The VALIANTS of VIRGINIA

By HALLIE ERMINIE RIVES (MRS. POST WHEELER)

ILLUSTRATED By LAUREN STOUT

SYNOPSIS.

CHAPTER I—John Valiant, a rich society favorite, suddenly discovers that the Valiant 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 Valiants ever since.

CHAPTER V—On the way to Damory court he meets Shirley Dandridge, an auburn-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 Valiant to Damory court.

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

CHAPTER IX—Valiant 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—Valiant 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 Valiant took part.

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

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

CHAPTER XIV—Valiant 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 Valiant is again living at Damory court.

CHAPTER XVI—Valiant 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.

Beyond the Box-Hedge.

As he greeted her, his gaze plunged deep into hers. She had recoiled a step, startled, to recognize him almost instantly. He noted the shrinking and thought it due to a stabbing memory of that forest-horror. His first words were prosaic enough:

"I'm an unconscionable trespasser," he said. "It must seem awfully prowly, but I didn't realize I was on private property till I passed the hedge there."

As her hand lay in his, a strange fancy stirred in him: in that wood-meeting she had seemed something witch-like, the wilful spirit of the passionate spring herself, mixed of her aerial essences and jungle wildernesses; in this scented dim-lit close she was grave-eyed, subdued, a paler pensive woman of under half-guessed sadnesses and haunting moods. With her answer, however, this gravity seemed to slip from her like a garment. She laughed lightly.

"I love to prowl myself. I think sometimes I like the night better than the day. I believe in one of my incarnations I must have been a panther."

They both laughed. "I'm growing superstitious about flowers," he said. "You know a rose figured in our first meeting. And in our last—"

She shrank momentarily. "The cape jessamines! I shall always think of that when I see them!"

"Ah, forgive me!" he begged. "But when I remember what you did—for me! Oh, I know! But for you, I must have died."

"But for me you wouldn't have been bitten. But don't let's talk of it." She shivered suddenly.

"You are cold," he said. "Isn't that gown too thin for this night air?"

"No, I often walk here till quite late. Listen!"

The bird song had broken forth again, to be answered this time by a rival's in a distant thicket. "My nightingale is in good voice."

"I never heard a nightingale before I came to Virginia. I wonder why it sings only at night."

"What an odd idea! Why, it sings in the daytime, too."

"Really? But I suppose it escapes notice in the general chorus. Is it a large bird?"

"No; smaller than a thrush. Only a little bigger than a robin. Its nest is over there in that hedge—a tiny loose cup of dried oak-leaves, lined with hair, and the eggs are olive color. How pretty the hedge looks now, all tangled with firefly sparks!"

"Doesn't it! Uncle Jefferson calls them 'lightning-bugs.'"

"The name is much more picturesque. But all the darky sayings are. Do you find him and Aunt Daphne useful?"

"He has been a godsend," he said fervently; "and her cooking has caught me to treat her with passionate respect. He's teaching me now about flowers—it's surprising how many kinds he knows. He's a walking herbarium."

"Come and see mine," she said. "Roses are our specialty—we have to live up to the Rosewood name. But beyond the arbors, are beds and beds of other flowers. See—by this big tree are speed-well and delphinium. The tree is a black-walnut. It's a dreadful thing to have one as big as that. When you want something that costs a lot of money you go and look at it and wonder which you want most, that particular luxury or the tree. I know a girl who had two in her yard only a little bigger than this, and she went to Europe on them. But so far I've always voted for the tree. How does your garden come on?"

"Famously. Uncle Jefferson has shanghaied a half-dozen negro gardeners—from where I can't imagine—and he's having the time of his life hectoring over them. He refers to the upper and lower terraces as 'up-and-down-stairs.' I've got seeds, but it will be a long time before they flower."

"Oh, would you like some slips?" she cried. "Or, better still, I can give you the roses already rooted—Mad Charles and Marechal Neil and Cloth of Gold and cabbage and ramblers. We have geraniums and fuchsias, too, and the coral honeysuckle. That's different from the wild one, you know."

