

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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In the aspect of that smitten waste—bleached earth patterned in almost orderly arrangement by sagebrush and gnarled cacti. At the distance of half a mile all blended into one vast plain of glaring gray that stretched over the round of the world to a broken wall of purple hills that reeled drunkenly in the haze-veiled southwest.

Was Judith out there, somewhere, lost, defenseless, forlorn, impotent to lift a hand to shield her face from the blast of that savage sun?

Staring beneath a shading hand, he discerned nothing that moved upon the surface of the desert but its myriad heat-devils jiggling monotonously their infernal danse macabre.

Or—as seemed more probable—was she back there among the Painted Hills, lying still and lifeless, crushed beneath the weight of that fallen horse?

No rest for Alan till he knew . . . Descending the knoll he reined his lagging mount back into the trail, following its winding course through the foothills and round the base of that monolithic mountain toward the junction with the ridge trail, miles away.

It approached the hour of noon before he gained the point where the two trails joined and struck out across the desert. And here he discovered what he thought indisputable indication that the fright of Judith's horse had persisted.

Abandoning immediately all notion of returning through the hills by the ridge-trail, he turned and swung away at the best pace he could spur from his broncho, delivering himself into the pitiless embrace of that implacable wilderness of sun and sand.

At long intervals he would check the broncho and, reeling in his saddle, endeavor to sweep the desert with his binoculars.

And toward the middle of the afternoon he fancied that something rewarded one such effort; something for an instant swam athwart the field of the glasses; something that seemed to move like a weary horse with a human figure bound to its back.

But now the phenomena were discernible which, had he been more desert wise, would have made him pause and think before he ventured farther from those hills, already beyond reach as they were.

His first appreciated warning came when the surface of the desert seemed

read bended and shoulders rounded, he began to forge a way into the teeth of the sandstorm.

How long he fought on, pitting his strength against the elements, cannot be reckoned.

In the end he stumbled blindly down a slight decline and was abruptly conscious that he had in some way found shelter from the full force of the wind.

He staggered on another yard or two, breathing more freely, and blundered into a rough-ribbed wall of rock—some sporadic outcrop, he understood, whose bulk stood between him and the storm.

He thought to rest for a time, until the storm had spent its greatest strength; but as he laid his shoulder gratefully against the rock and scrubbed the dust from his smarting eyes he saw what he at first conceived to be a hallucination: Judith Trine standing within a yard of him, alive, strong, free.

He stared incredulously, saw her recognize him, open her mouth to utter a wondering cry that was inaudible, and come quickly nearer.

"Alan! You came for me! You followed me, through all this!"

He threw off her hand with a bitter laugh—that was like the croaking of a raven as it issued from his bone-dry throat—and in momentary possession of hysterical madness, reeled away from the woman and the shelter of the rock and delivered himself anew to the mercy of the dust-storm.

CHAPTER XLIII.

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

ter 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 looked 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 to turn, strode away—or, 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 pertinaacious 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 mountainside 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 men she named.

"Now, Marrophat—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 gag 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.

Then she 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 horsemen—some six or seven, she judged—making at top speed toward the spot where Marrophat, 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 sullen fury.

Exact 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 the car 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 Marrophat 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

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.

CHAPTER XLIII.

Camp-for-the-Night.

"Well, gents!" the driver observed cheerfully, withdrawing head and hands from long and intimate communion with the stubborn genius beneath the hood. "I reckon you-all may's well make up yere minds to christen this hych salubrious spot Camp-for-the-Night. You won't be goin' no farther—not just 't present. Pulling this old wagon through them desert sands back yondeh has just naturally broke' the heart of that engine!"

"What, precisely, is the trouble?" Alan Law inquired, rousing from anxious preoccupation.

"Plumb bust' all to hell," the chauffeur explained tersely.

"Nothing could be fairer, more exact and comprehensive than that," Tom Barcus commented.

Law nodded a head too weary to respond to the other's humor. His worried eyes reviewed the scene of the breakdown.

"What's to be done?" Mr. Law wondered aloud.

"Take it calm," the affable chauffeur advised. "Frettin' won't get you-all nothin'. If it was me, I'd call it a day, make a fire, get them cushions out of the cyah, and get some rest. You can't do nothin' till I get back, anyway, and that won't be much before sunup."

"Where are you going?" Barcus demanded.

"Walkin', friend; just walkin'—"

"What for?"

"To fetch help—leastways, unless you've got some kick comin' and 'ud ruther stop hych permanent'—"

He turned off and busied himself with preparations against his journey.

"It's simply things like this make me believe this isn't, after all, nothing more nor less than a long-drawn-out nightmare," Barcus observed pensively.

But Mr. Law was no more attending: he had turned away and was just then standing by the running-board of the motor car and civilly explaining to Miss Judith Trine the purpose of the chauffeur's expedition.

