

THE TREY O' HEARTS

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WHOLE FAMILY USES THEM

CHAPTER XXVI.

Make-Believe.

For upwards of three-quarters of an hour of that golden morning which followed the night of his return to New York, Mr. Law was permitted to esteem himself as a participant of mortal. And inasmuch as this is not only a longer uninterrupted term of happiness than is humanly common but is more of that emotion than ordinarily leaves the whole of a lifetime, Alan was perhaps a swift, unexpressed plunge from sunlit peaks of supreme content to the black depths of a bleak Avenue of despair.

The beginning of the period was synchronous with the slam of a taxi-cab door that shut away a superfluous world from the company of two who loved. The sound spelled safety as well as success in Alan's understanding. The car slipped smoothly away from the curb, pursued only by a little gust of semi-ironic cheers from the little company of working men who had witnessed as well as measurably participated in the putative elopement from the house of Trine.

Vigilant for any indication that their strange home of deathless hatred, Alan watched it through the little window in the back of the cab until a corner blotted out the vision of it; then with a sigh of relief sank down by the side of the woman to whom his every thought, impulse and emotion were dedicated. "Rose!" he whispered, and tentatively touched one of the hands that lay clasped in her lap. She responded with never a sign to indicate consciousness either of his touch or his whisper.

And reminding himself of the strain imposed upon her by the experience through which they had just passed, Alan excused her unresponsiveness on grounds of reaction, and for the time felt constrained to let his sweat-soaked rest and regain her normal poise: there was bliss enough for him in the consciousness that he had won her safety away, that nothing now more than a short hour's drive across town and by ferry across the Hudson stood between them and the marriage that should prove the consummation of all their trials.

Barring accident! Alan had too often suffered the penalty of disappointment for over-indulgence in this falling of his for deprecating the unforeseen, not to make the mental reservation, "Barring accidents!" with a little shiver of dread.

Had any of Trine's household been cognizant of his daughter's escape, Alan argued, interference must have been instant. Despite the reassuring aspect, the preoccupation of his companion so were upon him that he was presently no longer able to refrain from disturbing her. "Rose!" he begged again, closing a hand tenderly over hers. "Dearest girl, don't worry another instant! Do calm yourself; remember we are safe

clung passionately to him. "Tell me again that you love me!" she prayed. "Promise me you'll never let anything come between us. Promise me, Alan—promise me you'll be kind to me always, dear!"

"Can you doubt I will be kind?" he murmured reproachfully. "I am afraid . . ." she whispered. "How could I be anything else, loving you as I do?" "I am afraid . . ." "Why should I be unkind to you?" "It isn't that . . . I'm just afraid."

"Of what?" "Of losing you." "But that can never be!" "You can't be sure. What if you were to find you'd been mistaken?" She caught her breath and added hastily—"That you don't really love me, I mean."

"Oh, that's ridiculous!" "That's not ridiculous. Nothing in life is permanent. What is love? Illusion of the senses! What is happiness? A will-o'-the-wisp! What is life? A make-believe!" "Dearest!" He held her more closely still. "You are nervous and overwrought. You don't know what you're saying. You can't mean what you're saying. . . . But say that it's so—that life is all make-believe. Then make-believe you love me."

"Oh, but I do, I do!" "And make-believe for a little while—until you wake up and realize that it's all real and true." She closed her eyes again. "Yes," she breathed, "you are right. Let's make-believe it's all true for a little longer . . . and forget . . ."

He could by no means account for this strange humor; but he did his best to comfort her, none the less tenderly because of his mystification. And for a long time she let illusion blind her, resting quietly in his arms, making believe.

Only on approaching the Twenty-third street ferry they must needs rouse and sit apart constrainedly for fear some one might glance through the window and surprise their secret.

As if one needed the evidence of a caress exchanged to know that they were lovers, who had eyes to see the flushed loveliness of the girl shrinking back in her corner or wit to interpret the radiant happiness that shone in Alan's face as he bent forward and watched warily from the window.

CHAPTER XXVII. The Ring. There's was the last vehicle to swing between the gates before these last were closed.

And this was quite as well; for Alan, rising for one last backward glance through the rear window, started involuntarily and choked upon an exclamation when he described a powerful touring car tearing madly toward the ferry-house, its one passenger half rising from the front seat, beside the driver, and exhibiting a countenance purple with congested chagrin as he saw his car barred out of the carriage entrance.

