

# ALICE of OLD VINCENNES

By MAURICE THOMPSON

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(CO. LINE.)

"A few such would make me another hot day's work," she replied, laughing. "Pretty talk would be cheaper and more satisfactory in the long run. Even the flour in these pates I ground with my own hand in an Indian mortar. That was hard work too."

By this time Rene had forgotten the river house and the liquor. With softening eyes he gazed at Alice's rounded cheeks and sheeny hair, over which the light from the curious earthen lamp she bore in her hand flickered most effectively. He loved her madly, but his fear of her was more powerful than his love. She gave him no opportunity to speak what he felt, having ever ready a quick, bright change of mood and manner when she saw him plucking up courage to address her in a sentimental way. Their relations had long been somewhat familiar, which was but natural, considering their youth and the circumstances of their daily life, but Alice somehow had kept a certain distance open between them, so that very warm friendship could not suddenly resolve itself into a troublesome passion on Rene's part.

We need not attempt to analyze a young girl's feelings and motives in such a case. What she does and what she thinks are mysteries even to her own understanding. The influence most potent in shaping the rudimentary

character of Alice Tarleton (called Roussillon) had been only such as a lonely frontier post could generate. Her associations with men and women had, with few exceptions, been unprofitable in an educational way, while her reading in M. Roussillon's little library could not have given her any practical knowledge of manners and life.

Her affection for Rene was interfered with by her large admiration for the heroic, masterful and magnetic knights who charged through the romances of the Roussillon collection. For although Rene was unquestionably brave and more than passably handsome, he had no armor, no war horse, no shining lance and embossed shield—the difference, indeed, was great.

Perhaps it was the light and heat of imagination shining out through Alice's face which gave her beauty such a fascinating power. Rene saw it and felt its electrical stroke send a sweet shiver through his heart while he stood before her.

"You are very beautiful tonight, Alice," he presently said, with a suddenness which took even her alertness by surprise. A flush rose to his dark face and immediately gave way to a grayish pallor. His heart came near stopping on the instant, he was so shocked by his own daring, but he laid a hand on her hair, stroking it softly.

Just a moment she was at a loss, looking a trifle embarrassed; then, with a merry laugh, she stepped aside and said:

"That sounds better, M. Rene de Ronville; much better. You will be as polite as Father Beret after a little more training."

She slipped past him while speaking and made her way back again to the main room, whence she called to him:

"Come here. I've something to show you."

He obeyed, a sheepish trace on his countenance betraying his self-consciousness.

When he came near Alice, she was taking from its buckhorn hook on the wall a rapier, one of a beautiful pair hanging side by side.

"Papa Roussillon gave me these," she said, with great animation. "He bought them of an Indian who had kept them a long time. Where he came across them he would not tell. But look, how beautiful! Did you ever see anything so fine?"

Guard and hilt were of silver; the blade, although somewhat corroded, still showed the fine, wavy lines of Damascus steel and traces of delicate engraving, while in the end of the hilt was set a large oval turquoise.

"A very queer present to give a girl," said Rene. "What can you do with them?"

A captivating flash of playfulness came into her face and she sprang backward, giving the sword a semi-circular turn with her wrist. The blade sent forth a keen hiss as it cut the air close, very close to Rene's nose.

He jerked his head and hung up his hand.

She laughed merrily, standing beautifully poised before him, the rapier's point slightly elevated. Her short skirt left her feet and ankles free to show their graceful proportions and the perfect pose in which they held her supple body.

"You see what I can do with the olechemarde, eh, M. Rene de Ronville?" she exclaimed, giving him a smile which fairly blinded him. "Notice how very near to your neck I can thrust and yet not touch it. Now!"

She darted the keen point under his chin and drew it away so quickly that the stroke was like a glint of sunlight.

"What do you think of that as a nice and accurate piece of skill?"

She again resumed her pose, the right foot advanced, the left arm well back, her lissome, finely developed body leaning slightly forward.

Rene's hands were up before his face in a defensive position, palms outward. Just then a chorus of men's voices sounded in the distance. The river



The rapier was making a crisscross pattern of flashing lines.

house was beginning its carousal with a song. Alice let fall her sword's point and listened.

Rene looked about for his cap.

"I must be going," he said.

Another and louder swish of the rapier made him pirouette and dodge again with great energy.

"Don't," he cried, "that's dangerous. You'll put out my eyes. I never saw such a girl!"

She laughed at him and kept on whipping the air dangerously near his eyes until she had driven him backward as far as he could squeeze himself into a corner of the room.

Mme. Roussillon came to the door from the kitchen and stood looking in and laughing, with her hands on her hips. By this time the rapier was making a crisscross pattern of flashing lines close to the young man's head while Alice, in the enjoyment of her exercise, seemed to concentrate all the glowing rays of her beauty in her face her eyes dancing merrily.

"Quit now, Alice," he begged, half in fun and half in abject fear. "I please quit—I surrender!"

She thrust to the wall on either side of him, then springing lightly backward a pace, stood at guard. Her thick yellow hair had fallen over her neck and shoulders in a loose wavy mass, out of which her face beamed with a bewitching effect upon her captive.

Rene, glad enough to have a cessation of his peril, stood laughing dryly, but the singing down at the river house was swelling louder and he made another movement to go.

"Your surrendered, you remember," cried Alice, renewing the sword play. "Sit down on the chair there and make yourself comfortable. You are not going down yonder tonight; you are going to stay here and talk with me and Mother Roussillon. We are lonesome and you are good company."

A shot rang out keen and clear, there was a sudden tumult that broke up the singing, and presently more firing at varying intervals cut the night air from the direction of the river.

Jean, the hunchback, came in to say that there was a row of some sort. He had seen men running across the com-



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mon as if in pursuit of a fugitive, but the moonlight was so dim that he could not be sure what it all meant.

Rene picked up his cap and bolted out of the house.

## CHAPTER III.

THE RAPE OF THE DEMIJOHN.

THE row down at the river house was more noise than fight, so far as results seemed to indicate. It was all about a small dame Jeanne of fine brandy which an Indian of the name of Long Hair had seized and run off with at the height of the carousal. He must have been soberer than his pursuers or naturally fleet, for not one of them could catch him or even keep long in sight of him. Some pistols were emptied while the race was on, and two or three of the men swore roundly to having seen Long Hair jump sidewise and stagger, as if one of the shots had taken effect. But, although the moon was shining, he some way disappeared, they could not understand just how far down beside the river below the fort and the church.

[TO BE CONTINUED.]

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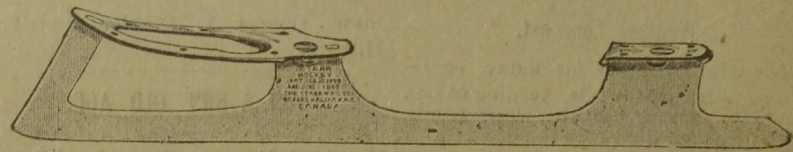
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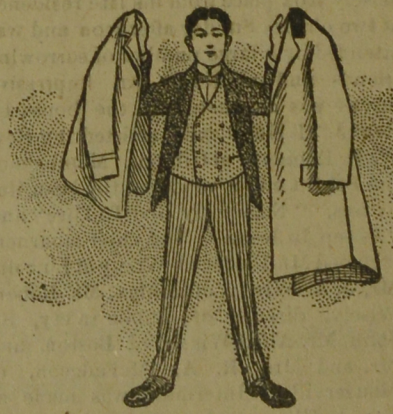
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