

ALICE of OLD VINCENTS

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(Continued.)

CHAPTER III.

THE RAY 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 carnival. He must have been soberer than his pursuers or naturally faster, 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 aside 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.

It was not an uncommon thing for an Indian to steal what he wanted, and in most cases light punishment followed conviction, but it was felt to be a capital offense for an Indian or anybody else to rape a demijohn of fine brandy, especially one sent as a present by a friend in New Orleans to Lieutenant Governor Abbott, who had until recently been the commandant of the post. Every man at the river house recognized and resented the enormity of Long Hair's crime, and each was for the moment ready to be his judge and his executioner. He had broken at once every rule of frontier etiquette and every bond of sympathy. Nor was Long Hair ignorant of the danger involved in his daring enterprise. He had beforehand carefully and stolidly weighed the conditions, and true to his Indian nature had concluded that a little wicker covered bottle of brandy was well worth the risk of his life. So he had put himself in condition for a great race by slipping out and getting rid of his weapons and all surplus weight of clothes.

This incident brought the drinking bout at the river house to a sudden end, but nothing further came of it that night and no record of it would be found in these pages but for the fact that Long Hair afterward became an important character in the stirring historical drama which had old Vincennes for its center of energy.

Rene de Ronville probably felt himself in bad luck when he arrived at the river house just too late to share in the liquor or to join in chasing the bold thief. He listened with interest, however, to the story of Long Hair's capture of the commandant's demijohn and could not refrain from saying that if he had been present there would have been a quite different result.

"I would have shot him before he got to that door," he said, drawing his heavy flintlock pistol and going through the motions of one aiming quickly and firing. Indeed, so vigorously in earnest was he with the pan tomime that he actually did fire, unintentionally, of course, the ball burying itself in the doorjamb.

He was laughed at by those present for being more excited than they who witnessed the whole thing. One of them, a leathery faced and grizzled old man, leered at him contemptuously and said in queer French, with a curious accent caught from long use of backwoods English:

"Listen how the boy brags! Ye might think to hear Rene talk that he actually amounted to a big pile."

This personage was known to everybody in Vincennes as Uncle Jaxon, and when Uncle Jaxon spoke the whole town felt bound to listen.

"An' how well he shoots, too," he added, with an intolerable wink. "Aimed at the door and hit the post. Certainly Long Hair would have been in great danger! Oh, yes, he'd have killed Long Hair at the first shot, wouldn't he though?"

"All right, Uncle Jaxon," said Rene, laughing and blowing the smoke out of his pistol. "Twas you, all the same, who let Long Hair trot off with the governor's brandy; not I. If you could have hit even a doorpost it might have been better."

Uncle Jaxon took off his cap and looked down into it in a way he had when about to say something final.

"Ventrebien! I did not shoot at Long Hair at all," he said, speaking slowly. "Because the scoundrel was unarmed. He didn't have on even a knife, and he

was havin' enough to do dodgin' the bullets that the rest of 'em were plumpin' at 'im without any compliments from me to bother 'im more."

"Well," Rene replied, turning away with a laugh, "if I'd been scalped by the Indians as you have I don't think there would be any particular reason why I should wait for an Indian thief to go and arm himself before I accepted him as a target."

Uncle Jaxon lifted a hand involuntarily and rubbed his scapular crows; then he chuckled with a grotesque grimace as if the recollection of having his head skinned were the funniest thing imaginable.

"When you're killed as many of 'em as Uncle Jaxon has," remarked a bystander to Rene, "you'll not be so hungry for blood, maybe."

"Especially after you've took fifty-nine scalp to pay for yer one," added Uncle Jaxon, replacing his cap over the hairless area of his crown.

The men who had been chasing Long Hair presently came straggling back with their stories—each had a distinct one of how the fugitive escaped. They were wild looking fellows, most of them somewhat intoxicated, all profusely liberal with their stock of picturesque profanity. They represented the roughest element of the well nigh lawless post.

