

SERIAL STORY

No Man's Land

A ROMANCE

By Louis Joseph Vance

Illustrations by Ray Walters

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SYNOPSIS.

Garrett Coast, a young man of New York, meets Douglas Blackstock, who is a card party. He accepts, although he dislikes Blackstock, the reason being that both are in love with Katherine Thaxter. Coast fails to convince her that Blackstock is unworthy of her hand. At the party Coast meets two friends, Dundas and Van Tuyl.

CHAPTER II.—(Continued.)

Blackstock interposed hastily. "That fourth-best spade of yours certainly did lead him up to slaughter." He reached over and took up the deck at Truax's elbow, spreading the cards with a dextrous sweep of his strong, blunt fingers. "New game. Cut, you fellows."

"The invitation tempts; but there are some skins too thick. . . . Van Tuyl pursued."

Truax pushed back his chair, nodding cheerfully to Coast. But for a heightened tint of color he showed no trace of being aware of Van Tuyl's insolence. "Cut in, Garrett; it's your turn. . . . Unless," he added, "you-all want to quit, it's pretty late. I think I'll drop, for one."

"Drop," said Van Tuyl sweetly, "and be damned."

"What do you mean by that?" Truax, on his feet, turned upon his tormentor with an imperceptible tremor in his voice.

Prudence is the better part of bridge," Van Tuyl explained carefully. "He's a prudent man, who becomes conscious of chilled extremities when ahead of the game."

Crimson with resentment, Truax hesitated, the roset on the tip of his tongue only withheld because of Coast's appealing and sympathetic look. Then with a lift of his plump shoulders he turned away, nodding to his host, Dundas and Coast.

"Good-night," he said brusquely, and so betrayed the effort his self-control cost him. "You-all can send your checks if I am anything ahead."

"We'll try not to forget, thanks." A satiric smile on Van Tuyl's thin lips winged the Partisan dart.

Truax did not reply, but left the room abruptly, Blackstock accompanying him to the door. In his absence Coast cut in as Van Tuyl's partner and took the chair Truax had just vacated.

"Deal?" he inquired.

"Yours," Dundas told him.

"And," Van Tuyl interjected as Coast took up the cards, "let us trust you've more bridge sense than that professional dummy." He nodded to indicate the departing Truax. "I carefully told him, early in the evening, that when I doubled I wanted not his highest card, but the highest card of his weakest suit. Do you think you can remember that?"

"Yes," said Coast shortly, annoyed by the other's offensive manner.

"I sincerely trust so. I didn't come here to be rooked by everybody, by incompetent partners included."

Coast quietly put down the cards without completing the deal. "Aren't you spraining something in your attempts to be insolent, Van?" he inquired as Blackstock reappeared. "It happens I've been your partner this evening more frequently than anybody else."

"Precisely."

"And you think yourself justified in suggesting that I've played against you?"

Van Tuyl's dark eyes met his steadily in a sardonic stare. "I'm the heaviest loser here," he said. "You've played like a raw amateur every time you've played with me. Interpret that to your liking."

"I shall," Coast got up, white to the lips. "It spells good-night to me."

"Why . . . good-night." Blackstock's mouth smiled, but his speech was mechanical and his eyes, slightly prominent and magnified by thick lenses, met Coast's with an opaque look singularly suggesting a cast. "I'm sorry our party has to break up so early—"

"Look here!" Van Tuyl swung round with a glass half-full of raw Scotch in his hand. "Aren't you going to join us?"

"Thank you, no," said Coast dryly. "No," said Blackstock. "And," he added, "if I were you, Van, I'd chop that drink. It won't do you a world of good."

"Oh?" Van Tuyl smiled acidly. "Don't you know I reserve the privilege of acting as my own wet-nurse?" "I advised you as a friend, but I'm willing to push the trespass and tell you something you evidently don't know," Van Tuyl; drink makes you ugly."

Coast, lingering in anxiety, detected suddenly the gleam of drink-insanity in Van Tuyl's eyes. Alarmed, he moved to place himself between the men, and in the act received full in the face what had been intended for Blackstock—the contents of Van Tuyl's glass.

Half-blinded and choking, he stepped back, groping for his handkerchief. The alcohol burned his eyes like liquid fire, and the fumes of it in his throat and nostrils almost strangled him for a moment, preventing his clear understanding of what was taking place. Dimly he heard Van Tuyl raving in his curiously clear and incisive accents, heard him stigmatize Blackstock card-sharp and blackguard.

More vaguely he heard him name Katherine Thaxter—in what connection he did not know. On the heels of that something barked hideously; Dundas screamed like a rat; Van Tuyl said: "Oh, God!" thickly.

Dazed with horror, Coast managed to clear his vision.

Blackstock had moved to the other side of the room, where he stood at a small table, the drawer of which he

like a man waking from evil dreams "Why . . . ?" he said huskily. He turned away as if to lose sight of the figure huddled at his feet.

Dundas in his corner whimpered. Blackstock swung to him with an oath. "Shut up, damn you! D'you want—" He clicked his strong white teeth, jumping as the bell of the house telephone interrupted. Then he went heavily to the instrument in the short hallway that led to the entrance to the apartment. Coast heard him jerk down the receiver.

"Well?" he demanded savagely. "Yes. An accident."

