

Alice of Old Vincennes

By Maurice Thompson

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BEGIN HERE

ALICE and JEAN were the foster children of JASPER ROUSSILLON, who, in the absence of a military commander, was regarded as chief of Vincennes.

A bottle of fine brandy sent to LIEUTENANT GOVERNOR ABBOTT was given by LONG HAIR, an Indian, who escaped after being badly shot.

Alice approves the attentions of RENE DE RONVILLE, a handsome youth of the village, but she has a jealous rival in the heartless WILLE ADRIENNE BOURCIER.

Because of a singular birthmark on her shoulder and the inscription "Tartan" on the small locket she possessed containing her baby picture, Alice hoped some day to be identified with her own family.

GO ON WITH THE STORY.

M. ROUSSILLON changed the subject, for he always somehow dreaded to have the good priest fall into the strain of argument he was about to begin. A stray sheep, no matter how long it has been a part of the flock, feels a touch of longing when it hears the shepherd's voice. M. Roussillon was a Catholic, but a trying one, who avoided the confessional and often forgot mass. Still, with all his reckless independence, and with all his outward show of large and breezy self-sufficiency, he was not altogether free from the hold that the church had laid upon him in childhood and youth. Moreover, he was fond of Father Beret and had done a great deal for the little church of St. Xavier and the mission it represented; but he distinctly desired to be let alone while he pursued his own course; and he had promised the dying woman who gave Alice to him that the child should be left as she was, a Protestant, without undue influence to change her from the faith of her parents. This promise he had kept with stubborn persistence and he meant to keep it as long as he lived. Perhaps the very fact that his innermost conscience smote him with vague yet telling blows at times for this departure from the strict religion of his fathers, may have intensified his resistance of the influence constantly exerted upon Alice by Father Beret and Madame Roussillon, to bring her gently but surely to the church. Perverseness is a force to be reckoned with in all original characters.

A few weeks had passed after M. Roussillon's return, when that big-hearted man took it into his head to celebrate his successful trading ventures with a moonlight dance given without reserve to all the inhabitants of Vincennes. It was certainly a democratic function that he contemplated, and motley to a most picturesque extent.

Rene de Ronville called upon Alice a day or two previous to the occasion and duly engaged her as his partner; but she insisted upon having the engagement guarded in her behalf by a condition so obviously fanciful that he accepted it without argument. "If my wandering knight should arrive during the dance, you promise to stand aside and give place to him," she stipulated. "You promise that? You see I'm expecting him all the time. I dreamed last night that he came on a great bay horse and, stooping, whirled me up beside the saddle, and away he went."

There was a childish, half-bantering air in her look; but her voice sounded earnest and serious, notwithstanding its delicious timbre of suppressed playfulness.

"You promise me?" she insisted. "Oh, I promise to shrink away into a corner and chew my thumb, the moment he comes," Rene eagerly assented. "Of course I'm taking a great risk, I know; for lords and

barons and knights are very apt to appear suddenly in a place like this. "You may banter and make light of it," she said, putting admirably. "I don't care. All the same the laugh will jump to the other corner of your mouth, see if it doesn't. They say that what a person dreams about and wishes for and waits for and believes in, will come true sooner or later."

"If that's so," said Rene, "you and I will get married; for I've dreamed it every night of the year, wished for it, waited for it and believed in it, and—"

It was a madly sudden rush. He made it on an impulse quite irresistible, as hypnotized persons are said to do in response to the suggestion of the hypnotist, and his head was clanking his throat before he could end his speech. Alice interrupted him with a hearty burst of laughter.

"A very pretty twist you give to my words, I must declare," she said, "but not new by any means. Little Adrienne Bourcier could tell you that. She says that you have vowed to her over and over again to marry her, and wish for her, and wait for her, precisely as you have just said to me."

