

# ALICE of OLD VINCENNES

By MAURICE THOMPSON

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(Continued.)

## CHAPTER IX. THE HONORS OF WAR.

**G**ASPARD ROUSSILLON was thoroughly acquainted with savage warfare, and he knew all the pacific means so successfully and so long used by French missionaries and traders to control savage character, but the emergency now upon him was startling. It confused him. The fact that he had taken a solemn oath of allegiance to the American government could have been pushed aside lightly enough upon pressing occasion, but he knew that certain confidential agents left in Vincennes by Governor Abbott had, upon the arrival of Helm, gone to Detroit, and of course they had carried thither a full report of all that happened in the Church of St. Xavier when Father Gbant called the people together, and at the fort when the British flag was hoisted down and the banniere d'Alice Roussillon run up in its place. His expansive imagination did full credit to itself in exaggerating the importance of his part in handing the post over to the rebels. And what would Hamilton think of this? Would he consider it treason? The question certainly bore a tragic suggestion.

M. Roussillon lacked everything of being a coward, and treachery had no rightful place in his nature. He was, however, so in the habit of fighting windmills and making mountains of molehills that he could not at first glance see any sudden presentment with a normal vision. He had no love for Englishmen, and he did like Americans, but he naturally thought that Helm's talk of fighting Hamilton was, as his own would have been in a like case, talk and nothing more. The fort could not hold out an hour, he well knew. Then what? Ah, he but too well realized the result.

Resistance would inflame the English soldiers and madden the Indians. There would be a massacre, and the belts of savages would sag with bloody scalps. He shrugged his shoulders and felt a chill creep up his back.

The first thing M. Roussillon did was to see Father Beret and take counsel of him; then he hurried home to dig a great pit under his kitchen floor in which he buried many bales of fur, and all his most valuable things. He worked like a giant beaver all night long. Meantime Father Beret went about over the town quietly modifying the inhabitants to remain in their homes until after the fort should surrender, which, he was sure, would happen the next day.

"You will be perfectly safe, my children," he said to them. "No harm can come to you if you follow my directions." Relying implicitly upon him, they scrupulously obeyed in every particular.

He did not think it necessary to call at Roussillon place, having already given M. Roussillon the best advice he could command.

Just at the earliest break of day, while yet the gloom of night scarcely felt the sun's approach, a huge figure made haste along the narrow streets in the northern part of the town. If any person had been looking out through the little holes called windows in those silent and rayless huts it would have been easy to recognize M. Roussillon by his stature and his gait, dimly outlined as he was. A thought which seemed to him an inspiration of genius had taken possession of him and was leading him as if by the nose straight away to Hamilton's lines. He was freighted with eloquence for the ear of that commander, and as he strode along facing the crisp morning air he was rehearsing under his breath, emphasizing his periods in tragic whispers with sweeping gestures and liberal facial contortions. So absorbed was he in his oratorical soliloquy that he forgot the military precaution and ran-plunged into the face of a savage picket guard, who, without respect for the great M. Roussillon's dignity, sprang up before him, granted cavernously, flourished a tomahawk and spoke in excellent and exceedingly guttural Indian:

"Wah, surrender!"

It is probable that no man ever complied with a modest request in a more docile spirit than did M. Roussillon upon that occasion. In fact, his promptness must have been admirable, for the savage granted approval and straightway conducted him to Hamilton's headquarters on a banniere in the river.

The British commander, a hale man of sandy complexion and probably under middle age, was in no very pleasant humor. Some of his orders had been misunderstood by the chief of his Indian allies, so that a premature exposure of his approach had been made to the enemy.

"Well, sir, who are you?" he gruffly demanded when M. Roussillon loomed before him.

"I am, Gaspard Roussillon, the mayor of Vincennes," was the lofty reply. "I have come to announce to you officially that my people greet you loyally and that my town is freely at your command." He felt as important as if his statements had been true.

"Where did Papa Roussillon go to?" he next inquired. "Is he going to fight?"

She shook her head.

"They'll tear down the fort, won't they?"

If she heard him she did not make any sign.

"They'll kill the captain and lieutenant and get the fine flag that you set so high on the fort, won't they, Alice?"

She lifted her head and gave the covering hunchback such a stare that he shut his eyes and put up a hand as if afraid of her. Then she impulsively took his little mishapen form in her arms and hugged it passionately. Her bright hair fell all over him, almost hiding him. Mme. Roussillon was lying on a bed in an adjoining room moaning dillently, at intervals handling her rosary and repeating a prayer. The whole town was silent outside.

