

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 City, meets Douglas Blackstock, who invites him to 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 friendship. At the party Coast meets a man named Dundas and Van Tuij. There is a quarrel, and Blackstock shoots Van Tuij dead. Coast struggles to wrest the weapon from him, thus the police discover them. Coast is arrested for murder. He is convicted, but as he begins his sentence, Dundas names Blackstock as the murderer and kills himself. Coast becomes free, but Blackstock has married Katherine Thaxter and Red. Coast purchases a yacht and while sailing sees a man thrown from a distant boat. He rescues the fellow who is named Appleyard. They arrive at a lonely island, known as No Man's Land. Coast starts out to explore the place and comes upon some deserted buildings. He discovers a man dead. Upon going further and approaching a house he sees Katherine Thaxter, who explains that her husband, under the name of Black, has bought the island. He is blind, a wireless operator and has a station there. Coast informs her that her husband murdered Van Tuij. Coast sees Blackstock and some Chinamen burying a man. They fire at him, but he is rescued by Appleyard, who gets him to the Echo in safety, and there he reveals that he is a secret service man and has been watching the crowd on the island, suspecting they are criminals. Coast is anxious to fathom the mysteries of No Man's Land, and is determined to save Katherine. Appleyard believes that Black and his gang make a shield of the wireless station to conduct a smuggling business. Coast penetrates to the lair of Blackstock's disguise.

CHAPTER XIII.—(Continued.)

Blackstock spoke abruptly the instant Coast succeeded in forcing the door to abruptly and harshly, but with a certain jerky intonation that betrayed jangled nerves: an involuntary confession most welcome to its hearer; this was, after all, with all its viciousness, a human being—no such nerveless monster of blood and iron as Appleyard had pictured in his narrative of the hour of the assassination, or even as Coast had come to figure the man in his long days of hopeless brooding.

"Who's that?" he cried. "Who's there? What the devil?"

He paused to control his agitation. But Coast withheld his reply an appreciable moment. Then, "Mr. Black, I believe," he said quietly.

"Black!" The man started at sound of an unfamiliar voice, and Coast saw his great frame quiver—slightly, indeed, but perceptibly. "That's my name," he continued hoarsely. "But . . . who are you? . . . What d'you mean by coming in here without knocking?" he added with a show of bluster.

"I knocked—several times," Coast lied steadily. "The wind, doubtless . . . Sorry I startled you; thought you'd be expecting me."

"Expecting you!" Blackstock moved impatiently. "But, damn it, who are you? Can't you give yourself a name?"

"Why, Handyside, of course." Coast's tone was a perfection of polite surprise. "Surely," it seemed to say, "you must've been looking for me!" Distrusting deliberately artificial inflections, he was at pains to speak crisply, as was not his habit; such being the only way he could think of to disguise his voice. He was watching Blackstock closely, alert for a sign of recognition in the man's expression. Somewhat to his surprise he detected none. "I got orders to come here and relieve Power last night," he continued. "Came down this morning to New Bedford and—"

The words froze upon his lips. A door to his left had opened; Katherine stood there, watching, listening. Apparently she had started to enter without any suspicion that her husband was not talking to one of the servants, and in her astonishment had stopped. The figure of the man by the door could not but be strange to her, masked as its every line and contour was by clumsy and flimsy outskirts and the deep shadow cast by the broad turned-down brim of a sou'wester. Yet Coast thought to discern a deathless apprehension in her pose, a mute but infinitely pitiful question in her eyes. And his heart stood still, for the crucial instant was imminent; in another minute, two at most, she would know him. And then . . . ?

"Well?" Blackstock roused him. "What you stopping for? I'm listening!"

"I beg pardon," Coast tugged at the button on the chin-strap of his sou'wester. "The lady there . . . I didn't know . . ."

Blackstock turned his head impatiently, moving his sightless eyes in the direction of Katherine. "Oh," he said, "my wife—"

The woman moved quickly into the room. "Yes," she said, still with her eyes to the stranger. "It is I, Douglas. I didn't know—I fancied one of the servants."

"This is Mr. Handyside," Blackstock told her sharply, as if irritated by the interruption; "he's to take Power's place—"

Coast removed his sou'wester and came forward a pace, so that the light was strong upon his face. "Yes, ma'am," he said, "I'm the new operator. 'How d'you do?'" He contrived to keep his tone coolly respectful and impersonal, but his eyes were pleading with her, and he hung upon the issue of her response as a condemned man lives in the hope of a reprieve.

