



# The VALIANTS of VIRGINIA

By HALLIE ERMINE RIVES  
ILLUSTRATIONS by LAUREN STOUT  
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### SYNOPSIS.

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. 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 Damory court, a neglected estate in Virginia. On the way to Damory court he meets Shirley Dandridge, an auburn-haired beauty, and decides that he is going to like Virginia immensely. Shirley's father, 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. Valiant finds Damory court overgrown with weeds and creepers and the buildings in a very much neglected condition. 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. He gives sanctuary to the cornered fox. Goswops discuss the advent of the new owner and recall the tragedy in which the elder Valiant took part. Valiant decides to rehabilitate Damory court and make the land produce a living for him.

### CHAPTER XIII—Continued.

They stood on the edge of a stony ravine which widened at one end to a shallow marshy valley. The rocks were covered with gray-green feathery creepers, enwound with curly yellow tendrils of love-vine. Across the ravine, on a lower level, began a grove of splendid trees that marched up into the long stretch of neglected forest he had seen from the house. "You love it?" he asked, without withdrawing his eyes. "I've loved it all my life. I love everything about Damory Court. Ruined as it is, it is still one of the most beautiful estates in all Virginia. There's nothing finer even in Italy. Just behind us, where those hemlocks stand, is where the duel the children spoke of was fought."

He turned his head. "Tell me about it," he said. She glanced at him curiously. "Didn't you know? That was the reason the place was abandoned. Valiant, who lived here, and the owner of another plantation, who was named Sassoon, quarreled. They fought, the story is, under those big hemlock trees. Sassoon was killed."

He looked out across the distance; he could not trust his face. "And—Valiant?" "He went away the same day and never came back; he lived in New York till he died. He was the father of the court's present owner. You never heard the story?" "No," he admitted. "I—till quite recently I never heard of Damory Court."

"That was the last duel ever fought in Virginia. Dueling was a dreadful custom. I'm glad it's gone. Aren't you?" "Yes," he said slowly, "it was a thing that cut two ways. Perhaps Valiant, if he could have had his choice afterward, would rather have been lying there that morning than Sassoon."

"He must have suffered, too," she agreed, "or he wouldn't have killed himself as he did. I used to wonder if it was a love-quarrel—whether they had been in love with the same woman."

"But why should he go away?" "I can't imagine, unless she had really loved the other man. If so, she couldn't have borne seeing Valiant afterward." She said a little laugh. "But then," she said, "it may have been nothing so romantic. Valiant's grandfather, who was known as Devil-John, is said to have called a man out because he rode past him on the wrong side. Our ancestors in Virginia, I'm afraid, didn't stand on ceremony when they felt upish."

He did not smile. He was looking out once more over the luminous stretch of fields, his side-face towards her. Curious and painful questions were running through his brain. With an effort, he thrust these back and recalled his attention to what she was saying. "You wonder, I suppose, that we feel as we do toward these old estates, and set store by them, and—yes, and brag of them insufferably as we do. But it's in our blood. You Northerners think we're desperately conceited," she smiled, "but it's true. We're still as proud of our land, and its old, old places, and love them as well as our ancestors ever did. Do you wonder we resent their passing to people who don't care for them in the Southern way?"

"But suppose the newcomers do care for them?" "Her lips curled. "A young millionaire who has lived all his life in New York, to care for Damory Court! A youth idiotically rich, brought up in a superheated atmosphere of noise and money!"

He started uncontrollably. So that was what she thought! He felt himself flushing. He had wondered what would be his impression of the neighborhood and its people; their possible opinion of himself had never occurred to him. "You think there's no chance of his choosing to stay here because he actually likes it?" "Not the slightest," she said indifferently. "You are so certain of this without ever having seen him?" She glanced at him covertly, an-

nnoyedly sensible of the impropriety of the discussion, since the man discussed was certainly his patron, maybe his friend. But his insistence had roused a certain bawdy willfulness that would have his way. "It's true I've never seen him," she said, "but I've read about him a hundred times in the Sunday supplements. He's a regular feature of the high-roller section. His idea of a good time is a dog-banquet at Sherry's. Why, a girl told me once that there was a cigarette named after him—the Vanity Valiant!"

