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

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CHAPTER I.

The Message of the Rose.

Lapped deep in the leather-bound luxury of an ample lounge-chair, walled apart from the world by the venerable solitude of the library of London's most exclusive club, Mr. Alan Law sprawled (largely on the nape of his neck) and, squinting discontentedly down his nose, admitted that he was exhaustively bored.

Now the chair filled so gracelessly stood by an open window, some twenty feet below which lay a sizable walled garden, an old English garden in full flower. And through the window, now and then, a half-hearted breeze wafted gusts of warm air, sauve and enervating with the heavy fragrance of English roses.

Mr. Law drank deep of it, and in spite of his spiritual unrest, sighed slightly and shut his eyes.

An unspoken word troubled the depth of his consciousness, so that old memories stirred and struggled to its surface. The word was "Rose," and for the time seemed to be the name neither of a woman nor of a flower, but oddly of both, as though the two things were one. His mental vision, bridging the gap of a year, conjured up the vision of a lithe, sweet silhouette in white, with red roses at her belt, posed on a terrace of the Riviera against the burning Mediterranean blue.

Mr. Law was dully conscious that he ought to be sorry about something. But he was really very drowsy indeed; and so, drinking deep of wine-scent of roses, he fell gently asleep.

The clock was striking four when he awoke; and before closing his eyes he had noticed that its hands indicated ten minutes to four. So he could not have slept very long.

For some few seconds Alan did not move, but rested as he was, incredulously regarding a rose which had materialized mysteriously upon the little table at his elbow. He was quite sure it had not been there when he closed his eyes, and almost as sure that it was not real.

And in that instant of awakening the magic fragrance of the rose-garden seemed to be even more strong and cloying sweet than ever.

Then he put out a gingerly hand and discovered that it was real beyond all question. A warm red rose, fresh-plucked, drops of water trembling and sparkling like tiny diamonds on the velvet of its fleshy petals. And when impulsively he took it by the stem, he discovered a most indisputable thorn—which did service for the traditional pinch.

Convinced that he wasn't dreaming, Alan transferred the rose to his sound hand, and meditatively sucked his

With Red Roses at Her Belt.

thumb. Then he jumped up from the chair and glared suspiciously round the room. It was true that a practical joke in that solemn atmosphere were a thing unthinkable; still, there was the rose.

There was no one but himself in the library.

Perplexed to exasperation, Alan fled the club, only pausing on the way out to annex the envelope he found addressed to him in the letter-rack.

It was a blank white envelope of good quality, the address typewritten, the stamp English, and bore a London postmark half illegible.

Alan tore the envelope open in absent-minded fashion—and started as if stung. The enclosure was a simple playing card—a trey of hearts!

As for Alan Law, he wandered homeward in a state of stupefaction. He could read quite well the message of the rose. He would not soon forget that year-old parting with his Rose of the Riviera: "You say you love me but may not marry me—and we must part. Then promise this, that if ever you change your mind, you'll send for me." And her promise: "I will send you a rose."

But the year had lapsed with never a sign from her, so that he had grown accustomed to the unflattering belief that she had forgotten him.

And now the sign had come—but what the deuce did the trey of hearts mean?

When morning came, London had lost Alan Law. No man of his acquaintance—nor any woman—had received the least warning of his disappearance. He was simply and sufficiently removed from English ken.

CHAPTER II.

The Sign of the Three.

Out-of-doors, high brazen noon, a day in spring, the clamorous life of New York running as fluent as quicksilver through its brilliant streets.

Within-doors, neither sound nor sunbeam disturbed a perennial quiet that was yet not peace.

The room was like a wide, deep well of night, the haunt of teeming shadows and sinister silences.

Little, indeed, was visible beyond the lonely shape that brooded over it, the figure of an old man motionless in a great, leather-bound chair.

His hair was as white as his heart was black. The rack of his bones, clothed in a thick black dressing-gown with waist-cord of crimson silk, from the thighs down was covered by a black woollen rug. He stared unblinkingly at nothing: a man seven-eighths dead, completely paralyzed but for his head and his left arm.

