

The White Sepulchre

The Tale of Pelee

BY WILL LEVINGTON COMFORT

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CHAPTER II.—(Continued.)

"Of course she is quite right," Constable went on, "but that doesn't make it any easier to bear. With all the impressiveness which comes of being twenty and a girl—that was the Madame's first age, five years ago—she informed me that a man is a nobody, even if he has a billion, when he isn't of some use in the world. Exquisite little proseler! Such things were never thought of, nor spoken to, mortal man before! I explained my view, that having all the money needful, it was my privilege to play for culture instead of coin, to water my mental garden as a life pursuit, but she broke up all my arguments, beat down my ideals. I regarded my valueless past and yearned to become an apostle of action."

"I see I am entertaining you, so I'll finish. I went home, buckled the Madame to Brooklyn, and disappeared—took her at her word! I shall do it again some time. For two solid months I didn't hurt anybody's feelings, and earned seventy dollars and board, stoking. Good clean stoking. Back and forth from Savannah to Boston in the bowels of an old coast liner, learning bunkers, boilers and firebeds at first hand; specializing in coals and callouses. I made a fairly decent coal passer, and met Denny Macready down there in the dark—Denny, who now passes tea. Then I scrubbed up again and steamed the Madame down to Martinique, to tell Miss Stansbury all about it, and show her my recommend from the third engineer. She was away in Europe. Her father says she will never be as beautiful as her mother. I thought perhaps we might look in on Martinique on our way around the islands. The statue of Josephine is there, you know."

"Your sentences are becoming unpolished, Peter. You are shirring the narrative," said Breen.

"Well, I've been taking an annual course in old Pelee since then. Saint Pierre sits in the shadow of the volcano, and from a geological standpoint—"

"Exactly, but—"

CHAPTER III.

Constable had an un-American capacity for waiting. He might have gone ashore in Saint Pierre that night, but instead he sat alone on deck, in the windless harbor. Quietly restless, he regarded the illumined terraces of the city. Back of all his levity and deliberation, it was not to be concealed from his own mind that before him lay the goal of the cruise. She was there, far to the right, among the lights on the mountain side—the little girl who had told him he was a nobody. Constable smiled, and grew serious from the start of an old thought. It was not impossible for her to have met some emperor who had demanded her seat for his throne room.

The harbor was weirdly hot. The heavy, moist sweetness of a horticultural garden, to which he had likened the nights of Saint Pierre, had been supplanted by dry, desiccated draughts of air. His throat and nostrils were irritated, and tobacco became unpalatable. There was no moon, and the stars were so faint in the north that the mass of Pelee was scarcely shaped against the sky. The higher lights of the city had a reddish, uncertain glow, as if a thin film of fog hung between them and the eye; but to the south the night grew clearer. He followed the circling shore with his eyes to the Morne d'Orange, which marked the southern boundary of the city. Beyond the morne stood the great plantation house where she lived. The night was pure purple in that direction, and the terra stars smiled.

Breen essayed to read the following forenoon away, leaving Constable to make his first descent upon the city alone. The Madame had already been sighted from the plantation house, and certain members of the establishment were out to welcome the guest. Indeed, Constable had scarcely stepped ashore from his launch at the Sugar Landing when he heard his name called and saw the flutter of a handkerchief above the hunched heads of the natives in the market place. It was Miss Stansbury, in a carriage. She greeted him merrily:

"Uncle Joey went out to the ship from the lower landing. I told him I would capture you if you touched here. We are very glad you've come, Mr. Constable." He took her hand and gained the seat beside her in the carriage. "This is great luck," he said nervously. "I feared

you might be away somewhere—in Europe or the States. Would you mind me looking at this little book in your lap?" "It's a little volume of essays," she told him, "and I'm not sure that I greatly admire their spirit, nor the views of the writer. He makes a statement, for instance, that women are incapable of the finer senses of friendship; that women cannot adhere through severe tests."

Miss Stansbury was to encounter, a few days later, stirring cause to remember these words and Constable's reply, which is neither here nor there, ethical niceties not being his specialty.

"The man is an arrant fool, and probably couldn't get a woman to live with him," he said with finality.

