



The VALIANTS of VIRGINIA

HALLIE ERMINIE RIVES
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SYNOPSIS.

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

CHAPTER III—Continued.

To be outside! All that light and color and comfort and pleasure would hum and sparkle on just the same, though he was no longer within the circle of its effulgence—slaving perhaps, he thought with a twisted smile, at some tawdry occupation that called for no experience, to pay for a meal in some second-rate restaurant and a pallet in some shabby-genteel, hall bedroom, till his clothes were replaced by ill-fitting "hand-me-downs"—till by wretched gradations he arrived finally at the status of the dime seat in the gallery and five-cent cigars!

There was one way back. It lay through the hackneyed gateway of marriage. Youth, comeliness and fine linen, in the world he knew, were a fair exchange for wealth any day. "Cutlet for cutlet"—the satiric phrase ran through his mind. Why not? Others did so. And as for himself, it perhaps need be no question of plain and spinstered millions—there was Katharine Fargo!

In his heart John Vallant was aware, by those subtle signs which men and women alike distinguish, that while Katharine Fargo loved first and foremost her own wonderful person, he had been an easy second in her regard.

John Vallant looked down at the bulldog squatted on the floor, his eyes shining in the dimness. A little hot ripple had run over him. "Not on your life, Chum!" he said. "No shameless barter! There must be other things besides money and social position in this doddering old world, after all! We're going to begin something for ourselves, if it's only raising cabbages! And we're going to stand it without any baby-aching—the nurse never held our noses when we took our castor-oil!"

It was folded down, that old bright page. Fins had been written to the rose-colored chapter. And even as he told himself, he was conscious of a new rugged something that had been slowly dawning within him, a sense of courage, even of zest, and a furious hatred of the self-pity that had wrenched him even for a moment.

He turned from the window, picked up his letters, and followed by the dog, went slowly up another flight to his room.

He tore open the letters abstractedly: the usual dinner-card or two, a tailor's spring announcement, a chronic serial from an exclamatory marble-quarrying company, a quarterly statement of a club house-committee. The last two missives bore a nondescript look.

One was small, with the name of a legal firm in its corner. The other was largish, corpulent and heavy, of stout Manila paper, and bore, down one side, a gaudy procession of postage stamps proclaiming that it had been registered.

"What's in that, I wonder?" he said to himself, and then, with a smile at



For a Long Time John Vallant Sat Motionless, the Opened Letter in His Hand, Staring at Nothing.

the unmasculine speculation, opened the smaller envelope.

"Dear Sir," began the letter, in the most uncompromisingly conventional of typewriting:

"Dear Sir: Enclosed please find, with little deed, a memorandum opened in your name by the late John Vallant some years before his death. It was his desire that the services indicated in connection with this estate should continue till this date. We hand you herewith our check for \$236.20 (two hundred and thirty-six dollars and twenty cents), the balance in your favor, for which please send receipt, and oblige,

"Yours very truly,
"Emerson and Ball."

"(Enclosure)" He turned to the memorandum. It showed a sizable initial deposit against which was discovered a series of annual

tax payments with minor disbursements credited to "inspection and care." The tax receipts were pinned to the account.

The larger wrapper contained an unsealed envelope, across which was written in faded ink and in an unfamiliar dashing, slanting handwriting, his own name. The envelope contained a creased yellow parchment, from between whose folds there clumped and fluttered down upon the floor a long flattened object wrapped in a paper, a newspaper clipping and a letter.

Puzzled he unfolded the cracking thing in his hands. "Why," he said half aloud, "it's a deed made over to me." He overran it swiftly. "Part of an old Colony grant . . . a plantation in Virginia, twelve hundred odd acres, given under the hand of a vice-regal governor in the sixteenth century. I had no idea titles in the United States went back so far as that!" His eyes fled to the end. "It was my father's! What could he have wanted of an estate in Virginia? It must have come into his hands in the course of business."

He picked up the newspaper clipping. It was worn and broken in the folds as if it had been carried for months in a pocketbook.

"It will interest readers of this section of Virginia (the paragraph began) to learn, from a recent transfer received for record at the County Clerk's office, that Damory Court has passed to Mr. John Vallant, minor."

He turned the paper over and found a date; it had been printed in the year of the transfer to himself, when he was six years old—the year his father had died.

"—John Vallant, minor, the son of the former owner.