Presently a faint clicking signal disturbed the stillness. Seneca Trine put forth his left hand and touched one of a row of crimson buttons embedded in the desk. Something else clicked—this time a latch. There was the faintest possible noise of a closing door, and a smallish man stole noiselessly into the light, paused beside the desk and waited respectfully for leave to speak.

"Well?"

"A telegram, sir—from England."

"Give it me!"

The old man seized the sheet of yellow paper, scanned it hungrily, and crushed it in his tremulous claw with a gesture of uncontrollable emotion.

"Send my daughter Judith here!"

Two minutes later a young woman in street dress was admitted to the chamber of shadows.

"You sent for me, father?"

"Sit down."

She found and placed a chair at the desk, and obediently settled herself in it.

"Judith—tell me—what day is this?"

"My birthday. I am twenty-one."

"And your sister's birthday: Rose, too, is twenty-one."

"Yes."

"You could have forgotten that," the old man pursued almost mockingly. "Do you really dislike your twin sister so intensely?"

The girl's voice trembled. "You know," she said, "we have nothing in common—beyond parentage and this abominable resemblance. Our natures differ as light from darkness."

"And which would you say was—light?"

"Hardly my own: I'm no hypocrite. Rose is everything that they tell me my mother was, while I"—the girl smiled strangely—"I think—I am more your daughter than my mother's."

A nod of the white head confirmed the suggestion. "It is true. I have watched you closely, Judith, perhaps more closely than even you knew. Before I was brought to this"—the wasted hand made a significant gesture—"I was a man of strong passions. Your mother never loved, but rather feared me. And Rose is the mirror of her mother's nature, gentle, unselfish, sympathetic. But you, Judith, you are like a second self to me."

An accent of profound satisfaction informed his voice. The girl waited in a silence that was tensely expectant.

"Then, if on this your birthday I were to ask a service of you that might injuriously affect the happiness of your sister—?"

The girl laughed briefly: "Only ask it!"

"And how far would you go to do my will?"

"Where would you stop in the service of one you loved?"

Seneca Trine nodded gravely. And after a brief pause, "Rose is in love," he announced.

"Oh, I know—I know!" the father affirmed with a faint ring of satisfaction. "I am old, a cripple, prisoner of this living tomb; but all things I should know—somehow—I come to know in course of time!"

"It's true—that Englishman she scraped an acquaintance with on the Riviera last year—what's his name?—Law, Alan Law."

"In the main," the father corrected mildly, "you are right. Only, he's not English. His father was Wellington Law, of Law & Son."

She knew better than to interrupt, but her seeming patience was belied by the whitening knuckles of a hand that lay within the little pool of blood-red light.

And presently the deep voice rolled on: "Law and I were once friends; then—it came to pass that we loved one woman, your mother. I won her—all but her heart: too late she realized it was Law she loved. He never forgave me, nor I him. Though he married another woman, still he held from me the love of my wife. I could not sleep for hating him—and he was no better off. Each sought the other's ruin; it came to be an open duel between us, in Wall street. One of us had to fall—and I held the stronger hand. The night before the day that was to have seen my triumph, I walked in Central park, as was my habit to tire my body so that my brain might sleep. Crossing the East drive I was struck by a motor-car running at high speed without lights. I was picked up insensible—and lived only to be what I am today. Law triumphed in the street while I lay helpless; only a living remnant of my fortune remained to me. Then his

We Both Loved One Woman.

chauffeur, discharged, came to me and sold me the truth; it was Law's car with Law at the wheel that had struck me down—a deliberate attempt at assassination. I sent Law word that I meant to have a life for a life. For what was I better than dead? I promised him that, should he escape, I would have the life of his son. He knew I meant it, and sent his wife and son abroad. Then he died suddenly, of some common ailment—they said; but I knew better. He died of fear of me."

Trine smiled a cruel smile: "I had made his life a reign of terror. Even so often I would send Law, one way or another—mysteriously always—a trey of hearts; it was my death-sign for him; as you know, our name, Trine, signifies a group of three. And every time he received a trey of hearts, within twenty-four hours an attempt of some sort would be made upon his life. The strain broke down his nerve. . . .

