

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 Desert Trail," "The Black Dog," etc.

Illustrated with Photographs from the Picture Production

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CHAPTER XLII.

Open Mutiny.

Though she had been schooled to hold the very name of Law in loathing un-speakable and to think of Alan as a mortal enemy and as one whose death alone could properly requite the cruel injury that had been done her father; and though the man himself had laughed to scorn her first involuntary confession of that love for him which now consumed her being with its insatiable fires, she swallowed her chagrin and followed him with the solicitude of one whose love can recognize no wrong in its object. Through all the remainder of that day of terror she was never far from his side.

With the meekness of the strong, she made herself his shadow. And she was now the stronger, for she had had more than an hour's rest beside the waterhole, which he had missed on the way of that rocky windbreak. Sooner or later his strength must fall him and he would need her; till then she was content to bide her hour.

It befell presently in startling fashion; she was not a yard behind him when he vanished abruptly.

But the next moment Judith herself was trembling on the crumbling brink of an arroyo of depth and width indeterminate in the obscurity of the duststorm. Down this, evidently, Alan had fallen in his dizzy blindness.

She found him insensible, lying with an arm bent under him in a pose frightfully suggestive of dislocation. Yet when she turned him on his back and released the arm, he made no sign to indicate that the movement had caused him the slightest pain.

There was a slight cut upon his brow, a bruise about his left temple. She tore linen from her bosom, beneath her coarse flannel shirt, and with sparing aid from the canteen, washed the cut clean and bandaged it.

Then seeing that the storm held with fury unabated, she rose, reconnoitered and returned to exert all her strength and drag the unconscious man across the dry bed of that ancient water-course and under the lee of its farther bank.

There, sitting, she pillowed his head upon her lap, and bending over him made her body an additional shelter to him from the swirling clouds of dust.

And for hours on end Judith nursed him, there, scarce daring to move save to minister to his needs, bathing his fevered brow and moistening his parched lips and throat.

In the course of the first hour she was once startled by the spectral vision through the driving sheets of dust of a horse that plodded up the arroyo, bearing two riders on its back.

Wary with the weight of its double burden, it went slowly and passed so near to Judith that she was able to recognize the features of her sister and Tom Barcus.

Be sure she made never a sign to catch their attention.

Within the next succeeding hour the coppery light lost something of its hot brilliance, took on a darker shade, and then one darker still. Twilight stole athwart the desert, turning its heat to chill, its light to violet.

Growing more intense, the cold eventually roused the sleeping man.

And hardly had his eyes unclosed and locked up into the eyes of Judith bending over him than he started up and out of her embrace, got unsteadily upon his feet and after a moment of pause, watching her rise in turn, strode away—er, rather, staggered—with the gesture of exorcism.

Uncomplaining, hugging her newborn humility to her with the ecstasy of the anchorite his horse-hair shirt, Judith followed him patiently, at a little distance.

Not far from where he had rested

there was a break in the overhanging wall of the arroyo. Through this he scrambled painfully, reaching the level of the desert only after cruel effort, the unheeded woman at his heels.

A brief pause there afforded both time to regain their breath and survey the desert for signs of assistance: it offered none, other than what they might accomplish through their own exertions. For leagues in any quarter it stretched without a break other than the black cleft of the arroyo, gleaming a bleached and deathly white in the moonshine—like the face of a frozen world.

With tacit consent both turned that way, Alan leading, Judith his pertina-cious shadow, with never a word or sign between them to prove that either was aware of the other's company.

But this was a state of affairs that could not long endure. Judith had the price to pay for her own trials, suffering and privation: the strain began to tell sorely upon her. She reeled slightly as she walked, weaving a winding trail across and across the straighter line of footprints that marked Alan's course through the ordered pattern of the powdered sagebrush.

And of a sudden she collapsed. Instinct alone made Alan glance over-shoulder; for she had made no sound whatever.

He turned and came directly back to her, knelt beside her, lifted her head, pillowed it gently on his arm and plied her in turn with the dregs of the canteen.

