



The VALIANTS of VIRGINIA

By HALLIE ERMINIE RIVES

ILLUSTRATIONS BY LAUREN STOUT

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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. His entire remaining possessions consist of an old motor car, a white bull dog and Danory court, a neglected estate in Virginia. On the way to Danory court he meets Shirley Dandridge, an auburn-haired beauty, and discovers that he is going to like Virginia immensely. An old negro tells Shirley's fortune and predicts great trouble for her on account of a man.

CHAPTER VIII.

What Happened Thirty Years Ago.
When Shirley came across the lawn at Rosewood, Major Montague Bristow sat under the arbor talking to her mother.

The major was massive-framed, with a strong jaw and a rufous complexion—the sort that might be supposed to have attained the utmost benefit to be conferred by a constant indulgence in mint-juleps. His blue eyes were piercing and arched with brows like sable rainbows, at variance with his heavy iron-gray hair and imperial. His head was leonine and he looked like a king who has humbled his enemy. It may be added that his linen was fine and immaculate, his black string-tie precisely tied and a pair of gold-rimmed eye-glasses swung by a flat black cord against his white waistcoat.

"Shirley," said her mother, "the major's brutal, and he shan't have his mint-julep."

"What has he been doing?" asked the other, her brows wrinkling in a delightful way she had.

"He has reminded me that I'm growing old."

Shirley looked at the major skeptically, for his chivalry was undoubted. During a long career in law and legislature it had been said of him that he could neither speak on the tariff question nor defend a man for murder, without first paying a tribute to "the women of the South, sah."

"Nothing of the sort," he rumbled. Mrs. Dandridge's face softened to wistfulness. "Shirley, am I?" she asked, with a quizzical, almost a droll uneasiness. "Why, I've got every emotion I've ever had. I read all the new French novels, and I'm even thinking of going in for the militant suffrage movement."

The girl had tossed her hat and croch on the table and seated herself by her mother's chair. "What was it he said, dearest?"

"He thinks I ought to wear a worsted shawl and arctics." Her mother thrust out one little thin-slipped foot, with its slender ankle gleaming through its open-work stocking like mother-of-pearl. "Imagine! In May. And he knows I'm vain of my feet! Major, if you had ever had a wife, you would have learned wisdom. But you mean well, and I'll take back what I said about the julep. You mix it, Shirley. Yours is even better than Ranston's."

"She makes me one every day, Monty," she continued, as Shirley went into the house. "And when she isn't looking, I pour it into the bush there."

Major Bristow laughed as he bit the end of a cigar. "All the same," he said in his big rumbling voice, "you need 'em, I reckon. You need more than mint-juleps, too. You leave

the whisky to me and the doctor, and you take Shirley and pull out for Italy. Why not? A year there would do you a heap of good."

She shook her head. "No, Monty, it isn't what you think. It's—here." She lifted her hand and touched her heart. "It's been so for a long time. But it may—it can't go on forever, you see. Nothing can."

"The major had leaned forward in his chair. "Judith!" he said, and his hand twitched. "It isn't true!" And then, "How do you know?"

"She smiled at him. "You remember when that big surgeon from Vienna came to see the doctor last year? Well, the doctor brought him to me. I'd known it before in a way, but it had gone farther than I thought. No one can tell just how long it may be. It may be years, of course, but I'm not taking any sea trips, Monty."

He cleared his throat and his voice was husky when he spoke. "Shirley doesn't know?"

"Certainly not. She mustn't." And then, in sudden sharpness: "You shan't tell her, Monty. You wouldn't dare!"

"No, indeed," he assured her quickly. "Of course not."

"It's just among us three, Doctor Southall and you and me. We three have had our secrets before, eh, Monty?"

"Yes, Judith, we have."

She bent toward him, her hands tightening on the cane. "After all, it's true. Today I am getting old, I may look only fifty, but I feel sixty and I'll admit to seventy-five. It's joy that keeps us young, and I didn't get my fair share of that, Monty. For just one little week my heart had it all—then—well, then it was finished. It was finished long before I married Tom Dandridge. It isn't that I'm empty-headed. It's that I've been an empty-hearted woman, Monty—as empty and dusty and desolate as the old house over yonder on the ridge."

"I know, Judith, I know."

"You've been empty in a way, too," she said. "But it's been a different way. You were never in love—really in love, I mean. Certainly not with me, Monty, though you tried to make me think so once upon a time, before Sassoon came along, and—Beauty Vallant."

