

ALICE of OLD VINCENNES

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(Continued.)

CHAPTER XXI.

SOME TRANSACTIONS IN SCALPS.

HISTORY would be a very orderly affair could the dry as dust historians have their way, and doubtless it would be thrillingly romantic at every turn if the novelists were able to control its current, fortunately neither one nor the other has much influence, and the result in long run is that most novels are lackingly tame, while the large body of history is loaded down with picturesque incidents which if used in fiction would be thought absurdly romantic and improbable.

Were our simple story of old Vincennes a mere fiction we should hesitate to bring in the explosion of a magazine at the fort with a view to sudden confusion and by that means directing attention from our heroine while she betakes herself out of a situation which, although delightful enough for a blessed minute, has quickly become an embarrassment quite unbearable. But we simply adhere to the established facts in history. Owing to some carelessness there was indeed an explosion of twenty-six pound cartridges, which made a mighty roar and struck the newly installed garrison into a heap, so to say, scattering things terribly and wounding six men, among them Captains Bowman and Worthington.

After the thunderous crash came a momentary silence, which embraced with the people within the fort and the wild crowd outside. Then the rush and noise were indescribable. Even Clark gave way to excitement, losing command of himself and of course of his men. There was a stampede toward the main gate by one wing of the troops in the hollow square. They literally ran over Beverley and Alice, flinging them apart and jostling them either and yonder without mercy. Of course the turmoil quickly subsided. Clark and Beverley got hold of themselves and sang out their peremptory orders with excellent effect. It was like oil on raging water. The men obeyed in a straggling way, getting back into ranks as best they could.

"Ventrebien!" squeaked Uncle Jazon. "Ef I didn't think the ole world had busted into a million pieces!"

He was jumping up and down not three feet from Beverley's toes, waving his cap excitedly.

"But wasn't I skeert! Ya, ya, ya! Vive la banniere d'Allice Rousillon! Vive Zhorsh Vasinon!"

Hearing Alice's name caused Beverley to look around. Where was she? In the distance he saw Father Beret hurrying to the spot where some of the men burned and wounded by the explosion were being stripped and cared for. Hamilton still stood like a statue. He appeared to be the only cool person in the fort.

"Where is Alice—Miss Rousillon? Where did Miss Rousillon go?" Beverley exclaimed, starting around like a lost man. "Where is she?"

"D'know," said Uncle Jazon, resuming his habitual expression of droll dignity. "She shot apast me jes' as thet thing busted loose, an' she went like er hammin' bird, skitch-jea' thet way—an' I didn't see 'er no more, 'cause I was skeert mighty nigh inter seven fits; spect that 'splosion blowed her clean away? Ventrebien! Never was so plum outen breath an' dead crazy weak 'er bein' afeard!"

"Lieutenant Beverley," roared Clark in his most commanding tone, "go to the gate and settle things there! That mob outside is trying to break in!"

The order was instantly obeyed, but Beverley had relapsed. Once more his soul groped in darkness while the whole of his life seemed unreal, a wavering, misty, hollow dream. And yet his military duty was all real enough. He knew just what to do when he reached the gate.

"Back there at once!" he commanded, not loudly, but with intense force, "back there!" This to the inward surging wedge of excited outsiders. Then to the guard:

"Shoot the first man who crosses the line!"

"Zif! me voic! Mot! Gaspard Rousillon. Laissez-moi passer, mesieurs." A great body hurried itself frantically past Beverley and the guard, going out through the gateway against the wall of the crowd, bearing everything before it and shouting:

"Back, fools! You'll all be killed. The powder is on fire! Zif! Run!"

Wild as a March hare, he bristled with terror and foamed at the mouth. He stampeded the entire mass. There was a wild howl, a rush in the other direction followed, and soon enough the esplanade and all the space back to the barricades and beyond were quite deserted.