The ponies were ascending the rise in Rue Victor Hugo, at the southern end of the city. The portresses, coming down from the hill-trails, the littest, hardiest women of the occasion, bore a pitiable look of fatigue in their faces. The pressure of the heat, and the dispiriting condition of the atmosphere, were revealed in the distended eyelids and colorless, twisted lips of the burden bearers. As Miss Stansbury looked out toward the harbor for Uncle Joey's boat, Constable regarded her profile. The delicacy of color and contour brought to him an imperious realization of her fairness. It appeared that in his absence the rarest touches of perfection had been set.

"You haven't changed much," she said laughingly. "You were always willing to agree that I was right, and all men, yourself most of all, deeply in the wrong. Don't you remember how I used to preach to you about a man's need of doing something emphatic?"

"Indeed I remember. Your lessons made a deep impression."

"At least, you bore very gracefully with an oppressive companion," she declared. "Just as if you didn't know best how to dispose of your time and talents!"

"On the contrary, you were more nearly right than you knew. I was in need of just such moral stimulus. The sorry part, Miss Stansbury, is that I don't bring you admirably invested talents even now."

She glanced at him quickly. "I believe I understand better some of the difficulties you have had to contend with," she said. "We all read how you kidnaped the entire New York newsboys' association—how you fed the grimy little chaps oceans of charlotte russe and mountains of plum-duff, giving them a Sunday afternoon at sea, and presents to remember. That was fine."

"I forgot to tell Breen about that," he remarked, smiling at the recollection. "Breen is a friend of mine, who was good enough to come along. He's a rare fellow, and you'll like him."

"You make people find out by themselves so much about you," she observed. "Think how you let me believe you were absolutely without interests or ambitions—ever last year, while you were making daily visits to the jails of Pelee. It was months afterward that I learned that those journeys meant—and then through the press. We all read the paper you delivered before the geological society on Antillean formations. Think how I felt while recalling some of my lectures on your endless attitude toward life. You might have told me!"

"I failed to discover the secret, Miss Stansbury," he said quickly. "Old Pelee has a big story for the right man, but I was unable to drag it forth. I had nothing to be proud of to tell you."

The ponies had gained the eminence of the Morne d'Orange. Ahead was the broad, white plantation house, where the Stansburys and Constable's uncle lived. To the right was the desolate, sapphire bay, where the Madame was moored among the shipping; behind and below, the red-tiled roofs of Saint Pierre, and behind the city, back of all, La Montagne Pelee, hung like an emperor of the Romans, pale in the intense light of morning, and wearing a delicate white ruck of cloud about his crown.

"It is different with most people," she smiled. "They have so much to tell of little things. The silent men who are dreaming of big things all the time—think of a conversation like this when the island is glowing like a brazier?"

"What is the meaning of this terrific sultriness and the white seam in the gutter?" he asked suddenly.

"Why, I supposed you understood—"

"Understood what, Miss Stansbury?"

"Why, old Pelee has been showering us with ash from time to time during the past ten days. It is the tint of sulphur that spoils the air. The city would have been white now, except for the heavy rain that washed the ashes away just before dawn."

Constable turned apprehensively toward the volcano. He had come into an inheritance of winged thoughts in the presence of the woman, but the news of Pelee's activity disordered the very root of things. Mrs. Stansbury was standing on the porch of the great house, whose walls, verandas and porticoes were cooled and perfumed by embowering vines. The driveway was bordered by Rose of Sharon hedges, and the gardens famed with peonies and roses. There was a cool grove of mango and India trees at the end of the lawn, edged with moon-flowers and clematis. Back of the plantation house waved the sleeping seas of cane; in front, the Caribbean.

On the south appeared the peaks of Carbet; on the north, the Monster.

Constable advanced eagerly to give his hand to Mrs. Stansbury, who received his greeting with cooling repression. He would have been dismayed, had he not felt on former occasions polar draughts from this source. Still, he paid her questioning homage. It was enough for him that Mr. Stansbury, an admirable American gentleman, honored her with a life of one-pointed devotion; that his uncle, Joseph Wall, of sound mental balance and heart vastness, cherished her good-will. It was enough for Constable, indeed, that Mrs. Stansbury mothered a daughter. He was by no means above conceiving that another should dislike him; although Mrs. Stansbury was in other respects an Isis veiled too darkly for his perception. The years had not touched the elder woman. She had the same tendril-like delicacy of figure and refinement of face. Her eyes had often startled him with their world-weariness and world-knowledge. They were always wonderful—the eyes of a mystic and vibrant with the suggestion of undiscovered continents in their depths. The cool, graceful fingers slipped quickly from his hand.

