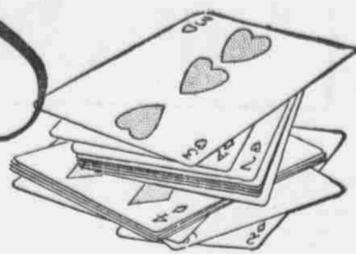
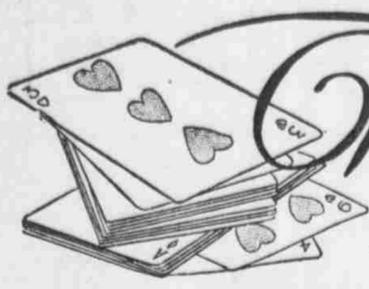


The TREY O' HEARTS

LOUIS JOSEPH VANCE



FIFTH INSTALLMENT

The photo-drama corresponding to the installments of "The Trey O' Hearts" may now be seen at the leading moving picture theaters. By this unique arrangement with the Universal Film Mfg. Co. it is therefore not only possible to read "The Trey O' Hearts" in this paper, but also to see each installment of it at the moving picture theaters.

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THE SUNSET TIDE

SYNOPSIS—The 3 of Hearts is the "death sign" employed by Rose 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 consistency to Rose kindles Judith's jealousy and settles her in her homicidal purpose. She is largely responsible for a shipwreck in Nanucket sound, from which Alan and Rose escape with their friend Barcus in a power-driven lifeboat.

I—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, grey, 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, her head pillowed on a cork-belt life-preserver.

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 bring them either to land or to rescue by some larger and less comfortable craft, Barcus steered mainly through force of habit.

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.

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 uniform 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—ah?"

"Yes, I did—ah! I happen to be boating 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 as well go to 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 de—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:

"Ahey! Help! Ahey there! Help!"

So instant, 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.

He replied, obviously with an effort overcoming the superstitious constriction of his throat: "Some other unfortunate. . . . But still his flesh crawled with dread; for he knew that voice; and it was the voice of one whom he had believed dead, drowned fathoms deep in the sound, miles from that spot."

"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 absently.

"Ahey! Motorboat aho-o-y! 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!"

"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 ahead!' 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 fly-wheel 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.

II—THE ISLAND

Not more than twenty seconds could have elapsed before Barcus recovered from the shock



—and Actually Got Time to Whisper a Word to Alan.

of the motor's treachery sufficiently to reverse the wheel, throttle down the carburettor 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 elude 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 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 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."

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 to 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 tides 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 up 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

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

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?"

"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 know 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 staunch 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 flickering 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 toward the further point of rocks.

Barcus 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," she said—which was not at all what he had meant to say. "I've 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-bye—good luck!"

"Not yet, dear friend," she returned, "not yet." 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-bye 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 possible 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.

"Well," She Demanded Brusquely, "How Much Longer Do You Think I Am Going to Tolerate Your Interference?"

on the sands and knuckling his hair. "I darsent 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 island, 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 fall, 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 gin-mill 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 cut-throats 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 bar-room, 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 short-lived, foredoomed to failure. He was weakened with sufficing 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.

They were granted time to exchange no more than one despairing glance when a curt laugh fairly chilled the blood in Mr. Barcus, and he swung sharply between his two guards to confront Judith Trine.

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

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 westerling 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."

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

III—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 anonymous 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

(To be continued.)