Alice was not aware that a serious accident had happened. Naturally she thought the great rattling, crashing noise of the explosion a mere part of the spectacular show. When the rush followed, separating her and Beverley, it was a great relief to her in some way, for a sudden recognition of the boldness of her action in the little scene that ended came over her and bewil-

dered her. An impulse sent her running away from the spot where, it seemed to her, she had invited public derision. The terrible noises all around her were, she now fancied, but the jeering and hooting of rude men who had seen her unmanly forwardness. With a burning face she flew to the postern and slipped out, once more taking the course which had become so familiar to her feet. She did not slacken her speed until she reached the Bourcier cabin, where she had made her home since the night when Hamilton's pistol ball struck her. The little domicile was quite empty of its household, but Alice entered and flung herself into a chair, where she sat quivering and breathless when Adrienne, also much excited, came in, preceded by a stream of potatis that sparkled continuously.

"The fort is blown up!" she cried, gesticulating in every direction at once, her petite figure comically dilated with the importance of her statement. "A hundred men are killed, and the powder is on fire!"

She pounced into Alice's arms, still talking as fast as her tongue could vibrate, changing from subject to subject without rhyme or reason, her practice making its way by skips and shies until what was really uppermost in her sweet little heart disclosed itself.

"And, O Alice, Rene has not come yet!"

She plunged her dusky face between Alice's cheek and shoulder. Alice hugged her sympathetically and said:

"But Rene will come, I know he will, dear."

"Oh, but do you know it? Is it true? Who told you? When will he come? Where is he? Tell me about him!"

Her head popped up from her friend's neck and she smiled brilliantly through the tears that were still sparkling on her long black lashes.

"I didn't mean that I had heard from him, and I don't know where he is. But—but he always come back."

"You say that because your man—because Lieutenant Beverley has returned. It is always so. You have everything to make you happy, while I—"

Again her eyes spilled their shower, and she hid her face in her hands, which Alice tried in vain to remove.

"Don't cry, Adrienne. You didn't see me crying?"

"No, of course not; you didn't have a fling to cry about. Lieutenant Beverley told you just where he was going and just what?"

"But think, Adrienne, only think of the awful story they told—that he was killed, that Governor Hamilton had paid Long Hair for killing him and bringing back his scalp! Oh, dear, just think! And I thought it was true."

"Well, I'd be willing to think and believe anything in the world if Rene would come back," said Adrienne, her face, now uncovered, showing pitiful lines of suffering. "Oh, Alice, Alice, and he never, never will come!"

Alice exhausted every device to cheer, encourage and comfort her. Adrienne had been so good to her when she lay recovering from the shock of Hamilton's pistol bullet, which, although it came near killing her, made no serious wound—only a bruise, in fact. It was one of those fortunate accidents or providentially ordered interferences which once in awhile save a life. The stone disk worn by Alice chanced to lie exactly in the missile's way, and, while it was not broken, the ball, already somewhat checked by passing through several folds of Father Beret's garments, flattened itself upon it with a shock which somehow struck Alice senseless.

Here, again, history in the form of an ancient family document (a letter written in 1821 by Alice herself) gives us the curious brace of incidents—the breaking of the miniature on Beverley's breast by a British musket ball and the stopping of Hamilton's bullet over Alice's heart by the Indian charm stone.

"Which shows the goodness of God," the letter goes on, "and also seems to sustain the Indian legend concerning the stone that whoever might wear it could not be killed. Unquestionable (sic) Mr. Hamilton's shot, which was aimed at poor, dear old Father Beret, would have pierced my heart but for that charm stone. As for my locket, it did not, as some have reported, save Fitzhugh's life when the musket ball was stopped. The ball was so spent that the blow was only hard enough to spoil temporary (sic) the face of the miniature, which was afterward restored fairly well by an artist in Paris. When it did actually save Fitzhugh's life was out on the Illinois plain. The savage Long Hair, peace to his memory, worked the miracle of restoring to me"—Here a fold in the paper has destroyed a line of the writing.