She knew him now; his action in discovering his features had but hastened slightly the confirmation of her most dread premonition. And of a sudden her face was a mask of chalk set with eyes that blazed with cold fires of terror. Coast saw her sway, but though he feared she was about to faint, dared not move to her assistance. Indeed, there was no need; she was fashioned of sterner stuff; though every atom of her being shuddered, she remained mistress of herself. An instant's delay would have been damning; she knew that . . . and her answer fell pat as he ceased to speak.

"Good evening," she said so admirably that there was even a hint of languid indifference in her voice. "You have surprised us, Mr. Handyside."

"Lord, yes!" Blackstock broke in. "It's hard to believe. D'you mean to tell me you made the run through this storm?"

The blood flowed back into Coast's heart. He flashed the woman a look of thanks, but her gaze was blank as it met his, and he knew that as yet she existed and guided her actions automatically. The real awakening to the situation was yet to come—nor with her would it be long delayed. The crisis was not yet past.

"Well," he said, with a careless half-laugh, "I'm here, you see. It is a blow, that's a fact. Had me frightened; I've seen some storms—but they were from the decks of



steamships." He began to unfasten the oilskin coat. "Lucky to get here at all, I guess."

"That's true, or I'm no judge of weather. I wonder you managed to get Finn and Hecksher to take the chance."

"They didn't want to." Coast offered up a fervent prayer of gratitude for the fortuitous turn of the conversation that had supplied him with the names of Mr. Handyside's traveling companions. "But I was told to hustle because Power was leaving you practically without notice, so I insisted. Of course the fog held us up all morning; and then we had to have an accident?"

"How's that?" Blackstock sat down heavily, still with his staring eyes turned toward Coast, his face clouded with thoughtfulness. "Where are they, anyway?" he continued without pause, as one reminded of an oversight. "Finn—Hecksher—why aren't they with you?"

"Oh, they're all right," Coast parried, making time for Katherine, whose struggle to retain her poise and comprehend just what it all meant was engaging his attention to such a degree that he had to force himself to give heed to Blackstock. "You don't need to worry about them."

Blackstock leaned forward, scowling intently. "What d'you mean by that? Didn't they bring you here?"

"Only part way; you see, this accident I mentioned—"

"What sort of an accident? Hang it, if they didn't bring you—Where'd you leave them?"

"Safe enough—high and dry—ground in Quiek's Hole."

"The devil you say! How'd Finn come to run the Corsair aground? Why, he knows more about this coast—"

"Not his fault. It came about kindness of some amateur asses—beg pardon, Mrs. Black; I'm quoting Mr. Finn—in a catboat. . . . They almost ran us down when we were about midway through the Hole—didn't seem to know what they were doing; and in trying to avoid a collision we plied up on a shoal on the

lethand side of the channel—forgot the name of the island it makes off from."

Coast hesitated in assumed perplexity, in actual trepidation more acute than he cared to acknowledge even to himself.

"Pasque, you mean?"

"That's it." But though his story seemed to be credited, the tension held unrelaxed; Katherine was recovering from her shock and . . . What would she do when she had had time to take second thought? Would her primal impulse shield him, to further his mad concept of duty force her to expose him and bring ruin down upon them both?

He could not keep his eyes from her. Not a detail of her attitude escaped him, not a convulsive movement of her hand (in whose rosy hollow lay his life and hers) . . . She stood unmoving by the table, one hand touching it for support.

Meanwhile he heard himself talking, responding glibly to Blackstock's testy catechism.

"But how the devil'd you get here, then?"

"Pure luck. We'd been stuck about half an hour when a fisherman—fellow named Wise, from Vineyard Haven—came along, trying to beat the storm home. We hailed him and he luffed up to us—he could do that with his boat, a light-draught Cape Cod cat; and I offered him a ten-spot to bring me on. You see, I understood it was an emergency case. He held back a bit, but the sight of the money fetched him; and he earned it. I wouldn't take that trip again for a hundred dollars."

"Well, then . . . But what's become of him?"

"Oh, he went back to his boat—said he didn't dare to leave her for

Prison Rules Under Fire.

