

SERIAL STORY

No Man's Land A ROMANCE By Louis Joseph Vance

Illustrations by Ray Walters

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CHAPTER I.

A gentleman who, leaving his offices on lower Broadway a trifle after four, presently ensconced himself in a corner seat of a Subway express and opened before him a damp afternoon paper (with an eye for the market reports) was surprised, when the train crashed heavily into the Fourteenth Street station, to find himself afoot and making for the door: this although his intention had been to alight at Grand Central. Thus it may be, that trickster in us all, which we are accustomed vaguely to denominate the subconscious mind, directs our actions to an end predestined.

Surprised, he hesitated; and for that was rewarded by having his heels trodden by the passenger behind. This decided him, absurdly enough, and he went on and out, solacing himself with a muttered something, hardly definite, about a stroll benefiting him. So, transferring to a local train, he alighted at Twenty-third Street, climbed the stairs and proceeded briskly west, buffeted by a rowdy wind.

Striking diagonally across Madison Square Park, past the drearily jetting fountain and between arrays of empty benches scarcely beggarly (since that class had deserted them for warmer lounging places) he turned northward on Fifth Avenue, threading the early evening throngs with a spring of impatience in his stride to distance casual competition; and received upon a mind still impressionable, for all that it had ample food for meditation and nursed a private grievance, a variety of pleasurable suggestions.

Dusk, the early violet dusk of late November, brooded over the city, blurring its harsh contours, subduing its too blatant youth, lending an illusion resembling the dim enchantment of antiquity.

Near Twenty-ninth Street he checked sharply and stood briefly debating something suggested by sight of a shop window well known to him:

"It might save time: one may as well be sure—"

Turning, he descended a pair of stone steps and crossed a flagged area to a door set at one side of a window dressed with a confusion of odd, enticing things: a display that tempted the eye with the colors of the rainbow fainting under weight of years and dust. A bell tinkled overhead as he opened and shut the door, letting himself into a deep and narrow room crowded with a heterogeneous assemblage of objects that glimmered with weird splendor in a semi-gloom made visible by half a dozen electric bulbs generously spaced. In the rear, beyond a partitioning screen, shone a warmer light.

For the moment he saw no one. Advancing a few paces he halted, waiting.

From behind the screen, at the back of the shop, the proprietor appeared, soft stepping, smiling to greet a good customer of discerning taste. The latter went to meet him with a pleasant air of liking.

"Good evening, Mr. Miller—"
"Good evening, Mr. Coast. Something I can show you this evening?"
"The telephone, if you please." Coast laughed a little and was answered cheerfully.

"Certainly. This way."
He was conducted behind the screen, where, beneath a strong light, an assistant at a jeweler's bench sat laboriously occupied with some task of delicate artifice. He looked up as Coast entered, with a greeting cordially returned. Coast went directly to the telephone, a wall instrument, unhooked the receiver and detailed a number to Central. The proprietor disappeared into an adjoining room. An instant later Coast spoke again.

"That you, Soames?" This is Mr. Coast. Is Miss Katherine at home? Then will you find out, please. Ask her if she has time to see me for a few moments before dinner. . . . Very well."

There was a lengthening pause, during which the antique dealer silently returned, his genial eye alternating between Coast and a crystal decanter he had fetched.

"Yes, Central, waiting." Coast put his hand over the transmitter and wagged a reproving head. "Going to try to poison me, Miller?"

"Just a drop of old brandy, Mr. Coast—very old, from my home in France."

Coast nodded, recalled to the telephone. "Hello, Soames. . . . Very well. Tell her I called, please. No! no message, thank you. Goodbye."

As he hung up the receiver, a warning tinkle sounded at the front door. Miller, busy with glasses,

looked to his assistant. "See who that is, Charley," he said. The assistant slipped from his seat, switched on more light in the front of the shop, and vanished round the screen.

As he did so, Coast heard the rumble of a man's voice, followed by a woman's ringing laugh, a thought too loud.

Miller was offering him a glass. He bowed, took it and held it to his lips for a moment without tasting, inhaling the mellow bouquet of the liquor. "That is good," he said, and sipped critically.

"The very best, Mr. Coast. There's little like it out of France."

"I'm glad I thought of imposing on your good nature."

"Why, so am I. My friends are always welcome. . . . Your health, Mr. Coast."

"And yours, Mr. Miller."

They drank ceremoniously. Coast put down an empty glass. "That," he declared from the bottom of a congratulated heart, "was delicious."

"Another drop?"

"No. Absolutely not. It would injure me to try to buy out the shop." He offered his hand. "Good night, and thank you."

"Good night, Mr. Coast."

