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

Author of "The Fortune Hunter," "The Brass Bowl," "The Black Bag," etc.

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, loves Alan, and learning of her sister's campaign against him, leaves home and joins her fortunes to his. 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's sound, from which Rose and Alan escape with their friend Barcus, Judith pursuing in a chartered schooner with a crew of cut-throats.

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 oar from the water, "and eel-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 eel-grass wrapped round the wheel. Which, I suppose, means I've got to go overboard and clear it away."

"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

Dug Into His Money Belt.

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 loss 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.

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

"It's no use," he conceded at length. "We're here for keeps."

"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."

"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."

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 lightkeeper 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-flung 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?"

"He's going. I'm the op'rator. No business transacted after office hours. Call raound 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—"

"I tell you, no!"

In desperation Alan rammed a hand into his trousers pocket. "Will a dollar influence your better judgment?" he suggested shrewdly.

"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.

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 3:00 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.

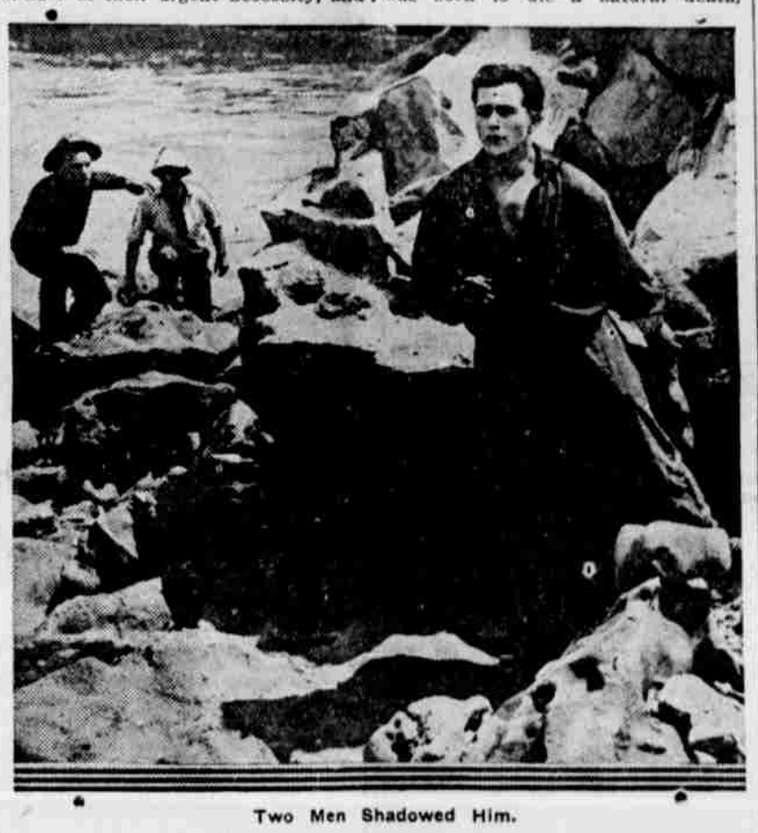
His shadow in the moonlight kept him company upon the sands; and above, on the edge of the bluffs, another shadow moved on parallel course and at a pace sedulously patterned after his.

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 wakened 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



Two Men Shadowed Him.

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 near by.

"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 avariciously keen to charter.

They observed haste religiously; within ten minutes they stood upon a float 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 oarlocks, 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 happening he had gone over the stern and had involuntarily disarmed himself as well.

The other two men made a sad business of attempting to overpower Mr. Barcus. In less than a minute they were both overboard.

"And just for this," Alan said before getting out of earshot—"I'm going to treat my party to a joy-ride in your pretty powerboat."

He concluded this speech abruptly as Barcus brought them up under the quarter of the power cruiser.

Within two minutes the motor was spinning contentedly, the mooring had been slipped, and the motorboat was heading out of the harbor.

Within five minutes she had left it well astern and was shooting rapidly westward, making nothing of the buffets of a very tolerable sea kicked up by the freshening southwesterly wind.

"My friend," observed Alan, "as our acquaintance ripens I am more and more impressed that neither of us was born to die a natural death, whether abed or at the hands of those who dislike us; but rather to be hanged as common pirates."

"You have the courage of ignorance," Barcus replied coolly; "if you'll take the trouble to glance astern I promise you a sight that will move you to suspend judgment for the time being."

