Mont Pelee The dug-out swung frailly along the black stream And paused in its course. As entranced in a dream The oldster rose feebly; his eyes glowed with awe. He saw neither jungle nor brilliant macaw Which winged away shricking, as slience oozed in Complete and oppressive and stealthy as sin. Leaves hanging fantastic, unquiv'ring o'erhead, A canopy over the slimy pool spread. Reposing demure in an amethyst veil, Pelee, o'er the island, its monarch and bale, Serenely was brooding; concealed and submerged Were demoniac powers with which she had scouraged The land, as a fountain outpouring a rain Of fire and of lava's destruction and pain. "'Tis I know thy power, oh treacherous one, Beholding with horror the deeds you have done, Surviving your tempest of unholy rage!" This passion of words shook the form, sere with age. He faced me; his figure covulsed with travail, His breath came in gasps. "I will tell you a tale," He whispered, and pausing, began, "On the coast Of the isle, Martinique, stood a town which could boast Of history stained with piratical acts, With slave-trading, gambling, and oft-ruptured pacts, A Sodom which vengeance, four decades ago, Destroyed in a moment with ravaging blow! Unjustly condemned, I was thrust in a cell To live out my life in the silence of hell, To see a thin sliver of sunlight so sweet Through a slit in a stone which looked ont on the street. My torture of solitude eased when I pressed My face to the grating, surveying those blest With freedom; their steps unimpeded, they passed In careless indifference. Starved gazes I cast O'er the broad panorama: the city, the peak Of Pelee, and the harbor, where ship's masts, oblique, Were patterned unmoving against a bronze sky. O'er all moved a murmur, a low, stifled cry, For the village was seething with rumors that day That spirits had waked in the mountain Pelee. I cast myself down on the dungeon's dank floor; I hear and I felt a subdued, angry roar In the caverns of earth; the volcano had stirred. St. Pierre was in panic as wild sped the word; An exodus flowed down the mountain's bare slopes, A stream without banks, as one aimless who gropes In danger-filled darkness, for paths to the light, And knowing not where to direct his mad flight. A feathery drifting of ashes like snow Was filtering down through the dim, lurid glow And tenderly shrouding the town and the field, Enfolding the mountain, as though to have healed Her lava-seared wounds, and as though to have cooled Her ire with its wint'ry caress. She who ruled The isle as a rival of pagan Pelee Was Our Lady of Watch; to her image to pray Crept abject beseechers, who, held in duress By sea and volcano, now wailed in distress, And lips which had sneered and were ever profane Were gasping petitions for mercy. In vain Was penitence now, for the demon prevailed. The most-mighty ocean recoiled when she flailed Its steam-writhing waters with lashes of fire. The jungle, in flames was the funeral pyre For those who had died and would perish e'er day Had faded in fiery twilight. There lay A pall o'er the island of smothering clouds Which crackled with light'ning. Hysterical crowds Were milling in dread through each tortuous lane. Then a shrieking like that of a devil insane Arose from the mountain and stabbed through the roar Which had rumbled so long that we heard it no more! With a blasphemous blast and a horrible shriek, Escaping in triumph, there rose o'er the peak A fanatical, murderous genii of fire! The spiral of cloud billowed higher and higher, Lurching and rising, itself to excel By grasping the stars! Bursting fetters of hell, It towered ever heavenward, whirling and churning, Upswelling, out-spreading, and finally returning To cloak the hot earth with its mantle of death And to blister the air with a venomous breath. The vengeance collected its fury and sped Down the slopes to the town. As though already dead, Its people, a hypnotized, horror-struck throng, Neither struggled nor fled nor sought to prolong Their agony, as all the region became A brazier of glowing, sanguineous flame. The smothering, ash-laden vapors poured down And extinguished the groan of a perishing town. The dungeon whose walls I had cursed as a tomb Was a chamber of life; like a child from the womb I came forth and beheld the fantastical scene Of a ravaged, a lifeless, demolished demesne. This day I have looked on the mount to behold That she manifests naught of her fury of old; A Virgin of Vesta, o'er whose lofty brow

A wisp of a halo is hovering now.

Hypocrisy's maiden! She gloats on the day

When the world will again know the wrath of Pelee!"

-Nancy Meyer.

DAILY EMERALD

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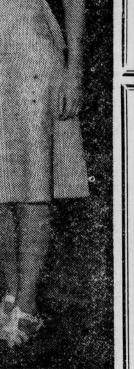
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