"I'm positive that he's wounded," said one. "Jacques and I shot at him together, so that our pistols sounded just as if only one had been fired—bang! that way—and he leaped sideways for all the world like a bird with a broken leg. I thought he'd fall; but he ran faster'n ever, and all at once he was gone—just disappeared."

"Well, tomorrow we'll get him," said another. "You and I and Jacques, we'll take up his trail, the thief, and follow him till we find him. He can't get off so easy."

"I don't know so well about that," said another. "It's Long Hair, you must remember, and Long Hair is no common buck that just anybody can find asleep. You know what Long Hair is. Nobody's ever got even with 'im yet. That's so, ain't it? Just ask Uncle Jaxon, if you don't believe it."

The next morning Long Hair was tracked to the river's edge. He had been wounded, but whether seriously or not could only be conjectured. A sprinkle of blood, here and there quite a dash of it, reddened the grass and clumps of weeds he had run through, and ended close to the water, into which it looked as if he had plunged with a view to bailing pursuit. Indeed pursuit was baffled. No further trace could be found by which to follow the cunning fugitive. Some of the men consoled themselves by saying, without believing, that Long Hair was probably lying drowned at the bottom of the river.

"Pas du tout," observed Uncle Jaxon, his short pipe askew far over in the corner of his mouth; "not a bit of it is that Indian drowned. He's jes' as live as a fat cat this minute, and as drunk as the devil. He'll get some of yer scalp yet after he's gazed all that brandy and sleep a week."

It finally transpired that Uncle Jaxon was partly right and partly wrong. Long Hair was alive, even as a fat cat perhaps, but not drunk, for in trying to swim with the rotund little dame Jeanne under his arm he lost hold of it and it went to the bottom of the Wabash, where it may be lying at this moment patiently waiting for some one to fish it out of its bed deep in the sand and mud and break the ancient wax from its neck!

Rene de Ronville, after the chase of Long Hair had been given over, went to tell Father Beret what had happened, and, finding the priest's hut empty, turned into the path leading to the Roussillon place, which was at the head of a narrow street laid out in a direction at right angles to the river's course. He passed two or three diminutive cabins, all as much alike as bees-hives.

As Rene passed along he spoke with a gay French freedom to the dames and lasses who chanced to be visible. His air would be regarded as violently brigandish in our day. We might even go so far as to think his whole appearance comical. His jaunty cap, with a tail that wagged as he walked; his short trousers and leggings of buckskin and his loose shirtlike tunic, drawn in at the waist with a broad belt, gave him a strong figure just the dash of wildness suited to the armament with which it was weighted. A heavy gun lay in the hollow of his shoulder, under which hung an other skin bullet pouch with its clear powder horn and white bone charger. In his belt were two huge flintlock pistols and a long case knife.

"Bonjour, mile Adrienne," he cheerily called, waving his free hand in greeting to a small, dark lass standing on the step of a veranda and idly swinging a broom. "Comment allez-vous un jour'hui?"

"J'importe tres bien, merci," M'sieu Rene, was the quick response. "Et vous?"

"Oh, I'm as lively as a cricket."

"Going a-hunting?"

"No, just up here a little way—just on business—up to M'sieu Roussillon's for a moment."

"Yes," the girl responded in a tone indicative of something very like spleen. "Yes, undoubtedly, M'sieu de Ronville. Your business there seems quite pressing of late. I have noticed your industrious application to that business."

"Ta-ta, little one," he wheedled, lowering his voice. "You mustn't go to making bugbears out of nothing."

"Bugbears?" she retorted. "You go on about your business, and I'll attend to mine," and she flitted into the house.

Rene laughed under his breath, standing a moment as if expecting her to come out again, but she did not, and he resumed his walk singing softly:

"Elle a les joues vermeilles, vermeilles.
Ma belle, ma belle petite."

But ten to one he was not thinking of Mile Adrienne Boucher. His mind, however, must have been absorbingly occupied, for in the straight, open way he met Father Beret and did not see him until he came near bumping against the old man, who stepped aside with astonishing agility and said:

"Dien vous benisse, mon fils, but what is your great hurry? Where can you be going in such happy haste?"

