The Trey O' Hearts

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

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Illustrated with Photographs from the Picture Production

SYNOPSIS.

The 3 of Hearts is the "death sign" employed by Seneca Trine in the private war of vengeance which, through his daughter Judith, a woman of violent passions like his own, he wages against Alan Law, son of the man (now dead) whom Trine held responsible for the accident which made him a helpless cripple. Rose, Judith's twin and double, learns of her sister's campaign against Alan and leaves her home to aid him, whom she loves. Under dramatic circumstances Alan saves Judith's life and so wins her love. But failure to shake his constancy to Rose kindles Judith's jealousy and settles her in her homicidal purpose. She is largely responsible for a shipwreck in Nantucket sound, from which Alan and Rose escape with their friend Barcus in a power-driven lifeboat.

CHAPTER XV.

The Masked Voice.

For a matter of twelve hours the fog, leaden, dank, viscous, as inexorable as the dominion of evil, had wrapped the world in an embrace as foul and noxious as the coils of some great, gray, slimy serpent.

Through its sluggish folds the ponderous, power-impelled lifeboat crept at a snail's pace, its stem parting and rolling back from either flank a heavy-hearted sea of gray.

In the bows a young woman rested in a state of semi-exhaustion, her eyes closed, he head pillowed on a cork-belt life-preserver, her sodden garments modeled closely to the slender body that was ever and again shaken from head to feet with the strength of a long, shuddering respiration.

Seated on the nearest thwart, Alan Law, chin in hand, watched over the rest of this woman whom he loved with a grimly hopeless solicitude. He was in no happier case than she, so far as physical comfort went—he was in worse, since he might not rest.

Premonition of misfortune darkened his heart with its impenetrable shadow.

In the stern Tom Barcus presided morosely over the steering gear; and Law was no more jealously heedful of his sweetheart than Barcus of the heavy-duty motor that chugged away so purposefully at its business of driving the boat heaven-knew-where.

Lacking at once a compass, all notion whatsoever of the sun's bearings, and any immediate hope of the fog lifting or chance bringing them either to land or to rescue by some larger and less comfortless craft, Barcus steered mainly through force of habit—the salt-water man's instinctive feeling that no boat under way should ever in any conceivable circumstance be without a hand at the helm. It had seemed impossible that it could long escape repetition of the disaster, but somehow, it always did escape, and that by a wide margin; never once had it passed near enough to another vessel to see it.

And now for more than an hour the silence had been uncannily constant, broken only by the rumble of the motor, the muted lisp of water slipping down the side, the suck and gurgle of the wake.

Forebodings no less portentous than Law's crawled in the mind of Barcus. It was as likely as not that the lifeboat was traveling straight out to sea. And gasoline tanks can and oftentimes do become as empty as an official weather prophet's promise of fair weather for a holiday.

More than this, Mr. Barcus was a confirmed skeptic in respect of marine motors; on terms of long and intimate experience with the ways of

Delivered Into the Hands of the Enemy.

the demon of perversity that tenants them one and all, he knew that the present sweet-tempered performance of the exhibit under consideration was no earnest whatsoever of future good behavior, that when such a complicated contraption was concerned there was never any telling . . .

In view of all of which considerations he presently threw open the battery switch.

And the aching void created in the silence by the cessation of that unform drone was startling enough to rouse even Rose Trine from her state of semi-somnolence.

With a look of panic she sat up, thrust damp hair back from her eyes, and nervously inquired:

"What's the matter?"

"Nothing," Barcus told her. "I shut the engine off—that's all."

Tempers were short in that hour, and Alan was annoyed to think that the rest of his beloved should needlessly have been disturbed.

"What did you do that for?" he demanded sharply.

"Because I jolly well wanted to," Barcus returned in a tone as brusque.

"Oh, you did—eh?"

"Yes, I did—eh! I happen to be bossing this end of the boat and to have sense enough to realize there's no sense at all in our wasting fuel the way we are—cruising nowhere!"

"Well," Law contended, struck by the fairness of this argument, but unable to calm his uneasiness—"just the same, we might—"

"Yes; of course, we might," Barcus snapped. "We might a whole lot. We might, for instance, be heading for Spain, for all you or I know to the contrary. And in such case, I for one respectfully prefer to have gas enough to take us home again if ever this da—blessed fog lifts!"

And for several seconds longer the stillness strangled their spirits in its ruthless grasp.