The major blinked, suddenly startled. It was out, the one name neither had spoken to the other for thirty years! He looked at her a little guiltily; but her eyes had turned away. "Everything changed then," she continued dreamily, "everything."

The major's fingers strayed across his waistcoat, fumbling uncertainly for his eye-glasses. For an instant he, too, was back in the long-ago past, when he and Vallant had been comrades. It had been a curious three-sided affair—he, and Vallant and Sassoon. Sassoon with his dissipated flair and ungovernable temper and strange fit of recklessness; clean, high-idealized, straightaway Vallant; and he—a Bristow, neither better nor worse than the rest of his name. He remembered that mad strained season when he had grimly recognized his own cause as hopeless, and with burning eyes had watched Sassoon and Vallant racing abreast. He remembered that glittering prodigal dance when he had come upon Vallant and Judith standing in the shrubbery, the candle-light from some open door engendering their faces: hers smiling, a little sippant perhaps, and conscious of her spell; his grave and earnest, yet wistful.

"You promise, John?"

"I give my sacred word. Whatever the provocation, I will not lift my hand against him. Never, never!" Then the same voice, vibrant, appealing: "Judith! It isn't because—because—you care for him?"

He had plunged away in the darkness before her answer came. What had it mattered then to him what she had replied? And that very night had befallen the fatal quarrel!

The major started. How that name had blown away the dust! "That's a long time ago, Judith."

"Thirty years ago tomorrow they fought," she said softly. "Vallant and Sassoon. Every woman has her one anniversary, I suppose, and tomorrow's mine. Do you know what I do, every fourteenth of May, Monty? I keep my room and spend the day like the same way. There's a little book I read. And there's an old hair-cloth trunk that I've had since I was a girl. Down in the bottom of it are some—things, that I take out and set round the room . . . and there is a handful of old letters I go over from first to last. They're almost worn out now, but I could repeat them all with my eyes shut. Then there's a tiny old straw basket with a yellow wisp in it that once was a bunch of cape jessamines. I wore them to that last ball—the night before it happened. The fourteenth of May used to be sad, but now, do you know, I look forward to it! I always have a lot of jessamines that particular day—I'll have Shirley get me some tomorrow—and in the evening, when I go down stairs, the house is full of the scent of them. All summer long it's roses, but on the fourteenth of May it has to be jessamines. Shirley must think me a whimsical old woman, but I insist on being humored."

He smiled, a little bleakly, and cleared his throat.

"Isn't it strange for me to be talking this way now?" she said presently. "Another proof that I'm getting old. But the date brings it very close; it seems, somehow, closer than ever this year.—Monty, weren't you tremendously surprised when I married Tom Dandridge?"

"I certainly was."

"I'll tell you a secret. I was, too. I suppose I did it because of a sneaking feeling that some people were feeling sorry for me, which I never could stand. Well, he was a man any one might honor. I've always thought a woman ought to have two husbands: one to love and cherish, and the other to honor and obey. I had the latter, at any rate."

"And you've loved, Judith," he said.

"Yes," she agreed, with a little sigh. "I've lived. I've had Shirley, and she's twenty and adorable. And I've had plenty of pretty things to look at, and old lace to wear, and I've kept my figure and my vanity—I'm not too old yet to thank the Lord for that! So don't talk to me about worsted shawls and horrible arctics. For I won't wear 'em. Not if I know myself! Here comes Shirley. She's made two juleps, and if you're a gentleman, you'll distract her attention till I've got rid of mine in my usual way."

The major, at the foot of the cherry-bordered lane, looked back across the box-hedge to where the two figures sat under the rose-arbor, the mother's face turned lovingly down to Shirley's at her knee. He stood a moment watching them from under his slouched hat-brim.

"Yes, she agreed, with a little sigh, 'I've lived. I've had Shirley, and she's twenty and adorable. And I've had plenty of pretty things to look at, and old lace to wear, and I've kept my figure and my vanity—I'm not too old yet to thank the Lord for that! So don't talk to me about worsted shawls and horrible arctics. For I won't wear 'em. Not if I know myself! Here comes Shirley. She's made two juleps, and if you're a gentleman, you'll distract her attention till I've got rid of mine in my usual way.'"

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"You never looked at me that way, Judith, did you?" he sighed to himself. "It's been a long time, too, since I began to want you to—most forty years. When it came to the showdown, I wasn't even as fit as Tom Dandridge!"



He inserted the key in the Rusted Lock.

CHAPTER IX.
Damory Court.