"Why don't you go get the pretty flag down and hide it before they come?" Jean murmured from within the silken meshes of Alice's hair.

In his small mind the gaudy banner was the most beautiful of all things. Every day since it was set up he had gone to gaze at it as it fluttered against the sky. The men had frequently said in his presence that the enemy would take it down if they captured the fort.

Alice heard his inquisitive voice, but it seemed to come from far off. His words were a part of the strange, wild swirl in her bosom. Beverley's look as he turned and left her now shook every chord of her being. He had gone to his death at her command. How

"I don't know exactly. I have not had admittance to the fort. I might be deceived as to numbers. But they're strong, I believe, M. le Gouverneur; at least they make a great show and much noise."

Hamilton eyed the huge bulk before him for a moment, then, turning to a subaltern, said:

"Place this fellow under guard and see that he doesn't get away. Send word immediately to Captain Farnsworth that I wish to see him at once."

The interview thereupon closed abruptly. Hamilton's emissaries had given him a detailed account of M. Roussillon's share in submitting Vincennes to rebel dominion, and he was not in the least inclined toward treating him graciously.

"I would suggest to you, M. le Gouverneur, that my official position demands"—M. Roussillon began. But he was fastened upon by two guards, who roughly hustled him aft and bound him so rigidly that he could scarcely move finger or toe.

Hamilton smiled coldly and turned to give some orders to a stalwart, ruddy young officer who in a canoe had just rowed alongside the bateau.

"Captain Farnsworth," he said, acknowledging the military salute, "you will take fifty men and make every thing ready for a reconnaissance in the direction of the fort. We will move down the river immediately and choose a place to land. Move lively! We have no time to lose."

In the meantime Beverley slipped away from the fort and made a hurried call upon Alice at Roussillon place. There was not much they could say to each other during the few moments at command. Alice showed very little excitement. Her past experience had fortified her against the alarms of frontier life. But she understood and perfectly appreciated the situation.

"What are you going to do?" Beverley demanded in sheer despair. He was not able to see any gleam of hope out of the blackness which had fallen around him and into his soul.

"What shall you do?" he repeated.

"Take the chances of war," she said, smiling gravely. "It will all come out well, no doubt."

"I hope so, but—but I fear not." His face was gray with trouble.

"Helm is determined to fight, and that means—"

"Good!" she interrupted, with spirit. "I am so glad of that. I wish I could go to help him. If I were a man I'd love to fight. I think it's just delightful."

"But it is reckless bravado. It is worse than foolhardiness," said Beverley, not feeling her mood. "What can two or three men do against an army?"

"Fight and die like men," she replied, her whole countenance lighting up. "Be heroic!"

"We will do that, of course. We—I do not fear death, but you—you"—His voice choked him.

A gunshot rang out clear in the distance, and he did not finish speaking.

"That's probably the beginning," he added in a moment, extending both hands to her. "Goodby. I must hurry to the fort. Goodbye."

She drew a quick breath and turned so white that her look struck him like a sudden and hard blow. He stood for a second, his arms at full reach, then:

"My God, Alice, I cannot, cannot leave you!" he cried, his voice again breaking hoarsely.

She made a little movement as if to take hold of his hands, but in an instant she stopped back a pace and said:

"Don't fear about me. I can take care of myself. I'm all right. You'd better return to the fort as quickly as you can. It is your country, your flag, not me, that you must think of now."

She folded her arms and stood boldly erect.

Never before in all his life had he felt such a rebuke. He gave her a straight, strong look in the eyes.

"You are right, Alice," he cried, and rushed from the house to the fort.

She held her right attitude for a little while after she heard him shut the front gate of the yard so forcibly that it broke in pieces, then she flung her arms wide, as if to sleep something, and ran to the door, but Beverley was out of sight. She turned and dropped

into a chair. Jean came to her out of the next room. His queer little face was pale and pinched, but his jaw was set with the expression of one who has known danger and can meet it somehow.

"Are they going to scalp us?" he half whispered presently, with a shuddering lift of his distorted shoulders.

Her face was buried in her hands, and she did not answer. Childlike he turned from one question to another inconsequently.

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match to suit his fancy and for probably the twentieth time looked critically to the powder in the beveled touchhole of his old cannon. He and Helm were facing the enemy, with their backs to the main area of the stockade, when a well known voice attracted their attention to the rear.

