The Valiants of Virginia

By Hallie Erminie Rives
(Mrs. Post Wheeler)

Illustrated by Lauren Stout

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Shirley's breath stopped. She felt her face tingling and a curious weakness came on her limbs. Why, indeed, unless—and the thought was like a wild prayer in her mind—she had been mistaken in her surmise? Thoughts came thronging in panic haste: the fourteenth of May and the cape jessamines—these might point no less to Valiant than to Sasseon. But her mother's fainting at the sight of the son—the eager interest she had displayed in Shirley's accounts of him, from the episode of the rose and the bulldog to the tournament ball—seemed now to stand out in a new light, throbbing and roseate. Could it be? Had she been stumbling along a blind trail, misled by the cunning dovetailing of circumstance? Her heart was beating stiflingly. If she should be mistaken now! She dashed her hand across her eyes as though to compel their clearness, and looked again.

It was Beauty Valiant's face that lay in the locket, and that could mean but one thing: it was he, not Sassoon, whom her mother loved!

The lamplight seemed to grow and spread to an unbearable radiance. Shirley thought she cried out with a sudden sweet wildness, but she had not moved or uttered a sound. The illumination was all about her, like a splendid cloud. The impossible had happened. The miracle for which she hysterically prayed had been wrought!

When she blew out the light, the shining still remained. That glowing knowledge, like a vitalizing and physical presence, passed with her through the hall to her room. As she stood in the elfish light of her one candle, the poignancy of her joy was as sharp as her past pain. Later was to come the wonder how that tragedy had bent Beauty Valiant's life to exile and her mother's to unfulfillment, and in time she was to know these things, too. But now the one great knowledge blotted out all else. She need starve her fancy no longer! The hours with her lover might again sweep across her memory undenied. She felt his arms, his kisses, heard his whispers against her cheek and smelled the perfume of Madonna lilies.

She drew the curtain and opened the window noiselessly to the light. Only a few hours ago she had been singing to her harp in what wretchedness! She laughed softly to herself. The quiet night was full of his voice: "I love you! I want nothing but you!" How her pitiful error had tortured and wrung them both! But tomorrow he, too, would know that all was well.

A clear sound chimed across the distance—the bell of the court-house clock, striking midnight. One! . . . Two! . . . How often lately it had run discordantly across her mood; now it seemed a clamant watcher, tolling joy. Three! . . . Four! . . . Five! . . . Perhaps he was sleepless, listening, too. Was he in the old library, thinking of her? Six! . . . Seven! . . . Eight! . . . Nine! . . . If she could only send her message to him on the bells! Ten! . . . It swelled more loudly now, more deliberate. Eleven! . . . Another day was almost gone. Twelve! . . . "Joy cometh in the morning"—ran the whisper across her thought. It was morning now.

Thirteen!

She caught a sharp breath. Her ear had not deceived her—the vibration still palpitated on the air like a heart of sound. It had struck thirteen! A little eery touch crept along her nerves and a cool dampness broke on her skin, for she seemed to hear, quavering through the wondering silence, the voice of Mad Anthony, as it had quavered to her ear on the door-step of the negro cabin, with the well-sweep throwing its long curved shadow across the group of laughing faces:

"Ah sees yo' gwine ter him. Ah heahs de co'ot-house clock a-strikin' in de night—en yo' gwine. . . . Don' wait, don' wait, li'l mistis, er de trouble-cloud gwine kyah him erway f'om yo' . . . When de clock strike thuhteen—when de clock strike thuhteen—"

She dropped the flowered curtain and drew back. A weird fancy had begun to press on her brain. Had not Mad Anthony foretold truly what had gone before? What if there were some cryptic meaning in this, too? To go to him, at midnight, by a lonely country road—she, a girl? Incredible! Yet her mind had opened to a vague growing fear that was swiftly mounting to a thriving anxiety. That innate superstition, secretly cherished while derided, which is the heritage of the Southron-born bred from centuries of contact with a mystical race, had her in its grip. Yet all the while her sober actual common-sense was crying out upon her—and crying in vain. Unknown appetences that had lain darkling in her blood, come down to her from long generations, were suddenly compelling her. The curtain began to wave in a little wind that whispered in the silk, and somewhere in the yard below she could hear Selim nipping the clover.

She was to go or the "trouble-cloud" would carry him away!

A strange expression of mingled fright and resolve grew on her face. She ran on tiptoe to her wardrobe and with frantic haste dragged out a rough cloak that fell over her soft house-gown, covering it to the feet. It had a peaked hood falling from its collar and into this she thrust the resentful masses of her hair. Every few seconds she caught her breath in a short gasp, and once she paused with an apprehensive glance over her shoulder and shivered. She scarcely knew what she did, nor did she ask herself what might be the outcome of such an absurd adventure. She neither knew nor cared. She was swept off her feet and whirled away into some outlandish limbo of shadowy fear and crying dread.

Slipping off her shoes, she went swiftly and noiselessly down the stair. She let herself out of the door and, shoes on again, ran across the clover. A hound clambered about her, whining, but she silenced him with a whispered word. Selim lifted his head and she patted the snuffling inquiring muzzle an instant before, with her hand on his mane, she led him through the hedge to the stable. It was but the work of a moment to throw on a side-saddle and buckle the girth. Then, mounting, she turned him into the lane.