"Isn't that beside the point? Because he has been an idler, must he necessarily be a—vandal?" She laughed again. "He wouldn't call it vandalism. He'd think it decided improvement to make Damory Court as frantically different as possible. I suppose he'll erect a glass cupola and a porte-cochere, all up-to-date and varnished, and put orchid hot-houses where the wilderness garden was, and a modern marble cupid instead of the summer-house, and lay out a kite-shaped track—"

Everything that was impulsive and explosive in John Valiant's nature came out with a bang. "No!" he cried, "whatever else he is, he's not such a preposterous ass as that!" She faced him squarely now. Her eyes were sparkling. "Since you know him so intimately and so highly approve of him—"

"No, no," he interrupted. "You mistake me. I shouldn't try to justify him. His flush had risen to the roots of his brown hair, but he did not lower his gaze. Now the red color slowly ebbed, leaving him pale. "He has been an idler—that's true enough—and till a week ago he was 'idiotically rich.' But his idling is over now. At this moment, except for this one property, he is little better than a beggar."

She had taken a hasty step or two back from him, and her eyes were now fixed on his with a dawning half-fearful question in them. "Till the failure of the Valiant Corporation, he had never heard of Damory Court, much less been aware that he owned it. It wasn't because he loved it that he came here—no! How could it be? He had never set foot in Virginia in his mortal life."

She put up her hands to her throat with a start. "Come?" she echoed. "Come!" "But if you think that even he could be so crassly stupid, so monumentally blind to all that is really fine and beautiful—"

"Oh!" she cried with flashing comprehension. "Oh, how could you! You—"

He nodded curtly. "Yes," he said. "I am that haphazard harlequin, John Valiant, himself."

### CHAPTER XIV.

On the Edge of the World. There was a pause not to be reckoned by minutes but suffocatingly long. She had grown as pale as he. "That was ungenerous of you," she said then with icy slowness. "Though no doubt you—found it entertaining. It must have still further amused you to be taken for an architect?"

"I am flattered," he replied, with a trace of bitterness, "to have suggested



The Next Moment, With Clenched Teeth, He Was Viciously Stamping His Heel Again and Again.

even for a moment, so worthy a calling." At his answer she put out her hand with sudden gesture, as if bluntly thrusting the matter from her concern, and turning went back along the tree-shadowed path. He followed glumly, gnawing his lip, wanting to say he knew not what, but wretchedly tongue-tied, noting that the great white moth was still waving its creamy wings on the dead stump and wondering if she would take the cape jessamines. He felt an embarrassed relief when, passing the roots where they lay, she stooped to raise them.

Then all at once the blood seemed to shrink from his heart. With a hoarse cry he leaped toward her, seized her wrist and roughly dragged her back, feeling as he did so, a sharp fiery sting on his instep. The next moment, with clenched teeth, he was viciously stamping his heel again and again, driving into the soft earth a twisting root-like something that

slapped the brown wintered leaves into a hissing turmoil. He had flung her from him with such violence that she had fallen sideways. Now she raised herself, kneeling in the feathery light, both hands clasped close to her breast, trembling excessively with loathing and feeling the dun earth-floor billow like a canvas sea in a theater. Little puffs of dust from the protesting ground were wreathing about her set face, and she pressed one hand against her shoulder to repress her shivers.

"The horrible—horrible—thing!" she said whisperingly. "It would have bitten me!" He came toward her, panting, and grasping her hand, lifted her to her feet. He staggered slightly as he did so, and she saw his lips twist together oddly. "Ah," she gasped, "it bit you! It bit you!" "No," he said, "I think not."

"Look! There on your ankle—that spot!" "I did feel something, just that first moment." He laughed uncertainly. "It's queer. My foot's gone fast asleep."

Every remnant of color left her face. She had known a negro child who had died of a water-moccasin's bite some years before—the child of a house-servant. It had been wading in the creek in the gorge. The doctor had said then that if one of the other children—

She grasped his arm. "Sit down," she commanded, "here, on this log, and see." Her pale fright caught him. He obeyed, dragged off the low shoe and bared the tingling spot. The firm white flesh was puffing up around two tiny blue-rimmed punctures. He reached into his pocket, then remembered that he had no knife. As the next best thing he knotted his handkerchief quickly above the ankle, thrust a stick through the loop and twisted it till the ligature cut deeply, while she knelt beside him, her lips moving soundlessly, saying over and over to herself words like these: "I must not be frightened. He doesn't realize the danger, but I do! I must be quite collected. It is a mile to the doctor's. I might run to the house and send Uncle Jefferson, but it would take too long. Besides, the doctor might not be there. There is no one to do anything but me."