The State Board of Public Charities' special investigating committee reported that the Dauphin county prison was being conducted in a manner that was not in keeping with good business methods, and recommended wholesale changes, including the adoption of new rules to take the place of those which were drawn up in the fifties, when spinning wheels were in use in prisons, and which have not been changed since. The special committee was named at the request of the Dauphin prison inspectors, as the result of an expose of the prison food and management. When the board met two reports were submitted, both making essentially the same recommendations. The committee report, as adopted, recommended that the warden who gets a trifling salary and is allowed a per diem, which, it is said, enables him to make from six to eight thousand dollars a year, be put on a salary, and that the sale of "kitchen orders" inside the prison be abolished as tending to bring about "favoritism and petty graft." The inspectors are rapped for negligence and failure to adopt modern methods and for not posting rules. The committee also recommended that the board of official visitors and the prison inspectors reach an understanding and that the prison be run on an up-to-date basis in all respects. Both the report of the special committee, signed by S. J. Gill and C. T. King, and the minority report, made by Colonel P. C. Boyle, found fault with the manner in which the prison conditions were exposed, contending that they should have been reported to the board instead of published in a newspaper.

Completing Road Survey.

The survey of the southern road between Pittsburgh and Gettysburg will be completed by the end of this month and valuable data regarding this famous highway, which is destined to be made one of the best in Pennsylvania and to connect with the fine roads leading out of Gettysburg, is now in hand.

Complete Joint Fish Plans.

State Fish Commissioner Buller announced that he had completed plans with the Ohio fishery authorities whereby the two States would unite in the planting of pike, perch in Lake Erie this spring.

Bayless Company Gets Charter.

Among the charters issued was one to the Bayless Manufacturing Corporation, which receives the right to manufacture paper, wood pulp and other products at Austin, where the disaster occurred on September 30, when a large dam, owned by a similar corporation broke. The new corporation has capital stock of \$100,000 and the incorporators are Stanley Bayless, Austin; George C. Bayless, Binghamton, N. Y.; R. R. Lewis, A. C. Patten and J. H. Dexter, Coudersport.

Infectious Laughter.

Some of our prominent scientists are so impressed with the germ peril that they go around looking pretty solemn all the time, on the theory that laughter is both contagious and infectious.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

STATE CAPITAL NEWS

Late Happenings of Interest at Harrisburg.

Would License Newspapermen.

A committee to draft a bill to provide State supervision of newspapermen and the qualifications of newspapermen by a department to be known as the State Department of Journalism, was named by the State Editorial Association at the closing session of the fortieth annual meeting here. This action followed a paper read by J. H. Zerby, of Pottsville, on an outline for State licensing of newspapermen and supervision of education for journalistic work, in which he advanced some novel ideas. The burden of Mr. Zerby's paper was that every newspaper and publication should be in charge of a certified journalist and that all men in responsible newspaper work should be required to satisfy men in authority in the Department of Journalism of their qualifications before receiving certificates. The object would be to raise the standard of newspaper work and to secure well educated men in the business. The paper suggested a ten thousand dollar appropriation to work out the details for the State. The committee to frame the bill consists of A. N. Pomeroy, Chambersburg; R. P. Habgood, Bradford; E. W. Wagenseller, Selinsgrove; J. H. Zerby, Pottsville, and A. D. Schoch, Harrisburg, who is also connected with the Chestnut Tree Blight Commission. The association also went on record in opposition to an increase in postal rates on second class matter; the printing of envelopes by the Government Postal Department, and the rates charged for express and freight in transportation of newspapers, magazines and periodicals. These officers were elected: President, Cromble Allen, formerly of Greensburg, now of Ontario, Cal. Mr. Allen's resignation was read following his election, and George W. Wagenseller, of Middleburg, was elected unanimously, as were the following other officers: First vice-president, J. H. Zerby, Pottsville; second vice-president, Fred. Newall, Canton; third vice-president, R. H. Thomas, Jr., Mechanicsburg; secretary and treasurer, R. P. Habgood, Bradford; assistant secretary, Miss Anna McGraw, Bradford; executive committee, W. H. Wray, Leechburg; W. C. Deward, Sunbury; C. H. Bressler, Lock Haven; W. W. Jones, Olyphant, and W. H. Binder, Pottstown.

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