"Then I turned my attention to the son, but the distance was too great, the difficulties insuperable. The Law millions mocked all my efforts; their alliance with the Rothschilds placed mother and son under the protection of every secret police in Europe. But they dared not come home. At length I realized I could win only by playing a waiting game. I needed three things: more money; to bring Alan Law back to America; and one agent I could trust, one incorruptible agent. I ceased to persecute mother and son, lulled them into a sense of false security, and by careful speculations repaired my fortunes. In Rose I had the lure to draw the boy back to America; in you, the one person I could trust.

"I sent Rose abroad and arranged that she should meet Law. They fell in love at sight. Then I wrote informing her that the man she had chosen was the son of him who had murdered all of me but my brain. It fell out as I foresaw. You can imagine the scene of passionate renunciation—pledges of undying constancy—the arrangement of a secret code whereby, when she needed him, she would send him a single rose—the birth of a great romance!"

The old man laughed sardonically. "Well, there is the history. Now the rose has been sent; Law is already homeward bound; my agents are watching his every step. The rest is in your hands."

The girl bent forward, breathing heavily, eyes aflame in a face that had assumed a waxen pallor.

"What is it you want of me?"

"Bring Alan Law to me. Dead or alive, bring him to me. But alive, if you can compass it; I wish to see him die. Then I, too, may die content."

The hand of hot-blooded youth stole forth and grasped the icy hand of death-in-life.

"I will bring him," Judith swore—"dead or alive, you shall have him here."

CHAPTER III.

The Trail of Treachery.

But young Mr. Law was sole agent of his own evanishment; just as he was nobody's fool, least of all his own. The hidden meaning of the trey of hearts perplexed him with such distrust that before leaving London, he dispatched a code cablegram to his confidential agent in New York.

What do you know about the trey of hearts? Answer immediately.

The answer forestalled his arrival in Liverpool:

Trine's death sign for your father. For God's sake, look to yourself and keep away from America.

But Alan had more than once visited America incognito and unknown to Seneca Trine via a secret route of his own selection.

Eight days out of London, a second-class passenger newly landed from one of the C.-P. steamships, he walked the streets of Quebec—and dropped out of sight between dark and dawn, to turn up presently in the distant Canadian hamlet of Bale St. Paul, apparently a very tenderfooted American woods-traveler chaperoned by a taciturn Indian guide picked up heaven-knows-where.

Crossing the St. Lawrence by night, the two struck off quietly into the hinterland of the Notre Dame range, then crossed the Maine border.

On the second noon thereafter, trail-worn and weary, as lean as their depleted packs, the two paused on a ridge-pole of the wilderness up back of the Allagash country, and made their midday meal in a silence which, if normal in the Indian, was one of deep misgivings on Alan's part.

Continually his gaze questioned the northern skies that lowered portentously, foul with smoke—a country-wide conflagration that threatened all northern Maine, bone-dry with drought.

Only the south offered a fair prospect. And the fires were making southward far faster than man might hope to travel through that grim and stubborn land.

Even as he stared, Alan saw fresh columns of dun-colored smoke spring up in the northwest.

Anxiously he consulted the impassive mask of the Indian, from whom his questions gained Alan little comfort. Jacob recommended forced marches to Spirit lake, where canoes might be found to aid their flight and withdrew into sullen reserve.

They traveled far and fast by dim forest trails before sundown, then again paused for food and rest. And as Jacob sat deftly about preparing the meal, Alan stumbled off to whip the little trail-side stream for trout.

Perhaps a hundred yards upstream, the back-lash of a careless cast by his weary hand hooked the state of Maine. Too tired even to remember the appropriate words, Alan scrambled ashore, forced through the thick undergrowth that masked the trail, found his fly, set the state of Maine free—and swinging on his heel brought up, nose to a sapling, transfixed by a rectangle of white pasteboard fixed to its trunk, a trey of hearts, of which each pip had been neatly punctured by a 22-caliber bullet.

He carried it back to camp, meaning to consult the guide, but on second thought, held his tongue. It was not likely that the Indian had overlooked an object so conspicuous on the trail.

So Alan waited for him to speak—and meantime determined to watch Jacob more narrowly, though no other suspicious circumstance had marked the several days of their association.