"Any room for a feller o' my size in this here crowded place?" It demanded in a cracked but cheerful tenor. "I'm kind o' outen breath a-runnin' to git here."

They turned about. It was Uncle Jason, with his long rifle on his shoulder and wearing a very important air. He spoke in English, using the backwoods lingo with the ease of long practice.

"As I's a-comin' in Fom a-huntin' I tuck notice 'at somepin' was up. I see a lot o' bonta on the river an' some feller w' guns a-smotin' around, so I jes' slipped by 'em all an' come in the back way. They's plenty of 'em, I tell you what! I can't shoot much, but I tuck one chance at a buck Indian out yander an' jes' happened to hit 'im in the left eye. He was one of the gang 'at scalped me down yander in Kalatuck."

The greasy old sinner looked as if he had not been washed since he was born. He glanced about with furtive, shifty eyes and grimaced and winked after the manner of an animal just waking from a lazy nap.

"Where's the rest of the fighters?" he demanded quizzically, lolling out his tongue and peeping past Helm so as to get a glimpse of the English line.

"Where's yer garrison? Have they all gone to breakfast?"

The last question set Helm off cursing and swearing in the most melodramatic rage.

Uncle Jason turned to Beverley and said in rapid French, "Surely the man's not going to fight those fellows yonder?"

Beverley nodded rather gloomily.

"Well," added the old man, fidgeting his side's stock and taking another glance through the gate, "I can't shoot we'll a cent, bein' sort o' nervous like, but I'll stan' by ye awhile jes' for luck. I might accidentally hit one o' 'em."

When a man is truly brave himself there is nothing that touches him like an exhibition of absolutely unselfish gameness in another. A rush of admiration for Uncle Jason made Beverley feel like hugging him.

Meantime the young British officer showed a flag of truce and, with a file of men, separated himself from the line, now stationary, and approached the stockade. At a hundred yards he halted the file and came on alone, waving the white cloth. He boldly advanced to within easy speaking distance and shouted:

"I demand the surrender of this fort!"

"Well, you'll not get it, young man!" roared Helm, his peevish yell mixed in with the words. "Not while there's a man of us left!"

"Ye'd better use sof' soap on 'im, cap'n," said Uncle Jason in English. "Cussin' won't do no good." While he spoke he rubbed the doughty captain's arm and then parted it gently.

Helm, who was not half as excited as he pretended to be, knew that Uncle Jason's remark was the very essence of wisdom, but he was not yet ready for the diplomatic language which the old trooper called "soft soap."

"Are you the British commander?" he demanded.

"No," said the officer, "but I speak for him."

"Not to me, sir. Tell your commander that I will hear what he has to say from his own mouth. No understrapper will be recognized by me."

That ended the conference. The young officer, evidently indignant, strode back to his line, and an hour later Hamilton himself demanded the unconditional surrender of the fort and garrison.

"Fight for it!" Helm stormed forth. "We are soldiers!"

Hamilton held a confab with his officers, while his forces, under cover of the town cabins, were deploying so as to form a half circle about the stockade. Some artillery appeared and was planted directly opposite the gate, not three hundred yards distant. One blast of that battery would, as Helm well knew, level a large part of the stockade.

"S'posin' I hev' a cannon, too, seein' it's the fashion," said Uncle Jason. "I can't shoot much, but I might skew 'em. This little one 'll do 'em."

He set his rifle against the wall and with Beverley's help raised one of the swivels alongside the guns already in position.

In a few minutes Hamilton returned under the white flag and shouted:

"Upon what terms will you surrender?"

"All the honors of war," Helm firmly replied. "It's that or fight, and I don't see which!"

Hamilton half turned away, as if done with the parley, then facing the fort again he said:

"Very well, sir. Haul down your flag."

Helm was dumfounded at this prompt acceptance of his terms. Indeed the incident is unique in history.

As Hamilton spoke he very naturally glanced up to where the banniere d'Alice Roussillon waved brilliantly. Some one stood beside it on the dilapidated roof of the old blockhouse and was already taking it from its place. His aid, Captain Farnsworth, saw this, and the vision made his heart draw in a strong, hot flood. It was a girl in short skirts and moccasins, with a fur hood on her head, her face, thrillingly beautiful, set around with tufts of wind-blown brown gold hair. Farnsworth was too young to be critical and too old to let his eyes deceive him. Every detail of the fine sketch, with its steel blue background of sky, flashed into his mind, there cut as a coupon. Involuntarily he

ed a point opposite Father Beret's hut, to which she then ran, the flag streaming bravely behind her in the wind, her heart beating time to her steps.

