

The Valiants of Virginia

By **Hallie Erminie Rives**
(Mrs. Post Wheeler)

Illustrated by **Lauren Stout**

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SYNOPSIS.

CHAPTER I—John Vallant, a rich society favorite, suddenly discovers that the Vallant corporation, which his father founded and which was the principal source of his wealth, has failed.

CHAPTER II—He voluntarily turns over his private fortune to the receiver for the corporation.

CHAPTER III—His entire remaining possessions consist of an old motor car, a white bull dog and Damory court, a neglected estate in Virginia.

CHAPTER IV—He learns that this estate came into the family by royal grant and has been in the possession of the Vallants ever since.

CHAPTER V—On the way to Damory court he meets Shirley Dandridge, an au-burn-haired beauty, and decides that he is going to like Virginia immensely.

CHAPTER VI—An old negro tells Shirley's fortune and predicts great trouble for her on account of a man.

CHAPTER VII—Uncle Jefferson, an old negro, takes Vallant to Damory court.

CHAPTER VIII—Shirley's mother, Mrs. Dandridge, and Major Bristow exchange reminiscences during which it is revealed that the major, Vallant's father, and a man named Sassoon, were rivals for the hand of Mrs. Dandridge in her youth. Sassoon and Vallant fought a duel on her account in which the former was killed.

CHAPTER IX—Vallant finds Damory court overgrown with weeds and creepers and the buildings in a very much neglected condition. Uncle Jefferson and his wife, Aunt Daphne, are engaged as servants.

CHAPTER X—Vallant explores his ancestral home. He is surprised by a fox hunting party which invades his estate. He recognizes Shirley at the head of the party.

CHAPTER XI—He gives sanctuary to the cornered fox. Gossips discuss the advent of the new owner and recall the tragedy in which the elder Vallant took part.

CHAPTER XII—Vallant decides to rehabilitate Damory court and make the land produce a living for him.

CHAPTER XIII—He meets Shirley, who has been gathering flowers on the Vallant estate, and reveals his identity to her.

CHAPTER XIV—Vallant saves Shirley from the bite of a snake, which bites him. Knowing the deadliness of the bite, Shirley sucks the poison from the wound and saves his life.

CHAPTER XV—Shirley tells her mother of the incident and the latter is strangely moved at hearing that a Vallant is again living at Damory court.

CHAPTER XVI—Vallant learns some of the history of his family from Doctor Southall and Major Bristow.

CHAPTER XVII—He learns for the first time that his father left Virginia on account of a duel in which Doctor Southall and Major Bristow acted as his father's seconds.

CHAPTER XVIII—Vallant and Shirley become good friends. Mrs. Dandridge falls when she first meets Vallant.

CHAPTER XIX—Vallant works wonders in the old place. He discovers that he has a fortune in old walnut trees.

CHAPTER XX—With the advice and assistance of the major and Shirley, Vallant restores the gardens to what they were in his father's time.

CHAPTER XXI—The yearly tournament, as survival of the jousting of feudal times, is to be held at Damory court.

CHAPTER XXII—At the last moment Vallant takes the place of one of the knights, who is sick, and enters the lists.

CHAPTER XXI.

Tournament Day.

The noon sun of tournament day shone brilliantly over the village, drowsy no longer, for many vehicles were hitched at the curb, or moved leisurely along the leafy street; big, canvas-topped country wagons drawn by shaggy-hoofed horses and set with chairs that bumped and jostled their holiday loads from outlying tobacco plantation and stud-farm; sober, black-covered buggies, long narrow, springless buckboards, frivolous side-bar runabouts and antique shays resurrected from the primeval depths of cobwebbed stables, relics of tarnished grandeur and faded fortune.

At midday vehicles resolved themselves into luncheon-booths—hamper stowed away beneath the seats, disclosing all manner of picnic edibles—the court-house yard was an array of grass-spread table-cloths, and an air of plenty reigned.

Within Mrs. Merryweather Mason's brown house hospitality sat enthroned and the generous dining-room was held by a regiment of feminine out-of-town acquaintances.

The yard, an hour later, was an active encampment of rocking-chairs, and a din of conversation floated out over the pink oleanders whose tubs had achieved a fresh coat of bright green paint for the occasion. Mrs. Polly Gifford—a guest of the day—here shone resplendent.

"The young folks are counting mightily on the dance tonight," observed Mrs. Livy Stowe of Seven Oaks. "Even the Buckner girls have got new ball dresses."

"Improvident, I call it," said Mrs. Gifford. "They can't afford such things, with Park Hill mortgaged up to the roof the way it is."

up his money as he did. What a princely act that was!"

