

# ALICE OF OLD VINNENNES

BY MAURICE THOMPSON

amid the activities in which Hamilton was engaged—his dealings with the Indians and the work of reconstruction—found time to worry about the perilous flag. He was every other man in the world, he was superstitious, and it had come into his mind that to insure himself and his banner against disaster, he must have the banner of his captives as a badge of his victory. It was a small matter; but it magnified the truth when he saw that the flag was missing. He sharply questioned Father Beret, only to be half convinced that the good priest told the truth when he said that he knew nothing what was on the subject beyond the fact that the banner had mysteriously disappeared from under his floor.

Captain Farnsworth scarcely sympathized with his chief about the flag, but he was nothing if not anxious to gain Hamilton's highest confidence. His military goal knew no bounds, and he never let pass even the slightest opportunity to show it. Hence his persistent search for a clue to the missing banner. He was no respecter of persons, and he was not afraid of lying. He would himself have lied under the existing circumstances, and he considered himself as truthful and trustworthy as a priest or a maid.

"I'll get that flag for you," he said to Hamilton. "If I have to put every man, woman and child in this town on the rack, I'll get it. I think, between Miss Rousillon and the priest, I'll get it. I'll get it in every way, and I can't see how they can both be ignorant of where it is, or at least of the whereabouts of the banner since being treated to that wonderful blow on the jaw, was apt to fall into a spasm of anger whenever the name Rousillon was spoken in his hearing."

"If it's that girl, make her tell," he eagerly commanded. "Let's have no guessing about it. If she's the priest, make him tell, or tie him up by the thumbs. Get that flag, or show some good reason for your failure. I'm not going to be baffled by a woman."

The captain's adventure with Father Beret came first in time to make it clear against that courageous and belated missionary in more ways than one. Captain Farnsworth did not tell Hamilton or any other person about the priest had done to him, but nursed his sore ribs and his wrath, waiting patiently for the revenge that he meant soon to take.

Alice heard from Adrienne the story of Farnsworth's conduct and his humiliating disfigurement at the hands of Father Beret. She was both indignant and delighted, sympathizing with Adrienne and glorying in the priest's vigorous pugilistic achievement.

"Well," she remarked, with one of her infectious trills of laughter, "so far the French have the best of it, anyway! Papa Rousillon knocked the governor's cheek nearly off, then Rene cracked the Irish corporal's head, and now Father Beret has taught Captain Farnsworth a lesson in fist-fights that he'll not soon forget! If the good work can only go on a little longer we shall see every English soldier in Vincennes wearing the mark of a Frenchman's blow." Then her mood suddenly changed from smiling lightness to almost fierce gravity, and she added:

"Adrienne Bourcier, if Captain Farnsworth ever offers to treat me as he did you, mark my words, I'll kill him—kill him, indeed I will! You ought to see me!"

"But he won't dare touch you," said Adrienne, looking at her friend with round, admiring eyes. "He knows very well that you are not little and timid like me. He'd be afraid of you."

"I wish he would try it. How I would love to shoot him into pieces, the hateful wretch! I wish he would!" The French inhabitants all, or nearly all, felt as Alice did; but at present they were helpless and dared not say or do anything against the English. Nor was this feeling confined to the creoles of Vincennes; it had spread to most of the points where trading posts existed. Hamilton found this out too late to mend some of his mistakes; but he set himself on the alert and organized scouting bodies of Indians under white officers to keep him informed as to the American movements in Kentucky and along the Ohio. One of these bands brought in a captive Colonel Francis Vigo of St. Louis, a Spaniard by birth, an American by adoption, a patriot to the core, who had large influence over both Indians and creoles in the Illinois country.

diplomatic temper of character. With the Indians he used a demoralizing system of bribery, but toward the whites he was too often gruff, imperious, repellent. Helm understood the whole situation and was quick to take advantage of it. His personal relations with Hamilton were easy and familiar, so that he did not hesitate to give advice upon all occasions. Here his jovial disposition helped him.

