

The Whited Sepulchre

The Tale of Pelee

BY WILL LEVINGTON COMFORT

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CHAPTER XVI.—(Continued.)

How many times the blue eyes of old Ernst rolled back under the lids, and his grip relaxed upon the oars, only to be recalled by the pleading voice and the face of tragedy before him; how many times the whipping tongue of Macready mumbled, forgetting its object, while his senses reeled against the burning walls of his brain; how many times the splendid spirit of the woman recalled her own lowlier faculties to action and the terrible meaning of the quest—only God and these knew. But the little boat held its prow to the desolate shore.

They gained the Sugar Landing at last, and strange sounds came from the lips of Ernst, as he pointed to the bulk of the launch, burned to the water line. Gray-covered heaps were sprawled upon the shore, some half-covered by the incoming tide, some entirely awash. Pelee had brought down the city; and the fire-tiger had rushed in at the kill. He was hissing and crunching still, under the ruins. The woman moaned and covered her face.

"There is nothing alive!" she said with dreadful stress.

"What else could you look for?" Macready demanded. "Wait till we get over the hill, and you'll hear the burrds sing in the nagsurs laughin' in the fields an' wonderin' why the milkman don't come." "I can live—yes, I can live—until I see our house crushed to the hill, all coated with paste, and those heaps lying about on the ground! * * * A woman can't be a friend like a man! You will stand and uncover your heads—when you see your friend lying upon the ground—and I—I will die!"

She was walking between them, up toward the market place, fighting back her tears, which added to the burdens of the men. The opened space was filled with the stones from the houses, hurled there as from a dice box. Smoke and steam oozed forth from every ruin. The silence was awful as the sight of death. Rue Victor Hugo was effaced, the way up toward the morne undiscernible. A breathing pile of debris barred every way. It was plain that they must make their way southward along the shore.

"If I cud only get hold o' that barnacle as a shark's toot, Pugh—if I cud only get him here wance bare-fatted," Denny gasped—"sure I'd lie happy holdin' av him! Ha!—don't sheep there!"

He pulled her away from a puddle of uncoagulated stuff as hot as running iron. * * * Once he had stepped upon what seemed to be an ash-covered stone. It was soft, springy, and vented a wheezy sigh. Rain and rock-dust had smeared all things alike in this gray, roasting shambles.

"Speak—won't you please speak?" the woman cried suddenly.

"It luks like rain, ma'am," Macready's quick tongue offered.

They were on the shore, nearing the rise of the Morne d'Orange. Saint Pierre had rushed to the sea—at the last. The mountain had found the women with the children, as all manner of visitations find them—and the men a little apart. There was nothing to do by the way, no lips to moisten, no voice of pain to hush, no dying thing to ease. Pelee had not faltered at the last. There was not an insect murmur in the air, nor a crawling thing beneath, not a moving wing in the hot gray sky. They traversed a shore of death absolute—these three—and the woman was thinking ahead.

From the shoulder of the morne Lara turned back one look. Saint Pierre was like a mouth that had lost its pearls. The land ahead was a husk divested of its fruit. Pelee had cut the cane fields, sucked the juices, and left the blasted stalks in his paste. The plantation house pushed forth no shadow of an outline. It might be felled, or lost in the smoky distance. The nearer landmarks were gone—homes that had brightened the morne in their day, whose windows had flashed the rays of the afternoon sun as it rode down over-sea—levelled like the fields of cane. There was no balm, no saving grace. Pelee had swept far and left only his shroud, and the heaps upon the way, to show that the old sea-road, so white, so beautiful, had been the haunt of man. The mangoes had lost their verdure; the palms were gnarled and naked fingers pointing to the pitiless sky.

She had known this highway in the mornings, when joy was not dead, when the songs of the toilers and the laughter of children glorified the fields; in the white moonlight, when the sweet draughts from the sea met and mingled with the spice from torrid hills, and scent of jasmine and rose gardens. * * * The dark eyes under the huge helmet were staring ahead; her lips were parted and white. Though they had passed the radius of terrific heat, she seemed slowly to be suffocating. Macready remembered his voice.