"There are few indeed who do not recall the tragedy with which in the public mind the estate is connected. The fact, moreover, that this old homestead has been left in its present state (for, as is well known, the house has remained with all its contents and furnishings untouched) to rest during so long a term of years unoccupied, could not, of course, fall to be commented on, and this circumstance alone has perhaps tended to keep alive a melancholy story which may well be forgotten."

He read the elaborate, rather stilted phraseology in the twenty-year-old paper with a wondering interest. "An old house," he mused, "with a bad name. Probably he couldn't sell it, and maybe nobody would ever live in it. That would explain why it remained so long unoccupied—why there are no records of rentals. Probably the land was starved and run down."

"It's an off-set to the hall-bedroom idea, at any rate," he said to himself humorously. "It holds out an escape from the noble army of rent-payers. When my twenty-eight hundred is gone, I could live down there a landed proprietor, and by the same mark an honorary colonel, and raise the cabbages I was talking about—eh, Chum?—while you stalk rabbits. How does that strike you?"

He laughed whimsically. He, John Vallant, of New York, first-nighter at its theaters, half-fellow-well-met in its club corridors and welcome diner at any one of a hundred brilliant glass-and-silver-twinkling supper tables, entombed on the wreck of a Virginia plantation, a would-be country gentleman, on an automobile and next to nothing a year!

He thought himself of the fallen letter and possessed himself of it quickly. It lay with the superscription side down. On it was written, in the same hand which had addressed the other envelope:

For my son, John Vallant,
When he reaches the age of twenty-five.

That, then, had been written by his father—and he had died nearly twenty years ago! He broke the seal with a strange feeling as if, walking in some familiar thoroughfare, he had stumbled on a lichen and sunken tombstone.

"When you read this, my son, you will have come to man's estate. It is curious to think that this black, black ink may be faded to gray and this white, white paper yellowed, just from lying waiting so long. But strangest of all is to think that you yourself whose brown head hardly tops this desk, will be as tall (I hope) as I! How I wonder what you will look like then! And shall I—the real, real I, I mean—be peering over your strong broad shoulder as you read? Who knows? Wise men have dreamed such a thing possible—and I am not a bit wiser.

"John, you will not have forgotten that you are a Vallant. But you are also a Virginian. Will you have discovered this for yourself? Here is the deed to the land where I and my father, and his father, and many, many more Vallants before them were born. Sometime, perhaps, you will know why you are John Vallant of New York instead of John Vallant of Damory Court. I can not tell you myself, because it is too true a story, and I have forgotten how to tell any but fairy tales, where everything happens right, where the Prince marries the beautiful Princess and they live happily together ever after.

"You may never care to live at Damory Court. Maybe the life you will know so well by the time you read this will have welded you to itself. If so, well and good. Then leave the old place to your son. But there is such a thing as racial habit, and the call of blood. And I know there is such a thing, too, as fate. Every man carries his fate on a ribbon about his neck; so the Moslem put it. It was my fate to go away, and I know now—since distance is not made by miles alone—that I myself shall never see Damory Court again. But life is a strange wheel that goes round and round and comes back to the same point again and again. And it may be your fate to go back. Then perhaps you will cry



She Was the First to Recover. "You Did Look So Funny!"

(but, oh, not on the old white bear's skin rug—never again with me holding your small, small hand!)

"Wishing-House! Wishing-House! Where are you?"

"And this old parchment deed will answer—"

"Here I am, Master; here I am!"

"Ah, we are only children, after all, playing out our plays. I have had many toys, but O John, John! The ones I treasure most are all in the Never-Never Land!"

CHAPTER IV.

A Vallant of Virginia.

For a long time John Vallant sat motionless, the opened letter in his hand, staring at nothing. He had the sensation, spiritually, of a traveler awakened with a rude shock amid wholly unfamiliar surroundings.

He was trying to remember—to put two and two together. His father had been Southern-born; yes, he had known that. But he had known nothing whatever of his father's early days, or of his forebears; since he had been old enough to wonder about such things, he had had no one to ask questions of.

Phrases of the letter ran through his mind: "Sometime, perhaps, you will know why you are John Vallant of New York instead of John Vallant of Damory Court . . . I cannot tell you myself." There was some tragedy, then, that had blighted the place, some "melancholy story," as the clipping put it.

He bent over the deed spread out upon the table, following with his finger the long line of transfers: "To John Vallante," he muttered; "what odd spelling! Robert Vallant—without the 'e'. Here, in 1730, the 'y' begins to be 'i'. There was something strenuous and appealing in the long line of dates. Vallant. Always a Vallant. How they held on to it! There's never a break."

