ALICE of OLD VINCENNES

By MAURICE THOMPSON

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(Continued.)

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 boles of trees here and yonder. What if he could knock Long Hair down and run away? This might possibly be easy, considering the 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.

Long Hair, who was at his heels, leaped before him when he had gone but a few steps and once more nourished the tomahawk. To struggle was useless save to insist upon being brained outright, which just then had no part in Beverley's considerations. Long Hair kicked his victim heavily, uttering laconic curses meanwhile, and led him back again to the starting point.

The young man, who had borne all he could, now turned upon him furiously and struck straight from the shoulder, setting the whole weight of his body into the blow. Long Hair stepped out of the way and quick as a flash brought the flat side of his tomahawk with great force against Beverley's head. This gave the amusement a sudden and disappointing end, for the prisoner fell limp and senseless to the ground. No more running the gantlet for him that day. Indeed it required protracted application of the best Indian skill to revive him so that he could fairly be called a living man. There had been no dangerous concussion, however, and on the following morning camp was broken.

Beverley, sore, haggard, forlornly dishevele, had his arms bound again and was made to march apace with his nimble enemies, who set out swiftly eastward, their disappointment at having their sport cut short, although bitter enough, not in the least indicated by any facial expression or spiteful act.

Was it really a strange thing, or was it not, that Beverley's mind now busied itself unceasingly with the thought that Long Hair had Alice's picture in his pouch? One might find room for discussion of a cerebral problem like this, but our history cannot be delayed with analyses and speculations. It must run its direct course unhindered to the end. Suffice it to record that while tramping at Long Hair's side and growing more and more desirous of seeing the picture again Beverley began trying to converse with his taciturn captor. He had a considerable smattering of several Indian dialects, which he turned upon Long Hair to the best of his ability, but apparently without effect. Nevertheless he babbled at intervals, always upon the same subject and always endeavoring to influence that huge, stolid, heartless savage in the direction of letting him see again the child face of the miniature.

When night came on again the band camped under some trees beside a swoll-

"Try run 'way, kill!"

en stream. There was no rain falling, but almost the entire country lay under a flood of water. Fires of logs were soon burning brightly on the comparatively dry bluff chosen by the Indians. The weather was chill, but not cold. Long Hair took great pains, however, to dry Beverley's clothes and see that he had warm wraps and plenty to eat. Hamilton's large reward would not be forthcoming should the prisoner die. Beverley was good property, well worth careful attention. To be sure, his scalp in the worst event would command a sufficient honorarium, but not the greatest. Beverley thought of all this while the big Indian was wrapping him snugly in skins and blankets for the night, and there was no comfort in it save that possibly if he were returned to Hamilton he might see Alice again before he died.

At about the midhour of the night Long Hair gently awoke his prisoner by drawing a hand across his face [illegible] whispered in his ear:

"Still!"

Beverley tried to rise, uttering a sleepy ejaculation under his breath.

"No talk!" hissed Long Hair. "Still!"

There was something in his voice that not only swept the last film of sleep out of Beverley's brain, but made it perfectly clear to him that a very important bit of craftiness was being performed. Just what its nature was, however, he could not surmise. One thing was obvious, Long Hair did not wish the other Indians to know of the move he was making. Deftly he slipped the blankets from around Beverley and cut the thongs at his ankles.

"Still!" he whispered. "Come 'long."

Under such circumstances a competent mind acts with lightning celerity. Beverley now understood that Long Hair was stealing him away from the other savages and that the big villain meant to cheat them out of their part of the reward. Along with this discovery came a fresh gleam of hope. It would be far easier to escape from one Indian than from nearly a score. Already he was planning or trying to plan some way by which he could kill Long Hair when they should reach a safe distance from the sleeping camp.

But how could the thing be done? A man with his hands tied, though they are in front of him, is in no excellent condition to cope with a free and stalwart savage armed to the teeth. Still Beverley's spirits rose with every rod of distance that was added to their slow progress.

Their course was nearly parallel with that of the stream, but slightly converging with it, and after they had gone about a furlong they reached the bank. Here Long Hair stopped and, without a word, cut the thongs from Beverley's wrists. This was astounding. The young man could scarcely realize it, nor was he ready to act.

"Swim water," Long Hair said in a guttural murmur barely audible. "Swim!"

Again it was necessary for Beverley's mind to act swiftly and with prudence. The camp was yet within hailing distance. A false move now would bring the whole pack howling to the rescue. Something told him to do as Long Hair ordered, so with scarcely a perceptible hesitation he scrambled down the bushy bank and slipped into the water, followed by Long Hair, who seized him by one arm when he began to swim and struck out with him into the boiling and tumbling current.