"I have always remembered your gracious hospitality," Constable said.

"I remember, too," Mrs. Stansbury replied, with scarcely a trace of a smile. "Who could forget the dentist—the dentist to La Montagne Pelee? Have you come again to look into the mouth of the mountain?"

CHAPTER III.

Constable had incurred the especial displeasure of the mother on a former visit, through the unwhashed fashion with which he had endeavored to pry into the secrets of the volcano. Old Pelee was identified with the inner life of Martinique, like the memory and the statue of Josephine. Mrs. Stansbury felt that the mysteries of the mountain were not for the eyes of man; least of all, for the eyes of an American, in whom the spirit of veneration was not. She had a very clear picture in her mind of Constable as he peered, and possibly spat, into the appalling chasms of the summit, and pattered about in the dim gorges which seemed the Titan's flanks. The daughter had shared Constable's opinion on the mountain had fallen into her hands. Then she realized that this was no paragon who had carried on his studies in their midst.

Mr. Stansbury was away on his annual trip to the States. The mantle of host fell, accordingly, upon the simple shoulders of Uncle Joey. He arrived within an hour, and his trip out to the Madame had not been futile, since he brought Breen with him. The latter seemed to divine at once the defective current between Mrs. Stansbury and his friend, and forestalled any slight tension during dinner that evening by sprightly narratives of the voyage. He seemed to attract the attention of the elder woman, and to be stimulated by her close scrutiny of his face and personality. That evening, after dinner, the men moved out upon the veranda to smoke.

"This is second-hand air, Uncle Joey," Constable remarked. "I shut my eyes a moment ago and thought I was down among the steel mills of the lower Monongahela."

"You're the expert in Pelee, not I, Peter," the old planter answered. "April and May aren't our best months, but I never knew such heat between rains as we are having now."

Constable moved out into the garden to look at the sky. In no way did he underestimate the seriousness of the time. In the south, low and to the left of the Carbet peaks, the new moon arose, but without the sharpness of outline peculiar to the tropics. It was an orange hue, instead of silvery, and shrouded, as if seen through a fine wire screen. A faint, low rumbling was heard from the north. It was like thunder, but the horizon above and around Pelee was smoothed by lightning. Miss Stansbury had been at the piano, but the music now ceased.

"How long is it since the mountain has had a session of grumbling, Uncle Joey?" Constable asked.

"From time to time for the past ten days. Before that, twenty years, Peter."

"This is quite a novelty—this additional egg moon," Constable added. "It's the ash-fog lying between. If there isn't a heavy rain in the night, we'll have a white world to-morrow."

Miss Stansbury appeared on the veranda, and moved out upon the lawn, where Constable was standing.

"Are you really so greatly worried, Mr. Constable?" she asked in a low tone.

"Why, the fact that Pelee is acting out of the ordinary is enough to make any one skeptical of his intentions. There are a few man-eaters among the mountains of the world—Krakatoa, Bandai-san, Cotopaxi, Vesuvius, Etna—chronic old ruffians, whom you can't tame. A thousand years is nothing to them. They wait, still as crocodiles, until cities have formed on their flanks and seers have built temples in their rifts. They have tasted blood, you see, and the madness comes back. Pelee is a suspect."

(To be continued.)

Just Like a Bee.

"Why doesn't that lazy Philander find something to do?"

"Find something to do? Why, he's busy as a bee."

"But he hasn't done a thing this winter but loaf."

"Well, that's what a bee does in winter, doesn't it?"

Unnecessary Now.

"They used to give such splendid entertainments, but they never seem to have anything worth going to any more."

"No. They have an established position in society now."

Science AND Invention

Metals get tired as well as living things, a scientist declares. Telegraph wires are better conductors on Monday than Saturday, on account of their Sunday rest, and a rest of three weeks adds 10 per cent to the conductivity of a wire.

Alum is the name given to a new metal, which is composed of two parts of aluminum and one part of steel. It is said to equal cast iron in strength, but is much more elastic. Alum is superior because it does not rust and takes a high polish.