Then of a sudden a cry shrilled through the fog, so near at hand that it seemed scarcely more distant than over the side:

"Ahoy! Help! Ahoy there! Help!"

So insistent, so urgent was its accent that, coupled with the surprise, it brought the three as one to their feet, all a-tremble, their eyes seeking one another's faces, then shifting uneasily away.

"What can it be?" Rose whispered, aghast, shrinking into Alan's ready arm.

"A woman," Barcus put in harshly.

"Judith," the girl moaned.

Alan shook himself together. "Impossible!" he contended. "I saw her go down . . ."

"That doesn't prove she didn't come up," Barcus commented acidly.

"Ahoy! Motorboat aho-o-oy! Help!"

"And that," Barcus pursued sadly, "just proves she did come up—blame the luck! Alive she is, and kicking; stand clear. An able-bodied pair of lungs was back of that hail, my friend; and you needn't tell me I don't know the dulcet accents of that angelic contralto!"

Without heeding him, Alan cupped hands to mouth and sent an answering cry ringing through the murk:

"Ahoy! Where are you? Where away?"

"Here—on the reef—half-drowned—perishing with chill—"

"How does my voice bear?" Alan called back.

"What the dickens do you care?" Barcus interpolated suspiciuosly.

"To port," the response rang through the fog. "Starboard your helm and come in slowly!"

"Right-o! Half a minute!" Alan replied reassuringly.

"Like hell!" Mr. Barcus muttered in his throat as he jumped down into the engine pit and bent over the fly-wheel.

Leaping on the forward thwart and balancing himself perilously near the gunwale, Alan strained his vision vainly against the opacity of the fog.

"Can't make out anything," he grumbled, looking back. "Start her up—but slow's the word—and 'ware reef!"

"Nothing doing," Barcus retorted curtly. "The motto is now 'Full speed astern!' as you must know."

"O come! We can't leave a woman out there—in a fix like that!"

"Can't we? You watch!" Barcus grunted malevolently, rocking the heavy flywheel with all his might; for the motor had turned suddenly stubborn.

"Alan!" Rose pleaded, laying a hand upon his sleeve. "Think what it means! I know it sounds heartless of me—and it's my own sister. But you know how mad she is—wild with hatred and jealousy. If you take her into this boat, it's your life or hers!"

"If we leave her out there," Alan retorted, shaking his arm impatiently free, "it's her life on our heads!"

At this juncture the motor took charge of the argument, ending it in summary fashion. With a smart explosion in the cylinder, it started up unexpectedly, at one and the same time almost dislocating the arm of Mr. Barcus and precipitating Alan overboard.

It was not given him to know what was happening until he found himself in the water; he struggled to the surface just in time to see the bows of the lifeboat back away and vanish into the mist.

CHAPTER XVI.

The Island.

Not more than twenty seconds could have elapsed before Barcus recovered from the shock of the motor's treachery sufficiently to reverse the wheel, throttle down the carburetor and jump out of the engine-pit.

But in that small space of time the lifeboat and Alan Law had parted company as definitely as though one of them had been levitated bodily to the far side of the earth.

It could not have been more than a minute after the accident before Barcus was guiding the boat over what, going on his sense of location and judgment of distance, he could have sworn was the precise spot where Alan had disappeared, but without discovering a sign of him.

And for the next twenty minutes he divided his attention between attempts to soothe and reassure the half-distracted girl and efforts to educe a reply from Alan by stentorian hailing—with as little success in the one as in the other.

"Alan!" he shrieked at the top of his lungs. "Alan! Give a hail to tell us you're safe!"

There was a little pause; he was racking his brains for some more moving mode of appeal when the answer came in another voice—in the voice of Judith Trine, clear, musical, effervescent with sardonic humor:

"Be at peace, little one—bleat no more! Mr. Law is with us—and safe—oh, quite, quite safe!"

In dumb consternation Barcus sought the countenance of Rose. Her eyes, meeting his, were blank with

Yanked Him Off to His Cell.

despair. He shook his head helplessly and let his hands dangle idly between his knees.

With no way on her, the lifeboat drifted with a current of unknown set and strength.

"What can we do?" Rose implored. "We must do something. We can't leave him . . . Oh, when I think of him there, in her hands, I could go mad!"

