

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 hulk 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 rains. 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 burrs sing in the naggars 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 terrors, 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 end on'y get hold o' that barnacle as a shark's toot, Pugh—if I end on'y get him here wance bare-futed," Denny gasped—"sure I'd lie happy holdin' av him! Ha!—don't step there!"

He pulled her away from a puddle of uncleaned 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 chamber.

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

"It lugs 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' 'roat I'd be intertainin' Mr. Constable presently in the bottom av th' ship, togged out head an' fut in irons fur th' occasion, an' he'd say, 'Dinny, why didn't you shand be th' lady when I told you? Perhaps you can stand 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 house about him! All that a soft Irish heart could feel of terror and bereavement had waged 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 split av a mountain t' yinge 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 yet 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 Rabeaut, Mondet, the ships in the inner harbor, the thirty thousand of Saint

Pierre—were they all wrecked in the mells 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 wince 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. You were 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

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.

THE HELPLESS FLUFFY.



There is a sort of woman whom all women despise and most men adore, and that is the bit of fluff who can't do anything for herself—when there is a man around.

She is not always a pretty woman. If she were, women would forgive her. She is not always a little woman. If she were, women could stand her.

But sometimes she is old and big and fat—but helpless. Helpless, too, in maddening ways. She can't get up a flight of steps alone, or over a muddy crossing. She never can swim, so she requires all the men on the beach to pull her up when she falls down in the water. Then she generally weeps and does kittenish things that make other women long to slap her.

The men may regard her as a nuisance, but they bear with her and wait on her until self-respecting women, who can tie their own shoe laces and button their own gloves without calling out the fire department, wonder if it pays to be self-reliant and strong.

Did you ever take the trouble to watch one of these women? A small, rather pretty woman, I mean, who was of the helpless variety?

She watches men as a cat watches a mouse-hole. She never gets helpless when there are only women about. She can stir around quite nimbly when she has to. But wait until the mouse pushes his first whisker out of his hole; wait until she can see a little black speck on the horizon which her instinct tells her will resolve itself into a man.

Presto! Both her shoe laces come untied, she drops her handkerchief, and everything in sight becomes unbuttoned.

Yes, I said everything in sight.

The man appears, and no matter how much the other women may want him, he finds himself hooking and buttoning and tying the helpless woman, retrieving her handkerchief and parasol, fetching and carrying for her like a white slave, and—believing what her timid, upward glances tell him of his strength and bigness and viking-like qualities of mind and soul and body.

Meantime the properly hooked and buttoned women have to stand around and grit their teeth and make up their minds never to be caught again with everything done. They register a vow that if it is as easy as it looks they will come undone somewhere and make a man tie 'em up.

Oh, the motor vells which have to be kept in place by a man!—for the helpless woman! The way she can stumble over her own feet, if there are no rocks handy, and the fool way the men fall into her traps!

Helpless women are regular man snares.

They ought to be regulated by the police.—Chicago Journal.

He Knew Their Secrets.

Bishop Donahue, of Wheeling, W. Va., is a very conservative prelate. He shares the views of many other bishops in his communion concerning secret societies, and as a consequence, when the Knights of Columbus was organized in his diocese, he was rather chary in affording them official recognition. Finally, he became convinced that the order was not inimical to Church or state, and as a proof of his satisfaction attended one of their annual gatherings. A member of the order attempted to twit him on his skepticism, and he promptly retorted:

"You young men imagine that you belong to a secret society; but you are very much deceived. I have been up in the cupola of the cathedral, and with the aid of a telescope have discovered everything that you have been doing. I know all of your signs; I know your passwords, and I even know the color of your goat."

Painful Memories.

The best man thought he'd take a look around and see that everything was running as a fastidious bride would wish it, and up in the room where the presents were displayed, alone and unhappy looking, he came upon a youth, seemingly ready, like the wedding guest of the English poet, to "beat his breast." He was wandering about, looking at silver, and cut glass without seeing them, and the best man hardly knew how to approach him.

"Er—have you kissed the bride?" he asked at last.