She crouched beside him, putting her hands by his on the stick and wrenching it over with all her strength. "Tighter, tighter," she said. "It must be tighter." But, to her dismay, at the last turn the improvised cord snapped, and the released stick flew a dozen feet away.

Her heart leaped chokingly, then dropped into hammer-like thudding. He leaned back on one arm, trying to laugh, but she noted that his breath came shortly as if he had been running. "Absurd!" he said, frowning. "How such a fool thing—can hurt!"

Suddenly she threw herself on the ground and grasped the foot with both hands. He could see her face whitening with shuddering, and her eyes dilating with some determined purpose. "What are you going to do?" "This," she said, and he felt her shrinking lips, warm and tremulous, pressed hard against his instep.

He drew away sharply, with savage denial. "No—no! Not that! You shant! My lord—you shant!" He dragged his numbing foot from her desperate grasp, lifting himself, pushing her from him; but she fought with him, clinging, panting broken sentences: "You must! It's the only way. It was—a moccasin, and it's deadly. Every minute counts!" "I won't. No, stop! How do you know? It's not going to—here, listen! Take your hands away. Listen!—Listen! I can go to the house and send Uncle Jefferson for the doctor and he—No! stop, I say! Oh—I'm sorry if I hurt you. How strong you are!"

"Let me!" "No! Your lips are not for that—good God, that damnable thing! You yourself might be—" "Let me! Oh, how cruel you are! It was my fault. But for me it would never have—" "No! I would rather—" "Let me! Oh, if you died!"

With all the force of her strong young body she wrenched away his protestant hands. A thirft and a sickish feeling were upon him, a curious irresponsible giddiness, and her hair which that struggle had brought in tumbled masses about her shoulders, seemed to have little flames running all over it. His foot had entirely lost its feeling. There was a strange weakness in his limbs.

Moments of half-consciousness, or consciousness jumbled with strange imaginings, followed. At times he felt the pressure upon the wounded foot, was sensible of the suction of the young mouth striving desperately to draw the poison from the wound. From time to time he was conscious of a white desperate face haloed with hair that was a mist of woven sparkles. At times he thought himself a recumbent stone statue in a wood, and her a great tall golden-headed flower lying broken at his feet. Again he was a granite boulder and she a vine with yellow leaves wailing and

clinging about him. Then a blank—a sense of movement and of troublous disturbance, of insistent voices that called to him and inquisitive hands that plucked at him, and then voices growing distant again, and hands falling away, and at last—silence.

Inky clouds were gathering over the sunlight when Shirley came from Damory Court, along the narrow wood-path under the hemlocks, and the way was striped with blue-black shadows and filled with sighing noises. She walked warily, halting often at some leafy rustle to catch a quick breath of dread. As she approached the tree-roots where the cape jessamines lay, she had to force her feet forward by sheer effort of will. At a little distance from them she broke a stick and with it managed to drag the bunch to her, turning her eyes with a shiver from the trampled spot near by. She picked up the flowers, and treading with caution, retraced her steps to the wider path.

She stepped into the Red Road at length in the teeth of a thunder-storm, which had arisen almost without warning to break with the passionate intensity of electric storms in the South. There was no smelter, but even had there been, she would not have sought it. The turbulence of nature around her matched, in a way, her overstrained feeling, and she welcomed the fierce bulge of the wind in the up-blowing whorls of her hair and the drenching wetness of the rain. She tried to fix her mind on near things, the bending grasses, the scurrying red runnels and flapping shrubbery, but her thoughts wilfully escaped the tether, turning again and again to the events of the last two hours. She pictured Uncle Jefferson's eyes rolling up in ridiculous alarm, his winnowing arm lashing his indignant mule in his flight for the doctor.