The singular phenomenon of hard steel being cut by a rapidly revolving disk of soft steel has been somewhat puzzling. A microscopic examination by an English engineer, F. W. Hartford, has now shown that the metal acted upon is heated nearly or quite to the melting point of steel, but only at the point of contact with the disk.

A section of the Canadian Northern Railway, running northwest from Sudbury and crossing the Vermillion River, is unique in that it is ballasted with gold. Every yard of the gravel used for ballast has been found to contain from 50 cents worth to \$1 worth of the precious metal in the shape of fine dust, and a syndicate is installing machinery for its extraction.

There was recently brought to the British museum about half a peck of stones asserted to have been taken from the stomach of an African elephant. The stones are angular and unsmooth. Other instances of the same nature are known to hunters. The man who gave the curiosities to the museum has demonstrated the existence of the stone-swallowing habit in crossbills.

During the year 1907 the Nile reached the lowest level known in Egypt since 1877 and but for the existence of the great dam at Assuan and the vast volume of water impounded by it to supplement the low Nile during the season of drought the country would have been plunged into the horror of a famine. The year 1907 was the eighth successive lean year, so far as the Nile flood was concerned.

So great is the part played by birds in disseminating seeds and in protecting plants by the destruction of noxious insects that H. W. Hanshaw reaches the somewhat astonishing conclusion that if all birds were exterminated, not only would successful agriculture become impossible, but the greater part of the vegetation of the earth would eventually be destroyed. A permanent reduction in the bird population, he says, could not but have disastrous consequences.

One of the most remarkable of the high flights achieved by the free balloons, now employed in many countries for scientific exploration of the upper air, was made on July 25, 1907, near Brussels. The tandem balloons left the village of Levie at 7 o'clock in the morning, and one hour and six minutes later they had attained an elevation, as indicated by the self-recording barometer, of almost exactly 16½ miles. At that point the upper balloon burst, and the flight was arrested. At the height of about 7½ miles, as usual, the fall of the thermometer was arrested, and a sudden rise of 12 degrees occurred in the temperature. At a little less than 8½ miles an isothermal zone was encountered, above which another rise of temperature began, and continued until the balloon burst. The last temperature recorded was about -44 degrees Fahrenheit.

SHIPWRECKS AND COURTS MARTIAL.

The custom of holding courts-martial in the British navy after every case of shipwreck has a curious origin. In 1741 the Wager, one of Commodore Anson's vessels, was wrecked off the coast of Chile, most of the crew being saved. The men and some of the junior officers held that they were no longer amenable to discipline because their pay ceased with the wreck, but the captain, whose name was Davy Champ, differed, treated them as mutineers and shot one of his midshipmen. He was then deposed, and most of the crew made off in three of the boats. Later when it was proposed to proceed against the so-called mutineers the officers of the crew decided that the men had been correct in their view. This discovery led to the framing of Section 9 of the articles of war, which provides that in the case of shipwreck, destruction or capture by the enemy a ship is held to remain in command pending inquiry by a court-martial.

IN DE NATCHAL WAY.

A rich Northerner, walking about in a Southern negro settlement, came upon a house around which several children were playing. Seeing that the family was destitute, he called the oldest negro boy and gave him a dollar, telling him to spend it for a Christmas turkey. As soon as the generous man had gone, the negro woman called her boy and said, "Thomas, yo' gimme dat dollar and go git dat turkey in de natchal way."—Success Magazine.

Money is the root of much evil when it gives a man a fashionable wife.

the country. Who may know but that some of the benefits which we enjoy today under the institutions of our government are results of the discussions of those two great patriots beneath this grand old tree? I brought myself to think so, at any rate.

"A few miles from this historic oak, an old resident informed me, is another tree which besides being an ancient landmark is something of a curiosity. It is a chestnut tree, with a trunk twenty-one feet in circumference, from which about six feet from the ground a white elm of large size has grown. The chestnut trunk completely incloses that of the elm, and the explanation of the curious association is that at some time a branch of the chestnut was broken off, leaving a cavity in which in time mold and vegetable matter collected and made suitable depth of soil for the seed of the elm, which lodged therein to germinate and grow and become a tree, a veritable part of its unprotesting host, the mammoth chestnut trunk."