Quickly sensitive to his emotion, the girl caught nervously at Alan's hand. "What is it, dear?" "Marrophat," he snapped. She uttered a hushed cry of dismay. "Don't be alarmed, however," he hastened to comfort her. "He's lost the race; the gates are shut—even the passenger gates—and there must be a company spotter somewhere near by, for the gateman is virtuously refusing to be bribed by a roll of money as thick as my wrist!"

At that instant the taxicab rolled aboard the ferry-boat; the deck gates were closed; a hoarse whistle rent the roaring silence of the city; winches rattled and chains clanked; and the boat went ponderously out of its slip. "So much for Mr. Marrophat!" Alan crowed, sitting down. "Folled again! He can't stop us now!"

"Perhaps . . ."

"Why that perhaps? Why that tone?" he demanded sharply, struck by the foreboding her accents confessed. "This isn't the only ferry. There's the Pennsylvania and the Lackawanna—and by hard driving the boat might manage to catch the boat that connects with this from the Christopher street ferry of the Erie!"

"Impossible! I don't believe it! I won't!" "Let's not," she agreed. "But, Alan . . ."

"Yes!" "Promise me—if he should manage to catch up with us—you won't let him talk to you. I mean, don't let him—" "No fear of that!" he asserted hotly. "If he tries to exchange one word with me—I only wish he would!"

She seemed satisfied with that; but the incident had served appreciably to chill their spirits. They accomplished the remainder of that voyage in a silence that was no less depressed because they sat hand in hand throughout.

Nor were their taxicab three minutes out of the ferry house on the Jersey shore—through the chauffeur, stimulated by Alan's extravagant promises, was doing his best to fracture the speed laws and escape arrest—when the girl's fears were amply justified; a shout from behind drew Alan's head out of the window on one side and the girl's on the other and proved to both that Marrophat had indeed found some way to make the crossing without great delay.

Alan's touring car was within fifty yards when they first were aware of it; and Marrophat, standing on the running-board, was shouting inarticulately and flourishing an imperative hand; while the distance between

them was momentarily growing, less noticeable. An Marrophat's car drew abreast Alan nodded and said quietly: "Don't be alarmed; I can attend to this gentleman single-handed."

And this he proceeded to demonstrate with admirable ease, even though called upon to do so far sooner than he had thought to be—thanks to Marrophat's hair-brained precipitancy. For, falling to influence the taxi driver by shouted demands or threats, or to gain the least attention from Alan, Trine's first lieutenant abruptly and surprisingly took his life in his hands and in one wild bound bridged the distance between the two flying cars and landed on the taxi's running-board.

"Stop!" he screamed madly. "Stop, I say! You don't know what you're doing! Let me tell you—" He got that far but no farther. In the same breath Alan had swung wide the door and was at the fellow's throat. There was a struggle of negligible duration; Marrophat was in no way his antagonist's match; within three seconds he threw out both hands, clutched helplessly at the framework of the cab, and fell heavily to the street.

The taxi sped on without pause, its driver deaf to the halls of innocent if indignant bystanders. Alan pulled himself together and looked back just in time to catch a glimpse of the hero of fencers lifting Marrophat to his feet and helping him to the sidewalk

inclined to believe that Marrophat hoped to stop the taxicab by depriving it, in course of time, of its fuel. And with this in mind he was presently surprised, as the cab took a corner, to see Marrophat's car stop at that corner and Marrophat himself get down. The brow of a hill intervened, shutting off sight of the blackguard as he knelt and lit a match. It was the girl who gave the alarm, suddenly withdrawing her head from the window to scream at Alan:

"He's fired the gasoline! It's flaming along the street, following the line of the leak—and catching up with us!" Without pausing to put his hand to the latch, Alan kicked the door open. "Jump!" he cried. "For your life—jump! As soon as that flame catches up with the tank—"

Simultaneously the chauffeur, over-hearing, shut off the power. The three gained the sidewalk barely in time; the tiny trail of flames, almost imperceptible in the sunlight, was not a yard from the jet that sputtered through the bullet hole in the tank. In the flutter of an eyelash the explosion followed. Had the cab been loaded with nitroglycerin its destruction could have been no more absolute. There was a roar . . . and then a heap of smoking ruins.

