

ALICE of OLD VINCENNES

By MAURICE THOMPSON

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(CONTINUED).

"I have thought of him—it was like him—but he is, as you say, very old to be so tremendously strong and ac-



The two men stood with a tight grip between them.

tive. Why, I tell you that men went from his hands against the walls and floor as if shot out of a mortar. It was the strangest and most astounding thing I ever heard of."

A little later Barlow seized a favorable opportunity and withdrew. The conversation was not to his liking.

Hamilton sent for Father Beret and had a long talk with him, but the old man looked so childishly inoffensive in spirit and so collapsed physically that it seemed worse than foolishness to accuse him of the exploit over which the entire garrison was wondering. Farnsworth sat by during the interview. He looked the good priest curiously and critically over from head to foot, remembering, but not mentioning, the most unclerical punch in the side received from that energetic right arm now lying flabbily across the old man's lap.

When the talk ended and Father Beret humbly took his leave, Hamilton turned to Farnsworth and said:

"What do you think of this affair? I have cross questioned all the men who took part in it, and every one of them says simply priest or devil. I think old Beret is both, but plainly he couldn't hurt a chicken; you can see that at a glance."

Farnsworth smiled, rubbing his side reminiscently, but he shook his head.

"I'm sure it's puzzling, indeed."

Hamilton sat in thoughtful silence for awhile, then abruptly changed the subject.

"I think, captain, that you had better send out Lieutenant Barlow and some of the best woodsmen to kill some game. We need fresh venison, and, by George, I'm not going to depend upon these French traitors any longer. I have set my foot down. They've got to do better or take the consequences." He paused for a breath, then added: "That girl has done too much to escape severest punishment. The garrison will be demoralized if this thing goes on without an example of authority rigidly enforced. I am resolved that there shall be a startling and effective public display of my power to punish. She shot you. You seem to be glad of it, but it was a grave offense. She has stabbed Barlow. That is another serious crime; but, worst of all, she aided a spy and resisted arrest. She must be punished."

Farnsworth knew Hamilton's nature, and he now saw that Alice was in dreadful danger of death or something even worse. No sooner had he left headquarters and given Barlow his instructions touching the hunting expedition than his mind began to wander amid visions and schemes by no means consistent with his military obligations. In order to reflect undisturbed he went forth into the dreary, lane-like streets of Vincennes and walked aimlessly here and there until he met Father Beret.

Farnsworth saluted the old man and was passing him by when, seeing a sword in his hand half hidden in the folds of his worn and faded cassock, he turned and addressed him:

"Why are you armed this morning, father?" he demanded very pleasantly. "Who is to suffer now?"

"I am not on the warpath, my son," replied the priest. "It is but a rapier that I am going to clean of rust spots that are gathering on its blade."

"Is it yours, father? Let me see it."

"No; not mine."

Father Beret seemed not to notice Farnsworth's to handle the

weapon, and the young man instead of repeating his words reached farther, nearly grasping the scabbard.

"I cannot let you take it, my son," said Father Beret. "You have its mate. That should satisfy you."

"No; Colonel Hamilton took it," Farnsworth quickly replied. "If I could I would gladly return it to its owner. I am not a thief, father, and I am ashamed of—of what I did when I was drunk."

The priest looked sharply into Farnsworth's eyes and read there something that reassured him. His long experience had rendered him adept at taking a man's value at a glance. He slightly lifted his face and said:

"Ah, but the poor little girl! Why do you persecute her? She really does not deserve it. She is a noble child. Give her back to her home and her people. Do not soil and spoil her sweet life."

It was the singsong voice used by Father Beret in his sermons and prayers, but something went with it indescribably touching. Farnsworth felt a lump rise in his throat, and his eyes were ready to show tears.

"Father," he said with difficulty, making his words distinct, "I would not harm Miss Roussillon to save my own life, and I would do anything"—He paused slightly, then added with passionate force, "I would do anything, no matter what, to save her from the terrible thing that now threatens her."