A curious pride, new-born and self-conscious, was dawning in him. He was descended from ancestors who had been no weaklings. A Vallant had settled on those acres under a royal governor, before the old frontier fighting was over and the Indians had sullenly retired to the westward. The sons of those who had braved sea and savages had bowed their strong bodies and their stronger hearts to raze the forests and turn the primeval jungles into golden plantations.

There stole into his mood an eery suggestion of intention. Why should the date assigned for that deed's delivery have been the very day on which he had elected poverty? Here was a foreordination as pointed as the index-finger of a guide-post. "Every man carries his fate," he repeated, "on a ribbon about his neck." Chum, do you believe in fate?

For answer the bulldog, cocking an alert eye on his master, discontinued his occupation—a conscientious if unsuccessful mastication of the flatfish packet that had fallen from the folded deed—and with much solicitous tail-wagging, brought the sodden thing in his mouth and put it into the outstretched hand.

His master unrolled the pulpywad and extricated the object it had enclosed—an old-fashioned iron door-key.

After a time Vallant thrust the key

into his pocket, and rising, went to a trunk that lay against the wall. Searching in a portfolio, he took out a small old-fashioned photograph, much battered and soiled. It had been cut from a larger group and the name of the photographer had been erased from the back. He set it upright on the desk, and bending forward, looked long at the face it disclosed. It was the only picture he had ever possessed of his father.

He turned and looked into the glass above the dresser. The features were the same, eyes, brow, lips, and strong waving hair. But for its time-stains the photograph might have been one of himself, taken yesterday.

CHAPTER V.

On the Red Road.

The green, mid-May Virginian afternoon was arched with a sky as blue as the tiles of the Temple of Heaven and steeped in a wash of sunlight as yellow as gold. Nothing in all the springy landscape but looked warm and opalescent and inviting—except a tawny bull that from across a barred fence-corner switched a truculent tail in silence and glowered sullenly at the big motor halted motionless at the side of the twisting road.

Curled worm-like in the driver's seat, with his chin on his knees, John Vallant sat with his eyes upon the distance. For an hour he had whirled through that wondrous shimmer of color with a flippant loitering breeze in his face, sweet from the crimson clover that poured and rooted over the roadside.

"Chum, old man," said Vallant, with his arm about the bulldog's neck, "if those color-photograph chaps had shown us this, we simply wouldn't have believed it, would we? Such scenery beats the roads we're used to, what?" He wound his strong fingers in a choking grip in the scruff of the white neck, as a chipmunk chattered on the low stone wall. "No, you don't you cannibal! He's a jolly little beggar, and he doesn't deserve being eaten!"

He filled his briar-wood pipe and drew in great breaths of the fragrant incense. "What a pity you don't smoke, Chum; you miss such a lot!" After a time he shook himself and knocked the red core from the pipe-bowl against his boot-heel. "I hate to start," he confessed, half to the dog and half to himself. "To leave anything so sheerly beautiful as this! However, on with the dance! By the road map the village can't be far now. So long, Mr. Bull!"

He clutched the self-starter. But there was only a protestant wheeze; the car declined to budge. Climbing down, he cranked vigorously. The motor turned over with a surly grunt of remonstrance and after a tentative throb-throb, coughed and stopped dead. Something was wrong. With a sigh he flung off his tweed jacket, donned a smudgy "jumper," opened his tool-box, and, with a glance at his wrist-watch which told him it was three o'clock, threw up the monster's hood and went bitterly to work.

At half past three the investigation had got as far as the lubricator. At four o'clock the bulldog had given it up and gone nosing afield. At half past four John Vallant lay flat on his back, like some disreputable stevedore, alternately tinkering with refractory valves and cursing the obdurate mechanism. A sharp stone gnawed frenziedly into the small of his back and just as he made a final vicious lunge, something gave way and a prickling red-hot stab of pain shot zig-zagging from his smitten crazy-bone



REGIMENTAL COLORS IN PAWN

Odd Experiences of British Emblems Once Greatly Prized by Those Who Carried Them.

The discovery of the long lost colors of the old 50th regiment in the garden of Funtington house, near, Chichester, is a reminder of the strange fates that have befallen so many of these glorious military emblems, London Tit-Bits remarks. The colors of the 81st foot—since disbanded—were captured by American pirates during the war of independence and hidden away in Ireland; the colors of the 20th regiment were deliberately burnt prior to the surrender at Saratoga to prevent their capture by the enemy.

