

NO MAN'S LAND A ROMANCE

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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 Tui. There is a quarrel, and Blackstock shoots Van Tui 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 fled. Coast purchases a yacht and while sailing sees a station there. Coast informs her that her husband murdered Van Tui. 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. Katherine enters the room and passes him a note which tells Coast that neither his life or her own are safe.

CHAPTER XIV.—(Continued.)

His hand remained on Coast's shoulder, obnoxious but imperative. "And then," he continued after a slight pause, "my fingers remember anything they've ever felt. Let me run my hands over a man's face once, and I'll pick him out of a dozen any time afterwards. Like this."

Before Coast could object Blackstock had brought both hands into play upon his face; lightly, softly and gently the ten blunt, hard tips of his stubby fingers moved over Coast's features, tapping, pressing, gliding on.

It was all but insufferable; Coast was conscious that the blood burned in his face like fire, that his heart was pounding—so loud, it seemed, that the other must be aware of it. Revolted, he almost choked at this familiarity of contact which he must endure, endure, from the man of all men he had the greatest cause to hate, loathe and despise. He dug his nails into his palms in an effort to enforce submission. Blackstock's face was within two feet of his own; a satiric smile (he fancied) rested upon those crudely modeled, animal features; he realized suddenly that it was the face of a Satyr, simply, naively sensual, as soulless as its lightless eyes. And a vinuous breath offended his nostrils; his own breath he held, clenching his teeth.

"Now I know you." He could think of nothing to say but: "Oh?" It was with difficulty that he succeeded in enunciating that.

The hands moved on, down over his shoulders, and felt of his arms.

"Hard!" commented Blackstock. "You've got strength, haven't you? Not as great as mine, though; you'd hardly realize how immensely strong I am. See now!" His hands moved swiftly back to Coast's throat and girdled it with a collar of iron. "Do you realize I could easily squeeze your breath out of your body. I could!"

Coast's face explored the face above him. His smile was gone. Something ran cold along his spine, and of a sudden he was without emotion, quite calm and collected.

"But you won't, you know," he said easily; "that is, you wouldn't if you knew my right hand in my pocket was pointing a pistol directly at your heart. Would you?"

Perhaps the fact that he had merely stated the truth was responsible for his coolness. He noted the instinctive movement of the blind eyes, as if they sought to see if it was true; and he thought: "Habit is strong."

Raising his left hand, he grasped Blackstock's right by the wrist and removed it with a certain firmness. The other hand released him an instant later, and the man stood back with a short laugh.

"But you wouldn't have fired?" "Not any sooner than you'd have tried to strangle me."

"Of course I'd no such idea—"

"Of course not; but you shouldn't have suggested it. You made me nervous."

For a moment it was as if the mask had been dropped, as if they openly acknowledged one another as implacable enemies. And again Coast remarked that Blackstock quivered as he had when surprised, an hour before; a ripple of tensed muscles, hardly to be detected, seemed to shake him from head to foot—and was gone

in a twinkling, while the hard smile reappeared on the Satyr's features. "Do you really tote a gun, Handy-side?"

"Always," Coast rejoined briefly. "Why—up here—?"

"You never can tell what's going to happen."

"Perhaps you're right." Blackstock conceded the point graciously. "I don't mind, but you really ought not to take a joke so seriously. However, I'm full of sleep and you must be. . . . John—hat, cane."

One of the servants brought them instantly. "G'd-night, Handyside."

Blackstock hesitated an instant, then got his bearings and found the back door with unerring accuracy. On the stoop he paused long enough to say: "We'll get together after breakfast and talk business;" and the blackness received him.

Mystified, Coast waited, staring at the spot where he had last seen the man, until one of the Chinamen mildly suggested that his room was ready. He followed the fellow stupidly, preoccupied, his mind ranging far in futile speculation as to the riddle of Blackstock's conduct. Long after he was left alone in the room that had

out. More than that, if Blackstock had planned an attempt upon his life during the night, Coast might as well know it; for he was armed and unafraid, and he who knows what to fear is doubly armed.

Having wedged a chair beneath the knob of each door, he placed the lamp upon the table, turning it low that its scanty store of oil might last the night, and sat down on the bed, the pillow at his back, Appleyard's pistol ready at his side.

Insensibly as the dead hours lagged marked by no disturbance foreign to the storm, his weariness bore heavily upon him. His thoughts blurred into a chaotic jumble of incoherencies. He nodded, drowsed with chin on breast, roused with a start when some unusually violent squall swooped over the island, drowsed again, and in the end slipped over upon his side and slept the sleep of the exhausted, profound and dreamless.

CHAPTER XV.

Coast awakened with a gasp, jumping to his feet as if to the peremptory summons of a subconscious alarm-clock. Such, in fact, was more or less the case; he who sleeps upon the thought of danger is apt to waken with that thought predominant.

A moment gone everything had been densely dark, with that narcotic blackness which characterizes the slumbers of the overworked and overwrought. Now in a twinkling he found himself intensely conscious, in the middle of the floor, pistol in hand, every nerve on the qui vive, every muscle tense.