It was plainly a great surprise to Father Beret, who looked up from his prayer when she rushed in, making a startling clatter, the loose pincushions slinking together under her reckless feet.

"Oh, father, here it is! Hide it, hide it, quick!"

She thrust the flag toward him.

"They shall not have it! They shall never have it!"

He opened wide his shrewd, kindly eyes, but did not fairly comprehend her meaning.

She was panting, half laughing, half crying. Her hair, wildly disheveled, hung in glorious masses over her shoulders. Her face beamed triumphantly.

"They are taking the fort," she breathlessly added, again urging the flag upon him. "They're going in, but I got this and ran away with it. Hide it, father; hide it, quick, quick, before they come!"

The daring light in her eyes, the witching play of her dimples, the madcap air intensified by her attitude and the excitement of the violent exercise just ended, something compounded of

all these and more, affected the good priest strangely. Involuntarily he crossed himself, as if against a dangerous charm.

"Mon Dieu, Father Beret!" she exclaimed, with impatience. "Haven't you a grain of sense left? Take this flag and hide it, I tell you! Don't stay there gazing and blinking. Here, quick! They saw me take it; they may be following me. Hurry, hide it somewhere!"

He comprehended now, rising from his knees with a queer smile broadening on his face. She put the banner into his hands and gave him a gentle push.

"Hide it, I tell you; hide it, you dear old goose!"

Without speaking he turned the staff over and over in his hand until the flag was closely wrapped around it; then, stooping, he lifted a pincushion and with it covered the gay roll from sight.

Alice caught him in her arms and kissed him vigorously on the cheek. Her warm lips made the spot tingle.

"Don't you dare to let any person have it! It's the flag of George Washington!"

She gave him a strong squeeze.

He pushed her from him with both hands and hastily crossed himself, but his eyes were laughing.

"You ought to have seen me, I waved the flag at them—at the English—and one young officer took off his hat to me!—Oh, Father Beret, it was like what is in a novel. They'll get the fort, but not the banner, not the banner! I've saved it, I've saved it!"

Her enthusiasm gave a splendor to her countenance, heightening its color and color and somehow adding to its natural girlish expression an awedness sweetness. The triumphant success of her undertaking lent the dignity of conscious power to her look, a dignity which always sits well upon a young and somewhat immaturely beautiful face.

Father Beret could not resist her fervid eloquence, and he could not run away from her or stop up his ears while she went on. So he had to laugh when she said:

"Oh, if you had seen it all you would have enjoyed it. There was Uncle Jason squatting behind the little swivel, and there were Captain Helm and Lieutenant Beverley holding their burning sticks over the big cannon ready to shoot, all of them so intent that they didn't see me, and yonder came the English officer and his army against the three. When they got close to the gate the officer cried out, 'Surrender!' and then Captain Helm yelled back: 'Blessed if I do! Come another step and I'll blow you all to hades in a second! I was mighty in hopes that they'd come on. I wanted to see a cannon ball hit that English commander right in the face, he looked so arrogant.'"

Father Beret shook his head and tried to look disapproving and solemn.

Meantime down at the fort Hamilton was demanding the flag. He had seen Alice take it down and supposed that it was lowered officially and would be turned over to him. Now he wanted to handle it to the best token of his bloodless but important victory.

"I didn't order the flag down, until after I had accepted your terms," said Helm, "and when my man started to obey we saw a young lady snatch it and run away with it."

"Who was the girl?"

"I do not inform on women," said Helm.

Hamilton smiled grimly, with a vexed look in his eyes, then turned to Captain Farnsworth and ordered him to bring up M. Roussillon, who when he appeared still had his hands tied together.

"Tell me the name of the young woman who carried away the flag from the fort. You saw her; you know every soul in this town. Who was it, sir?"

It was a hard question for M. Roussillon to answer. Although his humiliating captivity had somewhat cooled him, still his love for Alice made it impossible for him to give the information demanded by Hamilton. He choked and stammered, but finally managed to say:

"I assure you that I don't know—I didn't look—I didn't see—it was too far off for me to—I was somewhat excited—I—"

"Take him away. Keep him securely bound," said Hamilton. "Condemn him. We'll see how long it will take to refresh his mind. We'll puncture the big wind bag."

While this court scene was passing the flag of Great Britain rose over the fort to the lusty cheering of the victorious soldiers.

