

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 two 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 goes to sea. Coast chases 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 sends Chinaman 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 fair of Blackstock's disguise. Katherine enters the room and passes him a note which tells Coast that neither his life or her own are safe. Coast feels that Blackstock suspects him, Appleyard and the Echo disappear. Coast assures Katherine of his protection, and she informs him that they are to abandon the island immediately. The blind man and his coolie servant overpower Coast.

CHAPTER XVII.—(Continued.)

"But this boat—you say you have found it—the row-boat?" Coast demanded excitedly.

"Yes. When I had called Chang, I went down to the beach. I wanted to be alone, so that I might think. Today has been dreadful to me—alone there with him, the man I was married to, knowing he was a murderer; always fearing he suspected and trying to behave as if nothing had happened."

Coast folded her close. "I know, I know," he said softly.

At their feet the dog stirred restlessly, whimpering; and alarmed, the woman deftly disengaged herself, with a terrified glance up the straggling, deserted street. But still they were gratefully if desperately alone and unwatched.

"Then—the shock of being told we were to leave the island . . . I wanted to think . . . I went west along the beach, without noticing—some distance beyond the western point. Then suddenly I found the boat, drawn up close under the bluff, invisible from above. . . . At first I thought it meant Mr. Power had come back, and then I saw how unlikely that was, and tried to explain it. And suddenly it came to me—the real meaning of it. And I hurried to find you . . ."

"Thank God!" said Coast.

She looked up, wondering at his tone.

"I mean it's one way out," he said soberly; "a mighty slim chance—but yet a chance; I mean, the boat. I've been puzzling all along—if worst came to worst, there was the catboat—but how to get you aboard her? You couldn't swim that far. . . . She shook her head. "I could; but even then would it be possible to work her inshore and take you aboard unobserved? For if they saw us, I'd be under fire and . . . Blackstock has my pistol," he ended lamely.

She uttered a low cry of distress; but he could only shake his head in melancholy confirmation of the tidings, detailing the way Blackstock had seized the weapon.

"But now," he wound up with a sorry show of optimism. "It's another story. With the rowboat, we can get off. As things stand, Appleyard . . . Well, we'd better not risk waiting for him. The cat lies out of easy range, and if they try to swim out to stop us, I can beat them off with a boathook or an oar. I think we can make it—at least, it's worth trying. I'll go now and have a look at that boat."

She drew a deep breath, with a nod endorsing this forlorn hope. "Very well," she said tersely. "Go, then. Must hurry back, for fear he may miss me. . . . Yes, I can brave it out; don't worry—I shan't let him suspect. . . . And there's another reason," she continued stubbornly, when he tried to object; "I can get you a revolver if I go back. Yes, my own. I have it in my trunk; I'm sure he doesn't know of it, for I never thought to show it him. It is loaded, too; and I can get it easily. . . . Now I will go."

"Very well," he consented reluctantly. "They won't miss me, that's sure; but you . . . Try to slip away about dusk. Make some excuse, and—

I'll be waiting here, all prepared, And make sure of that revolver, first thing you get back. Take care of yourself above all things. . . . Oh, don't worry about me; he doesn't; with my fangs drawn, I'm no longer a factor in his calculations. . . . Go, then, and—God keep you, Katherine."

He could imagine the effort that her brave smile at parting cost her. . . . Unsmiling, somberly thoughtful, he watched her away, then hurried down to the beach.

Ten minutes of steady walking brought him to the place where he had bathed that morning—ages ago! A scant hundred feet further on, at the very foot of the bluff that arched a slightly concave face above it, lay a rowboat, bottom up, screened by a huge boulder. Hope palpitant in his bosom, leaping and dying like a candle in the wind, he hastened to it, bent over, hands beneath the thwart, and stood it on its side. A low cry of disappointment sighed out from his lips. He let the boat fall back to its original position.

There were neither oars nor rowlocks.

Despair blackened the sky for him. He swung about mechanically, in a daze of frustrated hope, and started back, plodding heavily as with weighted feet.