The letter is a sacred family paper, and there is not justification for going farther into its faded and, in some parts, almost obliterated writing. But so much may pass into these pages as a pleasant authentication of what otherwise might be altogether too sweet a double nut for the critic's teeth to crack.

While Adrienne and Alice were still discussing the probability of Rene de-

ronville's return M. Rousillon came to the door. He was in search of madame, his wife, whom he had not yet seen.

He gathered the two girls in his mighty arms, touting them with rough tenderness. Alice returned his affectionate embrace and told him where to find Mme. Rousillon, who was with Dame Godere, probably at her house.

"Nobody killed," he said, in answer to Alice's inquiry about the catastrophe at the fort. "Some of 'em hurt and burnt a little. Great big scare about nearly nothing. Zif! my children, you should have seen me quiet things. I put out my hands this way—comme ça—pouf! It was all over. The people went home."

His gestures indicated that he had borne back an army with open hands. Then he chuckled Adrienne under the chin with his finger and added in his softest voice:

"I saw somebody's lover the other day over yonder in the Indian village. He spoke to me about somebody—eh, ma petite, que voulez-vous dire?"

"Oh, Papa Rousillon, we were just talking about Rene!" cried Alice. "Have you seen him?"

"I saw you, you little mix. Jumping into a man's arms right under the eyes of a whole garrison! Bah! I could not believe it was my little Alice!"

He let go a grand guffaw which seemed to shake the cabin's walls. Alice blushed cherry red. Adrienne, too bashful to inquire about Rene, was trembling with anxiety. The truth was not in Gaspard Rousillon just then, or if it was it stayed in him, for he had not seen Rene de Ronville. It was his generous desire to please and to appear opulent of knowledge and sympathy that made him speak. He knew what would please Adrienne, so why not give her at least a delicious foretaste? Surely, when a thing is so cheap one need not be so parsimonious as to withhold a mere anticipation. He was off before the girls could press him into details, for indeed he had none.

"There, now, what did I tell you?" cried Alice when the big man was gone. "I told you Rene would come. They always come back."

Father Beret came in a little later. As soon as he saw Alice he frowned and began to shake his head, but she only laughed and, imitating his hypocritical scowl, yet fringing it with a twinkle of merry lines and dimples, pointed a taper finger at him and exclaimed:

"You bad, bad man! Why did you pretend to me that Lieutenant Beverley was dead? What sinister ecclesiastical motive prompted you to describe how Long Hair scalped him? Ah, father—"

The priest laid a broad hand over her saucy mouth.

"Something or other seems to have excited you mightily, ma fille. You are a trifle impulsively inclined today."

"Yes, Father Beret; yes, I know, and I am ashamed. My heart shrinks when I think of what I did. But I was so glad, such a grand joy came all over me when I saw him so strong and brave and beautiful coming toward me, smiling that warm, glad smile and holding out his arms—ah, when I saw all that—when I knew for sure that he was not dead, I, why, father—I just had to. I couldn't help it."

Father Beret laughed in spite of himself, but quickly managed to resume his severe countenance.

"Ta, ta!" he exclaimed. "It was a bold thing for a little girl to do."

"So it was, so it was. But it was also a bold thing for him to do—to come back after he was dead and scalped and look so handsome and grand! I'm ashamed and sorry, father, but—I'm afraid I might do it again if—well, I don't care if I did! So there, now!"

"But what in the world are you talking about?" interposed Adrienne. Evidently they were discussing a most interesting matter of which she knew nothing and that did not suit her feminine curiosity. "Tell me. She pulled Father Beret's sleeve. "Tell me, I say!"

It is probable that Father Beret would have pretended to betray Alice's source of mingled delight and embarrassment had not the rest of the Bourcier household returned in time to break up the conversation. A little later Alice gave Adrienne a vividly dramatic account of the whole scene.