The first half of the night was, as the day, devoted to relentless progress southward; thirty minutes of steady jogging, five minutes for rest—and repeat.

No more question as to the need for such urgent haste; overhead the north wind muttered without ceasing. Thin veils of smoke drifted through the forest, hugging the ground, like some weird acrid mist; and ever the curtained heavens glared, livid with reflected fires.

By midnight Alan had come to the bounds of endurance; flesh, bone and sinew could no longer stand the strain. Though Jacob declared that Spirit lake was now only six hours distant, as far as concerned Alan he might have said 600. His blanket once unrolled, Alan dropped upon it like one drugged.

The sun was high when he awakened and sat up, rubbing heavy eyes, stretching aching limbs, wondering what had come over the Indian to let him sleep so late.

Of a sudden he was assailed by sickening fears that needed only the briefest investigation to confirm. Jacob had absconded with every valuable item of their equipment.

Nor was his motive far to seek. Overnight the fire had made tremendous gains. And ever and anon the wind would bring down the roar of the holocaust, dulled by distance but not unlike the growling of wild animals feeding on their kill.

Alan delayed long enough only to swallow a few mouthfuls of raw food, gulped water from a spring, and set out at a dog-trot on the trail to Spirit Lake.

For hours he blundered blindly on, holding to the trail mainly by instinct.

At length, panting, gasping, half-blinded, he staggered into a little natural clearing and plunged forward headlong, so bewildered that he could not have said whether he was tripped or thrown; for even as he stumbled a heavy body landed on his back and crushed him savagely to earth.

In less than a minute he was overcome; his wrists hitched together, his ankles bound with heavy cord.

When his vision cleared he found Jacob within a yard, regarding him with a face as immobile as though it had been cast in the bronze it resembled.

Beyond, to one side, a woman in a man's hunting costume stood eyeing the captive as narrowly as the Indian, but unlike him with a countenance that seemed aglow with a fierce exultancy over his downfall.

But for that look, he could have believed here the face that had brought him overseas to this mortal pass. Feature for feature, even to the hue of her tumbled hair, she counterfeited the woman he loved; only those eyes, aflame with their look of inhuman ruthlessness, denied that the two were one.

He sought vainly to speak. The breath rustled in his parched throat like wind whispering among dead leaves.

Thrusting the Indian roughly aside, the woman knelt in his place by Alan's head.

"No," she said, and smiling cruelly, shook her head—"no, I am not your Rose. But I am her sister, Judith, her twin, born in the same hour, daughter of—can you guess whose daughter? But see this!" She flashed a card from within her hunting shirt and held it before his eyes. "You know it, eh? The trey of hearts—the symbol of Trine—Trine, your father's enemy, and yours, and—Rose's father and mine! So, now, perhaps you know!"

A gust of wind like a furnace blast swept the glade. The woman sprang up, glanced over-shoulder into the forest, and signed to the Indian.

"In ten minutes," she said, "these woods will be your funeral pyre."

She stepped back. Jacob advanced, picked Alan up, shouldered his body, and strode back into the forest. Ten feet in from the clearing he dropped the helpless man supine upon a bed of dry logs and branches.

Then, with a single movement, he disappeared.

CHAPTER IV.

Many Waters.

Overhead, through a rift in the foliage, a sky was visible whose ebon darkness called to mind a thunder-cloud.

The heat was nearly intolerable; the voice of the fire was very loud.

A heavy, broken crashing near by made Alan turn his head, and he saw a brown bear break cover and plunge on into the farther thickets—forerunner of a mad rout of terrified forest folk, deer, porcupines, a fox or two, a wildcat, rabbits, squirrels, partridges—a dozen more. . . .

Two minutes had passed of the ten. Something was digging uncomfortably into Alan's right hip—the automatic pistol in his hip pocket, of which Jacob had neglected to relieve him. Then a sharp, spiteful crackling brought him suddenly to a sitting position, to find that the Indian had thoughtfully touched a match to the pyre before departing. At Alan's feet the twigs were blazing merrily.