Without waiting to admire the spectacle, Alan caught the arm of the girl and hurried her up the street, at the same time calling to the chauffeur to follow. And chance brought them to the next corner as another cab, far-

chance to move aside, but seized him so fiercely by the wrists that he instinctively lifted to protect himself, and she fairly threw him half a dozen feet from her. He brought up with a crash against the wall even as the door slammed behind the girl.

When Alan, the first to recover, gained the sidewalk, she was already in the taxicab. Whatever reward she had promised the man, he whipped his machine away as if from the fear of sudden death.

And darting from the house, hard on the minister's heels, Marrophat leaped into his own car and, as if he had not heard her threat or received substantial proof of her earnestness, tore off in pursuit.

CHAPTER XXVIII. And the Rose. Taking the dazed young man by the hand, as though he had been a child, the Reverend Mr. Wright led Alan back to his study and established him in a comfortable armchair beside his desk.

"Sit there and compose yourself, my dear young friend," he insisted in a soothing voice. "At the elbow of the Reverend Mr. Wright a telephone shrilled imperatively. With a gesture of professional patience he turned to the instrument, lifted the receiver to his ear, and spoke in musically modulated accents.

"Yes; this is Mr. Wright. . . . Ah, yes, Mr. Digby. . . . Not coming? But, my dear sir, Mr. Law is already here. I must tell you—"

He checked with a reproving glance for Alan, who was twitching his sleeve insistently. "If you please," Alan begged, "let me speak to Digby at once. Forgive me—" Reluctantly the minister surrendered the telephone.

"That you, Digby?" "Alan! Bless my soul, what are you doing over there? Is Miss Trine with you? But how can that be possible?" "Rose? No. What about her?" Alan demanded, stammering with anxiety.

"Why—one of my spies has just reported by telephone. He was going on duty this morning when he saw a young woman—either Rose or Judith—wearing a rough coat over boudoir dress—climb out of one of the basement windows of Trine's house. She was apparently in great distress of mind and anxious to escape without being seen from the house; but before my man—whose post of observation is in the third story of one of the houses opposite—could get to the street, she had been caught by several rough-looking customers, who rushed out of Trine's house, seized the girl, and made off with her in a motor-car bearing a New Jersey license number. I am sending men to watch the Jersey ferries. Call me up in an hour—"

Without a word of response, and without a word of apology to the Reverend Mr. Wright, Alan dropped the receiver, snatched up his hat, and fled that house like a man demented.

Rose, escaping from Trine's house, overpowered and made the captive of Trine's lowest creatures—gunmen possibly, of the stamp of that animal whom Trine had charged with the assassination of Alan the night before!

There was neither a motor-car in sight for him to charter nor any time to waste in seeking one. Alan could only hope to find one on his way back toward the ferry. It must have been upwards of an hour before he came into a street which he recognized, by its dinginess and squalor, as that in which he had thrown Marrophat from the running-board of the taxicab.

And then, as he paused, breathless and footsore, to cast about him for the way to the ferry, a touring car turned a corner at top speed and slowed to a stop before that selfsame tenement of the unsavory aspect to whose sidewalk he had seen Marrophat assisted by the loafers of the quarter.

And this touring car was occupied by some half-a-dozen ruffians in whose hands a young girl writhed and struggled when, immediately on the stop, they jumped out and wrestled her out with brutal inconsideration.

Like a shot, Alan had crossed the street—but only to bring up nose to the panels of the tenement door, and to find himself seized and thrown roughly aside by a burly denizen when he grasped the knob and made as if to follow in.

"Keep back, young fellow!" his assailant warned him viciously. "Keep out this, now, if you don't want to get into trouble."

To the speaker's side another ranged, eyeing Alan with a formidable scowl. At discretion he stepped back and turned as if persuaded to mind his own business, then swung on his heel, caught the two in the very act of opening the door, and threw himself between them.

An elbow planted heavily in the pit of the stomach of one disposed of him for the time being, Alan fled to the shoulder sent the other reeling to the gutter. And Alan was in the tenement's lowermost hall—a fool and evil-odored place, dark as a pit the instant the door was closed, its murk relieved only by the flame of a kerosene lamp smoking in a bracket near the foot of the stairs.

Sounds of scuffling of feet were audible on the first landing. Alan addressed himself impetuously to the staircase, gaining its top in half a dozen leaps, and only in time to see a door slammed at the forward end of the hall and hear a key turned in its lock.