He was thoroughbred, and her tense excitement seemed to communicate itself to him. He blew the breath through his delicate flaring nostrils and flung up his head at her restraining hand on the bridle. Once on the Red Road, she let him have his will. The long vacant highway reeled out behind her to the fierce and lonely hoof-tattoo. She was scarcely conscious of consecutive thought—all was a vague jumble of chaotic impressions threaded by that necessity that called her like an insistent voice.

Copse and hedge flew by, streaks of distemper on the shifting gloom; swarthy farmhouse roofs huddled like giant Indians on the trail, and ponds in pastures glinted back the pale glimmering of stars. The faint mist, tangled in the branches of the trees, made them look like ghosts gathered to see her pass. Was this real or was she dreaming? Was she, Shirley Dandridge, really galloping down an open road at midnight—because of the hare-brained maunderings of a half-mad old negro?

The great iron gate of Damory court hung open, and scarcely slackening her pace, she rode through and up the long drive. The glooming house-front was blank and silent and its huge porch columns looked like lonely gray monoliths in the wan light. Not a twinkle showed at chink or cranny; the ponderous shutters were closed. There was a sense of desertion, of emptiness about the place that brought her heart into her throat with a sickly horrible feeling of certainty.

She jumped down from the blowing horse and hurried around the house. The door of the kitchens was open and a ladder of dim reddish light fell from it across the grass. She ran swiftly and looked in. A huddled figure sat there, rocking to and fro in the lamplight.

"Aunt Daph," she called, "what is the matter?"

The turbaned head turned sharply toward her. "Dat yo', Miss Shirley?" the old woman said huskily. "Is yo' come ter see Mars' John 'fo' he gwine away? Yo' too late, honey, too late! He done gone ter de deepo fo' ter ketch de th'oo train. En, oh, honey, Ah knows in mah ole ha'at dat Mars' John ain' nevah gwine come back ter Dam'ry co'ot no mo'!"

CHAPTER XXXV.

The Song of the Nightingale.

Along the dark turnpike John Valiant rode with his chin sunk on his breast. He was wretchedly glad of the darkness, for it covered a thousand familiar sights he had grown to love. Yet through the dark came drifting sounds that caught at him with clutching hands—the bay of a hound from some far-off kennel, the whirring note of frogs, the impatient high whinny of a horse across pasture-bars—and his nostrils widened to the wild braided fragrance of the fields over which the mist was spinning its fairy carded wool.

The preparations for his going had been quickly made. He was leaving behind him all but a single portmanteau. Uncle Jefferson had already taken this—with Chum—to the station. The old man had now gone sorrowfully afoot to the blockhouse, a half-mile up the track, to bespeak the stopping of the express. He would go back on the horse his master was riding.

The lonely little depot flanked a siding beside a dismal stretch of yellow clay-bank gouged by rains. Its windows were dark and the weather-beaten plank platform was illuminated by a single lantern that hung on a nail beside the locked door, its sickly flame showing bruise-like through smoky streakings of lamp-black. At one side, in the shadow, was his bag, and beside it the tethered bulldog—sole spot of white against the melancholy forlornness—lying with one splinted leg, like a swaddled ramrod, sticking straight out before him.

(To be continued.)

Local Markets

Market report corrected by N. I. Gorsuch Son Co.

Wheat	83c
Bran, per ton,	$25.00
Middlings, per ton,	$30.00
Barley	50@ 50
Oats	42c
Rye	50c
Ear corn per bbl.,	$3.50 to $3.75
Sea Foam Flour, per bbl.,	$5.00
Shorts or Middlings	$31.00
Ear Corn, per bbl.,	$3.25 to $3.50
Rye Straw, per ton,	$7.00@$8.00
Timothy hay	$10.00 to $12.00
Sucrene Dairy Feed	$26.00

Market reports corrected by Englar & Sponseller up-to-date.

Wheat	83c
Bran	$1.25
Middlings	$1.50
Cotton Seed Meal	$1.70
Linseed Meal	$1.70
Hammond Dairy Feed	$1.25
Dried Bett Pulp	$1.40
Hominy Chop	$1.50
Brewer's Drie' Grains	1.30
Screenings	1.25

Wheat	84c per bu.
Rye	60c per bu.
Barley	60c per bu.
Oats	40c per bu.
Ear Coorn	$3.60 per bbl.
Hay, Timothy	$14 to $16 per ton
Hay, Mixed	$13 to $15 per ton
Straw Wheat	$6 per ton
Straw, tangled Rye	$8 per ton
Straw, straight Rye	$8 per ton

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This announcement tells of some especially good values in silk hosiery. We shall be pleased to furnish any information you may desire about any other sort of stockings for women or socks for men and children.

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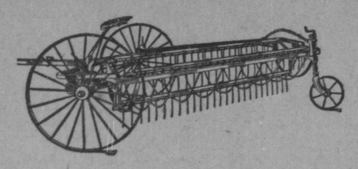
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Although beef will be higher than ever this fall, it is believed that the ordinary consumer will be able to afford soup made from the hoof, horns and tail.

The Osborne Line



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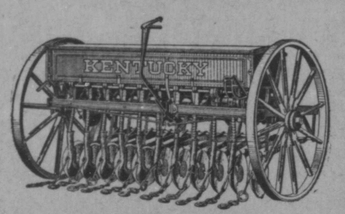
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You can go into the field a few hours after you cut the hay and rake it up into light, fluffy windrows, through which the air will circulate freely. This cures the hay evenly and quickly, making it more nutritious, more even in color, and of higher market value.

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