

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

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CHAPTER V.

The Hunted Man.

That day was hot and windless with an unclouded sky—a day of brass and burning.

Long before any sound audible to human ears disturbed the noonday hush, a bobcat sunning on a log in a glade to which no trail led, pricked ears, rose, glanced over shoulder with a snarl and—of a sudden was no more there.

Perhaps two minutes later a succession of remote crashings began to be heard, a cumulative volume of sounds made by some heavy body forcing by main strength through the underbrush, and ceased only when a man broke into the clearing, pulled up, stood for an instant swaying, then reeled to a seat on the log, pillowing his head on arms folded across his knees and shuddering uncontrollably in all his limbs.

He was a young man who had been and would again be very personable. Just now he wore the look of one hounded by furies. His face was crimson with congested blood and streaked with sweat and grime; bluish veins throbbled in high relief upon his temples; his lips were cracked and swollen, his eyes haggard, his hands torn and bleeding. His shirt and trousers and "crucifers" were wrecks, the latter scorched, charred, and broken in a dozen places. Woods equipment he



It Was a Rose.

had none beyond a hunting knife belted at the small of his back. All else had been either consumed in the forest fire or stolen by his Indian guide—who had subsequently died while attempting to murder his employer.

Since that event, the man had succeeded in losing himself completely. In seeking shelter from the thunderstorm, he had lost touch with his only known and none too clearly located landmarks. Then, after a night passed without a fire in the lee of a ragged bluff, he had waked to discover the sun rising in the west and the rest of the universe sympathetically upside-down; and aimlessly ever since he had stumbled and blundered in the maze of those grimly reticent fastnesses, for the last few hours haunted by a fear of falling reason—possessed by a notion that he was dogged by furtive enemies—and within the last hour the puppet of blind, witless panic.

But even as he strove to calm himself and rest, the feeling that something was peering at him from behind a mask of undergrowth grew intolerably acute.

At length he jumped up, glared wildly at the spot where that something no longer was, flung himself frantically through the brush in pursuit of it, and—found nothing.

With a great effort he pulled himself together, clamped his teeth upon the promise not again to give way to hallucinations, and turned back to the clearing.

There, upon the log on which he had rested, he found—but refused to believe he saw—a playing card, a tray of hearts, face up in the sun-glare.

With a gesture of horror, Alan Law fled the place.

While the sounds of his flight were still loud, a grinning half-beaked guide stole like a shadow to the log, laughed derisively after the fugitive, picked up and pocketed the card, and set out in tireless, cat-footed pursuit.

An hour later, topping a ridge of rising ground, Alan caught from the hollow on its farther side the music of clashing waters. Tortured by thirst, he began at once to descend in reckless haste.

What was at first a gentle slope covered with waist-deep brush and carpeted with leaf-mold, grew, swiftly more declivitous, amossey hillside, as steep as a roof, bare of underbrush, and sparsely sown with small cedars through whose ranks cool blue water twinkled far below.

The shelting moss-beds afforded treacherous footing; Alan was glad now and then of the support of a cedar, but these grew ever smaller, and more widely spaced and were not always convenient to his hand. He

came abruptly and at headlong pace within sight of the caves of a cliff—and precisely then the hillside seemed to slip from under him.

His heels flourished in the air, his back thumped a bed of pebbles thinly overgrown with moss. The stones gave, the moss-skin broke, he began to slide—grasped at random a youngish cedar which stayed him imperceptibly, coming away with all its puny roots—caught at another, no more substantial—and amid a shower of loose stone shot out over the edge and down a drop of more than thirty feet.

He was instantaneously aware of the sun, a molten ball wheeling madly in the cup of the turquoise sky. Then dark waters closed over him.

He came up struggling and gasping, and struck out for something dark that rode the waters near at hand—something vaguely resembling a canoe.

But his strength was largely spent, his breath had been driven out of him by the force of the fall, and he had swallowed much water—while the field of his consciousness was stricken with confusion.

Within a stroke of an outstretched paddle, he flung up a hand and went down again.

Instantly one occupant of the canoe, a young and very beautiful woman in a man's hunting clothes, spoke a sharp word of command and, as her guide steadied the vessel with his paddle, rose in her place so surely that she scarcely disturbed the nice balance of the little craft, and curved her lithe body over the bow, head-foremost into the pool.

Mr. Law had, in point of fact, endured more than he knew; more than even a weathered woodsman could have borne without suffering. Forty-eight hours of such heavy woods-walking as he had put in to escape the forest fire, would have served to prostrate almost any man; add to this (ignoring a dozen other mental, nervous and physical strains) merely the fact that he had been half-drowned.

He experienced a little fever, a little delirium, then blank slumbers of exhaustion.

He awakes in dark of night, wholly unaware that thirty-six hours had passed since his fall. This last, however, and events that had gone before, he recalled with tolerable clearness—allowing for the sluggishness of a drowsy mind. Other memories, more vague, of gentle ministering hands, of a face by turns an angel's, a flower's, a fiend's, and a dear woman's, troubled him even less materially. He was already sane enough to allow he had probably been a bit out of his head, and since it seemed he had been saved and cared for, he found no reason to quarrel with present circumstances.