"If only I knew," Barcus protested; "but my hands are tied, my wits are as helpless as my eyes are blind. There's nothing to go by—except the bare possibility that the reef she spoke of may be Norton's. It doesn't seem possible, but we may have made that much southing. In that case we're about three miles off the mainland, somewhere in the neighborhood of Katama island, a little, rocky, desolate bump of earth, inhabited mainly by fishermen."

The girl wrung her hands. "But how could Judith get there—and with her men—and ammunition?"

"Don't ask me. Going on my experience with the lady, I'd be willing to bet that she was picked up by the steamer that ran us down, and proceeded to make a prize of it—or try to. One thing's certain—she must have found or stolen a boat from somebody; they couldn't have made Norton's reef by swimming—it's too far. That's the answer; they were picked up, stole a boat, and piled it up on the reef."

"And there's no hope—!"

"Only of the fog relenting. If we could make the mainland and get help . . ."

His accents died away into a disconsolate silence that was unbroken for upwards of an hour.

So slowly the current bore the lifeboat toward the beach and so still the tide that Barcus never appreciated they were within touch of any land until the bows grounded with a slight jar and a grating sound.

With a cry of incredulity he leaped to his feet—"Land, by all that's lucky!"—and stooping, lent a hand to the girl, aiding her to rise.

Hardly had Rose had time to comprehend what had happened, when Barcus was over the side and wrestling with the bows, dragging the boat farther upon the shoals.

She was, however, more than one man could manage; and when her stem had bitten a little more deeply into the sands, Barcus gave over the attempt and, lifting Rose down, set her on dry land, then climbed back into the vessel, rummaged out her anchor and cable, and carried them ashore, planting the former well up towards the foot of the cliff.

And as he rose from this last labor he was half blinded by the glare of the westering sun as it broke through the fog.

In less than five minutes the miraculous commonplace was an accomplished fact; the wind had rolled the fog back like a scroll and sent it spinning far out to sea, while the shore on which the two had landed was deluged with sunlight, bright and beautifully warm.

He showed a thoughtful and considerate countenance to the girl.

"You're about all in!"

She nodded confirmation of this, which was no more than simple truth. "Where are we?" she added.

He made her party to his own perplexity.

"You're not able to travel," he pursued. "Do you mind being left alone while I take a turn up the beach and have a look round? We can't be far from some sort of civilization; even if it's an island there are no desert isles along this coast. I'll find something soon enough, no fear."

By tacit consent both avoided mention of Alan, but each knew what thought was uppermost in the other's mind.

"There's a niche among the rocks up here," Barcus indicated, "almost a cave. You'll be warm and dry enough, and secure from observation overhead. Maybe you can even snatch a few winks of sleep. . . ."

She negatived that suggestion with a weary smile; no sleep for her until sheer exhaustion overpowered her, or she knew of Alan's fate.

And so, reiterating his promise to be gone no longer than absolutely might be needful, he left her there.

CHAPTER XVII.

This Mortal Tide.

She was very certain she would never sleep before her anxiety was assuaged by word of Alan's fate; but she reckoned without her host of trials that had bred in her a fatigue anodynous even to her mental anguish.

It was not true, she told herself, that people never die of broken hearts.

She knew that, were he taken from her, she could no longer live. . . .

And sleep overwhelmed her suddenly, like a great, dark cloud . . .

But its dominion over her faculties was not of long duration. Slowly, heavily, mutinously, she was rescued from its nirvana—came to her senses with an effect of one who emerges from some vast place of blackness and terror, to find Barcus kneeling over and gingerly but persistently shaking her by the shoulder.

And then she sat up with a cry of mystified compassion; for in the brief time that he had been absent—it had not been more than an hour—Mr. Barcus had most unquestionably been severely used.

He had acquired a long cut over one eye, but shallow, upon which blood had dried, together with a bruised and swollen cheek that was badly scratched to boot. And what simple articles of clothing remained to him, after his strenuous experiences of the last forty-eight hours, had been reduced to even greater simplicity; his shirt, for example, now lacked a sleeve that had been altogether torn away at the shoulder.

"No!" he told her, as soon as he saw her wits were awake once more—"don't waste time pitying me. I'm all right—and so is Alan! That's the main thing for you to understand; he's still alive and sound—"

"But where is he? Take me to him!" she demanded, rising with a movement of such grace and vigor that it seemed hard to believe she had ever known an instant's weariness.