Rene's brown face flushed to the temples, partly with anger, partly with the shock of mingled surprise and fear. He was guilty, and the guilt showed in his eyes and paralyzed his tongue, so that he sat there before Alice with his under jaw sagging ludicrously.

"Don't you rather think, Monsieur Rene de Ronville," she presently added in a calmly advisory tone, "that you had better quit trying to say such foolish things to me, and just be my very good friend? If you don't, I do, which comes to the same thing. What's more, I won't be your partner at the dance unless you promise me on your word of honor that you will dance two dances with Adrienne to every one that you have with me. Do you promise?"

He dared not oppose her outwardly, although in his heart resistance amounted to furious revolt and riot. "I promise anything you ask me," he said resignedly, almost sullenly; "anything for you."

"Well, I ask nothing whatever on my own account," Alice quickly replied; "but I do tell you firmly that you shall not maltreat little Adrienne Bourcier and remain a friend of mine. She loves you, Rene de Ronville, and you have told her that you love her. If you are a man worthy of respect you will not desert her. Don't you think I am right?"

Like a snared and crippled moth vainly trying to rise once again to the alluring yet deadly flame, Rene de Ronville essayed to break out of his embarrassment and resume equal footing with the girl so suddenly become his commanding superior; but the effort disclosed to him as well as to her that he had fallen to rise no more. In his abject defeat he accepted the terms dictated by Alice and was glad when she adroitly changed her manner and tone in going on to discuss the approaching dance.

"Now let me make one request of you," he demanded after a while. "It's a small favor; may I ask it?"

"Yes, but I don't grant it in advance."

"I want you to wear, for my sake, the buff gown which they say was your grandmother's."

"No, I won't wear it."

"But why, Alice?"

"None of the other girls have anything like such a dress; it would not be right for me to put it on and make them all feel that I had taken the advantage of them, just because I could; that's why."

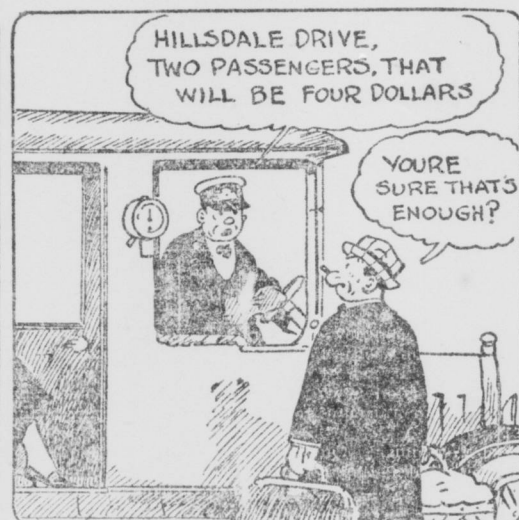
"But then none of them is beautiful and educated like you," he said; "you'll outshine them anyway."

"Save your compliments for poor pretty little Adrienne," she firmly responded. "I positively do not wish to hear them. I have agreed to be your partner at this dance of Papa Roussillon's, but it is understood between us that Adrienne is your sweetheart. I am not, and I'm not going to be either. So for your sake and Adrienne's, as well as out of consideration for the rest of the girls who have no fine dresses, I am not going to wear the buff brocade gown that belonged to Papa Roussillon's mother long ago. It is safe to say that Rene de Ronville went home with a troublesome bee in his bonnet. He was not a bad-hearted fellow. Many a right good young man, before him and since, has loved an Adrienne and been dazzled by an Alice. A violet is sweet, but a rose is the garden's queen. The poor youthful Romanticism ought to have been stronger; but he was not, and what have we to say?"

As for Alice, since having a confidential talk with Adrienne Bourcier recently, she had come to realize what M. Roussillon meant when he said: "But my little girl is better than most of them, not a foolish mischief-maker, I hope." She saw through the situation with a quick understanding of what Adrienne might suffer should Rene prove permanently fickle. The thought of it aroused all her natural honest and serious nobleness of character, which lay deep under the almost boyish levity usually observable in her manner. Crude as her sense of life's larger significance was, and meager as had been her experience in the things which count for most in the sum of a young girl's existence under fair circumstances, she grasped intuitively the gist of it all.