It would have been easy enough, acting on instinct, to snatch his limbs away, but he did not move more than to strain his feet as far as their bonds permitted. Conscious of scorching heat even through his hunting boots, he suffered that torture until a tongue of flame licked up, wrapped itself round the thick hempen cord and ate it through.

Immediately Alan kicked his feet free, lifted to a kneeling position, and crawled from the pyre.

As for his hands—Alan's hunting-knife was still in its sheath belted to the small of his back. Tearing at the belt with his hampered fingers, he contrived to shift it round until the sheath knife stuck at the belt-loop over his left hip. Withdrawing and conveying the blade to his mouth, he

Sawed the Cords Against the Razor-Sharp Blade.

gripped it firmly between his teeth, and sawed the cords round his wrists against the razor-sharp blade.

Before Alan could turn and run he saw a vanguard of flames bridge 50 yards at a bound and start a dead pine blazing like a torch.

And then he was pelting like a madman across the smoked-filled clearing, and in less than two minutes broke from the forest to the pebbly shore of a wide-bosomed lake, and within a few hundred feet of a substantial dam, through whose spillway a heavy volume of water cascaded with a roar rivaling that of the forest-fire itself.

Two quick glances showed Alan two things: that his only way of escape was via the dam; that there was a solitary canoe at mid-lake, bearing swiftly to the farther shore Judith Trine and the Indian—the latter wielding the paddle.

In the act of turning toward the dam he saw Jacob drop the paddle. The next instant a bullet from a Winchester .30 kicked up a spurt of pebbles only a few feet in advance of Alan.

He quickened his pace, but the next bullet fell closer, while the third actually bit the earth beneath his running feet as he gained the dam.

Exasperated, he pulled up, whipped out his pistol and fired without aim. At the same time, he noted that the distance between dam and canoe had

A Tremendous Weight Tore at His Arms.

lessened perceptibly, thanks to the strong current sucking through the spillway.

His shot flew wide, but almost instinctively his finger closed again upon the trigger, and he saw the paddle snap in twain, its blade falling overboard. And then the Indian fired again, his bullet droning past Alan's ear.

As he fired in response Jacob started, dropped his rifle and crumpled up in the bow of the canoe.

Simultaneously earth and heavens rocked with a terrific clap of thunder.

He turned again and ran swiftly along the dam, toward two heavy timbers that bridged the torrent of the spillway.

Then a glance aside brought him up with a thrill of horror; the suck of the overflow had drawn the canoe within a hundred yards of the spillway. The dead Indian in its bow, the living woman helpless in its stern, it swept swiftly onward to destruction.

His next few actions were wholly unpremeditated. He was conscious only of her white, staring face, her strange likeness to the woman that he loved.

He ran out upon the bridge, threw himself down upon the innermost timber, turned, and let his body fall backward, arms extended at length, and swung, braced by his feet beneath the outer timber.

With a swiftness that passed conscious thought, he was aware of the canoe hurtling onward with the speed of wind, its sharp prow apparently aimed directly for his head. Then hands closed round his wrists like clamps; a tremendous weight tore at his arms, and with an effort of inconceivable difficulty he began to lift, to drag the woman up out of the foaming jaws of death.

Somehow that impossible feat was achieved; somehow the woman gained a hold upon his body, shifted it to his belt, contrived inexplicably to clamber over him to the timbers; and somehow he in turn pulled himself up to safety, and sick with reaction, sprawled prone, lengthwise upon that foot-wide bridge, above the screaming abyss.

Later he became aware that the woman had crawled to safety on the farther shore, and pulling himself together, imitated her example. Solid earth underfoot, he rose and stood swaying, beset by a great weakness.

Through the gathering darkness—a ghastly twilight in which the flaming forests on the other shore burned with an unearthly glare—he discovered the wan, writhen face of Judith Trine close to his and he heard her voice, a scream barely audible above the commingled voices of the conflagration and the cascades:

"You fool! Why did you save me? I tell you, I have sworn your death!"

The utter grotesqueness of it all broke upon his intelligence like the revelation of some enormous fundamental absurdity in Nature. He laughed a little hysterically.

Darkness followed. A flash of lightning seemed to flame between them like a fiery sword. To its crashing thunder, he lapsed into unconsciousness.