"You are too good! If you would only advise me where to set them! But I dare say you think me presuming."

She turned her full face to him. "'Presuming!' You're punishing me now for the dreadful way I talked to you about Damory Court—before I knew who you were. Oh, it was unpardonable! And after the splendid thing you had done—I read about it that same evening—with your money, I mean!"

"No, no!" he protested. "There was nothing splendid about it. It was only pride. You see the corporation was my father's great idea—the thing he created and put his soul into—and it was foundering. I know that would have hurt him. One thing I've wanted to say to you, ever since the day we talked together—about the duel. I want to say that whatever lay behind it, my father's whole life was darkened by that event. Now that I can put two and two together, I know that it was the cause of his sadness."

"Ah, I can believe that," she replied.

"I think he had only two interests—myself and the corporation. So you see why I'd rather save that and be a beggar the rest of my natural life. But I'm not a beggar. Damory Court alone is worth—I know it now—a hundred times what I left."

"You are so utterly different from what I imagined you!"

"I could never have imagined you," he said, "never."

"I must be terribly outre."

"You are so many women in one. When I listened to your harp playing I could hardly believe it was the same you I saw galloping across the fields that morning. Now you are a different woman from both of those."

As she looked at him, her lips curled corner-wise, her foot slipped on the sheer edge of the turf. She swayed toward him and he caught her, feeling for a sharp instant the adorable nearness of her body. It ridged all his skin with a creeping delight. She recovered her footing with an exclamation, and turned back somewhat abruptly to the porch where she seated herself on the step, drawing her filmy skirt aside to make a place for him. There was a moment of silence which he broke.

"That exquisite serenade you were playing! You know the words, of course."

"They are more lovely, if possible, than the score. Do you care for poetry?"

"I've always loved it," he said. "I've been reading some lately—a little old-fashioned book I found at Damory Court. It's 'Lucile.' Do you know it?"

"Yes. It's my mother's favorite."

He drew it from his pocket. "See, I've got it here. It's marked, too."

He opened it, to close it instantly—not, however, before she had put out her hand and laid it, palm down, on the page. "That rose! Oh, let me have it!"

"Never!" he protested. "Look here. When I put it between the leaves, I did so at random. I didn't see till now that I had opened it at a marked passage."

"Let us read it," she said.

He leaned and held the leaf to the light from the doorway and the two heads bent together over the text.

A sound fell behind them and both turned. A slight figure, in a soft gray gown with old lace at the throat, stood in the doorway behind them. John Valiant sprang to his feet.

"Ah, Shirley, I thought I heard voices. Is that you, Chilly?"

"It's not Mr. Lusk, mother," said Shirley. "It's our new neighbor, Mr. Valiant."

As he bent over the frail hand, murmuring the conventional words that presentations are believed to require, Mrs. Dandridge sank into a deep cushioned chair. "Won't you sit down?" she said. He noticed that she did not look directly at him, and that her face was as pallid as her hair.

"Thank you," said John Valiant, and resumed his place on the lower step.

Shirley, who had again seated herself, suddenly laughed, and pointed to the book which lay between them. "Imagine what we are doing, dearest! We were reading 'Lucile' together."

She saw the other wince, and the deep dark eyes lifted, as if under compulsion, from the book-cover to Valiant's face. He was startled by Shirley's cry and the sudden limp unconscious settling-back into the cushions of the fragile form.

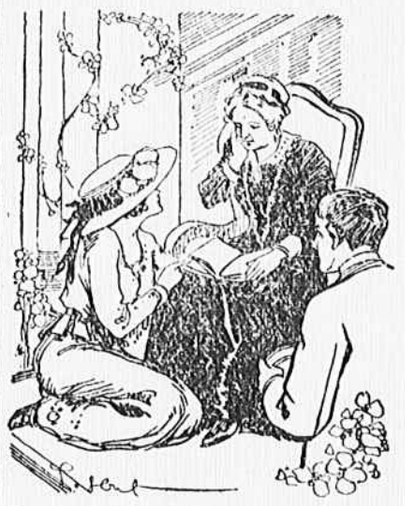
CHAPTER XIX.