With a sigh, a stifled moan and a little shiver, she revived.

He helped her gently to regain her feet, passed an arm round her.

In this fashion they struggled on in strange, dumb companionship of misery and wonder.

Thus an hour passed; and for all their desperate struggles neither could see that the light on the mountain-side was a yard the nearer.

Behind them other lights appeared, two staring yellow eyes that peered up over the horizon, seemed to pause a time in search of the two, then leaped out directly toward them.

Of this they were altogether ignorant; and when a deep, droning sound disturbed the desert silence, like the purring of some gigantic cat, both ascribed it to the drumming of their laboring pulses.

The two lights were not a mile behind them when, silently, without a sign to warn the girl, Alan released her, took a step apart and dropped as if shot.

Instantly she was kneeling by his side. But in the act of bending over him she drew back and remained for several moments motionless, staring at those twin glaring eyes, sweeping down upon them with all the speed attainable by a six-cylinder touring car negotiating a trackless desert.

When Judith did move it was not to comfort Alan. On the contrary, her first act was to draw from her pocket a heavy, blunt-nosed revolver, break it at the breech and blow its barrel clear of dust. Her hand went next to the holster on Alan's hip. From this she extracted his Colt's .45, treating it as she had the other. Then she crouched low above the man she loved, as if thinking perhaps to escape notice from the occupants of the motorcar.

If that were her thought, it was bred of an idle hope. Alan had chosen to fall in the middle of a wide space so arid that not even sagebrush had ventured to take root there. When the glare of the headlights fell upon them it was inevitable that discovery should follow. The motor car stopped within twenty feet. Three men jumped out and ran toward the pair, leaving two in the car—the chauffeur and one who occupied a corner of the rear seat; an aged man with the face of a damned soul, doomed for a little time to live

upon this earth in the certain knowledge of his damnation.

As this happened, Judith Trine leaped to her feet and stood over the body of Alan, a revolver poised in either hand.

"Halt!" she ordered imperatively. "Hands up!"

The three who had alighted obeyed without a moment's hesitation; her father's creatures, they knew the daughter's temper far too well to dream of opposing her will.

In the six hands that were silhouetted against the headlights' radiance, three revolvers glimmered; but at her command all three dropped harmlessly to the earth.

Then, sharply, "Stand back two paces!" she required.

They humored her unanimously. Darting forward, she picked up and pocketed the three weapons, then with one of her own singled out the man she named.

"Now, Marrophiat—and you, Hicks—pick Mr. Law up and carry him into the car. And treat him gently, mind! If one of you lifts a finger to harm him, that one shall answer to me."

Still none ventured to dispute her. The two men designated, without a sign of disinclination, stepped forward. One lifted Alan Law by the shoulders; the other took the legs. Between them they bore him with every care toward the motor car.

But now a second will manifested itself. The man in the rear seat lifted up a weirdly sonorous voice:

"Stop!" he cried. "Stop this nonsense! Drop that man! Judith, I command you—"

"Be silent!" the girl cut in sharply. "I command here—if it's necessary to tell you."

There was a pause of astonishment. Then the old man broke out in exasperation that threatened to wax into fury: "Judith! What do you mean by this? Has it indeed come to this that my own daughter defies me to my face?"

"Apparently!" she shot back, with a short laugh. "Judge for yourself!"

"Have you forgotten your vow to me?"

"No. But I take it back and cancel it: that is my privilege, I believe. . . . Silence!" she stormed as he strove to gainsay her. "Silence—do you hear?—or it will be the worse for you!"

As well command the sea to still its voice; her father raged like a madman that he was, for the time being divested of his habitual mask of frigid heartlessness.

And seeing that there was no other way of quieting him, the girl turned to the third man.

"Now Jimmy!" she said crisply. "Into that car—and be quick about it—and sag him!"

"If you do," her father foamed, "I'll have your life—"

A flourish of her weapons gained instant obedience.

She stepped up on the running board and shot a quick, searching glance at the face of the chauffeur.