"Things are queer by the sea, ma'am. Now, if I'd ha' tuk Pugh be th' rroat I'd be intertainin' Mr. Constable presently in the bottom av th' ship, togged out head an' fut in irons for th' occasion, an' he'd say, 'Dinny, why didn't you sthand be th' lady whin I tould you? Perhaps you can sthand be th' bunkers better, me son. Go to thim, ye goat!' * * * Ernst, lad, you're intertainin', you're loquacious."

The woman was stepping forward swiftly between them. Words died upon Macready's tongue when he saw her face and thought of what she would find ahead. He believed that she would keep her word—that she would break, brain and body—if the mountain had shown no mercy at their journey's end. * * * And Macready did not hope. The man to whom he had tied his own life would be down like the others, and the great heart could him! All that a soft Irish heart could feel of terror and bereavement had waded in his breast for hours. To let the woman succumb among her dead was more than he could bear.

The ruins of the plantation house wavered forth from the fog. The prayer had not availed; the day still lived. A swoon had not fallen pitifully upon the woman.

He was allowing her to walk forward to her end, this beautiful creature whose courage was more than a man's! * * * Her fingers were upon his sleeve, pulling him forward. She had no need of words from him now. Life remained in her to reach the place ahead. She did not want more life, if the dead were there.

"Wait, ma'am!" he pleaded.

"No, no! I cannot wait!"

"Fur ould Dinny!"

"I thank you both. You have been very brave and kind; but, Denny, don't keep me back—not now!"

"Let me go first!" he implored, harboring the mad idea that he might put something out of her sight.

"No!" she screamed, breaking from him, and rushing forward through the fallen gate.

Her cry brought an answer—a muffled answer, the voice from a pit. Macready and Ernst plucked at the charred boards in the circle of ruin.

"Peter, King Peter! Where are you, Great-heart?" she called, laughing, crying, picking at her hands.

"In the cistern—in the old cistern," came the answer. "Why—did—they—let you—come—here?"

"Didn't I tell you 'twud take more than a spit av a mountain t' singe hair av him, ma'am?" Macready yelled, dancing about the rim. "Are you hurted, sorr? Tell me, are you hurted?"

He was pushed away, and the woman knelt at the rim, bending far down.

CHAPTER XVII.

Constable rested and reflected in the cistern. It did not occur to him, save in the most flimsy and passing way, to doubt the efficacy of the distance in the case of Lara. She was safe, eight miles at sea, and watched over by Macready, whom he had learned thoroughly to trust. Here was gladness immovable. Second, for the present and to all intents, his own life had been spared. This was not so important in itself, but was exceedingly vital in consideration of the third point—that she loved him, and had said so. His first worry was that Lara might be thinking him dead.

The aspect of Constable's mind being touched upon, it may be well to outline the state of affairs as a third party would see it. In the first place, there was a woman in his arms, a woman whom the fire had touched and in whom consciousness was not; the mother of the world's matchless girl. Then he was sitting upon a slimy stone in a subterranean cell, the floor of which was covered with six inches of almost scalding water, and the vault filled with steam. The volcanic discharge, showering down through the mouth of the pit, had heated the water and released the vapor. An earthquake years before had loosened the stone walls of the cavern, and with every shudder of the earth, under the wrath of Pelee, the masonry lining the cistern tottered. Then, his hand had been torn during the descent of the chain, and the terrific heat in the well livened his burns to exquisite painfulness. But, as has been stated, these were mere cuticle disorders, and the heart of the man sang again and again its tuneful story.

Pelee was giving vent to the after-pangs. Torrents of rain were descending. The man in the cistern had lost track of time. Though replenished with rain, the water was still too hot to step in; therefore, he could not change his position and relieve the tension of his arms. Still, he felt that he owed an astonishing debt to the old cistern. No sudden impulse had brought him there. Since he had discovered the place in his night's vigil, and examined it more closely the following day, the idea had become fixed in his mind that it might be used at the last minute.

The women sighed now and stirred in his arms. The first gripping realization took his mind. He waited in embarrassment for her to speak. Would the fact that he had saved her life stand as extenuation for his rough treatment? Constable was by no means sure that he was not about to hear her estimate of him on the old footing, with the rage of a manhandled woman added—the whole a finished document delivered with Mrs. Stansbury's art and force. But she did not get awake.