At Bergen-op-Zoom the Royal Scots, to save their precious colors from falling into French hands, sank them deep in the river, though the enemy later fished them out; and when the second battalion of the 8th foot was disbanded at Portsmouth in 1816 the colors were cut into small pieces and distributed among the officers.

One of the colors of the 1st Northamptonshire regiment, which had been carried right through the peninsular campaign, was discovered some years ago in a pawn broker's shop, though how it got there is a mystery to this

day. A similar uncertainty attaches to a pair of old colors of the 2d Border regiment, which were recovered from a London pawn broker, who was offering them for sale, by Lord Archibald Campbell in 1888.

Four years later four colors which had accompanied the Gloucester regiment in Egypt and in the peninsula were recovered from a York pawnbroker. It appeared that, having been bequeathed by an old colonel of the regiment to his son, they were ultimately secured by a servant, who, falling on evil times, pawned them for a few shillings.

Wood Is Made Fireproof.

It is said that the Metropolitan railway has fireproofed all its rolling stock without the elimination of woodwork and the structural and decorative advantages which woodwork affords. The method of fireproofing is the same as that now being employed by the admiralty. This consists of the impregnation of the pores and fibers of the wood with chemicals such as render the wood absolutely flameproof. Wood so treated is said to lose none of its natural characteristics, and has no harmful effect upon glues, nails, varnishes or metal fittings with which it may be brought into contact.—Railway Times, London.

through every tortured crevice of his impatient frame. Like steel from flint it struck out a crisp oath that brought an answering bovine snort from the fence-corner.

Worming like a lizard to freedom, his eyes puckered shut with the wretched pang, John Vallant sat up and shook his grimy fist in the air. "You silly loafing idiot!" he cried. "Thump your own crazy-bone and see how you like it! You—oh, lord!"

His arm dropped, and a flush spread over his face to the brow. For his eyes had opened. He was gesturing not at the bull but at a girl, who fronted him beside the road, haughtiness in the very hue of her gray-blue linen walking suit and, in the clear-cut cameo face under her felt cavalry hat, myrtle-blue eyes that held a smolder of mingled astonishment and indignation. An instant he gazed, all the muscles of his face tightened with chagrin.

"I beg your pardon," he stammered. "I didn't see you. I really didn't. I was—I was talking to the bull."

The girl had been glancing from the flushed face to the thistly fence-corner, while the startled dignity of her features warred with an unmistakable tendency to mirth. He had struggled to his feet, nursing his bruised elbow, irritably conscious of his resemblance to an emerging chimney-sweep. "I don't habitually swear," he said, "but I'd got to the point when something had to explode."

"Oh," she said, "don't mind me!" Then mirth conquered and she broke forth suddenly into a laugh that seemed to set the whole place a quiver with a musical contagion. They both laughed in concert, while the bull pawed the ground and sent forth a rumbling bellow of affront and challenge.

She was the first to recover. "You did look so funny!" she gasped. "I can believe it," he agreed, making a vicious dab at his smudged elbow. "The possibilities of a motor for comedy are simply stupendous."

She came closer and looked curiously at the quiescent motor—at the steamer-trunk strapped on the carrier and the bulging portmanteau peeping over the side of the tonneau. "Is it broken?"

"Merely on strike, I imagine. Are we far from the village?"

"About a mile and a half."

"I'll have to have it towed after me. The immediate point is my traps. I wonder if there is likely to be a team passing?"

"I'm afraid it's not too certain," answered the girl, and now he noted the liquid modulation, with its slightly questioning accent, charmingly Southern. "There is no livery, but there is a negro who meets the train sometimes. I can send him if you like."

"You're very good," said Vallant, as she turned away, "and I'll be enormously obliged. Oh—and if you see a white dog, don't be frightened if he tries to follow you. He's perfectly kind."

She looked back momentarily. "He—he always follows people he likes, you see—"

"Thank you," she said. The tone had now a hint—small, yet perceptible—of aloofness. "I'm not in the least afraid of dogs." And with a little nod, she swung briskly on up the Red Road.

John Vallant stood staring after her (till she had passed from view around a curve. "Oh, glory!" he muttered. "To begin by shaking your fist at her and end by making her wonder if you aren't trying to be fresh! You poor, profane, floundering dolt!"

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

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