At this Alan sat up with a start.

Back against the loom of the Elizabeth Islands through which they had navigated while he nodded, shone the milk-white sails of an able schooner.

Sheets all taut and every inch of canvas fat with the beam wind, she footed it merrily in their wake—a silver jet spouting from her cutwater.

CHAPTER XX.

Hell-Fire.

But by this stage in his history Mr. Law had arrived at a state of mind immune to surprise at the discovery that he had once more failed to elude the vigilance and pertinacity of the woman who sought his life.

He viewed the schooner with no more display of emotion than resided in narrowing eyelids and a tightening of the muscles about his mouth.

"Much farther to go?" he inquired presently, in a colorless voice.

"At our present pace—say, two hours."

"And will that enable us to hold our own?"

"Just about," Barcus allowed, squinting critically at the chase; "she's some footer, that schooner; and this is just the wind she likes best."

"How much lead have we got?"

"A mile or so—none too much."

"Anything to be done to mend matters?"

"Nothing—but pray, if you remember how."

In the end they made it by a narrow margin. The face of Judith Trine was distinctly revealed by the chill gray light of early dawn to those aboard the power cruiser as she swept up through the reaches of New Bedford harbor and aimed for the first wharf that promised a fair landing on the main waterfront of the city.

There was neither a policeman nor a watchman of any sort in sight.

Nor was there, for all his hopes and prayers, based on the telegram to Digby, a sign of a motor car.

Still, not much of the street was revealed. The docks on either hand were walled and roofed, cutting off the view.

If they ran for it, they must surely be overhauled. Something must be done to hinder the crew of the schooner from landing.

"Here!" he cried sharply to Barcus. "You take Rose and hurry to the street and find that motor-car. I know she's there. Digby never failed me yet!"

"But you—"

"Don't waste time worrying about me. I'll be with you in three shakes. I'm only going to put a spoke in Judith's wheel. I've got a scheme!"

As for his scheme—he had none other than to give them battle, to sacrifice himself if need be, to make sure the escape of Rose.

Sheer luck smiled on him to this extent, that in turning his eye lighted on a four-foot length of stout, three-inch scantling, an excellently formidable club.

But soon, disarmed, his case was desperate—and there were two already safe upon the dock and others madly scrambling up to reinforce them.

Wildly he cast about for some substitute weapon, he leaped toward a small pyramid of little but heavy kegs, and seizing one, swung it overhead and cast it full force into the midriff of his nearest enemy; so that this one doubled up convulsively, with a sickish grunt, and vanished in turn over the end of the wharf.

His fellow followed with less injury. But Alan had no time to wonder whether the man had tripped and thrown himself in his effort to escape a second hurtling keg, or had turned coward and fled. It was enough that he had returned, precipitately and heavily, to the schooner.

The keg, meeting with no resistance, pursued him even to the deck, where the force of its impact split its seams.

None of the combatants, however, Alan least of all, noticed that the powder that filtered out was black and coarse.

In the same breath he heard a friendly voice shout warning far up the dock, and knew that Barcus was coming to his aid.

A glance over-shoulder, too, discovered the cause of the warning; two men who had thus far escaped his attentions were maneuvering to fall upon him from behind. The bound required to evade them brought him face to face with Judith as she landed on the dock.

"Oh," she cried, "I hate you, I hate you—"

"So you've said, my dear, but—"

His final words were not audible even to himself. In his confidence (now that Barcus was taking care of the others) and his impatience with the woman, and in his perhaps unworthy wish to demonstrate conclusively how cheap he held her, Alan had tossed the pistol over the end of the wharf.

It was an old-fashioned weapon, and the force with which it struck the deck released the hammer.

Instantly the .44 cartridge blazed into the open head of a broken powder keg.

And with a roar like the trump of doom and a mighty gust of flame and smoke the decks of the schooner were riven and shattered; her masts tottered and fell . . .

CHAPTER XXI.

Anticlimax.

Alan came to himself supported by Barcus—his senses still reeling from the concussion of that thunderbolt which he had so unwittingly loosed—the cloud of sulphurous smoke and yet dissipated by the wind.

Judith lay at his feet, stunned; and round about other figures of men insensible, if not, for all he could say, dead.

And then Barcus was hustling him unceremoniously down the wharf.