Beverley had always thought himself a master swimmer, but Long Hair showed him his mistake. It was a long, cold struggle, and when at last they touched the sloping, low bank on the other side Long Hair had fairly to lift his chilled and exhausted prisoner to the top.

"Ugh, cold!" he grunted, beginning to pound and rub Beverley's arms, legs and body. "Make warm heap!"

All this he did with his right hand, holding the tomahawk in his left.

It was a strange, bewildering experience out of which the young man could not see in any direction far enough to give him a hint upon which to act. In a few minutes Long Hair jerked him to his feet and said:

"Go."

It was just light enough to see that the order had a tomahawk to enforce it withal. Long Hair indicated the direction and drove Beverley onward as fast as he could.

"Try run 'way, kill!" he kept repeating, while with his left hand on the young man's shoulder he guided him from behind dexterously through the wood for some distance.

They had just emerged from a thicket into an open space where the ground was comparatively dry. Overhead the stars were shining in great clusters of silver and gold against a dark, cavernous looking sky, here and there overrun with careering black clouds. Beverley shivered, not so much with cold as on account of the stress of excitement which amounted to nervous rigor. Long Hair faced him and leaned toward him until his breathing was audible and his massive features were dimly outlined. A dragon of the darkest age could not have been more repulsive.

"Ugh, friend!"

Beverley started when these words were followed by a sentence in an Indian dialect somewhat familiar to him, a dialect in which he had tried to talk with Long Hair during the day's march. The sentence, literally translated, was:

"Long Hair is friendly now. Will white man be friendly?"

Beverley heard, but the speech seemed to come out of vastness and hollow distance. He could not realize it fairly. He felt as if in a dream, far off somewhere in loneliness, with a big, shadowy form looming before him. He heard the chill wind in the thickets roundabout, and beyond Long Hair rose a wall of giant trees.

"Ugh, not understand?" the savage presently demanded in his broken English.

"Yes, yes," said Beverley, "I understand."

"Is the white man friendly now?" Long Hair then repeated in his own tongue with a certain insistence of manner and voice.

"Yes, friendly."

Long Hair fumbled in his pouch and took out Alice's locket, which he handed to Beverley. "White man love little girl?" he inquired in a tone that bordered upon tenderness, again speaking in Indian.

Beverley clutched the disk as soon as he saw it gleam in the starlight.

"White man going to have little girl for his squaw, eh?"

"Yes, yes," cried Beverley without hearing his own voice. He was trying to open the locket, but his hands were numb and trembling. When at last he did open it he could not see the child face within, for now even the starlight was shut off by a scudding black cloud.

"Little girl saved Long Hair's life. Long Hair save white warrior for little girl."

A dignity which was almost noble accompanied these simple sentences. Long Hair stood proudly erect like a colossal statue in the dimness.

The great truth dawned upon Beverley that here was a characteristic act. He knew that an Indian rarely failed to repay a kindness or an injury, stroke for stroke, when opportunity offered.

"Wait here a little while," Long Hair said, and, without lingering for reply, turned away and disappeared in the wood. Beverley was free to run if he wished to, and the thought did surge across his mind, but a restraining something like a hand laid upon him would not let his limbs move. Down deep in his heart a calm voice seemed to be repeating Long Hair's Indian sentence, "Wait here a little while."

A few minutes later Long Hair returned bearing two guns, Beverley's and his own, the latter a superb weapon given him by Hamilton. He afterward explained that he had brought these, with their bullet pouches and powder horns, to a place of concealment near by before he awoke Beverley.

Delay could not be thought of. Long Hair explained briefly that he thought Beverley must go to Kaskaskia. He had come across the stream in the direction of Vincennes in order to set his warriors at fault. The stream must be recrossed, he said, farther down, and he would help Beverley a certain distance on his way, then leave him to shift for himself. He had a meager amount of parched corn and buffalo meat in his pouch which would stay hunger until they could kill some game. Now they must go.

They flung miles behind them before day dawn. Long Hair leading, Beverley pressing close at his heels. Most of the way led over flat prairies covered with water, and they therefore left no track by which they could be followed.

Late in the forenoon Long Hair killed a deer at the edge of a wood. Here they made a fire and cooked a supply which would last them for a day or two, and then on they went again. But we cannot follow them step by step. When Long Hair at last took leave of Beverley the occasion had no ceremony. It was an abrupt, unemotional parting. The stalwart Indian simply said in his own dialect, pointing westward:

"Go that way two days. You will find your friends."