His brain worked rapidly now. She had lain upon his shoulder during the descent. Livid dust had fallen through the orifice. His burns were slight. * * * His eyes strained into her face, but the cistern was dark, dark. The fire had touched her hair—he knew that. Her bare arm brushed his cheek, and his whole being crawled with fear. * * * It seemed that hours elapsed. Where had Uncle Joey been at the last? Did Pelee tolerate any favorites? Breen, Soronia, Pere Rabaut, Mondet, the ships in the inner harbor, the thirty thousand of Saint Pierre—were they all wrecked in the mills of the world? * * * But the Madame was eight miles at sea! Pelee had waited for the woman. His heart of hearts held this joy.

The breath of life was returning to his burden. She sighed once more, and then, full pityingly, he felt her winces with the pain which consciousness brought.

"What is this dripping darkness?" he heard at last. The words were slowly uttered, and the tones vague. * * * In a great dark room somewhere, in a past life, perhaps, Constable had heard such a voice from some one lying in the shadows.

"We are in the old cistern—you and I, Peter Constable." His tones became glad as he added, "But your daughter is safe at sea!"

"Did you forget something, or did Lara send you for her parasol?"

"I came for you—came to tell you how much we needed you—how much we feared for your life, and to ask you once more—"

"What—an extraordinary youth!" she murmured. "Was—there—ever—such—darkness—as—this?" The cavern was dark, but not utterly

black now. The circle of the orifice was sharply lit with gray.

"They will come from the ship to rescue us soon. Please—please turn your face to the light—so! * * * Yes, that will do!"

"Did you not know that I am blind, boy? * * * How big you seem! I should think you would put me down and rest your arms—"

Her face had been turned upward in the descent of the chain! He steeled himself to speak steadily. There was a cumulative harshness in that her face, above all others, so fragile, of purest line, should meet the coarse element, burning dirt. Furies leaped upon him that he had not saved her.

"The water is still hot in the bottom of the cistern," he said. "My arms are not in the least tired."

An interminable interval passed before he heard the voice again, slower, fainter: "And so you came back for me—and you knew Pelee—better! * * * No, the burns do not hurt terribly. My—face—feels—dead. The water was not burned—so?"

This was the moment of dreadful memory. Her body, her face, arms, throat, had covered him, as the rusty chain slipped through his hand. The molten stuff had not cracked his flesh because she had stood between.

"I tried to save you—you know that—but you kept the fire from me!"

His voice was broken with rebellion. Then out of a sigh came the words that lived with him always:

"I—would—have—you—know—that—la Montagne Pelee—is artistic!" (To be continued.)

SHARPENING A PENCIL.

In This Act You May Read a Man's Character.

No woman should marry a man till she has seen him sharpen a lead pencil. She can tell by the way he does it whether he is suited to her or not. Here are a few infallible rules for her guidance in the matter:

The man who holds the point toward him and close up against his shirt front is slow and likes to have secrets. He is the kind of man who, when the dearest girl in the world finds out that there are "others" and asks him who they are and what he means by calling on them, will assume an air of excessive dignity.

The man who holds the pencil out at arm's length and whittles away at it, hit or miss, is impulsive, jolly, good-natured and generous.

He who leaves a blunt point is dull and plodding, and will never amount to much. He is really good natured, but finds his chief pleasures in the commonplace things of life.

He who sharpens his pencil an inch or more from the point is high strung and imaginative and subject to exuberant flights of fancy. He will always be seeking to mount upward and accomplish things in the higher regions of business and art, and his wife's greatest trouble will be to hold him down to earth and prevent his flying off altogether on a tangent.

The man who sharpens his pencil all around smoothly and evenly, as though it was planed off in an automatic sharpener, is systematic and slow to anger, but he is so undeviating from a fixed principle that he would drive a woman with a sensitive temperament to distraction in less than six months. On the contrary, he who jumps in and leaves the sharpened wood as jagged as saw teeth around the top has a nasty temper and will spank the baby on the slightest provocation.

The man who doesn't stop to polish the point of lead once the wood is cut away has a streak of coarseness in his nature.