"Come! Come!" he rallied Alan. "Pull yourself together and keep a stiff upper lip. Rose is waiting in the car, and if you don't want to be arrested you'll stir your stumps, my son! That explosion is going to bring the worthy burghers of New Bedford buzzing round our ears like a swarm of hornets!"

His prediction was justified even before it was made; already the nearby dwellings were vomiting half-clothed humanity; already a score of people were galloping down toward the head of the wharf; and in their number a policeman appeared as if by magic.

And while the man hesitated Alan grabbed him by the shoulder, threw him bodily from the car, dropped into his seat, cried a warning to Rose, and threw in the clutch. The machine responded without a jar; they were a hundred feet distant from the scene of the accident before Alan was fairly settled in his place.

As he grew more and more calm, he congratulated himself on having drawn an excellent car in the lottery of chance.

Yet his congratulations were premature; they were not ten minutes out of the environs of the city when Rose left her seat and knelt behind his, to communicate the intelligence that they were already being pursued.

A heavy touring car, she said it was, driven by a man, a woman in the seat by his side—Judith the latter, the man an old employe of her father's by the name of Marrophat.

Marrophat!

Alan remembered that one.

He could only trust in his skill as a driver, and skill is the lesser factor in such a race.

For his own part, he drove like an exceptionally cunning madman. . .

And then, quite clearly, he recognized the time and the place and the character of the road that lay before him as the car sped like a dragon-fly down a slight grade.

From the bottom of the grade it swung away in a wide, graceful curve, bordered for some distance by railroad tracks on a slightly lower level.

He had guessed the fiendish plan of the other driver only too truly.

As they approached at express speed the stretch where the road par-

The Face of Judith Was Distinctly Revealed.

alleled the tracks Alan sought to hug the left-hand side of the road, but in vain.

Roaring, with its muffler cut out, the pursuing car swept up and baffled him, bringing its right forward wheel up beside the left rear wheel of his car, then more slowly forging up until, with its weight, bulk and superior power, it forced him inch by inch to the right, toward the tracks, until his right-hand wheels left the road and ran on uneven turf, until the left-hand wheels as well lost grip on the road metal, until the car began to dip on the slope to the tracks.

There followed a maniac moment when the world was upside down Alan's car slipped and skidded, swung sideways with frightful momentum toward the railroad tracks, caught its wheels against the ties, and . . .

The sun swung in the heavens like a ball on a string. There was a crash, a roar . . . There was nothing—oblivion . . .

The car had turned turtle, pinning Rose and Alan beneath it.

"Alan!" she gasped. "You are not killed?"

"No—not even much hurt, I fancy," he replied. "And you?"

"Not much—"

The deep-throated roar of the locomotive bellowing danger silenced him. He closed his eyes.

Then abruptly the weight was lifted from his chest. He saw a man dragging Rose from under the machine, and saw that the man was Marrophat. And almost immediately someone lifted his head and shoulders, caught him with two hands beneath his arm pits and drew him clear of the machine.

And the face of his rescuer was the face of Judith Trine.

The crash he had expected, of the car being crumpled up by the oncoming locomotive, did not follow.

As he scrambled to his feet, his first glance was up the track, and discovered the train slowing to a halt.

His next was one of wonder for the countenance of Judith Trine as she stood, at a little distance, regarding him; her look almost illegible, a curious compound of passions coloring it—relief, regret, hatred, love . . .

His third glance descried beyond her the figures of Marrophat carrying Rose in his arms, stumbling as he ran toward his car on the highroad.

He moved precipitately to pursue, but found his way barred by Judith.

"No!" she cried violently. "No, you shall not—!"

Her hand sought the grip of a revolver that protruded from her pocket.

With a short, hysterical gasp, he began to laugh.

The hot blood mantled her exquisite face like red fire. She caught her breath with a sob, then flung wildly at him:

"Well, if you must know—it's true. I can't bring myself to kill you. I would to God I could. But I can't. For all that, you shall die—I could not save you if I would! And this I promise you—you shall never see Rose again before you die!"

And while he stood gaping, she swung from him and ran, quickly covering the little distance between him and the car.

As she jumped into this and dropped down upon the seat beside her half-conscious sister, Marrophat swung the car away.

It vanished in a dust-cloud as a throng of railroad employes surrounded and assailed him with clamorous questions.

(TO BE CONTINUED)