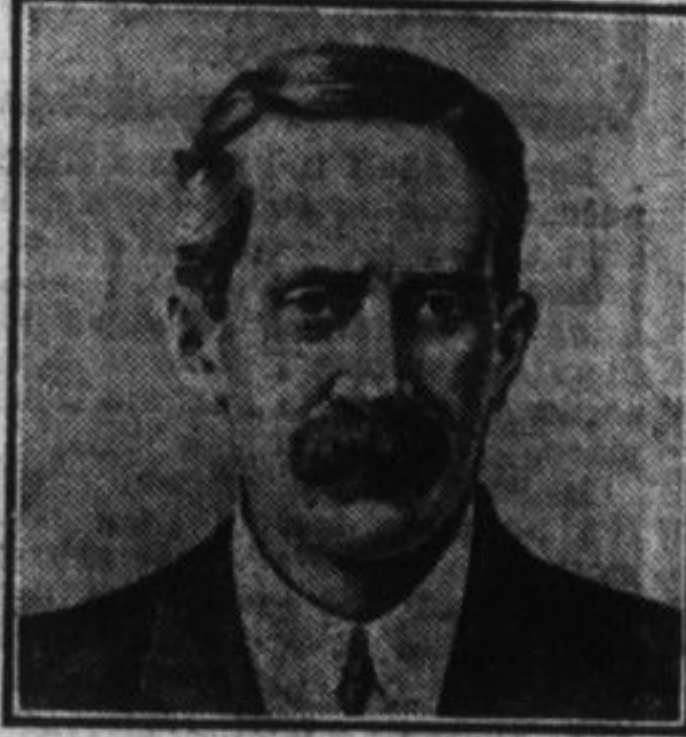
A cluster of men blocked the way. He didn't pause to wait for it to be cleared; but threw himself headlong into their midst, and by dint of the

tackle dragged the ground with its ropes. It was the work of a minute to convince a thick-headed policeman that the attempt was feasible and should be permitted. It was the work of less than another minute to rig a loop in the line and fasten round his body beneath the arms. Volunteers did not lack; a couple of husky longshoremen sprang to the ropes at his first call. They heaved with a will. His feet left the ground, he soared, he caught the ropes of the shed-roof, and shouting to cease hauling, drew himself up on this last, backed a little ways down it and calculating his direction nicely, with a running jump launched himself out over the street.

The momentum of his leap carried him well out over the head of the throng assembled in the street and truly toward that window where Rose was waiting. Then its force slackened. For an awful instant he believed that he had failed. But with the last expiring ounce of impetus, he was brought within grasping distance of the window sill.

Hauling himself up, he gathered her into his arms. A great tongue of tawny flame licked angrily out of the windows as he swung her back to safety.

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Belgium. Mary Du Dusey, New York Herald, Belgium, the brave, true land, thy martyred blood, Like red flames, rises to the throne above. And he who bears His smallest creature cry on you—your fame shall never die. Just where your temples stood a noble fame Now reaches to the sky—your dear, brave name.