Rene did not stop to parley with the priest. He had in his mind what he was going to say when Alice and he should be alone together. It was a pretty speech, he thought—indeed a very thrilling little speech by the way. It stirred his own nerve centers as it coned it over.

Mme. Roussillon met him at the door in not a very good humor.

"Is Mile Alice here?" he ventured to demand.

"Alice? No, she's not here; she's never here just when I want her most. Vite le piebleu et la grive (see the woodpecker and the robin) eating the



He lifted his head and glared.

cherries, eating every one of them, and that girl running off somewhere instead of staying here and picking them," she railed in answer to the young man's polite inquiry. "I haven't seen her these four hours, neither her nor that rascally hunchback, Jean. They're up to some mischief, I'll be bound!"

Mme. Roussillon puffed audibly between phrases, but she suddenly became very mild when relieved of her tirade.

"Mais entrez," she added in a pleasant tone. "Come in and tell me the news."

Rene's disappointment rushed into his face, but he managed to laugh it aside.

"Father Beret has just been telling me," said Mme. Roussillon, "that our friend Long Hair made some trouble last night. How about it?"

Rene told her what he knew and added that Long Hair would probably never be seen again.

"He was shot, no doubt of it," he went on, "and is now being nibbled by fish and turtles. We tracked him by his blood to where he jumped into the Wabash. He never came out."

Strangely enough, it happened that at the very time of this chat between Mme. Roussillon and Rene, Alice was bandaging Long Hair's wounded leg with strips of her apron. It was under some willows which overhung the bank of a narrow and shallow lagoon or slough, which in those days extended a mile or two back into the country on the farther side of the river. Alice and Jean went over in a pirogue to see if the water lilies, haunting a pond there, were yet beginning to bloom.

They landed at a convenient spot some distance up the little lagoon, made the boat fast by dragging its prow high ashore, and were on the point of setting out across a neck of wet, grassy land to the pond, when a deep grunt, not unlike that of a self-satisfied pig, attracted them to the willows, where they discovered Long Hair, badly wounded, weltering in some black mud.

His hiding place was cunningly chosen, save that the mire troubled him, letting him down by slow degrees, and threatening to engulf him bodily; and he was now too weak to extricate himself. He lifted his head and glared. His face was grimy, his hair matted with mud. Alice, although brave enough and quite accustomed to startling experiences, uttered a cry when she saw those snaky eyes glistening so savagely amid the shadows. But Jean was quick to recognize Long Hair. He had often seen him about town, a figure not to be forgotten.

"They've been hunting him everywhere," he said in a half whisper to Alice, clutching the skirt of her dress. "It's Long Hair, the Indian who stole the brandy. I know him."

Alice recoiled a pace or two.

"Let's go back and tell 'em," Jean added, still whispering. "They want to kill him; Uncle Jaxon said so. Come on!"

He gave her dress a jerk, but she did not move any farther back. She was looking at the blood oozing from a wound in the Indian's leg.

"He is shot; he is hurt, Jean; we must help him," she presently said, recovering her self control, yet still pale.

"We must get him out of that bad place," Jean caught Alice's merciful spirit with sympathetic readiness and showed immediate willingness to aid her.

Long Hair, who understood French a little, and at last they got hold of his arms, tagged, rested, tagged again and finally managed to help him to a dry place.

Still under the willows, where he could lie more at ease, Jean carried water in his cap with which they washed the wound and the stolid savage face. Then Alice hopped up her cotton apron, in which she had hoped to bear home a load of lilies, and with the strips bound the wound very neatly. It took a long time, during which the Indian remained silent and apparently quite indifferent.

Long Hair was a man of superior physique, tall, straight, with the muscles of a Vulcan, and while he lay stretched on the ground, half clad and motionless, he would have been a grand model for a heroic figure in bronze. Yet from every lineament there came a strange repelling influence, like that from a snake. Alice felt almost unbearable disgust while doing her merciful task, but she bravely persevered until it was finished.

