

# SERIAL STORY

## No Man's Land A ROMANCE

By Louis Joseph Vance.

Illustrations by Ray Walters

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### SYNOPSIS.

George Coast, a young man of New York City, meets Douglas Blackstock, who invites him to a card party. He accepts, with the result that he is introduced to a woman being in love with Keith, the architect. Coast fails to convince her that Blackstock is a scoundrel, but they become friends. At the party Coast meets two men, one of whom is a spy, the other a quarrel, and Blackstock shoots Van Tuyl dead. Coast struggles to write the word "murder" on the man's coat to cover them. Coast is arrested for murder.

### CHAPTER III.—(Continued.)

"Well, so much for Blackstock—until the police get wind of him, at all events. They're trying to locate him by cable now; haven't heard of any success that way, however. Naturally . . . But a few days ago Dundas came to the surface."

Coast started violently. "Dundas?"

"Um—um; full confession, exculpating you, humiliating Blackstock. Corroborative details: letters from Blackstock—all the sort of things. Furthermore, Dundas told us that Blackstock feared Van Tuyl: Van Tuyl knew something—some dirty business Blackstock had cooked up in the west. Immortal now; tell you later. Also Dundas took us to the shop where Blackstock bought that gun—salesman recalled the transaction. You remember how we failed to prove the gun his?"

"Of course. Go on about Dundas."

"Well . . . it was Trux doing; nailed Dundas on the street end, somewhere east of town. The man was in hiding ever since Blackstock cleared out; he was in a pretty bad way, broke and seedy; claimed Blackstock hadn't sent him a dollar since he disappeared. So Dundas, thrown back upon his pen for a means of livelihood, went all to pieces; couldn't work—had forgotten the trick—or wouldn't; drank up all he could raise by pawnings things."

Trux stalked him to a man, and drubbed plenty of drink into all that on an impulse which made him miserable. Confessed he was keeping a conscience—remorse gnawing at his vitals—whatever those are—every-thing like that. Then Trux bundled him into a taxi and brought him to my rooms. It was near midnight—got me out of bed; I caught a cold. However . . . I own it without compunction, we worked the poor devil through the tenth degree, poor, browned and half-bleary-eyed him up; I was ashamed of myself. But the truth pained me, finally, along with tears—whisky tears. We hadn't finished the bottle."

"As I say, in the end Dundas owned up to the whole slyby affair, just as you told it—whispered about selling his soul to Blackstock, price not de-posed. We made him sign a brief con-  
fession, but I knew that wouldn't be sufficient, and it was then too late and Dundas too far gone to do him with. I called in a central office and I happened to know, and turned Dundas over to him to be taken to a Turkish bath and flogged into shape; and it did the trick, with a hearty breakfast and plenty of black coffee for a chaser. He was pretty shaky next morning, but I coaxed him into a taxi and had him at the district attorney's office before he knew what was up. There he wanted to hag, but his signature to the original con-  
tract was still in his pocket, so he had to leave it out of him, and he went all over it again, with a stenographer taking it down—type-written deposition—all that sort of thing."

"Meanwhile, my friend, the detective had unpacked Dundas' lodgings—some cheap room just off the Bowery—and found a bundle of letters from Blackstock—mostly written during the trial, when they didn't dare be seen together—hints and orders, the width of its front sheet occupied by headlines from the papers, before a single word had been said to indict him for perjury. The poor fool was scared stiff, as soon as he realized what he had done—declared Blackstock would get him sooner or later. So he saved him the trouble—killed himself. His cell had 10 hours after being committed—had a phial of morphine secreted in his clothing."

"After a pause Coast said slowly: "So Blackstock did get him after all. That makes two—look—two!"

"Yes," Warburton assented uneasily, worried by the hard expression that lined Coast's mouth; "looked at that way, yes . . . Well, we called our trial judge [John] Dillon—the district attorney and I—and between the three of us drew up a petition for your pardon, the district attorney being the first to sign. I got off to Albany to file the first trial. There wasn't a soul called on the telephone—Warbur-

ton the parden without a murmur. And here we are."

"And here we are," Coast repeated in a whisper. He was quiet for a time.

"You know I can't thank you, old man," he said at length, smiling. "I always thought he'd be a scoundrel."

"You don't have to. I feel too good about it myself. Always knew it would come out all right. Never lost faith in you, not for a second. Gar-rett?"

He rattled on, Coast listening by fits and snatches. He heard a little of this master and that, heard less of more. He repeated, in times abbreviated, "Garrett's Thaxter? Had she heard? All Coast's thoughts focused upon this; he must see her."

There came a pause, made awkward by a constraint in Warburton's manner. Coast glanced at him inquiringly. The little lawyer licked his lips nervously.

"There's one thing," he said, "you won't like, perhaps."

Coast smiled. "I'm not in a mood for fault-finding. What is it?"

"Garrett, you know it's desirable to get Blackstock."

"Well . . .

"You won't be fully cleared in the public mind at least, until he's convicted in your stead."

"That's true enough."

"So we're keeping it quiet, for the time being—the reason for your release, I mean."

"Why? What's the sense of that?" Coast demanded, excitedly.

"It's so it can't will be. But we don't want to scare Blackstock. If he hears that Dundas has confessed, he'll never be found. If we permit him to think, as the public will certainly think, that you are pardoned principally because of your social standing and 'pull' . . . then he won't be so wary. You see? So we're withholding the real reason. By gosh; it will only be for a little while. And in the end it will be exoneration, absolute and unquestionable. Will you stand for that?"

Coast nodded somberly at the dull light hanging over the awltering city toward which they raced. "I presume I must," he said wearily; "but it's hard—thundering hard . . . I had hoped . . ."

"I know, old boy." Warburton's hand touched his again. "But it's for

"How can I tell?"

With a sigh and a shrug Warburton drew the check and rang for his head clerk. That person brought with him the information that representatives of the Sun and the Herald had gathered with the Journal reporter in the outer office, and would not be denied.

"Get the money," said Warburton.

"I'll tell to the rest."

He made a scurry into the reception room and returned crestfallen. "I've lied like a trooper," he confessed, "but they won't budge. You were seen to enter; you haven't been seen to leave."

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