"You'd better let Vigo return to St. Louis," he said. "They have a bow of something hot steaming between them. I know him. He's harmless if you don't rub him too hard the wrong way. He'll go back, if you treat him well, and tell Clark how strong you are here and how foolish it would be to think of attacking you. Clark has but a handful of men, poorly supplied and tired with long, hard marches. If you'll think a moment you cannot fail to understand that you'd better be friends with this man Vigo. He and Father Gbault and this old priest here, Beret, sorry Frenchmen in their own hearts. I'm not an American, and I'd bow the whole of you to kingdom come in a minute, if I could; but common sense is a common sense. All the same, there's no good to you and no harm to Clark in mistreating, or even holding this prisoner. What harm can he do you by going back to Clark and telling him the whole truth? Clark knew everything long before Vigo reached here. Old Jazon, my best scout, left here the day you took possession, and you may hear he got to Kaskaskia in short order. He'll tell Clark to stay where he is, and Vigo can do no more."

What effect Helm's bold and apparently artless talk had upon Hamilton's mind is not recorded; but the message historical facts at command show that Vigo was released and permitted to return upon promise that he would give no information to the enemy on his way to Kaskaskia.

Doubtless this bit of careless diplomacy on the governor's part did have a somewhat soothing effect upon a large class of Frenchmen at Vincennes; but Farnsworth quickly neutralized it to a serious extent by a foolish act while slightly under the influence of liquor.

Alice stood gazing at him with a look on her face she would never forget. It was a look that changed by wonderful swift gradations from terrible hate to something like sweet pity. The instant she saw him hurt and bleeding, his countenance relaxed, and his heart failed her. She took a step toward him, her hand opened, and with a thud the heavy old pistol fell upon the ground beside her.

Father Beret sprang nimbly to sustain Farnsworth, snatching up the pistol as he passed around Alice. "You are hurt, my son," he gently said, "let me help you." He passed his arm firmly under that of Farnsworth, seeing that the captain was unsteady on his feet.

"Lean upon me, come with me, Alice, my child, and I will take him into the house."

Alice picked up the captain's sword and led the way. It was all done so quickly that Farnsworth, in his half-dazed condition, scarcely realized what was going on until he found himself on a couch in the Rousillon home, his wound (a jagged furrow) slung out by the sword's blade had first intercepted, neatly dressed and bandaged, while Alice and the priest hovered over him busy with their careful ministrations.

Hamilton and Helm were, as usual, playing cards at the former's quarters when a guard announced that Mademoiselle Rousillon wished an audience with the governor.

"Bring the girl in," said Hamilton, throwing down his cards and scowling darkly.

"Now you'd better be wise as a serpent and as gentle as a dove," remarked Helm. "There is something up, and that gunshot we heard awhile ago may have a good deal to do with it. At any rate, you'll find kindness your best card to play with Alice Rousillon just at the present stage of the game."

Of course, they knew nothing of what had happened to Farnsworth; but they had been discussing the strained relations between the garrison and the French inhabitants when the roar of Alice's big-mouthed pistol startled them. Helm was slyly beating about to try to make Hamilton lose, and the danger from Clark's direction. To do this he artfully magnified the insidious work that might be done by the French and their Indian friends should they be driven to desperation by the pressive or exasperating action on the part of the English.

Hamilton felt the dangerous uncertainty upon which the situation rested, but, like many another vigorously self-reliant man, he could not subordinate his passions to the dictates of policy. When Alice was conducted into his presence he instantly swelled with anger. It was her father who had struck him and escaped, it was she who had carried off the rebel flag at the moment of victory.

"Then take the consequences!" Farnsworth lifted his sword, not to thrust, but to strike with its flat side, and down it flashed with a noisy whack. Father Beret flung out an arm and deftly turned the blow aside. It was done so easily that Farnsworth sprang back glaring and surprised.

"You fool!" he cried, leveling his weapon for a direct lunge. "You devilish hypocrite!"