Night.

A quicker breeze was stirring as John Valiant went back along the Red Road. He had waited in the garden at Rosewood till Shirley, aided by Emmaline and with Ranston's anxious face hovering in the background, having performed those gentle offices which a woman's fainting spell requires, had come to reassure him and to say good night.

As he threw off his coat in the bedroom he had chosen for his own, he felt the hard corner of the "Lucile" in the pocket, and drawing it out, laid it on the table by the bedside. He seemed to feel again the tingle of his cheek where a curling strand of her coppery hair had sprung against it when her head had bent beside his own to read the marked lines.

When he had undressed he sat an hour in the candle-blaze, a dressing-gown thrown over his shoulders, striving vainly to recreate that evening call, to remember her every word and look and movement. For a breath her face would flush suddenly before him, like a live thing; then it would mysteriously fade and elude him, though he clenched his hands on the arms of his chair in the fierce mental



Shirley, Who Had Again Seated Herself, Suddenly Laughed, and Pointed to the Book.

effort to recall it. Only the intense blue of her eyes, the tawny sweep of her hair—these and the touch of her, the consciousness of her warm and vivid fragrance, remained to wrap all his senses in a mist woven of gold and fire.

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Shirley, meanwhile, had sat some time beside her mother's bed, leaning from a white chintz-covered chair, her anxiety only partially allayed by reassurances, now and then stooping to lay her young cheek against the delicate arm in its lacy sleeve or to pass her hand lovingly up and down its outline, noting with a recurrent passion of tenderness the transparency of the skin with its violet veining and the shadows beneath the closed eyes. Emmaline, moving on soft worsted-shod feet about the dim room, at length had whispered.

"You go tuh baid, honey. I stay with Mis' Judith till she go tuh sleep."

"Yes, go, Shirley," said her mother. "Haven't I any privileges at all? Can't I even faint when I feel like it, without calling out the fire-brigade? You'll pamper me to death and heaven knows I don't need it."

"You won't let me telephone for Doctor Southall?"

"Certainly not!

"And you are sure it was nothing but the roses?"

"Why, what else should it be?" said her mother almost peevishly. "I must really have the arbors thinned out. On heavy nights it's positively overpowering. Go along now, and we'll talk about it tomorrow. I can ring if I want anything."

In her room Shirley undressed thoughtfully. There was between her and her mother a fine tenuous bond of sympathy and feeling as rare, perhaps, as it was lovely. She could not remember when the other had not been a semi-invalid, and her earliest childhood recollections were punctuated with the tap of the little cane. Tonight's sudden indisposition had shocked and disturbed her; to faint at a rush of perfume seemed to suggest a growing weakness that was alarming. Tomorrow, she told herself, she would send Ranston with a wagon-load of the roses to the hospital at Charlottesville.

She slipped on a pink shell-shaded dressing-gown of slinky silk with a riot of azaleas scattered in the weave, and then, dragging her chair before the open window, drew aside the light curtain and began to brush her hair. All at once her gaze fell upon the floor, and she shrank backward from a twisting thread-like thing whose bright saffron-yellow glowed sharply against the dark carpet. She saw in an instant, however, that it was nothing more dangerous than a fragment of love-vine from the garden, which had clung to her skirt. She picked up the tiny mass of tendrils and with a slow smile tossed it over her right shoulder through the window. "If it takes root," she said aloud, "my sweetheart loves me." She leaned from the sill to peer down into the misty garden, but could not follow its fall.

Long ago her visitor would have reached Damory Court. She had a vision of him wandering, candle in hand, through the empty echoing rooms, looking at the voiceless portraits on the walls, thinking perhaps of his father, of the fatal duel of which he had never known. She liked the way he had spoken of his father!

