

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 Lunda and Van Tui. There is a quarrel, and Blackstock shoots Van Tui dead. Coast struggles to wrest the weapon from him, but the police discover them. Coast is arrested for murder. He is convicted, but as he begins his sentence, Lunda names Blackstock as the murderer and claims himself. Coast becomes free, but Blackstock has married Katherine Thaxter and she, Coast purchases a ticket and sails on a boat from a distant port. He reaches the island which 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. She is blind, a wireless operator and has a station there. Coast informs her that her husband murdered Van Tui. Coast sees Blackstock, who is blind, and accuses him of the murder. Coast tells her that he is a secret service man and has been watching the crowd on the island, suspecting an assassination. Coast is anxious to fathom the mystery of No Man's Land, and is determined to save Katherine. Coast 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. Coast feels that Blackstock suspects him. Appleyard and the Echo disagree. Coast informs Katherine of his protection, and she informs them they are to abandon the island immediately. The blind man and his small servant overpowered Coast, who afterward escaped to be met by Katherine, but before they can reach the coast the steamer states that he is no longer in the island. He is overpowered, and Coast and Katherine fly from the spot, and go to a remote part of the island and signal a boat which they see in the distance.

CHAPTER XIX.—(Continued.)

Out of the dusk, in which objects were just perceptible, the bungalow loomed up before them. By common consent they passed, Coast looking back toward the beach, Katherine peering up into his face.

"Are they coming, Garrett?"

"Not yet," he said, perplexity in his tone. "It's as I thought; they know they can lay hands on us at any time. So we can go hang until they're ready to take up our case."

"But," he amended, squaring his shoulders and his jaw and infusing his manner with a confidence and decision he had been glad to feel, "we'll fool 'em. It won't be long now."

"You mean before your friend—Mr. Appleyard?"

"Yes. He's sure to be here at almost any minute—he or the revenue cutter."

"But, Garrett, what are we going to do in the meantime?"

"We'll have to stick to the open till the Echo comes. Is there a lantern in the house—anything to make a light with?"

"Why—yes," she replied in surprise; "there's a kerosene lantern we used at night, when it was necessary to go to the farm-house. But . . . wouldn't it lead them to us? Isn't darkness our surest cover?"

"Absolutely; but I've got to have something to signal Appleyard with. We agreed that I should show a light on the sand pit, in event of any trouble; but he'll be counting on the cutter being here by this time, and it won't do to let him make a landing on the beach near the longboat."

"I understand. Just a minute . . . Is there time?"

"Plenty," he said briefly, adding inconsistently: "But hurry."

He followed her into the house and, while she disappeared to look for the lantern, found his way to the divan and robbed it of its covering—a heavy steamer rug, which he folded and tucked beneath one arm before Katherine returned.

"You won't want the light now?"

"No. Give me your hand."

They stepped out into unrelieved night: darkness, dense and warm and rendered tangible by its burden of humidity.

In the north arose a confusion of many voices; and in that quarter, likewise, was a fiery show of weaving lantern-lights.

Hand in hand they stole away like thieves, not three minutes before the bungalow was invaded by Blackstock and the crew of the schooner—a loud-mouthed, roistering company, making hideous the night with the clamor of their disputations and their cursings.

Unseen and all unsuspected (so far as they could say, with no sign given them of either detection or pursuit) they hurried off as warily and fearfully as wild things skirting the haunts of men, sliding silently over hills and down through hollows, over fields and fences, until at length they came without accident out upon the spreading sweep of sand to the east of the long, low-lying spit.

Later they found themselves at the end of this, the northern extremity of the island; and here Coast put down the unlighted lantern and spread the rug in a slight depression between low dunes.

Cimmerian muck enveloped them, abysmal, impenetrable, penetrated only by dimmed rays of light from the windows of the bungalow, seemingly incalculable miles distant.

Slowly the hours ebbed. They had long since ceased to speak. From the regularity of her breathing Coast believed she slept despite her fears, overcome by thorough exhaustion of every fiber, nerve and faculty. For himself he would not stir for fear of waking her.

The light of a lantern peeped over the ridge, inland, and descended, wavered, through the Cold Lairs to the beach, then became stationary near the edge of the water, over which it shot a long, slender spear of soft radiance.