At the mental picture she choked with hysterical laughter, then cringed suddenly against the sopping bark. She saw again the doctor's gaze lift from his first examination of the tiny punctures to send a swift penetrant glance at her, before he bent his great body to carry the unconscious man to the house. Again a fit of shuddering swept over her. Then, all at once, tears came, strangling sobs that bent and swayed her. It was the discharge of the Leyden jar, the hissing of the tense bow-string and it brought relief. After a time she grew quieter. He would get well! The thought that perhaps she had saved his life gave her a thrill that ran over her whole body. And until yesterday she had never seen him! She knelt in the back in the rain that still fell fast. In a few moments she rose and went on. At the gate of the Rosewood lane stood a mail-box on a cedar post and she paused to fish out a dragged Richmond newspaper. As she thrust it under her arm her eye caught a word of a headline. With a flush she tore it from its soggy wrapper, the wetted fiber parting in her eager fingers, and resting her foot on the lower rail of the gate, spread it open on her knee.

She stood stock-still until she had read the whole. It was the story of John Valiant's sacrifice of his private fortune to save the ruin of the involved corporation. Its effect upon her was a shock. She felt her throat swell as she read; then she was chilled by the memory of what she had said to him: "What has he ever done except play polo and furnish spicy paragraphs for the society columns?"

"What a beast I was!" she said, addressing the wet hedge. "He had just done that splendid thing. It was because of that that he—"

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cause of that that he was little better than a beggar, and I said those horrible things!" Again she bent her eyes, rereading the sentences: "Took his detractors by surprise . . . had just sustained a grilling at the hands of the state's examiner which might well have dried at their fount the springs of sympathy."

She crushed up the paper in her hand and rested her forehead on the wet rail. Idiotically rich—a vandal—a useless, purse-proud flaneur. She had called him all that! She could still see the paleness of his look as she had said it.

Shirley, overexcited as she still was, felt the sobs returning. These, however, did not last long and in a moment she found herself smiling again. Though she had hurt him, she had saved him, too! When she whispered this over to herself it still thrilled and startled her. She folded the paper and hastened on under the cherry-trees.

Emmaline, the negro maid was waiting anxiously on the porch. She was thin to spareness, with a face as brown as a tobacco leaf, restless black eyes and wool neatly pinned and set off by an amber comb. "Honey," called Emmaline, "I see been fearin' fo' yo' wid all that lightnin' 'arin' aroun'. Yo' got th' jessamine? Give 'em to Emmaline. She'll fix 'em all nice, jes' how Mis' Judith like."

"All right, Emmaline," replied Shirley. "And I'll go and dress. Has mother missed me?" "No'm. She ain' lef' hah room this whole blessed day. Now yo' bairn's all ready—all 'cep'n th' hot watah, en I sen' Ranston with that th' fus' thing. Yo' hurry en peel them wet close off yo'se'f, or yo' have one o' them digested chillis."

Her young mistress down and the hot water despatched, the negro woman spread a cloth on the floor and began to cut and dress the long stalks of the flowers. This done she fetched bowls and vases, and set the pearly white clumps here and there—on the dining-room sideboard, the hall mantle and the desk of the living-room—till the delicate fragrance filled the house, quite vanquishing the rose-scent from the arbors.

As the trim colored woman moved lightly about in the growing dusk, with the low click of glass and muffled clash of silver, the light tat-tat of a cane sounded, and she ran to the hall, where Mrs. Dandridge was descending the stairway, one slim white hand holding the banister, under the edge of a white silk shawl which drooped its heavy fringes to her daintily-shod feet. On the lower step she halted, looking smilingly about at the blossoming bowls.

"Don't they smell up th' whole house?" said Emmaline. "I know'd yo' be pleas', Mis' Judith. Now put yo' han' on mah shouldah en I'll take yo' to yo' big cha'."

They crossed the hall, the dusky form bending to the fragile pressure of the fingers. "Now heah's yo' cha'. Ranston he made up a little fish jes' to take th' damp out, en th' big lamp's lit, en Miss Shirley'll be down right quick."

A moment later, in fact, Shirley descended the stair, in a slimy gown of India-mullin, with a narrow beiting of gold, against whose flowing sleeves her bare arms showed with a flushed pinkness the hue of the pale coral beads about her neck. The damp newspaper was in her hand.

At her step her mother turned her head; she was listening intently to voices that came from the garden—a child's shrill treble opposing Ranston's stentorian grumble. (TO BE CONTINUED.)

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