"T-e-e-s," agreed Mrs. Gifford, "but a little—what shall I call it?—precipitous! If I were married to a man like that I should always be in terror of his adopting an orphan asylum or turning Republican or something equally impossible."

The doctor shut his office door with a vicious slam and from the vantage of the wire window-screen looked sourly across the beds of marigold and nasturtium.

"I reckon if Mrs. Polly Gifford shut her mouth more than ten minutes hand-runnin'," he said malevolently, "the top of her head'd fly from here to Charlottesville."

The major, encoined with a cigar in the easy chair behind him, flourished his palm-leaf fan and smote an errant fly.

"Speaking of Damory Court," he said in his big voice. "The dance idea was a happy thought of young Vallant's. I'll be surprised if he doesn't do it to the queen's taste."

The doctor nodded. "This place can't teach him much about such folderolings, I reckon. He's led more cotillions than I've got hairs on my head."

"I'd hardly limit it to that," said the major, chortling at the easy thrust. "And after all, even folderolings have their use."

"Who said they hadn't? If people choose to make whirling dervishes of themselves, they at least can reflect that it's better for their lives than cane-bottom chairs. Though that's about all you can say in favor of the modern ball."

"Fehaw!" said the major. "I remember a time when you used to rig out in a claw-hammer and—"

"Dance all night till broad daylight—"

"And go home with the gyrls in the morning, with the bravest of us. Used to like it, too."

"I got over it before I was old enough to make myself a butt of hilarity," the doctor retorted. "I see by the papers they've invented a new dance called the grizzly bear. I believe there's another named the yip-kyoodle. I hope you've got 'em down pat to show the young folk tonight, Bristow."

The major got up with some irritation. "Southall," he said, "sometimes I'm tempted to think your remarks verge upon the personal. You don't have to watch me dance if you don't choose to."

"No, thank God," muttered the doctor. "I prefer to remember you when you still preserved a trace of dignity—twenty odd years ago."

"If dignity—" the major's blood was rising now—"consists in your eternal tasteless bickerings, I want none of it. What on earth do you do it for? You had some friends once."

"Friends!" snapped the other, "the fewer I have the better!"

The major clapped on his straw hat angrily, strode to the door, and opened it. But on the threshold he stopped, and presently shut it, turned back slowly and resumed his chair. The doctor was relighting his cigar, but an odd furtive look had slipped to his face, and the hand that struck the match was unsteady.

For a time both sat smoking, at first in silence, then talking in a desultory way on indifferent topics. Finally the major rose and tossed his cigar into the empty grate.

"I'll be off now," he said. "I must be on the field before the others."

As he went down the steps a carriage, drawn by a pair of dancing grays, plumed past. "Who are those people with the Chalmers, I wonder," said the doctor. "They're strangers here."

The major peered. "Oh," he said, over his shoulder, "I forgot to tell you. That's Silas Fargo, the railroad president from New York, and his daughter Katharine. His private car's down on the siding. They're at the judge's—he's chief counsel for the road in this state. They'll be at the tournament, I reckon. You'll be there, won't you?"

The doctor was putting some phials and instruments into a worn leather bag. "No," he said, shortly. "I'm going to take a ten-mile drive—to add to this county's population, I expect. But I'm coming to the dance. Promised Vallant I would, in a moment of temporary aberration."

CHAPTER XXII.

A Virginian Runnymede.

"June in Virginia is something to remember." Today the master of Damory Court deemed this a true saying. For the air was like wine, and the drifting white wings of cloud, piled above the amethystine ramparts of the far Blue Ridge, looked down upon a violet world bound in green and silver. In his bedroom Vallant stood looking into the depths of an ancient wardrobe. Presently he took from a hook a suit of white flannel in which he arrayed himself. Over his soft shirt he knotted a pale gray scarf. The modish white suit and the rolling Panamas threw out in fine contrast the keen sun-tanned face and dark brown eyes.

In the hall below he looked about him with satisfaction. For the last three days he had labored tirelessly to fit the place for the evening's event. The parlor now showed walls rimmed with straight-back chairs and the grand piano—long ago put in order—had been relegated to the library. That instinct for the artistic, which had made him a last resort in the vexing problems of club entertainments, had aided him in the Court's adornment.

Out of the kitchens Cassandra's egg-beating chattered like a watchman's rattle, while Aunt Daphne put the finishing touches to an array of lighter edibles—destined to grace the long table on the rear porch, now walled in

with snow-white muslin and hung with candle-lusters. Under the trees Uncle Jefferson was even then experimenting with various punch compounds, and a delicious aroma of vanilla came to Vallant's nostrils.