"Ah, mon Dieu!" exclaimed the petite bronne after she had heard the exciting story. "That was just like you, Alice. You always do superb things. You were born to do them. You shoot Captain Farnsworth, you wound Lieutenant Barlow, you climb on to the fort and set up your flag; you take it down again and run away with it, you get shot and you do not die, you kiss your lover right before a whole garrison! Bon Dieu! If I could but do all those things!" She clasped her tiny hands before her and added rather dejectedly:

"But I couldn't, I couldn't. I couldn't kiss a man in that way!"

Late in the evening news came to Rousillon place, where Gaspard Rousillon was once more happy in the midst of his little family, that the Indian Long Hair had just been brought to the fort and would be shot on the following day. A scouting party captured him as he approached the town bearing at his belt the fresh scalp of a white man. He would have been killed forthwith, but Clark, who wished to avoid a repetition of the savage vengeance meted out to the Indians on the previous day, had given strict orders that all prisoners should be brought in to the fort, where they were to have a fair trial by court martial.

Both Helm and Beverley were at Rousillon place, the former sipping wine and chatting with Gaspard, the latter, of course, hovering around Alice after the manner of a hungry bee around a particularly sweet and deli-

ciously refractory flower. It was raining slowly, the fine drops coming straight down through the cold, still February air, but the two young people found it pleasant enough for them on the veranda, where they walked back and forth, making fair exchange of the exciting experiences which had befallen them during their long separation. Between the lines of these mutual recitals sweet, fresh echoes of the old, old story went from heart to heart, an amaranth love bout like that of spring birds calling tenderly back and forth in the blooming Maytime woods.

Both Captain Helm and M. Rousillon were delighted to hear of Long Hair's capture and certain fate, but neither of them regarded the news as of sufficient importance to need much comment. They did not think of telling Beverley and Alice, Jean, however, lying awake in his little bed, overheard the conversation, which he repeated to Alice next morning with great circumstantiality.

Having the quick insight bred of frontier experience, Alice instantly caught the terrible significance of the dilemma in which she and Beverley would be placed by Long Hair's situation. Moreover, something in her heart arose with irresistible power demanding the final, the absolute human sympathy and gratitude. No matter what deeds Long Hair had committed that were evil beyond forgiveness, he had done for her the all atoning thing. He had saved Beverley and sent him back to her.

With a start and a chill of dread, she thought, "What if it is already too late?"

But her nature could not hesitate. To feel the demand of an exigency was to act. She snatched a wrap from its peg on the wall and ran as fast as she could to the fort. People who met her flying along wondered, staring after her, what could be urging her so that she saw nobody, checked herself for nothing, ran splashing through the mud-

den against Beverley, of course, had no possible means of succoring the condemned savage.

"Him a-kickin' yer ribs clean inter ye, an' a-makin' ye run the gantlet, an' here ye air a-tryin' to save 'is life!" whined Uncle Jazon. "W'y man, I thought ye had some enterments! Dast 'is Injun liver, I kin feel them kicks when he gey me till yit. Ventrebien! Que diable voulez-vous?"

Clark simply pushed Beverley's pleadings aside as not worth a moment's consideration. He easily felt the fine bit of gratitude at the bottom of it all, but there was too much in the other side of the balance. Justice, the discipline and confidence of his little army and the claim of the women and children on the frontier demanded firmness in dealing with a case like Long Hair's.

"No, no," he said to Beverley, "I would do anything in the world for you, Fitz, except to swerve an inch from duty to my country and the defenseless people down yonder in Kentucky. I can't do it. There's no use to press the matter further. The die is cast. That brute's got to be killed and killed dead. Look at him—look at that scalp! I'd have him killed if I dropped dead for it the next instant."

Beverley shuddered. The argument was horribly convincing, and yet, somehow, the desire to save Long Hair overbore everything else in his mind. He could not cease his efforts. It seemed to him as if he were pleading for Alice herself. Captain Farnsworth, strange to say, was the only man in the fort who leaned to Beverley's side, but he was reticent, doubtless feeling that his position as a British prisoner gave him no right to speak, especially when every lip around him was muttering something about "infamous scalp buyers and Indian partisans," with whom he was prominently counted by the speakers.

