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ALICE of OLD VINCENTS By MAURICE THOMPSON Copyright 1903, by the EDWIN BELL COMPANY

CHAPTER XII. A BARRER THIRST. BEVERLY'S absence was not noticed by Hamilton until late in the following day, and even then he scouted Helm's suggestion that the young man was possibly carrying out his threat to disregard his parole. "He would be quite justified in doing it. You know that very well," said Helm, with a laugh. "And he's just the man to undertake what is impossible. Of course he'll get scaped for his trouble, and that will cost you something, I'm happy to say."

"If you'll think less about punishment, revenge and getting even with everybody and everything you'll soon begin to prosper!" Hamilton grinned, but smiled as one quite sure of himself. Jean followed the soldier to a rickety log pen on the farther side of the stockade, where he found the prisoner restlessly moving about like a bird in a rustic cage. It had no comforts, that gloomy little room. There was no fire, and the only furniture consisted of a bench to sit on and a pile of skins for a bed. Alice looked charmingly forlorn peering out from behind the bars. "What a wretched place!" she murmured. "It is a matter of small importance," Hamilton replied, "but I'll wager you the next today that he's not at the present moment a half mile from this spot. He's in a boat, and he's ready to grant that he is—but even a fool is not going to set out alone in this kind of weather to go to where your rebel friends are probably forcing their ships by the fire of green logs and half starting over yonder on the Mississippi."

"What do you mean?" "I mean that I don't for a moment believe that either the girl or the priest knows a thing about where that flag is. They are both as truthful and honorable as people ever got to be. I know them. Somebody else got that flag from under the priest's floor. You may depend upon that. If Miss Roussillon knew where it is she'd say so and I'd dare you to make her tell where it's hidden."

"Oh, the whole town is rotten with treason! That's very clear. There's not a loyal soul in it outside of my friends!" "Thank you for not including me among the loyalists!" "Hamilton smiled at these French people. They pretended to be true, but I believe they are all traitors." "You can manage them if you try. A little judiciousness goes a long way with 'em. I had no trouble while I held the town."

"Hamilton bit his lip and was silent. Helm was casual and good natured, but his eyes and his familiarity were irresistible. While he was yet speaking a guard came up, followed by Jean, the hunchback, and, saluting, said to Hamilton: "The lad wants to see the young lady, sir."

"Hamilton gazed quizzically at Jean, who planted himself in his habitual attitude before him and stared up into his face with the grotesque expression which seems to be characteristic of the hunchback and undogged birds—the look of an emboldened and hideous joke. "Well, sir, what will you have?" the governor demanded. "What for?" "I want to give her a book to read."

"What do you think of that?" "This novel," said a man in a military uniform, "is a very good one. I have never read a novel in my life; never expect to. I have read a book or two, but I don't care what sort of a book she reads," burst Helm. "She's a fine, pure, good girl. Everybody likes her. She's the good angel of this miserable little town. You'd like to see her yourself if you'd straighten up and quit burning town in your brain all the time. You're always so furious about something or other, but you've a chance to be just to yourself or pleasant to anybody else."

"If I had got furious at you every time you took from me, you'd have been long since hanged or shot. I fancy that I have shown angelic forbearance. I've been from you somewhat more than a prisoner's freedom."

"So you have, so you have," assented Helm. "I've often been surprised at your generous partiality in my case. Let's let's have some hot water with something else in it. What do you say? I won't give you any more advice for five minutes by your watch."

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COWBOYS AS FIREMEN THE WAY THEY BATTLE WITH FLAMES ON THE PRAIRIES. The "firemen of the plains" work with a system, each man knowing what is expected of him and bravely executing it like firemen of the city. Cowboys are the "fire fighters of the plains," and burning grass is the material consumed. We will take, for illustration, the great Espina and "spar" ranch in the lower Panhandle country of northwest Texas and go back a number of years, when destructive fires were more frequent than they are now. Hundreds of cowboys were employed on that ranch, living in camps widely separated, covering the unsettled counties of Dickens, Crosby, Garza and Kane. Great and very destructive prairie fires often occurred, and systematic plans were adopted to fight successfully by the devouring element, which not only involved a great loss of grass, but of stock also. One of the most successful plans was the following: It was understood among the men at the various camps that when smoke was discovered ascending from the prairie each and every cowboy on opposite sides, his horse and gallop away toward the fire straight out in a line from his camp. This had to be done at night also, the fire being detected by its light, and the boys would come from every direction, striking the line of fire at many different points almost at the same time. The men from the different camps would sometimes be many miles from each other, those from the same station going in a squad together. If it were at night and there would be one of wild and grander—the great line of fire, the galloping horses as the cowboys approached it, some from camps on opposite sides, their forms and those of their horses standing in relief in the bright glare of the burning grass. Herds of bellowing, frightened animals were seen in the scene more terrible and exciting as they ran before the pursuing, crackling, roaring flames. Above the din could be heard loud shouts of command from leaders of the assembling men. When the cowboys reached this, two men would cross plume through the blaze, snorting loudly and in terror. "Give me your end of the rope, Tom!" one of the other men would call out. "I can go over. Black Duncan will face it!" And with a great plunge he cleared the line of fire.

"The men were not standing still on their horses. The fire was traveling, and they were galloping out to meet it, ready to begin their attack. Cattle must be sacrificed to save cattle. As soon as an animal fell four cowboys dismounted, and sharp knives and hatchets were at work, and in less time than it takes to tell the slain animal was cut in twain. The halves were split so as to lay with the wind, and to each end of the end of a rope was fastened, the other end being around the pommel of a cowboy's saddle. They dashed away to the right and left, dragging the severed parts after them. When the cowboys reached this, two men would cross plume through the blaze, snorting loudly and in terror. "Give me your end of the rope, Tom!" one of the other men would call out. "I can go over. Black Duncan will face it!" And with a great plunge he cleared the line of fire.

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