It was now late in the afternoon and the sun would be setting before they could reach home.

"We must hurry back, Jean," Alice said, turning to depart. "It will be all we can do to reach the other side in daylight. I'm thinking that they'll be out hunting for us, too, if we don't move right lively. Come."

She gave the Indian another glance when she had taken but a step. He grunted and held up something in his hand—something that shone with a dull yellow light. It was a small, oval, gold locket which she had always worn in her bosom. She sprang and snatched it from his palm.

"Thank you," she exclaimed, smiling gratefully. "I am so glad you found it."

The chain by which the locket had hung was broken, doubtless by some movement while dragging Long Hair out of the mud, and the lid had sprung open, exposing a miniature portrait of Alice painted when she was a little child, probably not two years old. It was a sweet baby face, archly bright, almost surrounded with a fluff of golden hair. The neck and upper line of the plump shoulders, with a trace of richly delicate lace and a string of pearls, gave somehow a suggestion of petrician daintiness.

Long Hair looked keenly into Alice's eyes when she stooped to take the locket from his hand, but said nothing.

She and Jean now hurried away, and so vigorously did they paddle their pirogue, that the sky was yet red in the west when they reached home and duly received their expected scolding from Mme. Roussillon.

Alice sealed Jean's lips as to their adventure, for she had made up her mind to save Long Hair if possible, and she felt sure that the only way to do it would be to trust no one but Father Beret.

It turned out that Long Hair's wound was neither a broken bone nor a cut artery. The flesh of his leg, midway between the hip and the knee, was pierced. The bullet had bored a neat hole clean through. Father Beret took the case in hand and with no little surgical skill proceeded to set the big Indian upon his feet again. The affair had to be cleverly managed. Food, medicines and clothing were surreptitiously borne across the river, a bed of grass was kept fresh under Long Hair's back, his wound was regularly dressed and finally his weapons—a tomahawk, a knife, a strong bow and a quiver of arrows—which he had hidden on the night of his bold theft, were brought to him.

"Now go and sin no more," said good Father Beret, but he well knew that his words were mere puffs of articulate wind in the ear of the grim and silent savage, who slipped away with an air of stately dignity into the wilderness.

A loud yell from Alice's maid when Father Beret informed her of Long Hair's recovery and departure. Day and night the dread lest some of the men should find out his hiding place and kill him had depressed and worried her. Long Hair's imperturbable calmness, his stolid, immobile countenance, the mysterious reptilian gleam of his shifty black eyes and the soulless expression always lurking in them kept a fascinating hold on the girl's memory. They blended curiously with the impressions left by the romances she had read in M. Roussillon's mildewed books.

Long Hair was not a young man, but it would have been impossible to guess near his age. His form and face simply showed long experience and immeasurable vigor. Alice remembered with a shuddering sensation the look he gave her when she took the locket from his hand. It was of but a second's duration, yet it seemed to search every nook of her being with its subtle power.

CHAPTER IV.

THE FIRST MAYOR OF VINCENTS.

GOVERNOR ABBOTT probably never so much as heard of the dame Jeanne of French brandy sent to him by his crole friend in New Orleans. He had been gone from Vincennes several months when the battison arrived, having been recalled to Detroit by the British authorities, and he never returned. Meanwhile the little post with its quaint cabins and its dilapidated blockhouse, called Fort Sackville, lay sunning drowsily by the river in a blissful state of helplessness from the military point of view. There was no garrison, the two or three pieces of artillery abandoned and exposed, gathered rust and cobwebs, while the pickets of the stockade, decaying and loomed in the ground by winter frosts and summer rains, leaned in all directions, a picture of decay and inefficiency.