As Clark had said, the die was cast. Long Hair, bound to a stake, the scalp still dangling at his side, grimly faced his executioners, who were eager to fire. He appeared to be proud of the fact that he was going to be killed.

"One thing I can say of him," Helm remarked to Beverley—"he's the grandest specimen of the animal—I might say the brute—man that I ever saw, red, white or black. Just look at his body and limbs! Those muscles are perfectly marvelous."

"He saved my life, and I must stand here and see him murdered," the young man replied with intense bitterness. It was all that he could think, all that he could say. He felt inefficient and dejected, almost desperate.

Clark himself, not willing to cast responsibility upon a subordinate, made ready to give the fatal order. Turning to Long Hair first, he demanded of him as well as he could in the Indian dialect, of which he had a smattering, what he had to say at his last moment.

The Indian straightened his already upright form and by a strong bulging of his muscles snapped the thoughts that bound him. Evidently he had not tried thus to free himself. It was rather a spasmodic expression of savage dignity and pride. One arm and both his legs still were partially confined by the bonds, but his right hand he lifted, with a gesture of immense self-satisfaction, and pointed at Hamilton.

"Indian brave; white man coward," he said, scowling scornfully. "Long Hair tell truth; white man lie!"

Hamilton's countenance did not change its calm, cold expression. Long Hair gazed at him fixedly for a long moment, his eyes flashing most concentrated hate and contempt. Then he tore the scalp from his belt and flung it with great force straight toward the captive governor's face. It fell short, but the look that went with it did not, and Hamilton recoiled.

At that moment Alice arrived. Her coming was just in time to interrupt Clark, who had turned to the waiting platoon with the order of death on his lips. She made no noise, save the fluttering of her skirts and her loud and rapid panting on account of her long, hard run. She sprang before Long Hair and faced the platoon.

"You cannot, you shall not kill this man!" she cried in a voice loaded with excitement. "Put away those guns!"

Woman never looked more thrillingly beautiful to man than she did just then to all those rough, stern backwoodsman. During her flight her hair had fallen down, and it glistened like soft sunlight around her face. Something compelling flashed out of her eyes, an expression between a triumphant smile and a ray of irresistible beseechment. It took Colonel Clark's breath when he turned and saw her standing there and heard her words.

"This man saved Lieutenant Beverley's life," she presently added, getting better control of her voice and sending into it a thrilling timbre. "You shall not harm him; you must not do it!"

Beverley was astounded when he saw her, the thing was so unexpected, so daring and done with such high, imperious force. Still it was but a realization of what he had imagined she would be upon occasion. He stood gazing at her, as did all the rest, while she faced Clark and the platoon of riflemen. To hear his own name pass her quivering lips in that tone and in that connection seemed to him a consecration.

"Would you be more savage than your Indian prisoner?" she went on, "less grateful than he for a life saved? I did him a small—a very small—service once, and in memory of that he saved Lieutenant Beverley's life, because—because"—she faltered for a single breath, then added clearly and with magnetic sweetness—"because Lieutenant Beverley loved me and because I loved him. This Indian Long Hair showed a gratitude that could overcome his strongest passion. You white

men should be ashamed to fall below his standard."

Her words went home. It was as if the beauty of her face, the magnetism of her lissome and symmetrical form, the sweet fire of her eyes and the passionate appeal of her voice gave what she said a new and irresistible force of truth. When she spoke of Beverley's love for her and declared her love for him there was not a manly heart in all the garrison that did not suddenly beat quicker and feel a strange, sweet waft of tenderness. A mother somewhere, a wife, a daughter, a sister, a sweetheart, called through that voice of absolute womanhood.

"Beverley, what can I do?" muttered Clark, his bronze face as pale as it could possibly become.

"Do!" thundered Beverley. "Do! You cannot murder that man. Hamilton is the man you should shoot! He offered large rewards, he inflamed the passions and fed the love of rum and the emptiness of the poor wild men like the one standing yonder. Yet you take him prisoner and treat him with distinguished consideration. Hamilton offered a large sum for me taken alive, a smaller one for my scalp. Long Hair saved me. You let Hamilton stand yonder in perfect safety while you shoot the Indian. Shame on you, Colonel Clark! Shame on you if you do it!"