Still, he would have been grateful for some explanation of certain phenomena which still haunted him—such as a faint, elusive scent of roses with a vague but importunate sense of a woman's presence in that darkened room—things manifestly absurd.

With some difficulty, from a dry throat, he spoke, or rather whispered: "Water!"

In response he heard someone move over a creaking floor. A sulphur match spluttered infamously. A candle caught fire, elihouetting—illusion, of course!—the figure of a woman in hunting shirt and skirt. Water splashed noisily. Alan became aware of someone who stood at his side, one hand offering a glass to his lips, the other gently raising his head that he might drink with ease.

Draining the glass, he breathed his thanks and sank back, retaining his grasp on that hand of phantasy, and muttered rather inarticulately.

The hallucination even went so far as to say, in a woman's soft accents:

"You are better, Alan?"

He sighed incredulously: "Rose!"

The voice responded "Yes!" Then the perfume of roses grew still more strong, seeming to fan his cheek like a woman's warm breath. And a miracle came to pass; for Mr. Law, who realized poignantly that all this was sheer, downright nonsense, distinctly felt lips like velvet caress his forehead.

He closed his eyes, tightened his grasp on that hand of phantasy, and muttered rather inarticulately.

The voice asked: "What is it, dear?"

He responded: "Delirium . . ."

But I like it . . . Let me rave!"

Then again he slept.

CHAPTER VI.

Disclosure.

In a little corner office, soberly furnished, on the topmost floor of one of lower Manhattan's loftiest office-towers, a little mouse-brown man sat over a big mahogany desk; a little man of big affairs, sole steward of one of America's most formidable fortunes.

Precisely at eleven minutes past noon (or at the identical instant chosen by Alan Law to catapult over the edge of a cliff in northern Maine) the muted signal of the little man's desk

telephone clicked and, eagerly lifting receiver to ear, he nodded with a smile and said in accents of some relief: "Ask her to come in at once, please."

Jumping up, he placed a chair in intimate juxtaposition with his own; and the door opened, and a young woman entered.

The mouse-brown man bowed. "Miss Rose Trine?" he murmured with a great deal of deference.

The young woman returned his bow with a show of perplexity: "Mr. Digby?"

"You are kind to come in response to my—ah—unconventional invitation," said the little man. "Won't you—ah—sit down?"

She said, "Thank you," gravely, and took the chair he indicated. And Mr. Digby, with an admiration he made no effort to conceal, examined the fair face turned so candidly to him.

"It is quite comprehensible," he said diffidently—"If you will permit me to say so—now that one sees you, Miss Trine, it is quite comprehensible why my employer—ah—feels toward you as he does."

The girl flushed. "Mr. Law has told you?"

"I have the honor to be his nearest friend, this side the water, as well as his man of business."

He paused with an embarrassed gesture. "So I have ventured to request this—ah—surreptitious appointment in order to—ah—take the further liberty of asking whether you have recently sent Alan a message?"

Her look of surprise was answer enough, but she confirmed it with vigorous denial: "I have not communicated with Mr. Law in more than a year!"

"Precisely as I thought," Mr. Digby nodded. "None the less, Mr. Law not long since received what purported to be a message from you; in fact—a rose." And as Miss Trine sat forward with a start of dismay, he added: "I have the information over Mr. Law's signature—a letter received ten days ago—from Quebec."

"Alan in America!" the girl cried in undisguised distress.

"He came in response to—ah—the message of the rose."

"But I did not send it!"

"I felt sure of that, because," said Mr. Digby, watching her narrowly—"because of something that accompanied the rose, a symbol of another significance altogether—a playing card, a tray of hearts."

Her eyes were blank. He pursued with openly sincere reluctance: "I must tell you, I see, that a tray of hearts invariably foreboded an attempt by your father on the life of Alan's father."

With a stricken cry the girl crouched back in the chair and covered her face with her hands.

"That is why I sent for you," Mr. Digby pursued hastily, as if in hope of getting quickly over a most unhappy business. "Alan's letter, written and posted on the steamer, reached me within twenty-four hours of his arrival in Quebec, and detailed his scheme to enter the United States secretly—as he puts it, 'by the back door' by way of northern Maine—and promised advice by telegraph as soon as he reached Moosehead Lake. He should have wired me ere this, I am told by those who know the country he was to cross. Frankly, I am anxious about the boy!"

"And I!" the girl exclaimed pitifully. "To think that he should be brought into such peril through me!"

"You can tell me nothing?"

"Nothing—as yet. I did not dream of this—much less that the message of the rose was known to any but Alan and myself. I cannot understand!"

"Then I may tell you this much more, that your father maintains a very efficient corps of secret agents."

"You think he spied upon me?" the girl flamed with indignation.

"I know he did," Mr. Digby permitted himself a quiet smile. "It has seemed my business, in the service of my employer, to employ agents of my own. There is no doubt that your father sent you to Europe for the sole purpose of having you meet Alan."

"Oh!" she protested. "But what earthly motive—?"

"That Alan might be won back to America through you—and so—"

There was no need to finish out his sentence. The girl was silent, pale and staring with wide eyes, visibly mustering her wits to cope with this emergency.

"I may depend on you," Mr. Digby suggested, "to advise me if you find out anything?"

"For even more." The girl rose and extended a hand whose grasp was firm

(Continued on page eight.)

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