Father Beret's countenance changed suddenly as he gazed at the young man and said:

"If you really mean what you say you can easily save her, my son."

"Father, by all that is holy, I mean just what I say."

"Swear not at all, my son, but give me your hand."

The two men stood with a tight grip between them and exchanged a long, steady, searching gaze.

A drizzling rain had begun to fall again, with a raw wind creeping from the west.

"Come with me to my house, my son," Father Beret presently added, and together they went, the priest covering Alice's sword from the rain with the folds of his cassock.

CHAPTER XV. VIRTUE IN A LOCKET.

LONG HAIR stood not upon ceremony in conveying to Beverley the information that he was to run the gantlet. The preparations were simple and quickly made. Each man armed himself with a stick three feet long and about three-quarters of an inch in diameter. Rough weapons they were, cut from boughs of scrub oak, knotty and tough as horn. Long Hair unbound his body down to the waist. Then the lines formed, the Indians in each row standing about as far apart as the width of the space in which the prisoner was to run. This arrangement gave them free use of their sticks and plenty of room for full swing of their lithe bodies.

In removing Beverley's clothes Long Hair found Alice's locket hanging over the young man's heart. He tore it rudely off and grunted, glaring viciously first at it, then at Beverley. He seemed to be mightily wrought upon.

"White man thief!" he growled deep in his throat. "Stole from little girl!"

He put the locket in his pouch and resumed his stupidly indifferent expression.

When everything was ready for the delightful entertainment to begin Long Hair waved his tomahawk three times over Beverley's head and, pointing down between the waiting lines, said:

"Ugh, run!"

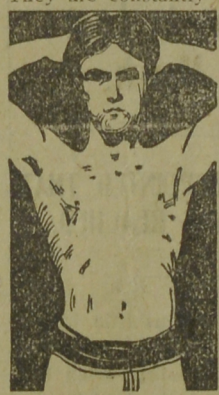
But Beverley did not budge. He was standing erect, with his arms, deeply creased where the thongs had sunk, folded across his breast. A rush of thoughts and feelings had taken tumultuous possession of him, and he could not move or decide what to do. A mad desire to escape arose in his heart the moment that he saw Long Hair take the locket. It was as if Alice had cried to him and bidden him make a dash for liberty.

"Ugh, run!"

The order was accompanied with a push of such violence from Long Hair's left elbow that Beverley plunged and fell, for his limbs, after their long and painful confinement in the rawhide bonds, were stiff and almost useless. Long Hair in no gentle voice bade him get up. The shock of falling seemed to awaken his dormant forces; a sudden resolve leaped into his brain. He saw that the Indians had put aside their bows and guns, most of which were leaning against the poles of trees here and yonder. What if he could knock Long Hair down and run away? This might possibly be easy, considering the

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Indian's broken arm. His heart jumped at the possibility. But the shrewd savage was alert and saw the thought come into his face.

"You try git 'way, kill dead!" he snarled, lifting his tomahawk ready for a stroke. "Brains out!"

Beverley glanced down the waiting and eager lines. Swiftly he speculated, wondering what would be his chance for escape were he to break through. But he did not take his own condition into account.

"Ugh, run!"

Again the elbow of Long Hair's hurt arm pushed him toward the expectant rows of Indians, who flourished their clubs and uttered impatient grunts.

Beverley made a direct dash for the narrow lane between the braced and watchful lines. Every warrior lifted his club. Every copper face gleamed steadily, a mask behind which burned a strangely atrocious spirit. The two savages standing at the end nearest Beverley struck at him the instant he reached them, but they were taken quite by surprise when he checked himself between them and, leaping this way and that, swung out two powerful blows, left and right, stretching one of them flat and sending the other reeling and staggering half a dozen paces backward with the blood streaming from his nose.

This done, Beverley turned to run away, but his breath was already short and his strength rapidly going.

[TO BE CONTINUED.]

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