Alice stood looking at the stairway commander while Beverley was pouring forth his torrent of scathing reference to Hamilton, and she quickly saw that Clark was moved. The moment was ripe for the finishing stroke. They say it is genius that avails itself of opportunity. Beverley knew the fight was won when he saw what followed. Alice suddenly left Long Hair and ran to Colonel Clark, who felt her warm, strong arms loop around him for a single point of time never to be effaced from his memory; then he saw her kneeling at his feet, her hands upstretched, her face a glorious prayer, while she pleaded the Indian's cause and won it.

Doubtless, while we all rather feel that Clark was weak to be thus swayed by a girl, we cannot quite blame him. Alice's flag was over him. He had heard her history from Beverley's cunning lips. He actually believed that Hamilton was the real culprit, and besides he felt not a little nauseated with executing Indians. A good excuse to have an end of it all did not go begging.

But Long Hair was barely gone over the horizon from the fort, as free and as villainous a savage as ever trod the earth, when a discovery made by Uncle Jazon caused Clark to hate himself for what he had done.

The old scout picked up the scalp which Long Hair had flung at Hamilton and examined it with odious curiosity. He had lingered on the spot with no other purpose than to get possession of that ghastly relic. Since losing his own scalp the subject of crown locks had grown upon his mind until its fascination was irresistible. He studied the hair of every person he saw as a physiognomist studies faces. He held the gruesome thing up before him, scrutinizing it with the expression of a connoisseur who has discovered on a grimy canvas the signature of an old master.

"Sae' bien!" he presently broke forth. "Well, I'll be— Look'ee yer, George Clark! Come yer an' look. Ye've been sold ag'in. Take a squint, ef ye please!"

Colonel Clark, with his hands crossed behind him, his face thoughtfully contracted, was walking slowly to and fro a little way off. He turned about when Uncle Jazon spoke.

"What now, Jazon?"

"A mighty heap right now, that's what. Come yer an' let me show ye. Yer a fine sort o' sejt now, ain't ye?"

The two men walked toward each other and met. Uncle Jazon held up the scalp with one hand, pointing at it with the index finger of the other.

"This here scalp come off'n Rene de Ronville's head."

"And who is he?"

"Who's he? Ye may well ax thet. He was a Frenchman. He wuz a fine young feller o' this town. He killed a corporal o' Hamilton's an' tuck ter the woods a month or two ago. Hamilton offered a lot o' money for 'im or 'is scalp, an' Long Hair went in fer gittin' it. Now ye knows the whole racket. An' ye lets that Injun go! An' that same Injun he mighty nigh kicked my ribs inter my stomach!"

Uncle Jazon's feelings were visible and audible, but Clark could not resent the contempt of the old man's looks and words. He felt that he deserved far more than he was receiving. No was Uncle Jazon wrong. Rene de Ronville never came back to little Adrienne Bourcier, although, being kept entirely ignorant of her lover's fate she waited and dreamed and hoped throughout more than two years, after which there is no further record of her life.

Clark, Beverley and Uncle Jazon consulted together and agreed among themselves that they would hold profoundly secret the story of the scalp. To have made it public would have exasperated the creoles and set them violently against Clark, a thing heavy with disaster for all his future plans. As it was, the release of Long Hair caused a great deal of dissatisfaction and mutinous talk. Even Beverley now felt that the execution ordered by the commander ought to have been sternly carried out.

A day or two later, however, the whole dark affair was closed forever by a bit of confidence on the part of Uncle Jazon when Beverley dropped into his hut one evening to have a smoke with him.

The rain was over, the sky shone like one vast luminary, with a nearly full moon and a thousand stars re-enforcing it. Up from the south poured one of those balmy, accidental wind floods



"The fort is blown up!"