"That's the rub," Barcus confessed, squatting on the sands and knuckling his hair. "I dasesnt take you to him. Judith might object. Besides, you can see for yourself it isn't safe to mingle with the inhabitants of this tight little island—and you can't get to where Alan is without mingling considerably. Sit down, and I'll tell you all about it, and we'll try to figure out what's best to be done. Maybe we can manage a rescue under cover of night."

And when the girl had settled herself beside him he launched into a detailed report.

"It's Katama Ieland, all right," he announced, "but a change has come over the place since I visited it some years ago. Then it was a community of simple-hearted villagers and fishermen; now, unless all signs fail, it's a den of smugglers. I noticed a number of Chinese about; and that, taken in connection with the fact that, when I ventured to introduce myself to the village ginmill and ask a few innocent questions, the entire population, to a child, landed on me like a thousand brick—the two circumstances made me think we'd stumbled on a settlement of earnest workers at the gentle art of helping poor Chinamen evade the exclusion laws."

With a wry smile, he pursued: "As for me, I landed out back of the joint, on the nape of my neck, and took the count, surrounded by a lot of unsympathetic boxes and barrels that had seen better days. And when I came to and started to crawl unostentatiously away, I was just in time to witness the landing of your amiable sister, that gang of cutthroats she keeps on the pay roll, and Alan in company with as choice a crew of scoundrels as you'd care to see. I gathered from a few words that leaked out of the back door of the barroom, that it was as I had thought—Judith had stolen a boat from the ship that picked her up, and rammed it on Norton's reef; and after she gathered Alan in the schooner of these smugglers happened along, and she hailed it and struck a bargain with the captain and signed co-partnership articles, or something like that. Anyway, her lot and the islanders were soon as thick as thieves, and tanking up so sociably that I actually got a chance to whisper a word to Alan and tell him you were all right, and that he'd find us both down here on the beach, if luck served him with an escape. That was all I got a chance to say, for Judith marched up just then and yanked him off to his cell. I mean to say, he's locked up now in a little stone hut on the edge of the cliff, with the door guarded and the window overlooking a sheer drop of thirty feet or so to the beach. When I'd seen that much I calculated it was about time for me to get quit of that neighborhood, before Mam'selle Judith nicked me with the evil eye."

"You don't think she saw you?" the girl cried.

"I don't think so," Barcus allowed gravely; and then, lifting his gaze, he added as he rose in a bound: "I just know she did—that's all.

In another instant he was battling might and main with three willing ruffians, who had come suddenly into view round a shoulder of rock; but his efforts were shortlived, foredoomed to failure. He was weakened with suffering and fatigue—and the three were fresh and had the courage at least of their numbers. He was overborne in a twinkling, and had his face ground brutally into the sand while his hands were made fast with stout rope behind his back. And when he rose, it was to find, as he had anticipated, that Rose's resistance had been as futile as his own; she, too, was captive, her hands bound like his, the huge and unclean paw of one of Judith's crew cruelly clamped upon her shoulders.

He was by no means poor-spirited, but he shrank openly from the look she gave him, and was relieved when she, with a sneer, passed him by and planted herself squarely before her sister.

"Well?" she demanded brusquely. "How much longer do you think I'm going to tolerate your interference—you poor little fool! How many more lessons will you require before realizing that I mean to have my way, and that you'll cross me only to suffer for it?"

The courage of the other girl won the unstinted admiration of Mr. Barcus. Far from cringing, she seemed to find fresh heart in her sister's challenge. Her head was high, her glance level with illimitable contempt as she replied:

"So you've tried again?" she inquired obliquely, with a tone of pity. "You've offered him your love yet another time, have you?"

"Silence!" Judith cried in fury.

"Only to learn once more that he would rather death than you?" Rose persisted, unflinching. "And so you come to take your spite out on me, do you? You pitiful thing! Do you think I mind—knowing as I do now that he could never hold you in anything but compassion and contempt?"

"You will see," she said in even and frigid accents. And the light of her mania leaped and leaped again in her eyes like a living flame. "I have prepared a way to make you understand what opposition to me means . . ."

She waved a hand toward the nearer point of rocks. "Take them along," she commanded.

The understanding between her and her men was apparently complete; for these last, without hesitation or further instructions, marched Rose and Barcus down to the end of the spit and on, into the water.

It was nearly knee-deep before Barcus was halted with a savage jerk, backed up to a rock, forced despite his frenzied resistance to sit down in the water, and swiftly, with half a dozen deft hitches of rope and a stanch knot, made fast in that position—submerged to his chest.