Then without another look or word he turned about and stalked eastward at a marvelously rapid gait. In his mind he had a good tale to tell his warrior companions when he should find them again—how Beverley escaped that night and how he followed him a long, long chase only to lose him at last under the very guns of the fort at Kaskaskia. But before he reached his band an incident of some importance changed his story to a considerable degree. It chanced that he came upon Lieutenant Barlow, who in pursuit of game had lost his bearings and, far from his companions, was beating around quite bewildered in a watery solitude. Long Hair promptly murdered the poor fellow and scalped him with as little compunction as he would have skinned a rabbit, for he had a clever scheme in his head, a very audacious and outrageous scheme, by which he purposed to recoup to some extent the damages sustained by letting Beverley go.

Therefore when he rejoined his somewhat disheartened and demoralized band he showed them the scalp and gave them an eloquent account of how he tore it from Beverley's head after a long chase and a bloody hand to hand fight. They listened, believed and were satisfied.

CHAPTER XVI.

FATHER BERET'S OLD BATTLE.

THE room in which Alice was now imprisoned formed part of the upper story of a building erected by Hamilton in one of the four angles of the stockade. It had no windows and but two oblong portholes made to accommodate a small swivel which stood darkly scowling near the middle of the floor. Day after day her loneliness and helplessness became more agonizing. Farnsworth, it is true, did all he could to relieve the strain of her situation, but Hamilton had an eye upon what passed and soon interfered. He administered a bitter reprimand, under which his subordinate writhed in speechless anger and resentment.

"Finally, Captain Farnsworth," he said in conclusion, "you will distinctly understand that this girl is my prisoner, not yours; that I, not you, will direct how she is to be held and treated, and that hereafter I will suffer no interference on your part. I hope you fully understand me, sir, and will govern yourself accordingly."

Smarting, or, rather, smothering, under the outrageous insult of these remarks, Farnsworth at first determined to fling his resignation at the governor's feet and then do whatever desperate thing seemed most to his mood. But a soldier's training is apt to call a halt before the worst befalls in such a case. Moreover, in the present temptation Farnsworth had a special check and hindrance. He had had a conference with Father Beret, in which the good priest had played the part of wisdom in suppers and of gentleness more dovelike than the dove's. A very subtle impression, illuminated with the "hope that withers hope," had come of that interview, and now Farnsworth felt its restraint. He therefore saluted Hamilton formally and walked away.

Father Beret's paternal love for Alice—we cannot characterize it more nicely than to call it paternal—was his justification for a certain mild sort of corruption insinuated by him into the heart of Farnsworth. He was a crafty priest, but his craft was always used for a good end. Unquestionably Jesuitic was his mode of circumventing the young man's military scruples by offering him a puff of fair weather with which to sail toward what appeared to be the shore of delight. He saw at a glance that Farnsworth's love for Alice was a consuming passion in a very ardent yet decidedly weak heart. Here was the worldly lever with which Father Beret hoped to raze Alice's prison and free her from the terrible doom with which she was threatened.

The first interview was at Father Beret's cabin, to which, as will be remembered, the priest and Farnsworth went after their meeting in the street. It actually came to nothing, save an indirect understanding but half suggested by Father Beret and never openly sanctioned by Captain Farnsworth. The talk was insinuating on the part of the former, while the latter slipped evasively from every proposition, as if not able to consider it on account of a curious obtuseness of perception. Still, when they separated they shook hands and exchanged a searching look perfectly satisfactory to both.

The memory of that interview with the priest was in Farnsworth's mind when, boiling with rage, he left Ham-

"It's an outrage!" he broke forth.

ilton's presence and went forth into the chill February air. He passed out through the postern and along the sodden and queachy edge of the prairie, involuntarily making his way to Father Beret's cabin. His indignation was so great that he trembled from head to foot at every step. The door of the place was open and Father Beret was eating a frugal meal of scones and sour wine (of his own make, he said), which he hospitably begged to share with his visitor. A fire smoldered on the hearth, and a flat stone showed, by the grease smoking over its hot surface, where the cakes had been baked.

"Come in, my son," said the priest, "and try the fare of a poor old man. It is plain, very plain, but good." He smacked his lips sincerely and fingered another scone. "Take some, take some."

Farnsworth was not tempted. The acid bouquet of the wine filled the room with a smack of vinegar, and the smoke from rank scorching fat and wheat meal did not suggest an agreeable feast.

"Well, well, if you are not hungry, my son, sit down on the stool there and tell me the news."

Farnsworth took the low seat without a word, letting his eyes wander over the walls. Alice's rapier, the mate to that now worn by Hamilton, hung in its curiously engraved scabbard near one corner. The sight of it inflamed Farnsworth.

"It's an outrage!" he broke forth. "Governor Hamilton sent a man to Roussillon place with orders to bring him the scabbard of Miss Roussillon's sword, and he now wears the beautiful weapon as if he had come by it honestly. Curse him!"

"My dear, dear son, you must not soil your lips with such language!" Father Beret let fall the half of a well bitten cake and held up both hands.