On his way out, Coast had an indifferent glance for the customers at a show case near the window. The woman stood with her back turned, chattering volubly to the assistant in indifferent French: a small, slight figure with arms uplifted, holding a chain of gold and imperial jade to the light. Beside her the man loomed solidly, his heavy proportions exaggerated by a fur-lined coat, his attentive pose owning a trace of proprietary interest. As Coast drew near he looked up and faced about, stripping off a glove.

"Why, h'ar'ye, Coast!"
Tone and manner proclaimed the

"I'm promising myself the pleasure."

"Well, when you come, just let me know."

"I shant forget," Coast assured her vaguely. "But now I must run along. Miss Fancher—Blackstock—good night."

He escaped to open air with a sensation of relief and perturbation oddly commingled. Instead of soothing, the brandy warmed his grievance until it turned writhing in his bosom and stung him like an adder. So that was the man! . . . He pressed forward more rapidly, but now in an introspective mood, oblivious of all that so recently had gratified him.

At Fortieth Street he pulled up on the southern corner, over across from the dull grey colonnade of the new Public Library, awaiting a break in the stream of traffic.

A policeman presently made a way for him, holding back the press of vehicles to permit a string of their counterparts to break through. Coast stepped down from the curb and in another minute would have been across, but stopped in mid-stride to hear himself named in a voice unforgettable, to him inexpressibly sweet.

Started, he halted beneath the noses of a pair of handsome horses champing in taut-reined restraint, and glanced at random right and left. Then as again he was called—"Garrett! Garrett Coast!"—out of the corner of an eye he detected the uplifted salutant two fingers of the driver of a town-car at halt in the outer line of north-bound traffic. In the window of the car a white glove fluttered, moth-like.

Beside the door, with a hand on the latch, he spoke through the lowered window.

"May I beg a lift, Katherine?"

"Indeed you may. Didn't I call you, Garrett?"

"Good of you. I am fortunate. I've



"I'm a Persistent Beggar, You Know, Katherine."

encounter of old friends. Perforce Coast took his hand, pausing, then dropped it, with a grave "Good evening, Blackstock." His distaste for the man affected him intensely, but he tried to conceal it beneath a forced banality: "Early Christmas shopping, eh?"

"Not exactly." Blackstock slurred explanations. "I've just been trying to get you on the telephone."

Coast's eyebrows underlined his surprise. "Yes?"

"Yes. Thought you might care for a hand at bridge tonight; just a few of us at my rooms: Van Tuyl, Trux, Dundas, yourself and me. We'll cut in and out. What d'ye say?"

Coast's acceptance followed an instant's consideration. Had the invitation been extended him at any time before noon of that same day, his refusal would have been prompt if qualified by an invented engagement. Now, however, after what the day had rumored of the man, he was inclined to grasp an opportunity to study him, to see as much of him as possible—little as he cared to see anything of him.

"What o'clock?"

"Oh, between nine and ten—any time. You know where I hang out? We'll count on you."

Blackstock beamed, his eyes shining behind thick lenses: to snare Garrett Coast was a signal conquest. An additional trace of affable effusiveness oiled his always slightly overpowering manner. Then doubt moderated it, and he had an irresolute eye for his companion.

"She had turned away from the case, with an assured attitude imperative of an introduction. Coast bowed to Blackstock's constrained words of presentation.

"Miss Fancher—my friend, Mr. Coast."

She nodded, giving him a small hand whose pressure was a thought too frank. "I've heard about you," she said, nodding emphatically. "Glad to know you."

"And I've enjoyed your dancing many times, from the far side of the footlights," he told her pleasantly.

"Nice of you to say that. I'm with the Rathskeller Girl now, you know. Have you seen it?"

been wanting to see you—"

He got in and shut the door at the moment when, by the grace of the omnipotent policeman, motion became again permissible. The racking motor quieted into purring: the car slipped forward, gaining momentum. Others, a swarm, swirled round and past like noisy fireflies. He ignored them all, blessing his happy chance. Katherine Thaxter in her corner had a smile for him, dimly to be detected through the gloom wherein her face glimmered like some wan flower of the night, beautiful, fragrant, mysterious.

"Where were you going, Garrett?"

"Oh . . ." He emerged from reverie with a little start at the sound of her voice. "No place in particular. I believe I had some hazy notion of the club when you hailed me. And you? Home of course."

"Yes. I've been shopping."

"Tired?"

"Not very. . . . Curious I should have been thinking of you just when the car stopped."

"I don't agree: it was telephatic."

"Oh, that's overworked, Garrett. Can't a commonplace coincidence be explained any other way nowadays?"