The dance did not come off; it had to be postponed indefinitely on account of a grave change in the political relations of the little post. A day or two before the time set for that function a rumor ran through the town that something of importance was about to happen. Father Gibault, at the head of a small party, had arrived from Kaskaskia, far away on the Mississippi, with the news that France and the American colonies had made common cause against the English in the great war of which the people of Vincennes neither knew the cause nor cared a straw about the outcome.

DOINGS OF THE DUFFS—



OUT OUR WAY—By WILLIAMS



SPRING BIRDS

J.P. WILLIAMS

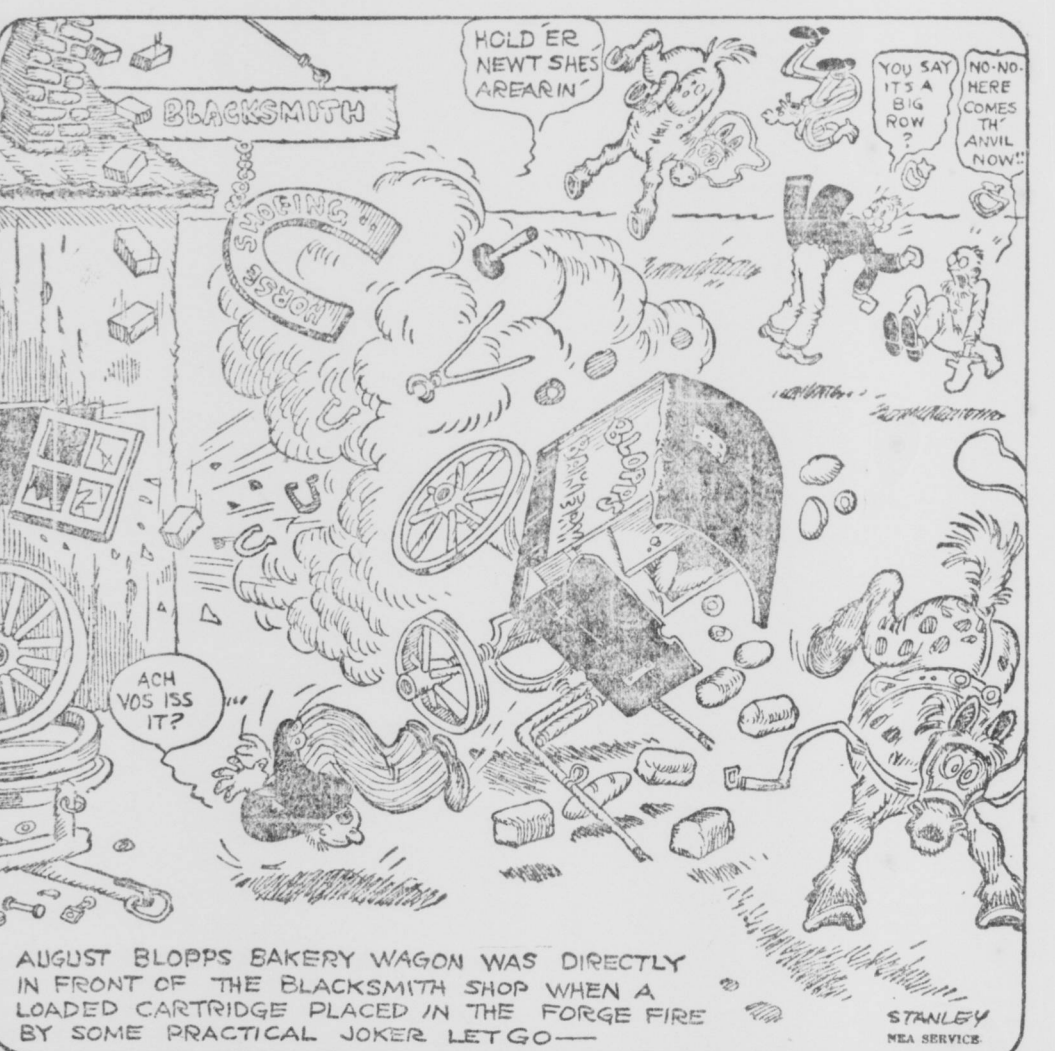
FRECKLES AND HIS FRIENDS—By BLOSSER



THEM DAYS IS GONE FOREVER—



THE OLD HOME TOWN—By STANLEY



AUGUST BLOPP'S BAKERY WAGON WAS DIRECTLY IN FRONT OF THE BLACKSMITH SHOP WHEN A LOADED CARTRIDGE PLACED IN THE FORGE FIRE BY SOME PRACTICAL JOKER LET GO—

STANLEY

"When It's Movie-Time in Muskogee"



—By AL POSEN

OUR BOARDING HOUSE—By AHERN

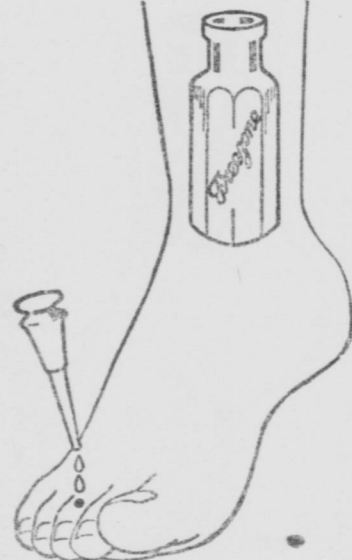


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rously and bowed to the best of his ability. He not only took off his queer cap, but looked into it with startled gaze, as if he expected something infinitely dangerous to jump out and seize his nose.

"A thousand thanks, Ma'm'selle," he presently said, "will ye please tell me where I can get a pair of shoes? I would wish to see 'em."

"Yes, Uncle Jazon; but first be seated, and let me offer you just a drop of

sau de vie; some that Papa Roussillon brought back with him from Quebec. He says it's old and fine."