Discovery of this circumstance worked a deep wrinkle between the brows as well as into the humor of Mr. Barcus.

Here, he promised himself, was a situation to titillate the Comic Muse

1914. He pointed out in turn the several component parts: the motor car derelict in the hollow of those awful and silent hills—for all the world like a mouse petrified with fright at finding itself in the midst of a herd of elephants; in the car, that aged monomaniac, Mr. Seneca Trine, author of all their woes and misadventures, gnashing his teeth in impotent rage to find himself in close juxtaposition to and helpless to injure the man for whose life he lusted with an insatiate passion; the latter standing outside the car, in polite conversation with Mr. Trine's mutinous Judith—talking to her in the friendliest fashion imaginable, precisely as if she had not



No Doubt Which Came First in His Esteem.

fallen little short of compassing his death, not once, but half a dozen times; Judith herself poised on the running-board and smiling down at her victim with a warmth patently even more than the warmth of friendship; and at some little distance, Rose, Mr. Law's fiancée and Judith's sister, eating her heart out with jealousy of this new-sprung intimacy between her sister and her lover!

"Bad business, my friend!" Barcus mentally apostrophized the unwitting Alan Law.

He interrupted himself to nod knowingly and with profound conviction: "I knew it. Now it begins again!"

For Rose had abruptly taken a hand in the affair, a gesture of exasperation prefacing her call: "Alan!"

To her Mr. Law turned instantly, with such alacrity that none who watched might doubt which of the two women came first in his esteem.

Nor was this wasted upon the understanding of Judith. Eyeing her narrowly though furtively, Mr. Barcus saw her handsome face darken ominously.

And her father was as quick to recognize these portents of trouble and to seek to advantage himself of them.

His head craned out horribly on his long, wasted neck as he picked up a slight whisper for her ears, and his face in the moonlight seemed to glow with the reflection of that inferno which smoldered in his evil bosom. . . .

But one was silenced, the other quenched, all in a twinkling. His daughter turned on him in a flash of imperial rage.

Barcus caught snatches of the woman's tirade.

"Be silent!" he heard her say. "Be silent, do you hear? Don't ever speak to me again unless you want me to replace that gag. I say, don't speak to me! . . . I am finished with you once and for all time; never again shall you pervert my nature to your damnable purposes—never again shall word or wish of yours drive me to lift my hand against a man who has never done you the least harm, though your persecution of him would have acquitted him of a charge of manslaughter in any court—on grounds of self-defense! . . . Understand me!" she raged. "I'm through. Henceforth I go my way, and you yours . . ."

Her voice broke. She clenched her hands into two tight fists with the effort at self-control, and lifted a written face to the moonlight.

"God help us both!" she cried.

CHAPTER XLIV.

As In a Glass, Darkly.

Thoughtfully Mr. Barcus returned his attention to the lovers.

If the evidence of his senses did not mislead him, he was witnessing their first difference of opinion. It was not an argument acute enough to deserve the name of quarrel; but undoubtedly the two were at odds upon some question—Rose insistent, Alan reluctant.

The last gave way in the end, shrugged, returned to the car.

"I'm going back up the trail," he announced, and hesitated oddly.

"Feeling the need of some little exercise, no doubt," Barcus suggested.

"Rose thinks it's dangerous to stop here," Alan began to explain, ignoring the interruption.

"Miss Rose is right—eh, Miss Judith?" Barcus interpolated.

Judith nodded darkly.

"So I'm going to see if I can't buy burros from the prospector back there. Rose says he has some—doesn't know how many—"

"Three will be enough," Judith interposed. "I mean, don't get one for me. I'm stopping here."

(TO BE CONTINUED)



"Rose—Miss Trine—Reason With the Madman—"

to lift and shake like the top of a canvas tent in a gale. At the same time a mighty gust of wind swept athwart the waste, hot as a furnace-blast. In a trice dust enveloped man and horse, a stifling cloud of superheated particles that stung the flesh like a myriad needles. And then darkness fell, the twilight of hades, a copper-colored pall. Nothing remained visible beyond arm's length.

Blinded, half suffocated, unspeakably dismayed and bewildered, the broncho swung round, back to the blast, and refused to budge another inch.

Himself more than half-dazed, but still hounded by his nightmare vision of Judith, Alan dismounted to escape being torn bodily from the saddle by that hellish sand-blast, and seizing the bridle sought to draw the horse on with him.

He wasted his strength in that endeavor: the animal balked, planted its hoofs deep in the sand, stiffened its legs and resisted with the stubbornness of a rock; then, of a sudden, jerked his head smartly, snapped the bridle from his grasp and flung away, scudding before the storm.

Pursuit was out of the question: indeed, the bridle was barely torn from his hand before Alan lost sight of the broncho.

For a moment he stood rooted in contemplation as if a bog—with an unbroken across his face.

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 fail 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 dust-storm. 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 shel-