Hamilton treated Helm and Beverley with extreme courtesy. He was a soldier—gruff, unscrupulous and cruel to a degree, but he could not help admiring the daring bravice of these two officers who had wrung from him the best terms of surrender. He gave them full liberty, on parole of honor not to attempt escape or to add in any way an enemy against him while they were prisoners.

Nor was it long before Helm's genial and sociable disposition won the Englishman's respect and confidence to such an extent that the two became almost inseparable companions, playing cards, brewing toddies, telling stories and even shooting deer in the woods together, as if they had always been the best of friends.

Hamilton did not permit his savage allies to enter the town, and he immediately required the French inhabitants to swear allegiance to Great Britain, which they did with apparent heartiness, all save M. Roussillon, who was kept in close confinement and bound like a felon, chafing lugubriously and wearing the air of a martyr. His prison was a little log pen in one corner of the stockade, much open to the weather, his gaping cracks giving him a dreary view of the frozen landscape through which the Wabash flowed in a broad, steel gray current. Helm, who really liked him, tried in vain to procure his release, but Hamilton was inexorable on account of what he regarded as duplicity in M. Roussillon's conduct.

"No; I'll let him rot," he said. "There's nothing like a little tyranny to break up a bad case of self importance. He'll soon find out that he has overrated himself."

CHAPTER X.  
M. ROUSSILLON ENTERTAINS COLONEL HAMILTON.

A DAY or two after the arrival of Hamilton the absent garrison of Buffalo, Indiana straggled back to Vincennes and were daily sworn to denounce themselves as lawful subjects of Great Britain. Rose de Rouville was among the first to take the oath, and it promptly followed that Hamilton ordered him pressed into service as a woodchopper and log hauler during the erection of a new blockhouse, large barracks and the making of some extensive repairs of the stockade. Nothing could have been more humiliating to the good woman Frenchman. Every day he had



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Hamilton treated Helm and Beverley with extreme courtesy. He was a soldier—gruff, unscrupulous and cruel to a degree, but he could not help admiring the daring bravice of these two officers who had wrung from him the best terms of surrender. He gave them full liberty, on parole of honor not to attempt escape or to add in any way an enemy against him while they were prisoners.

Nor was it long before Helm's genial and sociable disposition won the Englishman's respect and confidence to such an extent that the two became almost inseparable companions, playing cards, brewing toddies, telling stories and even shooting deer in the woods together, as if they had always been the best of friends.

Hamilton did not permit his savage allies to enter the town, and he immediately required the French inhabitants to swear allegiance to Great Britain, which they did with apparent heartiness, all save M. Roussillon, who was kept in close confinement and bound like a felon, chafing lugubriously and wearing the air of a martyr. His prison was a little log pen in one corner of the stockade, much open to the weather, his gaping cracks giving him a dreary view of the frozen landscape through which the Wabash flowed in a broad, steel gray current. Helm, who really liked him, tried in vain to procure his release, but Hamilton was inexorable on account of what he regarded as duplicity in M. Roussillon's conduct.

"No; I'll let him rot," he said. "There's nothing like a little tyranny to break up a bad case of self importance. He'll soon find out that he has overrated himself."

CHAPTER X.  
M. ROUSSILLON ENTERTAINS COLONEL HAMILTON.

A DAY or two after the arrival of Hamilton the absent garrison of Buffalo, Indiana straggled back to Vincennes and were daily sworn to denounce themselves as lawful subjects of Great Britain. Rose de Rouville was among the first to take the oath, and it promptly followed that Hamilton ordered him pressed into service as a woodchopper and log hauler during the erection of a new blockhouse, large barracks and the making of some extensive repairs of the stockade. Nothing could have been more humiliating to the good woman Frenchman. Every day he had

ed a point opposite Father Beret's hut, to which she then ran, the flag streaming bravely behind her in the wind, her heart beating time to her steps.

It was plainly a great surprise to Father Beret, who looked up from his prayer when she rushed in, making a startling clatter, the loose pincushions slinking together under her reckless feet.

"Oh, father, here it is! Hide it, hide it, quick!"

She thrust the flag toward him.

"They shall not have it! They shall never have it!"

He opened wide his shrewd, kindly eyes, but did not fairly comprehend her meaning.

She was panting, half laughing, half crying. Her hair, wildly disheveled, hung in glorious masses over her shoulders. Her face beamed triumphantly.

"They are taking the fort," she breathlessly added, again urging the flag upon him. "They're going in, but I got this and ran away with it. Hide it, father; hide it, quick, quick, before they come!"