She poured him a full glass, then setting the bottle on a little stand, went to find M. Roussillon. While she was absent Uncle Jazon improved his opportunity to the fullest extent. At least three additional glasses of the brandy went the way of the first. He grinned atrociously and smacked his corrugated lips; but when Gaspard

Roussillon came in, the old man was sitting at some distance from the bottle and glass gazing indifferently out across the veranda. He told his story curtly. Father Gibault, he said, had sent him to ask M. Roussillon to come to the river house, as he had news of great importance to communicate.

"Ah, well, Uncle Jazon, we'll have a nip of brandy together before we go," said the host.

"Why, yes, jes' one agin' the broil-in' weather," assented Uncle Jazon; "I don't mind jes' one."

"A very rich friend of mine in Quebec gave me this brandy, Uncle Jazon," said M. Roussillon, pouring the liquor with a grand flourish; "and I thought of you as soon as I got it. Now, says I to myself, if any man knows good brandy when he tastes it, it's Uncle Jazon, and I'll give him a good chance at this bottle just the

first of all my friends."

"It surely is delicious," said Uncle Jazon, "very delicious." He spoke French with a curious accent, having spent long years with English-speaking frontiersmen in the Carolinas and Kentucky, so that their lingo had become his own.

As they walked side by side down the way to the river house they looked like typical extremes of rough, sun-

burned and weather-tanned manhood. Uncle Jazon, a wizened, diminutive scrap, wrinkled and odd in every respect; Gaspard Roussillon towering six feet two, wide shouldered, massive, lumbering, muscular, a giant with long curling hair and a superb beard. They did not know that they were going down to help dedicate the great Northwest to freedom.

(To Be Continued.)