Gradually he realized that his nerves must have tricked him, that the hair-

He went quickly down through the Cold Lairs to the beach. The Echo was gone, but this did not surprise him; it had been Appleyard's purpose to heave anchor and get away as soon as the gale showed signs of slackening. Inside the sheltering spit a sturdy little catboat was dancing crazily at its mooring, but it was evidently deserted, and Coast rightly guessed that the vessel belonged to Blackstock, that its tender was the boat which Power had been accused of stealing—principally, no doubt, to allay the suspicions of Katherine; some means of accounting for the man's disappearance had necessarily to be invented. The boat was, of course, nowhere to be seen; doubtless Blackstock had caused it to be carried up and secreted in one of the abandoned dwellings, or in some recess beneath the bluffs to the west and south.

It was in the shelter of the westerly bluff that Coast stripped and took to the water. Here, as all round the island, the beach shelved boldly, the surf breaking close inshore.

Scrubbing his flesh aglow, he dressed quickly, tingling with the exhilaration of his recent contest, every trace of fatigue and drowsiness washed clean away. A sense of life and well-being ran like quicksilver through his veins; he could have sung aloud or whistled but for the sobering thought, never far beneath the surface of his consciousness, of his responsibility. With Katherine to guard and care for, with Blackstock to watch and guard against and circumvent, there could be little room for cheerfulness in his humor.

Instead of returning the way he had come, an impulse moved him to scale the bluff, which at this point presented not too steep an acclivity.

As he continued along the sole, approaching the heel of what has been likened to a crude sketch of a child's shoe, Coast remarked the crumbling stone walls of what had apparently once been a rude summer house and observatory set atop the highest hillock to seaward. But he had drawn quite near to it before he descried a hem of skirt whipping round a corner of a half-fallen wall. He quickened his steps and took her suddenly unawares as she stood, half-sheltered from the breeze and wholly invisible from the body of the island, her back to the weather-beaten and lichened stones, her gaze leveled to seaward in somber reverie.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

One on the Locusts.

"You know," said Silas, as he drove Mr. Commuter to the station, "them there seventeen-year-locusts is curious beasts. Oh, I've watched them, I know their ways. They comes up out of the ground and they climbs up the trunk till they gets to the leaves. Leaves is what they're after!"

"'Tother day I seen a man standin' in the road, a-lookin' up at a telegraph pole and a-laughin' to beat the band. 'Wot yer laughin' at, friend?' says I."

"See all them dom seventeen-year-old locusts, a-scuttlin' and a-scurryin' up that there pole?" says he.

"Yes," says I, "what of it?"

"I'm just a-thinkin', he says, a-most doublin' up laughin', 'what an April fool it'll be for them when they gets to the top!'"

A Thought.

I remember a young wife who had to part with her husband for a time. She did not write a mournful poem; indeed, she was a silent person, and perhaps hardly said a word about it; but she quietly turned to a deep orange color with jaundice. A great many people in this world have but one form of rhetoric for their profoundest experiences, namely, to waste away and die. When a man can read, his thought has slackened its hold.—Holmes.

Very Particular.

"Mayme is a crank on having things harmonize, isn't she?" "Yes, to such an extent that she won't use rats because she has mouse-colored hair."

Gilbert Had Good Memory

He Never Forgot That at Harrow One of His Lines Was Considered Improper.

This Gilbert story reaches me from an old Harrovian, says a writer in the Manchester Guardian. In 1872 the people of the town got up theatricals to raise funds for a hospital. Doctor Butler, the head master, said he would not allow the school to go unless the pieces were first submitted to him. One was Gilbert's "Palace of Truth."

In it is a passage in which the hero says to the heroine: "Meet me at nine o'clock tonight outside the garden gate." Doctor Butler vetoed this and substituted: "Meet me at three o'clock this afternoon." This seemed to him more decorous. About five years ago Gilbert was invited to the Harrow speeches. In reply to the toast of his health he said: "I am very much interested in visiting Harrow, for as far as I know it is the only

place in the world where a line of mine has ever been condemned as improper." Great consternation prevailed—all the greater because no one except the speaker and one other person, who was just leaving Harrow in 1872, knew what he meant. It was not Gilbert's way to forget these things.

Why Willie Was Late.

"Why, Willie, what kept you so late? Did you have to stay after school? I'm afraid you have been naughty." "No, ma'am, I ain't never naughty. Bobby Jones was licked fer bein' naughty, an' I stayed after school to hear him yell."

Easy Thing to Do.

People who are extravagant on themselves are often wonderfully ingenious in devising plans of economy for others.



Every Nerve on the Qui Vive.

been Power's he sat on the edge of the dingy bed, his gaze fixed upon the reflection of the lamp's flame in the window panel—absorbed in the enigma.

He could not rid himself of the impression that an inarticulate menace lurked beneath Blackstock's apparently unsuspecting reception of him.

Was insanity the explanation? Was the man in reality a homicidal maniac, at whose intellect the lust to slay ate like a cancer? . . . But in such case, would he have delegated to another the assassination of Power?

Did he or did he not suspect? Did that sudden slip of the mask signify that he had merely allowed himself to appear to be deceived and was but waiting to deliver some telling stroke in retaliation?

How much has Coast to apprehend, what to guard against?

To this latter question his every instinct answered in chorus: Everything. He dared leave no stone unturned to safeguard himself—that he might remain able to protect Katherine.

It came to him that it was not unlikely he had been left in that lonely cottage with the three Chinese that they might quietly make away with him while he slept.

With this in mind he took a more detailed inventory of his surroundings; and found them hopelessly exposed.

Unquestionably he would have been safer in the open; but the storm was now at the top of its fury. Sheets of water were sluicing the house as if cast from some gigantic bucket.

Danger within seemed very much preferable to misery with-

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