M. Gaspard Roussillon was looked upon as the aristocrat par excellence of Vincennes, notwithstanding the fact that his name bore no suggestion of

one and titled ancestry. He was rich and in a measure educated; moreover, the successful man's patent of leadership, a commanding figure and a suave manner, came always to his assistance when a crisis presented itself. He traded shrewdly, much to his own profit, but invariably with the excellent result that the man, white or Indian, with whom he did business felt himself especially favored in the transaction. By the exercise of firmness, prudence, vast assumption, florid eloquence and a kindly liberality he had greatly endeared himself to the people, so that in the absence of a military commander he came naturally to be regarded as the chief of the town, m'sieu le maire.

He returned from his extended trading expedition about the middle of July, bringing, as was his invariable rule, a gift for Alice. This time it was a small, thin disk of white flint, with a hole in the center through which a beaded cord of sinew was looped. The edge of the disk was beautifully notched and the whole surface polished so that it shone like glass, while the beads, made of very small segments of porcupine quills, were variously dyed, making a curiously gaudy show of colors.

"There now, ma chérie, is something worth fifty times its weight in gold," said M. Roussillon when he presented the necklace to his foster daughter with pardonable self-satisfaction. "It is a sacred charm string given me by an old heathen who would sell his soul for a pint of cheap rum. He solemnly informed me that whoever wore it could not be by any possibility be killed by an enemy."

Alice kissed M. Roussillon. "It's so curious and beautiful," she said, holding it up and drawing the variegated string through her fingers. Then with her mischievous laugh she added: "And I'm glad it is so powerful against one's enemy. I'll wear it whenever I go where Adrienne Boucher is. See if I don't!"

"Is she your enemy? What's up between you and la petite Adrienne, eh?" M. Roussillon lightly demanded. "You were always the best of good friends, I thought. What's happened?"

"Oh, we are good friends," said Alice quickly, "very good friends, in deed; I was but chaffing."

"Good friends, but enemies; that's how it is with women. Who's the young man that's caused the coolness? I could guess, maybe!" He laughed and winked knowingly. "May I be so bold as to name him at a venture?"

"Yes, if you'll be sure to mention M. Rene de Ronville," she gayly answered. "Who but he could work Adrienne up into a perfect green mist of jealousy?"

"He would need an accomplice, I should imagine; a young lady of some beauty and a good deal of heartlessness."

"Like whom, for example?" And she tossed her bright head. "Not me, I am sure."

"Toh! Like every pretty maiden in the whole world, ma petite coquette. They're all alike as peas, cruel as blue jays and as sweet as apple blossoms." He stroked her hair caressingly with his large hand, as a heavy and roughly fond man is apt to do, adding in an almost serious tone:

"But my little girl is better than most of them—not a foolish mischief maker, I hope."

Alice was putting her head through the string of beads and letting the translucent white disk fall into her bosom.

"It's time to change the subject," said she. "Tell me what you have seen while away. I wish I could go far off and see things. Have you been to Detroit, Quebec, Montreal?"

"Yes, I've been to a long, hard journey, but reasonably profitable. You shall have a goodly lot when you get married, my child."

"And did you attend any parties or balls?" she inquired quickly, ignoring his concluding remark. "Tell me about them. I want to know what you saw in the great towns—in the fine houses—how the ladies looked, how they acted—what they said—the dresses they wore—how?"

"Ciel! You will split my ears, child. Can't you fill my pipe and bring it to me with a coal on? Then I'll try to tell you what I can," he cried, assuming a humorously resigned air. "Perhaps if I smoke I can remember everything."

Alice gladly ran to do what was asked. Meantime Jean was out on the gallery blowing a flute that M. Roussillon had brought him from Quebec.

The pipe well filled and lighted apparently did have the effect to steady and encourage M. Roussillon's memory, or, if not his memory, then his imagination, which was of that fervid and liberal sort common to natives of the Midi and which has been exquisitely depleted by the late Alphonse Daudet in Tartarin and Hognard.

He leaned far back in a strong chair, with his massive legs stretched at full length, and gazed at the roof poles while he talked.