This accomplished, the men turned attention to Rose, lashing her in similar wise at Barcus' side.

Standing just above the water-line, with every sign of complete calm and sanity other than that ominous flicker-

Already the Waters Had Risen Over an Inch.

ing in her eyes, Judith superintended the business till its conclusion, then waved the men away.

Quietly, like well-trained servants, they turned their backs and marched off.

And again, after a brief wait, the woman laughed her short and mirthless laugh.

"The tide will be high," she said, "precisely at sunset. You may time your lives by that. When the sun dips into the sea, then will your lives go down with it."

She turned on her heel and strode swiftly away, with not so much as a backward glance, overtook her men, and passed quickly from sight around the farther point of rocks.

For some time Barcus struggled vainly with his bonds. As for Rose, she wasted no strength in struggling—perhaps had none to waste. When he looked her way he saw her exquisite profile unmarred by any line of fear or doubt, sharply relieved against the darkness of the rising flood. Her level gaze without a tremor traversed the shining flood to its far horizon.

He noted that already the waters had risen more than an inch.

Humbled even in his terror by that radiant calm that dwelt upon her, he ventured diffidently: "Rose — Miss Trine—"

She turned her head and found the heart to smile. "Rose," she corrected gently.

"I'm sorry," he said—which was not at all what he had meant to say. "I've

They Fought Like Madmen.

done my best. I suppose it's wrong to give up—but they've made it too much for me, this time."

"I know," she said gently.

"You"—he stammered—"you're not afraid?"

"There is nothing to fear," she said, "but death. . . ."

"Then," he said more bravely, after a time—the water now was near his chin—"good-by—good luck!"

"Not yet, dear friend," she returned, "not yet."

But the sun was perilously close upon the rim of the world. But a little time, and it would be night.

He closed his eyes to shut out the vision of its slow, implacable descent.

The water was now almost level with his lips; it seemed strange that his throat could be so dry, so parched . . .

He opened his eyes, shuddering.

"It's good-by now," he faltered.

"Not yet!" her voice rang beside him, vibrant. "Look—up there—along the cliff!"

He lifted his gaze . . .

Two men were running along the cliff—and the man in the lead was Alan. But his lead was very scant, and the man who pursued was one of Judith's, and stuck to the trail like a blood-hound fresh from the leash.

And now the water was at his lips; Barcus could no more speak without strangling.

Of a sudden he groaned in his heart; though there was no passable way down the cliff, still the sight of his friend alive and unharmed had brought with it a thrill of hope; now that hope died as he saw Alan stumble and go to his knees.

Before he could rise the other was upon him, with the fury of a wolf seeking the throat of a stag.

For an instant they fought like madmen; then, in a trice, the sky line of the cliff was empty; one or the other had tripped and fallen over the brink, and falling had retained hold of his enemy and carried him down as well.

By no chance, Barcus told himself, could either escape uninjured.

Yet, to his amazement, he saw one man break from the other's embrace and rise. And he who lay still, a crumpled, inhuman heap upon the sands, was Judith's man.

With a violent effort Barcus lifted his mouth above water and shrieked:

"Alan! Alan! Help! Here—at the end of the point—in the water—help!"

A precious minute was lost before Alan discovered their two heads, so barely above that swiftly rising flood.

Then he ran toward them as he had never run before, and as he came whipped out a jack-knife and freed its blade.

Even so—since it was, of course, Rose whom Alan freed the first—Barcus was half-drowned before Alan helped him in turn up to the beach.

And as this happened the last blood-red rim of the sun was washed under by the waves.

Two minutes later the lifeboat was afloat, and Mr. Barcus, already recovered, was laboring with the flywheel of the motor, stimulated to supreme exertion by the sight of a party, led by Judith, racing madly down the beach.

But it was not until well out from shore and on the way to the safety promised by the mainland—now readily discernible on the horizon—that any one of them found time for speech.

Then Mr. Barcus straightened up from his assiduous attentions to the motor, and observed:

"You bear a charmed life, my adventurous friend. I want to tell you that when I saw you go over that cliff I made up my mind your usefulness would be at least permanently impaired. As it is, I don't mind telling you that if ever I get out of this affair alive, I'm going to have a try at your life myself, just once, for luck!"

(TO BE CONTINUED.)