Fifty yards away from the boat, a resounding crash behind him brought him to the about face with a start.

Whether by accident of nature or human design a portion of the overhanging bluff, just at its verge, had given way, precipitating upon the boat, in a cloud of pebbles, earth and dust, a rock several hundred pounds in weight; one entire side of the dory had been crushed in.

Coast's gaze ranged upward. Along the edge of the bluff nothing moved.

He listened intently. Not a sound.

A pale smile edged his troubled lips. "Check!" he said; and with a shrug resumed the backward way.

Unheeded at his heels the blind dog

dragged, muzzled and tail droop, uttering now and then a wailing whine so faint that it seemed hardly more than a sigh.

CHAPTER XVIII.

Evening was advancing in utter calm when Coast regained the beach before the deserted village. The wind had died away to mere vagrant breaths, barely strong enough to darken that dully polished, unquiet floor of water, widening in loneliness from those desolate, fog-bound shores.

Pausing beside the beached catboat Coast stared hungrily at the little vessel off shore, gently swinging at its mooring. How to reach her, how make use of her if needs must?

He shook his head in doubt, strongly assured now that he would set foot upon her decks only through exercise of force.

His hopes reverted now to Appleyard as the last resort. Without the little man and the Echo—or some other boat—he was powerless, a figure for the mirth of his enemies.

At his feet the blind dog crouched, motionless as stone, seeming to search the infinite with the uninking stare of his dead, colorless eyes.

Abruptly a sound of pelting feet transformed the scene. The blind dog lifted up with a jump and faced round, growling, rumbling in its throat. Coast turned, startled and apprehensive.

Down the way to the beach Chang was running at a curious, outlandish jog-trot, head low between his broad, gaunt shoulders. Apparently he was heading directly for Coast.

With a little thrill of fear the American glanced round for some means of defending himself. He had no doubt that the Chinaman had been commissioned to dispose of him even as poor Power had been done away with. In a sudden flush of anger he laid hold of the first thing that caught his eye—which happened to be the half rotted tiller of the catboat, a heavy and

formidable club if it did not break with the initial blow—and moved a pace or two forward, holding himself in a position of defence.

But within a hundred yards the Chinaman swerved widely, then held on steadily toward the northern sand spit. A moment or two later he arrived at the water's edge, and while Coast stared half stupefied, stopped and stripped to his linen drawers, then took to the water, wading out until he lost footing, then swimming with long, powerful, overhand strokes, straight off for the catboat.

Watching the round, shaven poll with its coiled pigtail cut swiftly through the glimmering silvery sheet of water, Coast lost himself in anxious speculation until recalled by a quick movement of the dog at his side, accompanied by a deep-throated growl. He wheeled then to discover Blackstock close upon them, his burly body swaying heavily as he came on at a moderate pace.

A second growl, that more resembled an angry roar, brought the man to a standstill, with a hand moving nervously toward the side pocket of his coat, in which a firearm sagged visibly.

"If you're on speaking terms with that brute," said the man brusquely, "call him off before I take a pop-shot at him."

"Keep your hand clear of that pocket," said Coast sharply, advancing, "or I'll take a chance at you myself."

"You?" Blackstock's thick lips curved, contemptuous. "Take your chance, by all means, with that silly, worm-eaten tiller, if you've got the nerve; but call off that dog, or I'll shoot him dead. I want a little talk with you."

Coast, without ceasing to watch the man, for fear of treachery, had stepped to the dog's side and caught his fingers in an aged and weather-worn strap round its throat, before he appreciated the full significance of Blackstock's words. Then his jaw dropped and his eyes widened.

"What!" he cried, astounded. His gaze was upon the plump, dark, brutish face that leered at him; he saw its small eyes no longer dull and fixed, but twinkling with an evil, implacable glitter. The dim suspicion that more than once he had rejected from his thoughts as extravagant and idle, was suddenly resolved into conviction.

"So," he said slowly, "you do see, after all!"