"I beg your pardon, father. I know I ought to be more careful in your presence, but—but—the beastly scoundrel!"—

"Bah! Doucement, mon fils, doucement." The old man shook his head and his finger while speaking. "Easy, my son, easy. You would be a fine target for bullets were your words to reach Hamilton's ears. You are not permitted to revile your commander."

"Yes, I know; but how can a man restrain himself under such abominable conditions?"

Father Beret shrewdly guessed that Hamilton had been giving the captain fresh reasons for bitter resentment. Moreover, he was sure that the moving cause had been Alice. So, in order to draw out what he wished to hear, he said very gently:

"How is the little prisoner getting along?"

Farnsworth ground his teeth and swore, but Father Beret appeared not to hear. He bit deep into a scone, took a liberal sip of the muddy red wine and added:

"Has she a comfortable place? Do you think Governor Hamilton would let me visit her?"

"It is horrible!" Farnsworth blurted. "She's penned up as if she were a dangerous beast, the poor girl. And that d——d scoundrel!"—

"Son, son!"

"Oh, it's no use to try. I can't help it, father. The whelp!"—

"We can converse more safely and intelligently if we avoid profanity and undue emotion, my son. Now, if you will quit swearing, I will, and if you will be calm, so will I."

Farnsworth felt the sly irony of this absurdly vicarious proposition. Father Beret smiled with a kindly twinkle in his deep set eyes.

"Well, if you don't use profane language, father, there's no telling how much you think in expletives. What is your opinion of a man who tumbles a poor, defenseless girl into prison and then refuses to let her be decently cared for? How do you express yourself about him?"

"My son, men often do things of which they ought to be ashamed. I heard of a young officer once who maltreated a little girl that he met at night in the street. What evil he would have done, had not a passing kind hearted man reminded him of his honor by a friendly punch in the ribs, I dare not surmise."

"True, and your sarcasm goes home as hard as your fist did, father. I know that I've been a sad dog all my life. Miss Roussillon saved you by shooting me, and I love her for it. Lay on, father; I deserve more than you can give me."

"Surely you do, my son, surely you do, but my love for you will not let me give you pain. Ah, we priests have to carry all men's loads. Our backs are broad, however; very broad, my son."

"And your fists are heavy, father; mighty heavy."

The gentle smile again flickered over the priest's weather beaten face as he glanced sidewise at Farnsworth and said:

"Sometimes, sometimes, my son, a carnal weapon must break the way for a spiritual one. But we priests rarely have much physical strength. Our dependence is upon"—

"To be sure; certainly," Farnsworth interrupted, rubbing his side. "Your dependence is upon the first thing that offers. I've had many a blow, but yours was the solidest that ever jarred my mortal frame, Father Beret."

The twain began to laugh. There is nothing like a reminiscence to stir up fresh mutual sympathy.

"If your intercostals were somewhat sore for a time on account of a contact with priestly knuckles, doubtless there soon set in a corresponding uneasiness in the region of your conscience. Such shocks are often vigorously alterative and tonic; eh, my son?"

"You jolted me sober, father, and then I was ashamed of myself. But where does all your tremendous strength lie? You don't look strong."

While speaking Farnsworth leaned near Father Beret and grasped his arm. The young man started, for his fingers, instead of closing around a flabby, shrunken old man's limb, spread themselves upon a huge, knotted mass of iron muscles. With a quick movement Father Beret shook off Farnsworth's hand and said:

"I am no Samson, my son. Non sum qualis eram." Then, as if dismissing a light subject for a graver one, he sighed and added, "I suppose there is nothing that can be done for little Alice."

He called the tall, strong girl "little Alice," and so she seemed to him. He could not, without direct effort, think of her as a magnificently maturing woman. She had always been his spoiled pet child, perversely set against the holy church, but dear to him nevertheless.

"I came to ask that very question, father," said Farnsworth.

"And what do I know? Surely, my son, you see how utterly hopeless an old priest is against all you British. And besides"—

"Father Beret," Farnsworth huskily interrupted, "is there a place that you know of anywhere in which Miss Roussillon could be hidden if"—

"My dear son!"

"But, father, I mean it."

"Mean what? Pardon an old man's slow understanding. What are you talking about, my son?"

Father Beret glanced furtively about, then quickly stepped through the doorway, walked entirely around the house and came in again before Farnsworth could respond. Once more seated on his stool he added interrogatively:

"Did you think you heard something moving outside?"

"No."

"You were saying something when I went out. Pardon my interruption."

Farnsworth gave the priest a searching and not wholly confiding look.

"You did not interrupt me, Father Beret. I was not speaking. Why are you so watchful? Are you afraid of eavesdroppers?"

(Continued next Saturday.)

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