"Dar's Dam'ry Co't smack-dab ahead, sah."

John Vallant looked up, facing them at an elbow of the broad road, was an old gateway of time-nicked stone, clasping an iron gate that was quaint and heavy and red with rust. He put it out his hand.

"Wait a moment," he said in a low voice, and as the creaking conveyance stopped, he turned and looked about him.

Facing the entrance the land fell away sharply to a miniature valley through which rambled a willow-bordered brook, in whose shallows short-horned cows stood lazily. Beyond, whither wound the Red Road, he could see a drowsy village, with a spire and a cupolaed court-house; and farther yet a yellow gorge with a wisp of white smoke curling above it marked the course of a crawling far-away railway.

"It's er mighty fine of place, sah, mid dat big revenue ob trees," said Uncle Jefferson. "But Ah rek'n' et ain't got none ob de modern' connivances."

As Vallant jumped down he was possessed by an odd sensation of old acquaintance—as if he had seen those tall white columns before—an illusory half-vision into some shadowy, fourth-dimensional landscape that belonged to his subconscious self, or that, glimpsed in some immaterial dream-picture, had left a faint-etched memory. Then, on a sudden, the vista vibrated and widened, the white columns expanded and shot up into the clouds, and from every bush seemed to peer a friendly black savage with woolly white hair!

"Wishing-House!" he whispered. The hidden country which his father's thoughts, sadly recurring, had painted to the little child that once he was, in the guise of an endless wonder-tale! His eyes misted over, and it seemed to him that moment that his father was very near.

Leaving the negro to unload his belongings, he traversed an overgrown path of mossed gravel, between box-rows frowled like the manes of lions gone mad and smothered in an accumulation of matted roots and debris of rotting foliage, and presently, the bulldog at his heels, found himself in the rear of the house.

"Mine!" he said aloud with a rueful pride. "And for general run-downness, it's up to the advertisement." He looked musingly at the piteous wreck and ruin, his gaze sweeping down across the bare fields and unkempt forest. "Mine!" he repeated. "All that, I suppose, for it has the same earmarks of neglect. Between those cultivated stretches it looks like a wedge of Sahara gone astray." His

gaze returned to the house. "Yet what a place it must have been in its time! He went slowly back to where his conductor sat on the lichened horse-block.

"We's heab," called Uncle Jefferson cheerfully. "Whut we gwinter do nex, sah? Reck'n Ah better go ovah ter Miss Dandridge's place fer er crowbaw. Lawd!" he added, "et he ain't got de key! Whut yo' think ob dat now?"

John Vallant was looking closely at the big key; for there were words, which he had not noted before engraved in the massive flange. "Friends all hours." He smiled. The sentiment sent a warm current of pleasure to his finger-tips. Here was the very text of hospitality!

A Lilliputian spider-web was stretched over the preemted keyhole, and he fetched a grass-stem and poked out its tiny gray-striped denizen before he inserted the key in the rusted lock. He turned it with a curious sense of timidity. All the strength of his fingers was necessary before the massive door swung open and the leveling sun sent its late red rays into the gloomy interior.

He stood in a spacious hall, his nostrils filled with a curious but not unpleasant aromatic odor with which the place was strongly impregnated. The hall ran the full length of the building, and in its center a wide, balustraded double staircase led to upper darkness. The floor, where his foot-prints had disturbed the even gray film of dust, was of fine close parquetry and had been generously strewn everywhere with a mica-like powder. He stooped and took up a pinch in his fingers, noting that it gave forth the curious spicy scent.

Dim paintings in tarnished frames hung on the walls. From a niche on the break of the stairway looked down the face of a tall Dutch clock, and on one side protruded a huge bulging something draped with a yellowed linen sheet. From its shape he guessed this to be an elk's head. Dust, undisturbed, lay thickly on everything, ghostly floating cobwebs crawled across his face, and a bat flitted out of a fireplace and vanished squeaking over his head. With Uncle Jefferson's help he opened the rear doors and windows, knocked up the rusted belts of the shutters and flung them wide.

But for the dust and cobwebs and the strange odor, mingled with the faint musty smell that pervades a sunless interior, the former owner of the house might have deserted it a week ago. On a wall-rack lay two walking-sticks and a gold-mounted hunting-crop, and on a great carved chest below it had been swung an opened book bound in tooled leather. John Vallant picked this up curiously. It was "Lucile." He noted that here and there passages were marked with pencilled lines—some light and femininely delicate, some heavier, as though two had been reading it together, noting their individual preferences.