When he roused, it was with a shiver and a shudder. Rain was falling in torrents from a sky the hue of slate. Across the lake dense volumes of steam enveloped the fires that fainted beneath the deluge. A great hissing noise filled the world, muting even the roar of the spillway.

He was alone.

But in his hand, tattered and bruised by the downpour, he found—a rose.

(To be continued)

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UNITED STATES LAND OFFICE
Burns, Oregon, January 26th, 1915.

To Charles M. Cooper, of Burns, Oregon, Contestee:

You are hereby notified that Charles W. Hall who gives Diamond, Oregon, as his post-office address, did on January 25th, 1915, file in this office his duly corroborated application to contest and secure the cancellation of your Homestead Entry, No., Serial No. 06330 made March 19th, 1910, for W½SE¼, N½SW¼, of section 8, Township 28, South, Range 35 East, Willamette Meridian, and as grounds for his contest he alleges that said Charles M. Cooper has wholly abandoned said entry. That he never established or maintained a residence, or made any improvements thereon, and has absented himself and changed his residence therefrom ever since the date of entry.

You are, therefore, further notified that the said allegations will be taken as confessed, and your said entry will be cancelled without further right to be heard, either before this office or on appeal, if you fail to file in this office within twenty days after the FOURTH publication of this notice, as shown below, your answer, under oath, specifically responding to these allegations of contest, together with due proof that you have served a copy of your answer on the said contestant either in person or by registered mail.

You should state in your answer the name of the post office to which you desire future notices to be sent to you.

WM. FARRS, Register.

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UNITED STATES LAND OFFICE,
Burns, Oregon, February 11, 1915.

Notice is hereby given that Manson T. Aab, of Burns, Oregon, who, on Aug. 26, 1908 and Nov. 3, 1910, made Homestead Entries, No. 0064-00158 respectively, for N½NE¼, SW¼NE¼, NW¼SE¼, SE¼NW¼, N½SW¼, SE¼SW¼, Section 2, Township 21 South, Range 30 East, Willamette Meridian, has filed notice of intention to make final five-year Proof, to establish claim to the land above described, before Register and Receiver, at Burns, Oregon, on the 19th day of March, 1915.

Claimant names for witnesses:

Frank O. Jackson, Marvin M. McGee, John H. Caldwell, Lee Caldwell, all of Burns, Oregon

WM. FARRS, Register.

NOTICE FOR PUBLICATION.

UNITED STATES LAND OFFICE,
Burns, Oregon, February 8, 1915.

Notice is hereby given that Jerry Dillon, Jr., of Harriman, Oregon, who, on November 23, 1908, made Homestead entry No. 0945, for SW¼ Section 18, Township 24 South, Range 34 East, Willamette Meridian, has filed notice of intention to make final five year proof, to establish claim to the land above described, before Register and Receiver, at Burns, Oregon, on the 18th day of March, 1915.

Claimant names as witnesses:

Henry Olley and Henry George, both of Lawen, Oregon, Jeremiah Dillon, of Harriman, Oregon, Chas. Olley, of Lawen, Oregon.

WM. FARRS, Register.

IN THE COUNTY COURT OF THE STATE OF OREGON FOR HARNEY COUNTY.

In the matter of the Estate of F. Crews Croxton, Dec'd. } CITATION

To W. T. Croxton, Mary L. Croxton, Robert Croxton and Natalie Croxton, GREETING:

IN THE NAME OF THE STATE OF OREGON, you are hereby cited and required to appear in the County Court of the State of Oregon, for Harney County, at the Court Room there of at Burns, in the County of Harney on Monday, the 15th day of March, 1915, at 10 o'clock in the forenoon of that day, then and there to show cause, if any exist, why the Real property, to-wit: E½ NW¼ and Lots 1 and 2 of Sec. 18, Twp. 25, S., R. 34 E. W. M., belonging to said estate should not be sold.

WITNESS: The Hon. H. C. Levens, Judge of the County Court of the State of Oregon, for the County of Harney with the Seal of said Court affixed this 13th day of Feb., A. D. 1915.

ATTEST:

R. T. Hughet, Clerk.
By Walter T. Struck, Deputy Clerk
(Seal)