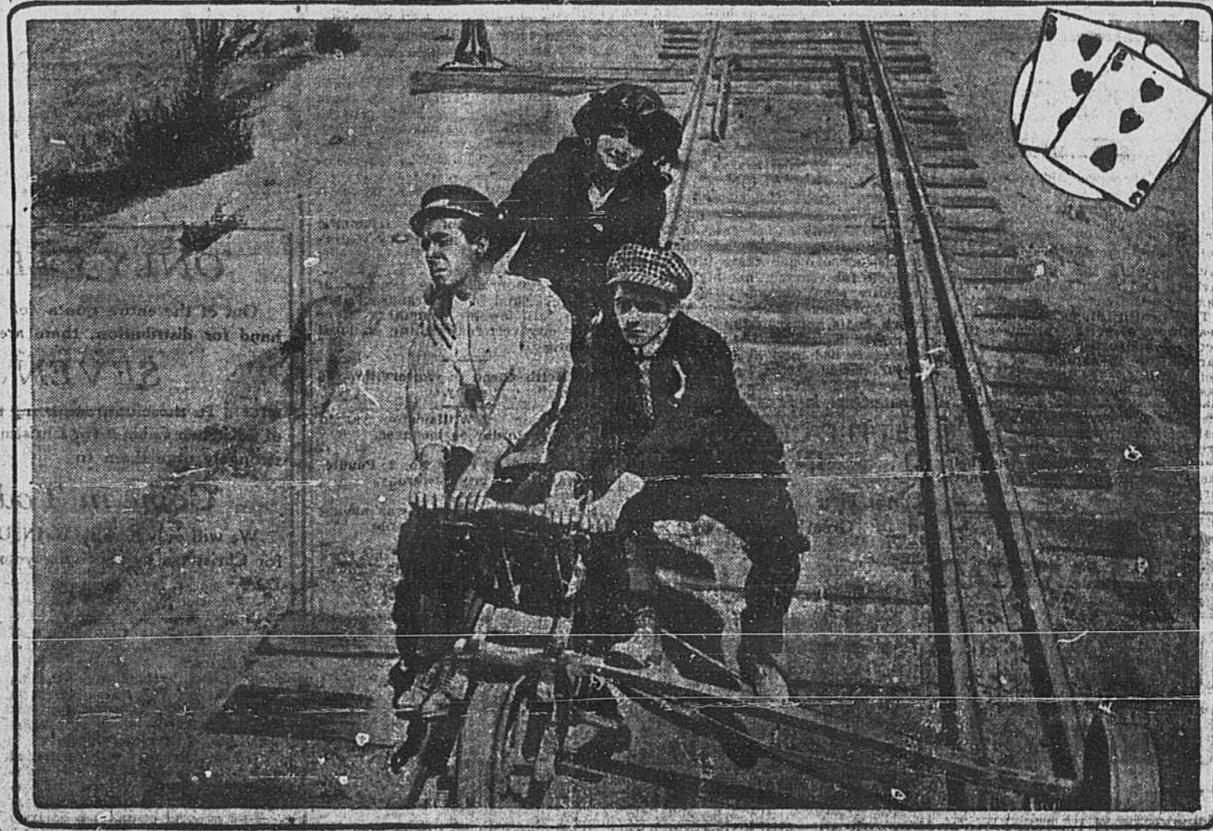
through tortuous stretch of track. And at this point discovery of the switch of a spur-line that shot off southward into the hills furnished Alan with his independent inspiration.
 Stopping the hand car after it had jolted over the frogs, he jumped down; set the switch to shunt the pursuit of the spur, and leaped back upon the car.
 Hardly had he succeeded in working the hand car up round the shoulder of the next bend when the special took the switch without pause and the roar of its progress, shut off by an intervening mountain, was suddenly stilled to a murmur.
 But even so, there was neither rest for the weary nor much excuse for self-congratulation: the rumble of the special was not altogether lost to hearing when the thunder of the freight replaced and drowned it out.
 Of a sudden, releasing the hand-bar, Alan stood up and signed to Barcus to imitate his example.
 "Well—" this last panted, when he had obeyed.
 "Jump off—leave the hand car where it is—they'll have to stop to clear it off the track."
 "And then?"
 "I'll buy a lift from them if it takes my last dollar in the world," Alan promised. "It's our only hope. We can't keep up this heartbreaking business forever—and it can't be long before Trine and Marrophi discover their mistake!"

IV—CABOOSE
 For once, in a way, it fell out precisely as Mr. Law had planned and prayed.
 Constrained to pull up in order to remove the obstruction from the track the train crew of the freight choked down its collective wrath on being presented with a sum of money. In the hopes of further largesse it lent its common ear to Alan's well-worn tale, which had so frequently proved itself in similar emergencies, of an sloping couple pursued by an unreasoning vindictive parent; and had its hopes rewarded by the price Alan bargained to pay in exchange for exclusive use of the caboose as

far as the next town.
 So that it was not more than ten minutes before Rose was settled to rest in such comfort as the caboose afforded, while Alan and Barcus sat with its doorway and smoked.
 Neither he nor any other aboard the freight suspected for an instant that in the box car next forward of the caboose, a woman in man's clothing lay perdu, now and again chuckling impudently to herself in anticipation of the time and the event she was biding with such patience as she could muster.
 The whistle of a locomotive overtaking the freight sounded the signal for her to take action on her cherished plan.
 Rising, she glanced out of the open door. A curve in the track below the freight, laboring up a steep grade, enabled her to catch a glimpse of a headlight, followed by a string of lighted windows, indicating a single car: the special, beyond a doubt.
 Without hesitation, since the train was not running at speed, she dropped out to the ballast, whirled smartly about, caught the handbar at the end of the box car as it passed and swung herself up between it and the caboose. Climbing to the top of the box car she peered keenly through the gloaming, which was not yet so dense that she might not discern two heads protruding from the window of the special's engine.
 She turned and peered ahead. The freight was approaching a trestle that

board.
 That it had been constructed of more solid stuff was abundantly proved by the shower of timbers, splinters and broken iron that rained about the heads of the fugitives.
 For all that, the gods smiled upon them for their courage; they escaped without a scratch.

(To be continued.)



Slowly it stirred on greasy-hungry axles.

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Arrivals—

No. 31	8:45 a. m.
No. 33	11:35 a. m.
No. 35	1:30 p. m.
No. 37	3:20 p. m.
No. 39	4:45 p. m.
No. 41	5:50 p. m.
No. 43	7:30 p. m.
No. 45	9:30 p. m.
No. 47	10:50 p. m.

Departures—

No. 30	5:40 a. m.
No. 32	7:30 a. m.
No. 34	10:25 a. m.
No. 36	11:55 a. m.
No. 38	2:10 p. m.
No. 40	3:40 p. m.
No. 42	4:45 p. m.
No. 44	6:25 p. m.
No. 46	8:35 p. m.

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