"One of my guests. Yes, badly. You'd better call up police headquarters and tell them to send an ambulance."

"And don't let anybody up here until they come. Understand?" He hung up the receiver with a bang and tramped back into the dining-room. "That damn hailboy! . . . They heard the racket in the flat below and called him up. . . . I have made a pretty mess of things!" He went to the buffet, carefully avoiding the body, and poured himself a stiff drink, which he swallowed at a gulp.

Blackstock strode restlessly back to the other end of the room and threw himself, a dead weight, into a chair, facing the wall. In the silence that followed Coast could hear his deep and regular respirations, unburied, unchecked. After a moment, however, he swung round, dug his elbows into his knees and buried his face in his hands.

"Good God!" he said. "Why did I do that?" Dundas coughed nervously and moved toward the door. Blackstock looked up with the face of a thunder-cloud.

"Where are you going?" Dundas stammered an incoherent excuse.

"Well, you stop where you are. Get back to that window-seat—and try to keep your miserable teeth still, can't you? D'you think I'm going to let

STATE CAPITAL CHAT

Probe Of State Schools.

Investigations of sweeping character into the activities of higher educational institutions were decided upon by two State bodies having in charge the safeguarding of educational interests, and they will be inaugurated within a short time. In addition, the State Board of Education ordered an inquiry made into conditions in school districts which are unable to maintain the minimum term. The State board determined upon this matter at its bi-monthly meeting in this city, the members present being State Superintendent of Public Instruction N. C. Schaeffer, the president; David B. Oliver, vice-president; Dr. Martin G. Brumbaugh, Dr. George M. Phillips, John S. Rilling, William Lauder and Dr. James M. Coughlin. Dr. Schaeffer was charged with the duty of investigating the conditions in some thirty or forty districts that are unable to maintain the term and to report information obtained and recommendations to the board at its next meeting. The office of permanent secretary to the board was tendered to Prof. J. George Becht, principal of the Clarion State Normal School, who is expected to answer within a short time. A resolution was also passed that as soon as the secretary enters upon his duties he shall make a careful and thorough investigation of the educational activities of such institutions as receive State aid and which are not under the supervision of the Superintendent of Public Instruction for eight school buildings, to be erected in the State, were submitted to the board by its architect and were ordered closely studied so that the most modern ideas may be incorporated, this being a line to which the new board will pay close attention. The additional investigation was ordered by the State's College and University Council which is composed of leading educators, and it directed that the secretary report on the accuracy of reports "that academic degrees are conferred by certain institutions in Pennsylvania, which the College and University Council has not granted the right to grant degrees."

Inquiry On Fenders.

The State Railroad Commission is having an investigation of transit conditions in Reading, and officers have been making inquiries regarding the use of fenders by the company operating in that city.

The commission has received a letter from the Lancaster Electric Light, Heat & Power Co., of Lancaster, denying charges made for electric service and a hearing may be held.

The Eastern Pennsylvania Railways Company, in a letter to the commission, states that it is impossible to keep miners off cars, and that although it has provided special cars for men coming from the mines, they get on others on regular runs.

Ask Pardon For Ware.

An application has been made for a pardon for Sydney Ware, the Lykens man, recently sentenced to not more than two years in the penitentiary for the second indictment growing out of a murder twenty-two years ago. Ware served twenty-one years on the first charge and was pardoned last June. He was immediately re-arrested and at his trial pleaded guilty to second degree murder.

Extra Session Not Expected.

The Legislature will not be called in extra session. The Governor declined to change his policy of refusing to discuss the proposition in any way. People connected with departments of the State government were not so silent, however, and freely predicted that only a demand from all of the third-class cities for a change in the law governing the time of commencement of the terms of mayors elected Tuesday would bring the lawmakers together. Others declared that they saw no reason for changing their previous opinion that there would be no call issued.

Against United Underwriters.

Attorney General Bell has directed preparation of a bill in equity against the Pittsburgh Underwriters' Association on the ground that it is an organization that illegally fixes rates. The action will be brought in Pittsburgh as a result of charges filed against the association with the Attorney General. The dissolution of the association will be asked.

Two Sentenced To Death.

For the first time in ten years the death sentence was pronounced on two persons on the same day in the Dauphin County Court. The sentence was pronounced on Harry A. Claybaugh and Joseph Stott, who were convicted last month of murdering women.

State Bank Call.

State Banking Commissioner Smith has issued a call for statements by State banks and trust companies showing business at the close of November 6.

Respites For Two Murderers.

The Governor issued respites staying the execution of Frank Endrukut and George Lee, Philadelphia, from November 9 to December 5. Their cases are pending before the State Board of Pardons.

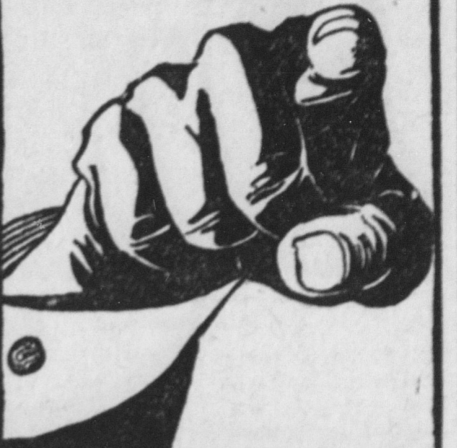
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