And the answer told far more than its two meager words might have been expected to. It was, "Not lately!"



Dyer—Well, I see Failing is on his feet again. Ryer—Yes; he was obliged to sell his auto.—Puck.

"Was that you I kissed in the conservatory last night?" "About what time was it?"—Philadelphia Inquirer.

She—Yes, whenever I see a man in a dark street I always run. He—And do you ever catch one of them?—Harper's Weekly.

"I didn't see you in church yesterday." "No; Willie didn't shovel a path through the Sunday papers in time."—Puck.

Polly—How do you like my bathing suit? Dolly—It must have been perfectly sweet before you outgrew it.—Cleveland Leader.

Barber—Hair getting thin, sir. Ever tried our hair preparation, sir? Customer—No, I can't blame it on that.—Boston Transcript.

He—Has your fortune ever been told? She—No; but I dare say papa will tell you if you really have serious intentions.—Sketch.

"You seem to manage remarkably well on your housekeeping money." "Yes; the storekeepers haven't sent in their bills yet."—Stray Stories.

"When they take woman away from the co-educational college," said the speaker, "what will follow?" "I will," cried a voice from the audience.—Success.

"Ah, I see you are married!" exclaimed the merchant. "No, sir," replied the applicant for a position. "I got this scar in a railroad accident."—The Bohemian.

Louie—Uncle, what's chagrin? Uncle—Well, it's what a stout man feels when he runs and jumps on a car that doesn't start for half an hour.—Chicago Daily News.

Tommy—Pop, what is retribution? Tommy's Pop—Retribution, my son, is something that we are sure will eventually overtake other people.—Philadelphia Record.

Mrs. Benham—Why does a man hate his mother-in-law? Benham—He doesn't hate her; he simply hates to think of the way she got into his family.—Harper's Weekly.

"De real resourceful man," said Uncle Eben, "when some one hands him a lemon is ready wld de sugar and other fixin's to make it to-l-table pleasant to take."—Washington Star.

"Officer, I appeal for protection. A man is following me, and attempting to make love to me." "Begorry, O've been lookin' for an escaped lunatic. Where is he?"—Kansas City Times.

Scott—What makes you think that the trust originated in Rhode Island? Mott—Dad used to speak of the trust in Providence as far back as when I was a boy.—Boston Traveler.

Old Gent—Here, you boy, what are you doing out here, fishing? Don't you know you ought to be at school? Small Boy—There, now! I knew I'd forgot something.—Philadelphia Inquirer.

Sparks—I wonder why it is a woman lets out everything you tell her? Parks—My dear boy, a woman has only two views of a secret—either it is not worth keeping, or it is too good to keep.—Stray Stories.

"You know Miss Strong, don't you?" "Oh, yes; mannish sort of girl." "Is she, really?" "Yes; she used the telephone to-day for the first time in her life, and she didn't giggle once."—Philadelphia Press.

She—This dress doesn't become my complexion. I must change it. He—More expense? I can't stand it; you'll ruin me. She—You silly! I don't mean the dress—I mean the complexion.—Chicago Journal.

"Here, Willie!" cried the boy's father, "you mustn't behave that way. Everybody will be calling you a little glutton. Do you know what that is?" "I suppose," replied Willie, "it's a big glutton's little boy."

"I have written a book that everybody ought to read," said the author. "I am afraid it won't do," answered the publisher. "What the public seems to want now is a book that nobody ought to read."—Washington Star.

Jack—Smith asked me to come to his home this evening. Says he's going to celebrate his golden wedding. Gladys—Why, he's been married only three years. Jack—That's what I told him. He said it seemed like fifty.

Mrs. Henpeck (to her husband)—What would you do if I were to die? Henpeck—It would drive me crazy. Mrs. H.—Would you marry again? Henpeck—I don't think I would be as crazy as that.—Pioneer Press.

"How often does the trolley run past your house?" asked a tourist of a farmer. "Waal, they run by so frequent and so often that I can't keep no track of 'em, but I fudge the last one passed here two hours ago."—Harper's Bazaar.