He understood that a guard had tardily been set over the scene. Coast.

From the bungalow came this, far

sounds of voices, now and then a husky shout cacophonous in that hour of calm, immutable peace.

They were drinking up there, forgotten alike of danger and their recent disaster.

Abruptly he saw that the lane of lantern light was shattered and dancing. He jumped to his feet, with a glance above that showed him a faint flash of starlight. He held up his hand and a breath of air blew cool against it—a shiver of breeze out of the southwest. All this meant clearing-

Swiftly the breeze freshened. Vague forms of mist faded before his straining sight. A musical whisper and clashing of waves echoed through the hush of night. And like a curtain the fog fell back and away, and was not.

About two miles offshore, to the northwest, a green light shone like a colored star, with a white light a little above—at about the height of the Echo's masthead. And while he looked the two moved and swung round, until he saw not only green and white, but the red port light as well, all moving steadily toward the island.

CHAPTER XX.

In his arms Katherine moved with a stifled moan of weariness, a gasp, and then a stiffening of her body which told him that she was now wide



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awake and mistress of her wits, in full comprehension of their position.

"Katherine—"

"What is it?"

"The Echo—Appleyard, I think—I'm sure. He'll be here in just a few minutes—ten or fifteen; and you must help me show the light."

"Help me up," she said in a dejected voice.

He rose and took her hands, lifting her to her feet. With one thought—permeant in both minds, they turned toward the sea.

Off to the northwest the red port and white masthead lights of the catboat were slipping briskly shorewards—the green no longer visible—standing in for the beach where the longboat lay.

A groan escaped Coast.

"Oh, the devil!" he said beneath his breath, exasperated; and aloud, half-fraughtly: "Hurry! He's taking the other light for my signal. Here—"

grabbed up the steamer's rug and thrust it unceremoniously into Katherine's hand—"hold this so, to hide it from the beach, while I light the lantern."

With agonizing slowness the minutes sped, and still the boat held on directly for the beach below the Cold Lairs. Then abruptly the watcher by the longboat awakened to its approach, apparently for the first time, and sounded the alarm by firing a shot from his revolver. A second later, in

"they're much too far away to catch us now. Only—hark to that!"

There was, in fact, a strange and sinister sound in the yelping of the gang; their cries were indistinguishable, but owned a dull, level pitch of minatory rage, infinitely perturbing, since it seemed so senseless—like the harsh and inarticulate snarling of an infuriated hound.

A shiver shot along Coast's spine. He found the woman, trembling, had moved close to his side.

"What does it mean?"

"I don't know," he said—"sounds like a pack of starving wolves. . . . No matter; it can't concern us. In two minutes . . ."

The Echo had drawn near enough for the noise of the motor to be perceptible; she was moving under power only, her sail down but not furled, hanging in stiff and clumsy folds in the lazy-jacks. He could even see the tender trailing astern, and make out a single figure at the wheel.

Then the latter bobbed down out of sight for an instant, and the purring of the engine was abrupted. There followed the splash of the anchor, and the little vessel brought up quickly, swinging wide to face the wind.

With a warning cry Katherine stepped quickly away from Coast and swung round, whipping out her small but effective pearl-handled revolver. "Stop!" she cried in a vibrant voice. "Halt, or I'll fire!"

desperation, Coast sent a piercing whistle echoing over the waters.

Immediately, at the pistol shot, the Echo swerved sharply off to the west, her red side light disappeared; and for a full minute held on so before she swung smartly on her heel and showed first the green and then the red, bearing straight as an arrow for the end of the sand spit.

On the island, at the same, the results of the report (which, when the catboat came about, was followed by four others in brisk succession) were no less marked. Down the wind from the bungalow floated a wild chorus of shouts and calls. In its vicinity half a dozen twinkling lights studded the darkness on the uplands, springing to life as if by magic, and were whisked hither and thither like so many will-o'-the-wisps, suggesting a stupid, half-distracted ferment of conflicting advice, argument and will among the smugglers. Presently, however, some sort of order was evidently evolved; the lights converged to a common center and bore swiftly down toward the beach.