As she leaned, out of the stillness there came to her ear a mellow sound. It was the bell of the courthouse in the village. She counted the strokes falling clearly or faintly as the sluggish breeze ebbed or swelled. It was eleven.

She drew back, dropped the curtain to shut out the wan glimmer, and in the darkness crept into the soft bed as if into a hiding-place.

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A warm sun and an air mildly mellow. A faint gold-shadowed mist over the valley and a soft lilac haze blending the rounded outlines of the hills. Through the shrubbery at Damory Court a cardinal darted like a crimson shuttle, to rock impudently from a fleering limb, and here and there on the bluish-ivory sky, motionless as a pasted wafer, hung a hawk; from time to time one of these wavered and slanted swiftly down, to climb once more in a huge spiral to its high tower of sky.

Perhaps it wondered, as its telescopic eye looked down. That had been its choicest covert, that dishevelled tangle where the birds held perpetual carnival, the weasel lurked in the underbrush and the rabbit lined his windfall. Now the wildness was gone. A pergola, glistening white, now upheld the runaway vines, making a sickle-like path from the upper terrace to the lake. In the barn loft the pigeons still quarrelled over their new cotes of fresh pine, and under a clump of locust trees at a little distance from the house, a half-dozen dolls' cabins on stilts stood waiting the honey-storage of the black and gold bees.

There were new denizens, also. These had arrived in a dozen zinc tanks and willow hampers, to the amaze of a sleepy express clerk at the railroad station: two swans now sailed majestically over the lily-ponds of the lake, along its gravel rim and a pair of bronze-colored ducks waddled and preened, and its placid surface rippled and broke to the sluggish backs of goldfish and the flirting fins of red Japanese carp.

The house itself wore another air. Its look of unkemptness had largely vanished. The soft gray tone of age remained, but the bleakness and forlornness were gone; there was about all now a warmth and genial bearing that hinted at mellowed beauty, firelight and cheerful voices within.

Valiant heaved a long sigh of satisfaction as he stood in the sunlight gazing at the results of his labors. He was not now the flippant boulevardier to whom money was the sine qua non of existence. He had learned a sovereign lesson—one gained not through the push and fight of crowds, but in the simple peace of a countryside, unvexed by the clamor of gold and the complex problems of a competitive existence—that he had inherited a need of activity, of achievement that he had been born to do.

"Chum," he said, to the dog rolling on his back in the grass, "what do you think of it all, anyway?" He reached down, seized a hind leg and whirling him around like a teetotum, sent him flying into the bushes, whence Chum launched again upon him, like a catapult. He caught the white shoulders and held him vise-like. "Just about right, eh? But wait till we get those ramblers!"

(Continued Next Week.)

HONOR ROLL
Watts Mill School.
Month Ending May 8th, 1914.

First Grade: Alice Kirby, Swanee Linder, Lewis Mims, Edwin Thomas, Willie Allen, Gray Patton, Roy McDowell, Kirk Taylor, Roy Page, Clyde Kirby, Jay Clarke, Raymond O'dell, Thad Price, Willie Hazel, Ollie Price, Ida Price, Mamie Gregory, Maud Brownlee, Gladys Lee, Irene Hazel.

Second Grade: Grace Oxner, Pearl Tumlin, Sadie Franks, Mary Linder, Sadie Hughes, Era Whitlock.

Third Grade: Clara Allen Lorie Bishop, Nina Bobo, Clyde Golightly, Emmett Jessee, Andrella McKee, Herman Taylor, Gladys Tumlin.

Fourth Grade: Winona Hughes, Ruth Oxner, Charlie Pulley.

Fifth Grade: Jessie Mae Golightly, Lorie Page, Nannie Lee Snoddy, Floyd Taylor.

Sixth Grade: Pauline Clark, Gertrude Oxner, Frank Thomas.

Seventh Grade: Maudie Mae Jessee.