The Red Road, as Vallant's car passed, was dotted with straggling pedestrians; humble country folk who trudged along the grassy foot-path with no sullen regard for the swift cars and comfortable carriage that left them behind; sturdy barefooted children who called shrilly after him, and happy-go-lucky negro youths clad in their best with Sunday shoes dangling over their shoulders, slouching regardlessly in the dust—all bound for the same Mecca, which presently rose before him, a gateway of painted canvas proclaiming the field to which it opened Runnymede.

He halted his car at the end of the field and snapped a leash in the bulldog's collar. "I hate to do it, old man," he said apologetically to Chum, reproachful look, "but I've got to. There are to be some stunts, and in such occasions you're apt to be convinced you're the main one of the contestants, which might cause a mix-up. Never mind; I'll anchor you where you won't miss anything."

With the excited dog tugging before him, he threaded his way through the press with keen exhilaration. Now and then his gloved hand touched his cap at a salutation. He was conscious of swift bird-like glances from pretty girls. Here was none of the rigid straight-ahead gaze or vacant stare of the city boulevard; the eyes that looked at him, frankly curious and inquiring, were full of easy open comradeship. Some of the girls wore gowns and hats that might that morning have issued from the Rue de la Paix; others were habited in cheap materials. But about the latter hung no benumbing self-consciousness. All bore themselves alike. He was beginning to realize that there might really exist strained circumstances, even actual poverty, which yet created no sort of social difference.

Opposite the canvas-covered grand stand sat twelve small mushroom tents, each with a staff and tiny flag. Midway lines of flaxen ropes stretched between rows of slender peeled saplings from whose tops floated gaudy streamers of vivid bunting. A pavilion of purple cloth, open at the sides, awaited for the committee, and near the center, a negro band was disposed on camp-stools, the brass of the waiting instruments winking in the sunlight. The stand was a confused glow of color, of light gauzy dresses, of young girls in pastel muslins with flowers in their belts, picturesque hats and slender articulate hands darting in vivacious gestures like white swallows—the gentr' from the "big houses."

The light athletic figure, towed by the white bull-dog, drew many glances. Vallant's eyes, however, as they swept the seats, were looking for but one, and at first vainly. He felt a quick pang of disappointment. Perhaps she would not come! Perhaps her mother was still ill. Perhaps—but then suddenly his heart beat high, for he saw her in the lower tier, with a group of young people. He could not have told what she wore, save that it was of soft Murillo blue with a hat whose down-curved brim was wound with a shaded plume of the same tint. Her mother was not with her. She was not looking his way as he passed—her arms at the moment being held out in an adorable gesture toward a little child in a smiling matron's lap—and but a single glance was vouchsafed to him.

"Who is that splendid old man giving directions? The One Who Looks Like a Lion."

quadrille tonight, too. Why doesn't the committee choose some one in his place? Listen. Why not ask Mr. Vallant? He is our host tonight. I'm sure he'd be glad to help out, even without the costume."

"Egad!" he said, pulling his imperial. "None of us had thought of him. He could ride Pendleton's mount, of course. He reflected a moment. I'll do it. It's exactly the right thing. You're a clever girl, Shirley."

He hastily crossed the field, while she leaned back, her eyes on the flannel figure—long since recognized—under the purple pavilion. She saw the committee put their heads together and hurriedly enter.

In the moment's wait, Shirley's gloved fingers clasped and unclasped somewhat nervously. The riders had been chosen long before John Vallant's coming. If a saddle, however, was performed to be vacant, what more appropriate than that he should fill it?

The thought had come to her instantly, bred of an underlying regret, which she had all along cherished, that he was not to take part. But beneath this was a deeper passionate wish that she did not attempt to analyze to see him assume his place with others long habituated to that closed circle—a place rightfully his by reason of birth and name—and to lighten the gloomy shadow, that must rest on his thoughts of his father, with warmer sunnier things. She heaved a secret sigh of satisfaction as the white-clad figure rose in acquiescence.

The major returned to the grand stand and held up his hand for silence. "Our gracious Liege," he proclaimed, in his big vibrant voice, "Queen of Beauty yet unknown, Lords, Knights and Esquires, Fair Dames and gentles all! Whereas divers noble persons have enterprized and taken upon them to hold jousts royal and tourney, you are hereby acquainted that the lists of Runnymede are about to open for that achievement of arms and grand and

"Friends! Snapped the Other, 'The Fewer I Have the Better!'"

before the major seized upon him and bore him to the purple pavilion, for he was one of the committee.