"The discovery," said Blackstock with a ponderous affectation of mordant wit, "does credit to your perceptivity. I congratulate you on making it—when I chose to let you."

For a moment occupied with restraining the dog, which seemed half-mad with desire to fly at Blackstock's throat, Coast made no reply. In the light of this revelation the situation was taking on a new and fairly terrifying complexion.

"Of the two of us, I must say you've been the blindest," Blackstock continued in a manner of biting irony that seemed to amuse him. "I wondered from the first how long you'd take to find me out. Kate, of course, I'm accustomed to; she had her hypnotized so long that she never dreams of questioning the matter, no matter how barefaced I am. But you—Lord! I thought you'd show more discrimination!" He chuckled grimly, resting an elbow on the side of the carved boat. "You, the knight-errant!" he jeered. "Blind as a bat! Good Lord!" Coast spoke to the dog and succeeded in quieting it temporarily. "You've been faking all along!" he asked without visible resentment. "Ever since you showed up in court with those smoked goggles?"

He was talking more than for any better reason, to gain time to readjust his view point.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

The Other Extreme.

"I haven't enough money to startle society with my gowns," "In that case, why not go in for barefoot dancing?"

STAR FILLS BIG GAP

Reliable and Experienced First Baseman Aids St. Louis.

Stovall's Presence Expected to Inspire Other Players With Confidence to Make Them 20 Per Cent Better in Fielding.

Ask any member of the Browns to give one reason why Wallace's club should not finish last and he will answer: "Stovall."

Not that the Browns figure Stovall, single-handed, will lead the club out of the depths of the sub-cellar but the players to a man believe that a presence of Stovall on first will give each member of the infield sufficient confidence to make him a 20 per cent better ball player.

Since Tom Jones was traded to Detroit for Claude Rossman there has been a big hole around the initial sack at Sportsman's Park. The players have had no one to "throw to." True, there has been no less than twenty men tried out at first, but they all failed, and many of them were so putrid that the Browns' infielders lost confidence.

Such is not the case this season. Stovall is a great fielder, and his presence will inspire Laporte, Hallinan and Austin with sufficient confidence to make them much better players.

"I heaved a sigh of relief when I heard Stovall was to join our club," declares Jimmy Austin. "It's so encouraging to know that we have a real first baseman after having had so many goats dancing around that bag."

"Why, do you know I have seen game after game lost when the players were afraid to take any chances with their throws because of crude work of whatever particular man we happened to have on first."

"We had so many of them that frequently I didn't know who the first baseman was. Then in a close game it often happened that a fast man hit a slow one to me. I had to rush in,

glove the pill, steady myself and shoot as straight as I could or else the first baseman would let it roll to the fence."

"I didn't have confidence in the man at first and consequently my work suffered. This year I know what Stovall can do. I can take more chances with my throws, I have more confidence, and consequently more dash and I'll head off a lot of fast men who last year got hits on slow grounders towards third."

"There's nothing so good to a ball club as one man's confidence in the others' ability. If you know the man on first or second or third is playing the game all the time, you can take more chances, throw faster and work with that recklessness which wins ball games. I think we'll win a lot of games this season with Stovall, not because he's a good hitter and a good fielder, but because the other infielders have confidence in him and their game will be better as a consequence."

WHY BALL GAMES ARE LONGER

Umpire Billy Evans Tells Why Core Tests Nowadays Require More Time Than Previously.

"Why are games longer? In the first place, the lively ball makes more hitting," vouchsafes Umpire Billy Evans. "In the second place, I have noticed that in batting against this lively ball almost double the number of fouls have been hit, either of the long raising variety or those which carom off the bat against the stands."

"In addition to this, there has been another vital change in the game. Instead of walking up and slamming away at the first good ball pitched, the average batsman of this season makes each pitcher work to the limit. Unless they are over the plate they pass them along. I have never before noticed so many individual cases where the batsman stood up with three balls and two strikes called."

Five Hits in a Game.

Olson of the Naps was the first player to register five hits in a game this season.

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