Coast put down the lantern on the swelling, rounded summit of a small dune, and took the steamer rug from Katherine, mechanically folding it as he divided troubled attention between the nearing boat and the distant rattle—now streaming headlong down through the Cold Lairs and shouting as they came.

"No more need for this," he said, referring to the rug; "the light won't tell them anything they don't know now. But . . . His perturbed voice trailed off irresolutely as he stood, a frowning glance directed down toward the beach.

Katherine was quick to catch the note of worry in his tone. "What is it?" she asked. "You're not afraid, you don't think—"

"No," he reassured her stoutly;

minion. A neighbor of the Allens from boyhood, their attorney and counselor in many of their civil and criminal bouts with the law, he has personally known the Allen clansmen of three generations.

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It is not without reason that the Carroll county Allens are referred to as the members of a clan. The first of their forbears who settled in this vicinity in Colonial times came of Scotch-Irish stock—a strain often of sterling worth, but ever with a touch of clanish family pride, and usually with more than a touch of pugnacity, impatience of restraint and fighting courage.

In Revolutionary days what is now Carroll was Montgomery county, Virginia. One of the members of the Montgomery county militia who left his plow and his ax to march across the Blue Ridge in time to take part in the battle of Guilford Court House, N. C., was William Allen. The militia detachment marched across the Ridge by way of the Fancy Gap road, the same thoroughfare over which armed scouts have been scurrying to and fro in search of this Revolutionary soldier's scion, on whose head the outlawed law has put a price.

As William Allen marched to battle he observed that the rolling land on the far side of the Fancy Gap was attractive. When the Revolutionary war was over he and one of his fellow soldiers settled there and so the Allens became established in the quarter which they have ruled ever since like feudal barons.

Tradition says William Allen was a good soldier. He was destined to be the progenitor of many good soldiers. He had two sons, only one of whom, William Allen, Jr., concerns this narrative, for the second, William, was the father of two sons, Bailey Allen and William Carr Allen.

Bailey Allen had four sons—Lemuel, William, Carr and Gaillet Allen. Of the four three were gallant soldiers in the Confederate service during the Civil war. Lemuel was killed in a charge during the second battle of Bull Run, or, as is generally designated in the south, the Battle of Manassas. William, who was a private in the same company, saw his brother fall, paused long enough to lift his stricken form and to note that he was dead, and then went on in the charge upon the Union position.

Carr Allen survived four years of active service. He was a soldier whose dash, courage and gallantry were uniformly praised by his officers. As a Confederate veteran and a good neighbor, he lived until about ten

years ago, when, at a good old age, he was shot and killed by Mack Howlett, and Howlett was lynched, after a band, believed to have included members of the Allen clan, had taken him from the Hillsville jail, the keys of which were surrendered by the jailer, who was a cousin of "Jack" Allen's wife.

Of the four sons of Bailey Allen the black sheep of the family was Bailey, Jr. Judge Bolen was called upon to defend him against numerous criminal charges, and he was finally sentenced to a long term in the state penitentiary for housebreaking and burglary.

William Carr Allen, the other son of the second William Allen, was the father of Jeremiah, Robert and John. Jeremiah also was a loyal soldier in the army of the south. He married the daughter of one of the most famous of the old trappers of the Blue Ridge mountains, "Uncle Billy" Combs. The Confederate veteran and the daughter of the old trapper raised a large family of boys. Their sons were Anderson, who died a few years ago after having served as a member of the Virginia Reserves during the last ten months of the war; Washington, who was killed by the fall of a tree;

Victor, who is the highly respectable and respected keeper of a country store a few miles from Hillsville; Garland, who is a preacher among the Primitive Baptists; Floyd, whose refusal to accept sentence of imprisonment caused the Hillsville massacre;

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A sister of the seven sons of Jeremiah Allen is Mrs. Edwards (now Mrs. Mundy), whose sons by her first husband were Sidna and Wesley Edwards, the first of whom surrendered himself to his uncle "Jack," while Wesley preferred to share the hardships of the mountains with his uncle Sidna. The other members of the younger generation who are directly involved in the Millsville affair are Claude and Victor, who are the sons of Floyd Allen, and Fred Allen, who is the son of "Jack."