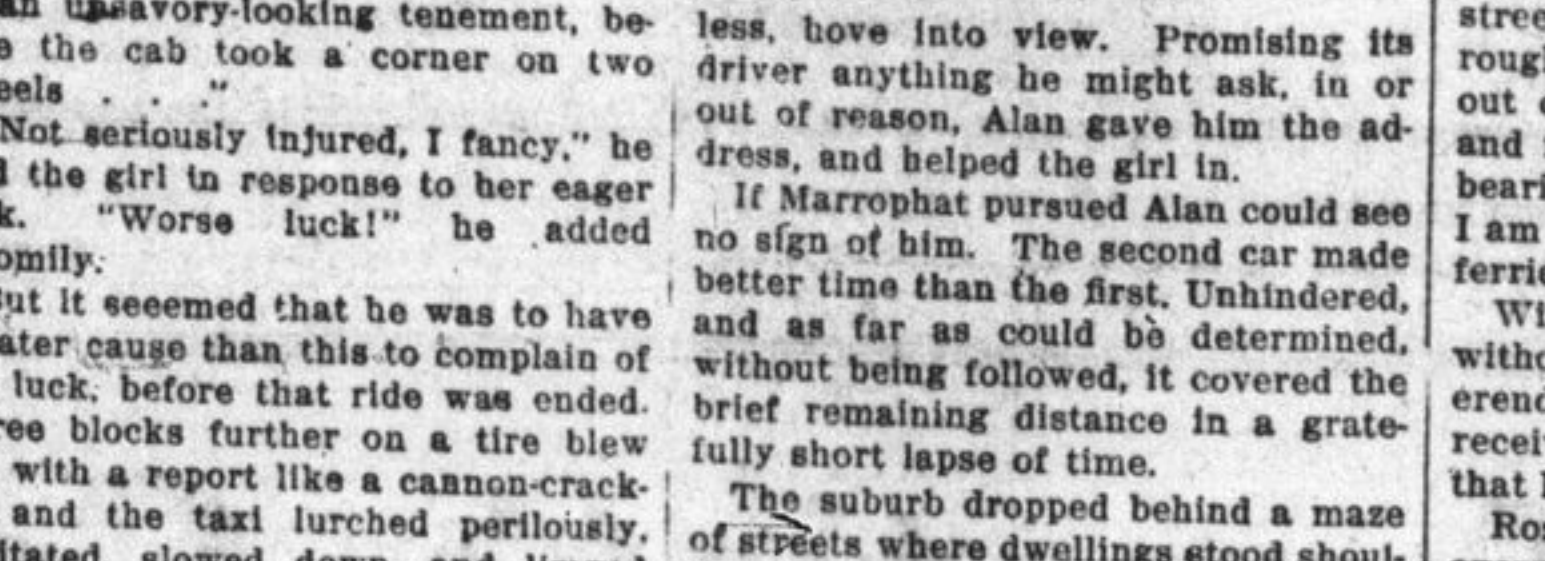
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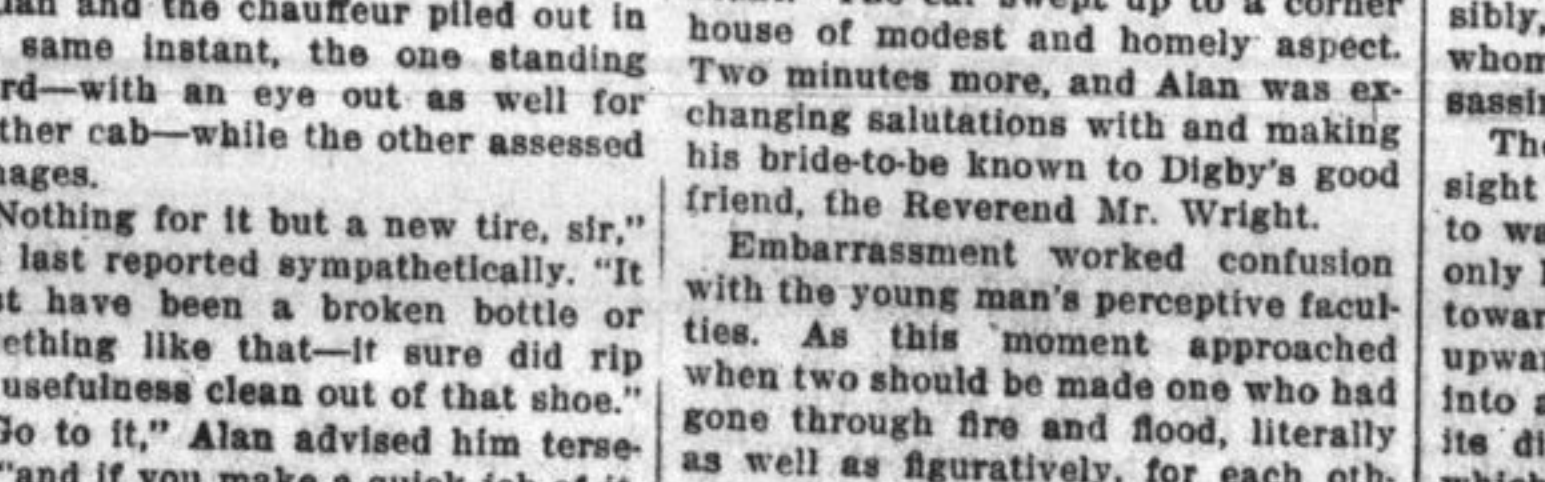
She Appeared Anxious to Escape Without Being Seen.



"That Woman is Judith Trine, You Idiot—Not Rose!"



less, dove into view. Promising its driver anything he might ask, in or out of reason, Alan gave him the address, and helped the girl in.



Charged With the Assassination of Alan.