He who shaves off the lead till the point is like a needle is refined, delicate and sensitive. He will not be likely to accomplish so much as his more common brother, but he will never shock you, and is without doubt a good man to tie to.—New York Press.

RUSSIAN RAILROAD STORY.

How a Student Thought to Relieve the Tedium of Travel.

The tedium of railroad traveling in Russia was relieved the other day in an unexpected manner, says the London Globe. In a compartment of the train going from Kursk to Kiev sat a beautiful young lady next to a chatty priest, with whom she held an animated conversation. Opposite sat a student who envied the priest the causerie he was enjoying.

As the evening came on the girl fell asleep and the priest nodded his head in slumber. That was an opportunity which no self-respecting joker could afford to let slip. Bending forward the student kissed the sleeping dame and sprang back into his seat.

The salute awakened the girl, who, thinking that it was her neighbor, the priest, who had dared to kiss her, jumped up and gave him a sounding box on the ears. The student rejoiced greatly. There was a commotion, the policeman accompanying the train was summoned, and he at once drew up a "protocol" against the wronged priest, while the student offered to appear as a witness in the law court at Kiev.

But at the last moment a young Jewess who had been sitting in a dark corner, unobserved by anybody stepped forward, exonerated the poor priest from the terrible accusation, and then it was the student's turn to feel miserable.

To Be Exact.

"Gee whiz! Here's the rain coming down again and somebody's stolen my umbrella."

"Somebody's stolen what?"

"Well, the umbrella I've been carrying for the last two weeks."—Philadelphia Press.

A self-chalking chalk line is the latest addition to the carpenter's kit.

COMING HOME.

The whole farm sort of spreads itself in one tremendous grin. The old house somehow looks as bright as if it was new again! And Tower's barkin' round the place as frisky as a pup. And Dexter has to work to keep his heels from kickin' up! Even the old red cow has got some glinger in her "Moo." And Mother's singin' at her work the way she used to do! My heart's as light as when it had more thatch up on the dome— And why? Why, it's Thanksgivin' Day; the children's comin' home.

They're comin' home! They're comin' home! They're comin' back to-day. To make the old place like it was afore they went away!

And Don'll leave his Boston store and Ned'll leave his stocks. And John'll stop a-drawin' plans for buildin' city blocks.

And Mary'll leave her New York house, with all its high-toned stuff. And come down here and say it's Home and plenty good enough.

And there'll be boys and girls around jest like there used to be— To make it real Thanksgivin' Day for Mother and for me.

Thanksgivin' Day! Poke up the fires and make the evenin' hum!

The turkeys, roastin' in the pans, are spoutin' "rin' 'Have they come?"

The puddin' knockin' at the lid and bubblin' "Are they here?"

The mince pies wave their flags of steam; the kettle leads a cheer.

The rheumatism is all forgot; dyspepsia's out of sight!

I'm goin' to eat from soup to nuts, and dance a reel to-night!

And "blind man's buff" is jest my size, and "stage coach" suits me prime—

The children's comin' home to-day! Git out, old Father Time!

The little feet that we shall hear trot up and down the stair!

To us'll seem the very same that used to patter there!

The little folks a-runnin' 'round and laffin' in their play!

Won't seem Dan's boy and Mary's girl, but jest the same as afore!

And we'll forget that winter's come with all its snow and cold.

Forget the next week's lonesomeness, forget we're gittin' old.

And jest be young as when our heads weren't nigh so white as foam!

Thank God for His Thanksgivin' Day! The children's comin' home!

—Joseph C. Lincoln, in the Saturday Evening Post.

A Martyr for Principle.

By Emily Huntington Miller.

He was mending his harness in the immaculate kitchen, a piece of burlap over the knees of his second-best pantaloons, and another under his feet to catch any possible litter. His wife sat by the window, re-enforcing his yarn mittens with a stout woollen patch. She pushed up her spectacles, dropped her hands in her lap, and was staring at him in amazement as she said:

"Ain't going to Mary Ellen's to Thanksgivin'! For the land's sake, father, you must be crazy!"