"Straight ahead, my man!" she said. "Make for the nearest pass through those hills yonder, and don't delay unless you are anxious for trouble. Off you go!"

The car began to move. She swept the three men in the desert a mocking bow, jumped into the body of the car and slammed the door.

They made no effort to plead their cause and secure passage even as far as the edge of the desert; doubtless they knew too well the futility of that, she thought, as she settled back in a seat, chuckling with the memory of those three masks of dismay unmitigated.

It was not until five minutes later, when she straightened up from making Alan comfortable that she realized what had made them so content to abide by her will.

They heard their voices lifted together in a long, shrill howl that was quickly answered by fainter yells from a distant quarter of the desert, then by pistols popping and flashing some two miles away, then by a growing rumble of galloping hoofs.

The night glasses in the car afforded her flashes of a body of several horse-men—some six or seven, she judged—making at top speed toward the spot where Marrophiat, Hicks and Jimmy waited beside a beacon which they had built and lighted.

Half a dozen sentences exchanged with the chauffeur advised her that these were horsemen from the town of Mesa who had charged themselves with the duty of avenging the death of Hopi Jim Slade.

A sardonic chuckle from within Trine's gag goaded the girl into a sudden fury.

Exacting his utmost speed from the chauffeur, under penalty of her displeasure, she set herself to revive Alan.

With the aid of such stores of food and drink as she carried, this was quickly enough accomplished.

Strangling with an overdose of brandy too little diluted with water, Alan sat up, grasped the conditions in a flash, and gained further information as he devoured sandwiches and emptied a canteen.

The mountain pass was now, he judged, a mile distant. The light on the hillside, according to the chauffeur, was that of a prospector who had camped there temporarily. There was nothing, then, to be feared from that quarter, but solely from the rear—where the horsemen, having picked up Marrophiat and his companions, had instituted hot pursuit, and were now strung out in a long, straggling line, three horses carrying double the farthest—perhaps a mile and a half away—one with a single rider the nearest, well within three-quarters of a mile.

Nobly mounted, this last came on

like the wind, gaining on the motor car with every stride; for his horse was trained to such going, whereas the car at best could only labor heavily in dust and sand.

None the less, it had won to a point within a quarter of a mile from the pass before the horseman got within what he esteemed the proper range, and opened fire.

He fired thrice. His first shot winged wide, his second by ill-chance ripped through a rear tire of the car, thus placing upon it an additional handicap, while his third sought the zenith as his hands flew up and he dropped from the saddle, drilled through the body by Alan's only shot.

A long-range pistol duel was in progress before the car had covered half the remaining distance to the pass.

By the time it entered this last, which proved to be a narrow ravine with towering side of crumbly earth and shale and broken rock, the pursuit was not a hundred yards behind, while the firing was well-nigh continuous.

Two hundred feet above the trail two men were working with desperate haste at some mysterious business—though none noticed them.

Only the chauffeur was aware of a woman running down the hillside at an angle, to intercept the car several



"Straight Ahead, My Man!" She Said, hundred yards from the mouth of the pass.

As it drew near the spot where she paused, waving both hands frantically, the head of the pursuing party swept into the mouth of the ravine.

At the same time the chauffeur noticed that the two men on the hillside were following the woman pell-mell, throwing themselves down the slope with gigantic leaps and bounds.

And then a great explosion rent the peaceful hush of night—that till then had been profaned by the pattering cracks of the revolver fusillade.

As the roar of dynamite subsided the entire side of the hill shifted and slid ponderously down, choking the ravine with debris to the depth of some thirty or forty feet, burying the leaders of the pursuit beyond hope of rescue.

Only a instant later the motor car jolted to a halt and Alan pulled himself together to find that Rose and Barcus were standing beside the door and jabbering joyful greetings, mixed with more or less incoherent explanations of the manner in which they had come to seek shelter for the night in the prospector's shack and, roused by the noise of firing and recognizing Alan in the car by the aid of spy-glasses, had with the prospector's aid hit upon this scheme of shooting a landslide in between the pursuit and its devoted quarry.

(Continued in next issue.)

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