He laid it back musingly, and opening a door, entered the large room it disclosed. This had been the dining-room. At one end stood a crystal-knobbed mahogany sideboard, holding glass candlesticks in the shape of ionic columns—above it a quaint portrait of a lady in hoops and love-curls—and at the other end was a huge fireplace with rust-red fire-dogs and tarnished brass fender. All these, with the round centipede table and the Chippendale chairs set in order against the walls, were dimmed and grayed with a thick powdering of dust.

which illustrate better than anything else this durable quality. They are both from a wreck which was submerged eighteen years off the west coast of Scotland. The one specimen—greenheart—is merely slightly pitted on the surface, the body of the wood being perfectly sound and untouched, while the other—teak—is almost entirely eaten away.

It is extensively used in shipbuilding for keelsons, beams, engine bearings and planking, and it is also used in the general arts, but its excessive weight units it for many purposes for which its other properties would render it eminently suitable.—Below the Rio Grande.

Legend of Aconite.
Aconite is classed by homeopathic authorities as the patriarch of drugs, as far as literature is concerned. It is told how Hercules went down to the lower regions and carried the three-headed hound Cerberus to the upper world. That ferocious beast was raging at this treatment, and the froth that fell to the ground was the origin of aconite, for it grew up from the froth as from seeds. It was on a bleak, windswept hill or mountain, and it is in such regions that the plant grows today. This hill, in Pontica, was known in olden days as "Aconitos."

The next room that he entered was big and wide, a place of dark colors, nobly smatched of time. It had been at once library and living-room. A great leather settee was drawn near the desk and beside this stood a reading-stand with a small china dog and a squat bronze lamp upon it. In contrast to the orderly dining-room there was about this chamber a sense of untouched disorder—a desk-drawer jerked half-open, a yellowed newspaper torn across and flung into a corner, books tossed on desk and lounge, and in the fireplace a little heap of whitened ashes in which charred fragments told of letters and papers burned in haste.

Suddenly he lifted his eyes. Above the desk hung a life-size portrait of a man, in the high soft stock and velvet collar of half a century before. The right eye, strangely, had been cut from the canvas. He stood straight and tall, one hand holding an eager hound in leash, his face proud and florid, his single, cold, steel-blue eye staring down through its dusty curtain with a certain malicious arrogance, and his lips set in a sardonic curve that seemed about to sneer. It was for an instant as if the pictured figure confronted the young man who stood there, mutely challenging his entrance into that tomb-like and secret-keeping quiet; and he gazed back as fixedly, repelled by the craft of the face, yet subtly attracted. "I wonder who you were," he said. "You were cruel. Perhaps you were wicked. But you were strong, too."

He returned to the outer hall to find that the negro had carried in his trunk, and he bade him place it, with the portmanteau, in the room he had just left. Dusk was falling.

"Uncle Jefferson," said Vallant abruptly, "have you a family?"

"No, sah, jes' me en mah ob 'ooman."

"Can she cook?"

"Cook!" The genial titter again captured his dusky escort. "When she got de fixens, Ah rek'n' she de beate'ns cook in his heah county."

"How would you both like to live here with me for a while? She could cook and you could take care of me."

Uncle Jefferson's eyes seemed to turn inward with mingled surprise and introspection. He shifted from one foot to the other, and said, "Ah ain' neb-bah seed yo' befo', sah."

"Well, I haven't seen you either, have I?"

"Dat's de trufe, sah, 'deed et is! Hyuh, hyuh! Whut Ah means ter say is dat de 'ooman hein' cook no fancy didoes like whut dey eats up Norf. She kin jes' cook de Ferginey style."

"That sounds good to me," quoth Vallant. "I'll risk it. Now as to wages—"

"Ah ain' spectaculous as ter de wages," said Uncle Jefferson. "Ah knows er gemman when Ah sees one."

"Then it's a bargain," responded Vallant with alacrity. "Can you come at once?"

"Yas, sah, me en Daph gwinter come ovah fus' thing in de mawnin'. Whut yo'all gwinter do fo' yo' sup-pah?"

"I'll get along," Vallant assured him cheerfully. "Here is five dollars. You can buy some food and things to cook with, and bring them with you. Do you think there's a stove in the kitchen?"

"Ah rek'n," replied Uncle Jefferson. "En of dar ain' Daph kin cook er Chris'mus dinnah wid fo' stones er tin skillet. Yas, sah!"

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

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"Shirley," said Her Mother, "The Major's Brutal."