In the first place, he had not been in Quebec or Montreal during his absence from home. Most of the time he had spent disposing of pelts and furs at Detroit and in extending his trading relations with other posts, but what mattered a trifling want of facts when his mercurial fancy once began to warm up? A smattering of social knowledge, gained at first hand in his youthful days in France while he was a student whose parents fondly expected him to conquer the world, came to his aid, and, besides, he had saturated himself all his life with poetry and romance. Scudery, Scarron, Prevost, M. La Fayette and Calprenede were the chief sources of his information touching the life and manners, morals and gayeties of people who, as he supposed, stirred the surface of that resplendent and far

off ocean called society.

Alice was absolutely charmed. She sat on a low wooden stool and gazed into Gaspard Roussillon's face with glittering eyes in which burned that rich and radiant something we call a passionate soul. She drank in his flamboyant stream of words with a thirst which nothing but experience could ever

quench. He felt her silent applause and the admiring involuntary absorption that possessed his wife. The consciousness of his elementary magnetism augmented the flow of his fine descriptions, and he went on and on until the arrival of Father Beret put an end to it all.

The priest, hearing of M. Roussillon's return, had come to inquire about some friends living at Detroit. He took luncheon with the family, enjoying the downright refreshing collation of broiled birds, onions, meat cakes and claret, ending with a dish of blackberries and cream.

M. Roussillon seized the first opportunity to resume his successful romance and presently in the midst of the meal began to tell Father Beret about what he had seen in Quebec.

"By the way," he said, with expansive casualness in his voice, "I called upon your old time friend and coadjutor, Father Sebastian, while up there. A noble old man. He sent you a thousand good messages. Was mightily delighted when I told him how happy and hale you have always



Alice was absolutely charmed.

been here. Ah, you should have seen his dear old eyes full of loving tears. He would walk a hundred miles to see you, he said, but never expected to in this world. Blessings, blessings upon dear Father Beret, was what he murmured in my ear when we were parting. He says that he will never leave Quebec until he goes to his home above—ah!"

The way in which M. Roussillon closed his little speech, his large eyes upturned, his huge hands clasped in front of him, was very effective.

"I am under many obligations, my son," said Father Beret, "for what you tell me. It was good of you to remember my dear old friend and go to him for his loving messages to me. I am very, very thankful. Help me to another drop of wine, please."

Now the extraordinary feature of the situation was that Father Beret had known positively for nearly five years that Father Sebastian was dead and buried.

"Ah, yes," M. Roussillon continued, pouring the claret with one hand and making a pious gesture with the other. "The dear old man loves you and prays for you. His voice quavers whenever he speaks of you."

"Doubtless he made his old joke to you about the birthmark on my shoulder," said Father Beret after a moment of apparently thoughtful silence. "He may have said something about it in a playful way, eh?"

"True, true; why, yes, he surely mentioned the same," assented M. Roussillon, his face assuming an expression of confused memory. "It was something sly and humorous, I mind, but it just escapes my recollection. A right jolly old boy is Father Sebastian. Indeed very amusing at times."

"At times, yes," said Father Beret, who had no birthmark on his shoulder and had never had one there or on any other part of his person.

"How strange!" Alice remarked. "I, too, have a mark on my shoulder—a pink spot, just like a small, five petaled flower. We must be of kin to each other, Father Beret."

The priest laughed.

"If our marks are alike, that would be some evidence of kinship," he said. "But what shape is yours, father?"

"I've never seen it," he responded. "Never seen it. Why?"

"Well, it's absolutely invisible," and he chuckled heartily, meantime glancing shrewdly at M. Roussillon out of the tail of his eye.

"It's on the back of his shoulder," quickly spoke up M. Roussillon, "and you know priests never use looking glasses. The mark is quite invisible therefore so far as Father Beret is concerned."

"You never told me of your birthmark before, my daughter," said Father Beret, turning to Alice with sudden interest. "It may some day be good fortune to you."

"Why so, father?"

"If your family name is really Tartarin, as you suppose from the inscription on your locket, the birthmark, being of such singular shape, would probably identify you. It is said that these marks run regularly in families. With the miniature and the distinguishing birthmark you have enough to make a strong case should you once find the right Tartarin family."