"I got sense enough to know my own mind, tennyrate. I told David if I heard of him 'lectioneering for 'Rastus Dorrance for s'lectman, I wouldn't go nigh his house, and I callate to do as I said. You might as well save your breath to cool your porridge. I sh'd s'pose you knew by this time I ain't one to be argyied out of my 'pinions."

He went on punching holes in the bit of leather, every feature of his old face radiating that mild obstinacy so much more hopeless than vigorous resolve. He did not expect a reply. For fifty years his wife had accepted his decisions without controversy, and he was surprised that she should have offered the gentlest plea against his ultimatum. But there was heroic firmness in her soul, in spite of the quaver in her voice as she said, quietly:

"Then, Nathaniel, I must say it don't 'pear to me just nor Christian, punishin' other folks because you couldn't have your own way. Mary Ellen'll cry herself sick. The very first Thanksgivin' in the new house!"

"I ain't punishin' anybody, unless it's myself, and I can't help what Mary Ellen does."

"And Joey—he's been lettin' on it for a month. He sets the world and all by his gran'pa."

"And I set by Joey; you know I do, but I shan't go back on my word. That old skeezicks ain't no more fit for s'lectman than a cat. Shows mighty poor judgment."



THE TWO SET OUT TOGETHER.

My opinion, settin' a man up to run the leectric that can't manage his own business without bein' sold up by the sheriff. (I must say, I'm 'dispointed in David. I give him credit for more sense.")

"But now it's done, your stayin' away from Thanksgivin' ain't going to help matters, as I see."

"Well, if women ain't the beaters for reasoning, I s'pose now you can't see it's a matter of principle."

"No, I can't, Nathaniel," said his wife, deliberately putting away her work. "I ain't no call to have principles about the s'lectmen, but I've got a sight of principles ag'inst making other folks miserable when there's no need, and I feel called to go to Mary Ellen's to dinner. There's ple in the buttry, and doughnuts and cheese, and some of that cold spare-rib. I guess you can make out for once."

The old man got up stiffly, and slowly straightened his back.

"Oh, don't trouble about me, M's' Martin," he said, sarcastically; "I desasy I can pick up a dinner good as I deserre. I never did lay much stress on showin' your thankfulness by gorgin'!"

Rather to her surprise her husband accompanied her, as usual, to the meeting

SAD ACCIDENT TO MR. T. GOBBLER, SR.



Mr. T. Gobbler, Jr.—I wonder where papa is? He hasn't been home for two days.

Sympathetic Friend—Why! Haven't you heard? He's had a sad accident.

"Was the accident serious?"

"Oh, quite serious, I assure you. He had his head cut off, was boiled in oil, drawn and quartered, cut into strips and eaten up."

"Why, that's too bad. When did these sad events occur?"

"They all took place yesterday. Would you like to see where he's been buried?"

"Oh, yes, indeed. Let us go and pay our last respects. Is it far?"

"No, the cemetery is quite near. Come, let us stroll over that way."—Chicago Tribune.

house, and sat through the service with Joey's little tow head snuggled under his arm. But after rather ostentatiously helping her into David's buggy he trudged away, deaf to Mary Ellen's plea and Joey's imperative "Grampaw! I want my grampaw!"

"Hush, Joey," said his mother, "gran'pa'll come presently. Now, mother, don't you fret. I know father, and he ain't going to stick it out there alone just because he's mad at David. He'll give up if he thinks nobody cares."

The conviction of being a martyr for principle is very sustaining to human nature, but the effect is wonderfully helped by an audience. Mr. Nathaniel Martin applauded himself vigorously as he turned the key in his door, brightened up the fire, discarded his uncomfortable collar, and settled snugly into the feather-cushioned chair. How still the house was, and how loud the clock ticked, and what a lonesome noise the teakettle made!

He had fallen asleep in his chair, and started up, bewildered at the sound of soft, muffled blows upon the door. Small muffled fists were beating upon it, and Joey's shrill voice demanded:

"Grampaw, I want my grampaw!"

He opened the door and caught the child in his arms, saying, exultingly:

"Gran'pa's boy! Joey's come to dinner with gran'pa."

"No, me ain't," said Joey, wriggling to the floor; "me rather have dinner to my house. We dot turkey, an' plum puddin' an' candy, an' nuts, and lots of figs. An' mommy said bring grampaw. Put on your hat, grampaw."