But for this distraction, he might have seen, entering the stand with the Chalmers just as the band struck up a delicious whir of "Dixie," the two strangers whom the doctor had observed an hour before as they whirled by the Merryweather Mason house behind the judge's grays. Silas Fargo might have passed in any gathering for the unobtrusive city man. Katharine was noticeable anywhere, and today her tall willow figure in her champagne-color lingerie gown and hat garnished with bronze and gold tinsel, setting in relief her ivory statuette face, drew a wave of white pered comment which left a sibilant wake behind him. The party made a picturesque group as they now disposed themselves, Katharine's colorless loveliness contrasting with the eager sparkle of pretty Nancy Chalmers and the gipsy-like beauty of Betty Page.

"You call it a tournament, don't you?" asked Katharine of the judge.

"Yes," he replied. "It's a kind of contest in which twelve riders compete for the privilege of naming a Queen of Beauty. There's a ball to-night, at which the lucky lady is

crowned. Those little tents are where the noble knights don their shining armor. See, there go their caparisoned chargers."

A file of negroes was approaching the tents, each leading a horse whose saddle and bridle were decorated with fringes of various hues. In the center of the roped lists, directly in front of the stand, others were planting upright in the ground a tall pole from whose top projected a horizontal arm like a slender gallows. From this was suspended a cord at whose end swung a tiny object that whirled and glittered in the sun.

The judge explained. "On the end of the cord is a silver ring, at which the knights tilt with lances. Twelve rings are used. The pike-points are made to fit them, and the knight who carries off the greatest number of the twelve is the victor. The whole thing is a relic, of course, of the old jousting of the feudal ages. The ring is supposed to represent the device on the boss of the shield, at which the lance-thrust was aimed."

"How interesting!" exclaimed Katharine, and turning, swept the stand with her lorgnette. "I suppose all the county's F. F. V.'s are here," she said laughingly to Nancy Chalmers. "I've often wondered, by the way, what became of the Second Families of Virginia."

"Oh, they've mostly emigrated North," answered Nancy. "The ones that are left are all ancient. There are families here that don't admit they ever began at all."

Silas Fargo shook his stooped shoulders with laughter. "Up North," he said genially, "we've got regular factories that turn out ready-made family-trees for anybody who wants to roost in one."

And now over the fluttering stand and the crowd about the barriers, a stir was discernible. Katharine looked again at the field. "Who is that splendid old man giving directions? The one who looks like a lion. He's coming this way, now."

"That's Major Montague Bristow," said the judge. "He's been master of the heralds for years. The tournament could hardly happen without the major."

"I'm sure I'd like him," she answered. "What a lovely girl he is talking to!"

It was Shirley who had beckoned the major from the lists. She was leaning over the railing. "Why has Ridgeley Pendleton left?" she asked in a low voice. "Isn't he one of the twelve?"

"He was. But he's ill. He wasn't feeling up to it when he came, but he didn't give up till half an hour ago. We'll have to get along with eleven tonight."

She made an exclamation of dismay. "Poor Ridge! And what a pity! There have never been less than the full number. It will spoil the royal

(To be continued)



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noble tournament for which they have so long been famed. But an hour since one of our noble knights, pricking hither to tilt for his lady, was beset by a grievous malady. However, lest our jousting lack the royal number, a new champion hath at this last hour been found to fill the Table Round, who of his courtesy doth consent to ride without armor."

A buzz ran over the assemblage. "It must be Pendleton who has defaulted," said Judge Chalmers. "I heard this morning he was sick. Who's the substitute knight, I wonder?"

At the moment a single mounted herald before the tents blew a long blast on a silver horn. Their flaps parted and eleven knights issued to mount their steeds and draw into line behind him. They were brilliantly decked in fleshings with slashed doublets and plumed chapeaus, and short jeweled cloaks drooped from their shoulders. Pages handed each a long lance which was held perpendicular, the butt resting on the right stirrup.

Under the pavilion, just for the fraction of a second, Vallant hesitated. Then he turned swiftly to the twelfth tent. Its flag-staff bore a long streamer of deep blood-red. He snatched this from its place, flung it about his waist and knotted it sash-wise. He drew the rose from his lapel and thrust it through the band of his Panama, leaped to the saddle of the horse the major had beckoned, and with a quick thrust of his heel, swung to the end of the stamping line.

The field and grand stand had seen the quick decision, with its instant action, and as the hoofs thudded over the turf, a wave of hand-clapping ran across the seats like a silver rain. "Neatly done, upon my word!" said the judge, delighted. "What a daring idea! Who is it? Is it—bless my soul, it is!"

Katharine Fargo had dropped her lorgnette with an exclamation. She stood up, her wide eyes fixed on that figure in pure white, with the blood-red sash and the single crimson blossom glowing in his hat.

"The White Knight!" she breathed. "Who is he?"

Judge Chalmers looked round in sudden illumination. "I forgot that you would be likely to know him, he said. "That is Mr. John Vallant of Damory Court."

(To be continued)

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