"Perhaps: but not this time. I've been thinking about you all day. Some impulse—I don't know what—moved me to walk uptown from Twenty-third Street and delays insignificant in themselves brought me to that corner just in time. That isn't coincidence: it's—"

He sought the word.

"What do you think?"

"Predestination—another name for luck."

"You're ingenious."

"Grateful, rather."

She laughed, a gentle laugh that faded in a sigh, and after a moment of anticipative silence, almost apprehensive, felt obliged to ask: "What were you thinking about me, Garrett?"

"Much the usual thing, I'm afraid—"

"Oh, Garrett!" Her voice was rueful though she laughed. "Again?"

"I'm a persistent beggar, you know, Katherine. . . . But otherwise, also, I happened to hear your name mentioned today . . . gossip . . . an idle rumor . . ."

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

STATE CAPITAL CHAT

To Revise Train Schedules.

The State Railroad Commission was advised by the Pennsylvania Railroad Company that it proposed to revise the time table of the Chester Creek branch to meet objections raised in a complaint before the commission by residents of Delaware County. Better connections will be afforded with the main line of the Philadelphia & Baltimore Central.

Start Fertilizer Suits.

Officials of the State Department of Agriculture ordered seven suits begun for violation of the State law requiring the correct branding of fertilizers, the number being the largest inaugurated at one time in years. Two were ordered in Lancaster and two in Luzerne county and one each in York, Northumberland and Wyoming, all being based on analysis that showed the packages to contain ingredients not stated on the labels. Later on actions will be started in other eastern counties where samples of fertilizer were taken by State agents. In all 1,500 samples have been secured.

Governor's Appointments.

The Governor has announced the following appointments: Dr. W. H. Ridge, Treviso, Bucks county; Dr. J. W. Sallade, Auburn, Schuylkill county; Dr. Jacob Helmer, Scranton, Lackawanna county; Dr. A. J. McCloskey, Chestnut Hill, Philadelphia county; Dr. F. W. Weil, Greenville, Mercer county, to be members of the State Board of Veterinary Medical Examiners. Spencer C. Gilbert, Harrisburg, reappointed a member of the Board of Trustees of the State Lunatic Asylum at Harrisburg.

Bleached Flour.

Dairy and Food Commissioner James Foust sent agents of his division to Luzerne and other northeastern counties to make an investigation into reports that bleached flour is being sold in this State contrary to the provisions of the act of 1909. The Commissioner received information that Western firms were shipping in flour that had undergone the bleaching process and prosecutions were ordered in every case of violation. The use of nitrous acid or nitrites in flour or other foodstuffs is prohibited by the pure food act of May 13, 1909.

Plan For State Park.

A. B. Farquhar, of York; J. Horace McFarland, of this city, and M. I. McCright, of Dubois, officers of the State Conservation Association, have returned from an inspection of the large tract in Clarion, Elk, Jefferson and adjoining counties, which it is planned to secure for a State park, and are preparing to urge the passage by the next Legislature of the bill creating a State Park Commission. The State Association will make a campaign in behalf of the bill and point to similar bodies and their works in New York, California, Michigan, Wisconsin and Kansas, where natural scenery has been preserved.

No Money For Picture Censors.

Because the last Legislature which enacted the law providing the State censorship of all moving picture films and other pictures intended for public display failed to make an appropriation for the payment of salaries of censors or their expenses, no appointments to carry out the provisions of the law will be made by the Governor. This announcement was made at the Capitol, and nothing will be done until the General Assembly sets aside the funds. The bill for censorship of the films was presented by Representative George W. Allen, of Allegheny county, and provided for two censors to pass on all films, which were to be shown before censors in order to obtain a State certificate.

Must File Expenses.

People who are candidates for nominations or for offices and who fail to file expense accounts are probably not aware that such omission may act as a bar to them ever assuming any office until they comply with the provisions of the act of 1908, according to George D. Thorn, chief clerk of the department of the Secretary of the Commonwealth. "The act of 1908," says Mr. Thorn, "provides that an expense account must be filed and the man who does not file an account is in danger of being estopped from taking an oath of office until he does so. A man who may have been a candidate for a nomination or an office in 1908 and failed to file an expense account may be elected this fall and yet when he comes to take the oath of office he would be in danger of being challenged. The only way out would be to file an account. The law makes no exception between successful and unsuccessful candidates."

Pass Capitol Park Ordinance.

The Common Council of Harrisburg has passed the ordinance to dedicate to the State the highways in the park extension area. The ordinance now goes to Select Council.

Second Death From Accident.

Augustus Baker, whose back was broken in the explosion of gas at one of the furnaces of the Pennsylvania Steel Company, died without regaining consciousness. Baker is the second man to die from the accident.

TERMS.—The terms of subscription to the Reporter are one dollar per year in advance.

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