"Gran'pa don't want any dinner; gran'pa don't feel—" He got no further, for the child burst into howls of grief.

"I want mine dinner! Joey wants to go home," he wailed.

"There, there, Joey," coaxed his grand-father; "gran'pa'll pop ye some corn; gran'pa'll fetch ye some sweet apples; gran'pa'll take gran'pa's watch." But his blandishments not only failed to soothe, but seemed actually to irritate the child to the unheard-of extent of declaring he was a naughty "krampaw," and Joey didn't love him "tall."

After which outburst he returned to his monotonous lament for home and dinner, until in desperation his grandfather yielded to his demand.

"Well, then, come on," he said, trying to be severe; "yer as set in yer way as—" he waited an instant to pull up his coat collar, and added, with a chuckle, "as I be."

The two set out together, and from the minute the gate clashed behind them a comfortable serenity began to settle over the grandfather.

With Joey's hand fast in his, and the fat little legs in their scarlet casings, trying to keep step with his own, with Hannah and Mary Ellen and a Thanksgivin' dinner in prospect, it seemed a very small matter that his ancient enemy had been chosen s'lectman.

"Grampaw's good now; grampaw's all pleasant," said Joey approvingly.

"Yes, gran'pa's good now," assented the old gentleman, with a passing reflection on the proverbial honesty of children and fools.

If there was a shade of reservation in his repentance, it vanished when Mary Ellen ran to meet him with open arms, and pronounced him a precious old darling between vigorous kisses; when he saw Hannah's peaceful face just inside the door; when David seized both his hands, declaring it wouldn't have been Thanksgivin' without father, and Joey tangled himself about his legs, screaming like a little cock sparrow:

"I fetched grampaw!"

The ghost of the obnoxious politician faded into nothingness, and through love and laughter and genial greeting the obscure text seemed singing itself to one of the old remembered melodies:

"Th' fruit of righteousness is sown in peace of them that make peace—that make peace—that—make—peace!"—Christian Advocate.

Thanksgiving Fashion Notes.

The subject of dressing is just now much discussed.

Popular taste for the Thanksgiving season inclines toward sage effects, somewhat stuffed in the waist.

A correct cut at the present time depends upon the material, whether light or dark, but a little of both, here and there, is a neat combination at this time of the year.

Conventional ideas in trimmings are popular.

The wing is not so much favored; but

on the other hand, the whole bird is frequently seen.

After dinner toilets are worn with a loose belt.—New York Times.

A Query.



Thanksgiving an a joyous day Throughout the mighty nation, But on one point about it I Would lak some information.

Why is it dat always, when We should feel most enraptured, We hanker for de piece ob turkey Some other niggah captured!

The Aftermath.

Mrs. Ferguson called her husband out to the dining room.

"George," she demanded, "who are all those strangers you have brought here to dinner?"

"The boys down at the office," he said. "I'd like to know what this sort of performance means!"

"It means, Laura," answered Mr. Ferguson, with a look of east iron determination on his face, "that there isn't going to be any of it left to serve up at every meal for the next six days—six days, by jucks!"

Mr. Tucker (after the company had been served)—Tommy, what part will you have?

"Tommy—I'll take the dramstick of course. That's what you told me I was to—maw, isn't this where you punch or leg or give me a kick under the table?"

"Isn't it nice," said one of the guests, "to have a family reunion like this once in a year?"

"Yes," responded Uncle Allen Sparks, sawing away energetically with his carving knife, "but when they come like this one at a time, you can hardly call it a reunion. This one seems to be the father of the one we had year before last and the grandfather of the one we had last year."

Badleigh Mildred—Had a horrible dream las' night, did ye? Wat was it?

Saymond Storey—I dreamt that the big feed the Salvation army people give at yistidday wuz all a dream!

"What seems to be the trouble, Mrs. Highmuss?" asked the doctor, warming his hands at the radiator before feeling her pulse.

"That's what I want you to tell me, doctor," said Mrs. Highmuss. "It's either a cold I caught at the football game or it's something I've eaten that has disagreed with me."

Mrs. Jenner Lee Ondego—