"A study of the genealogical tree of the Allens," said one who knows them well, "shows that, while many of the clan have been fighting men, it is only those of the present generation who have been what is commonly known as gun fighters. Old Jeremiah was a hard fighter even after the war was over, but he fought with his fists."

"All of the seven sons of 'Jerry' Allen were men of strong personality and of fierce, impetuous temper, but Anderson, Washington, Victor and Garland learned the important lessons of restraint and self control, while Floyd, 'Jack' and Sidna have

been brooked restraint nor tolerated opposition.

To students of heredity it might be interesting to speculate to what extent the soldier strain of the Allen family was tintured by less noble, more primitive influences engrained into it from the maternal side. The mother of the seven Allens who are the middle aged men of the present generation was the daughter of "Uncle Billy" Combs, the toughest old woodsman and trapper known to the history or traditions of the Carolina mountain border. "Uncle Billy" died at the age of 104.

"He tramped the mountain fastnesses habitually in his bare feet, the heels and soles of which had become so calloused and hooflike that he thought nothing of killing diamond back rattlers by tramping upon them."

"Like other mountaineers of his day, 'Uncle Billy' not only trapped or shot the wild beasts of the mountain, selling their pelts, but he made a respectable income by domesticating the wild honey bees and by raising droves of mountain hogs, which, until the advent of warm weather, would run wild and fatten upon the chestnuts and acorns of the forests."

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"Uncle Billy," though phenomenally strong, was a peaceable man among his fellows, and died much beloved and respected. His son "Jed," however, endowed with much of his father's physique, was a noted bully of the mountainside. "Jed" had met and conquered many rivals, but he had never tried conclusions with Ike Beamer. Ike was, like "Jed," a giant in strength and with sinews of steel, but Ike was neither quarrelsome nor ambitious to shine as a bully. "Jed" determined to force him to fight, trumped up some imaginary debt and went to Ike under pretense of collecting it.

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The "FIGHTING ALLENS"

WHAT IS the genealogy of the clan of the "Fighting Allens"? What are the racial strains and what the physical and social environment that have combined to produce this race of fearless fighters that has terrorized Carroll county, Virginia.

The question is an interesting one entirely apart from the academic theories of heredity. It is a question that scores of law abiding Americans doubtless have asked since the commission at Hillsville of one of the most astonishing acts in the criminology of a civilized country.

No man is better qualified to answer the question than Judge David W. Bolen. He is a leader of the Carroll county bar, was a delegate to the Virginia state consolidation convention, and is one of the most thorough students of Virginia history to be found within the borders of the Old De-



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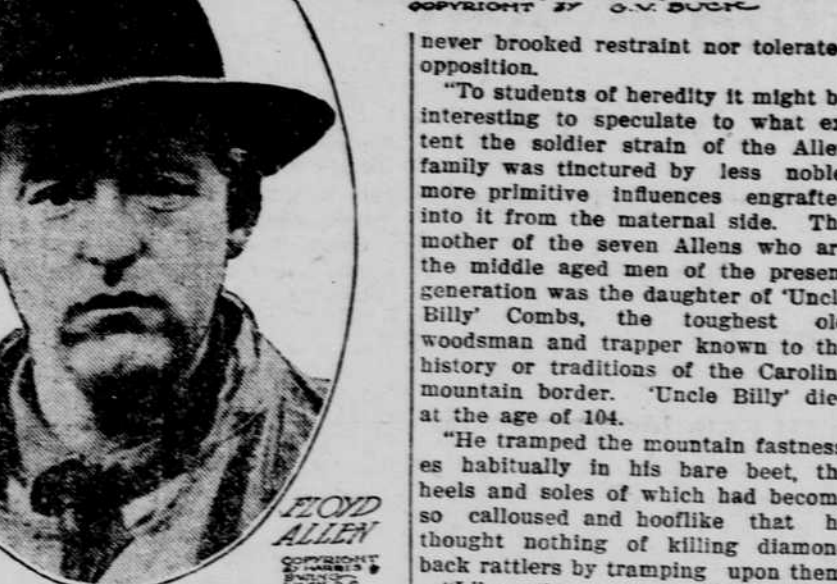
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CROWD AT COURT HOUSE WHEN TRAGEDY OCCURRED



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