It was then that Father Beret turned deadly pale and swiftly crossed himself. His face looked as if he saw something appalling just beyond his adversary. Possibly this sudden change of expression caused Farnsworth to hesitate for a mere point of time. Then there was the swish of a woman's skirts; a light step pattered on the frozen ground, and Alice sprang between the men, facing Farnsworth. As she did this something small and yellow—the locket at her throat—fell and rolled under her feet. Nobody saw it.

In her hand she held an immense horse pistol, which she leveled in the captain's face, its flaring, bugle-shaped muzzle gaping not a yard from his eye. The heavy tube was as steady as if in a vise.

"Drop that sword!" "That was all she said; but her finger was pressing the trigger, and the flint in the backward slanting hammer was ready to click against the steel. The leaden slugs were on the point of leaping forth."

"Drop that sword!" The repetition seemed to close the opportunity for delay.

Farnsworth was on his guard in a twinkling. He set his jaw and uttered an ugly oath; then, quick as lightning, he struck sidewise at the pistol with his blade. It was a move which might have taken a less alert person than Alice unawares; but her training in sword play was ready in her wrist and hand. An involuntary turn, the slightest imaginable, set the heavy barrel of her weapon strongly against the blow, partly stopping it, and then the gaping muzzle spat its load of balls and slugs with a below that awoke the drowsy village.

Farnsworth staggered backward, letting fall his sword. There was a rent in the clothing of his left shoulder. He reeled; the blood spurt out; but he did not fall, although he grew white.

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between his thumb and finger on the rude table.

She entered before him tall and straight, well bundled in furs. She was not pale; her blood was too rich and brilliant for that; but despite a half-smile and the inextinguishable dimples, there was a touch of something appealingly pathetic in the lines of her mouth. She did not waver or hesitate, however, but spoke promptly and distinctly.

"What's this you tell me?" he blurted out, "you say you've shot Captain Farnsworth?"

"Oui, monsieur." He stared a moment, then his features beamed with hate.

"An irresistible impulse swept Beverly to Alice's side, and his attitude was that of a protector. Helm sprang up. A lieutenant came in and respectfully, but with evident over-haste, reported that Captain Farnsworth had been shot and was at Rousillon place in care of the surgeon."

"Take this girl into custody. Confine her and put a guard over her."

In giving the order Hamilton jerked his thumb contemptuously toward Alice, and at the same time gave Beverly a look of supreme defiance and hatred. When Helm began to speak she turned fiercely upon him and stopped him with:

"None of your advice, sir. I have had all I want of it. Keep your place or I'll make you!"

"Retire, sir. When I wish to see you I'll send for you. At present you are not needed here."

The English lieutenant saluted his commander, bowed respectfully to Alice and said:

"Come with me, miss, please."

Helm and Beverly exchanged a look of helplessness and inquiring rage. It was as if they had said, "What are we to do? Must we bear it?" Certainly they could do nothing. Any interference on their part would be sure to increase Alice's contempt and at the same time add to the weight of their own humiliation.

Alice silently followed the officer out of the room. She did not even glance toward Beverly, who moved as if to follow her and was promptly rebuffed back by the guard. His better judgment returning held him from a rash and futile act, until Hamilton spoke again, saying loudly as Alice passed through the door:

"I'll see your master of this town if I have to shoot every French hoyden in it!"

side himself, his whole frame quivering.

Hamilton laughed derisively, then looked at Helm and said:

"Helm, I like you; I don't wish to be unkind to you; but positively you must quit breaking in upon my affairs with your ready-made advice. I've given you and Lieutenant Beverly too much latitude, perhaps. If that young fool don't look sharp he'll get himself into a beastly lot of trouble. You'd better give him a talk, and despatch what he's got. That girl has turned his head. I think I understand the whole affair. A little love, a little wine, some foolishness, and the wench shot him."

Helm generally assented; but they got back upon fair footing with the irascible governor. "I'll wait until he cools off somewhat, and then I can manage him. Leave him to me."

"Well, come walk with me to see what has really happened to Farnsworth. He's probably not much hurt, and deserves what he's got. That girl has turned his head. I think I understand the whole affair. A little love, a little wine, some foolishness, and the wench shot him."

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