MUD HOUSES BUILT BY WASPS.

A naturalist has thus described the habits of a species of wasp that makes its nest of mud, says the Dundee Advertiser. The mud of which their nests is composed, he said, is often carried for some distance, as it is essential for them to use good, stiff clay. At the edge of some pond or stream you may see these insects roll sticky little balls out of the stiff mud with their strong jaws. With this heavy load of mud they rise slowly, and, having gained some height, they get their bearings and fly in a straight line to their nest. In this way they resemble the bees; indeed, all the wasps and bees seem to have a wonderful faculty for flying directly home from any point. When the wasp has gained the place selected for a building site she puts the tiny ball of mud against the wall of the building and rubs it tight by moving her head from side to side very rapidly. The outer surface of the nest shows a series of rings, with sharply defined lines between most of them, but the interior is always extremely smooth and almost a perfect cylinder. While building her nest the insect continually runs in and out of the tiny cylinder, examining it minutely with her feelers. If a rough place is felt on the inner surface she carefully sets to work and rubs it smooth. When the cylinder is finished the wasp goes hunting for spiders.

A PSYCHIC PHENOMENON.

An extraordinary incident is connected with Prof. von Herkener's famous painting, "The Last Master," which was the picture of his year at the academy. One morning soon after the exhibition was opened the artist was astonished to receive a letter from a lady, a perfect stranger, who said she was not aware until she saw "The Last Master" at the academy on the previous day that her mother, then dead, had ever sat to the professor for her portrait.

Now, the figure in the picture was painted solely from imagination, and the artist hastened to explain this fact to his correspondent. She thereupon asked for an appointment and took an oil painting of her mother, asserting that it was a faithful representation of that lady.

The academicians were astonished to perceive that he had really portrayed on his own canvas a far stunner of the figure in this other painting, although it was that of a woman whom he had never seen in his life.—London M. A. P.

PHILADELPHIA INQUIRY.

"So," remarked the boyhood friend, "you are in the swim." "Mother and the girls think I am," answered Mr. Curator. "But my personal feelings are those of a man who has fallen overboard and ought to be holed for help."—Washington Star.

Teacher—If you are kind and polite to your playmates, what will be the result? Scholar—They'll think they can lick me!—Philadelphia Inquirer.

He—That fellow over there climbed me out of a coal mine. She—How could he? He—Wouldn't let me carry his daughter.—The Pathfinder.

"Just this way, sir," said the courteous clerk in the railroad ticket office. "Let me show you some summer guides entitled 'Where to Go' and 'What to Go.' The man with the modest income shook his head. "They don't interest me," he sighed. "What I want to know is 'How to Go.'"—Chicago Daily News.

"Professor," said Mrs. Gaswell to the distinguished musician who had been engaged at a high price to entertain her guests, "what was that lovely selection you played just now?" "That, madam," he answered, glancing at her, "was an improvisation." "Ah, yes, I remember now. I knew it was an old favorite, but I couldn't think of the name of it to save me."—Tit-Bits.

HIS AUGUSTED SPEECH.

Eventually our finest products will be cheap enough to be within the reach of all. Then the story of the boy and the hothouse grapes will be as dead and antiquated as the theater had stories of the past. This boy—he was a hothouse—entered a grocer's one day, and, pointing to some superb grapes, said:

"Wat's the price o' them there, mister?"

"One dollar a pound, my lad," the clerk replied.

A look of anguish passed over the boy's face, and he said hastily: "Then give us a cent's worth o' carrots. I'm dead gone on fruit."

FLASHES OF FUN

Old Gentleman—And if you had five hundred dollars and multiplied it by two, what would you get? Boy—'Nautmobile!—Harper's Weekly.

Teacher—Parse "court." Pupils—"Court," a verb, active, indicative mood, present tense, and agrees with all the girls in the neighborhood.—Tit-Bits.

Father—Got a fall, did you? Well, I hope you didn't cry like a baby. Son—No, dad, I didn't cry. I just sold my word—the same as you'd have said—Punch.

"What sort of a looking chap is this, ag?" "Well, if you ever see two men in a corner and one looks bored to death, the other one is Gussy."—London Opinion.

Mother (crossly)—Tommy, haven't I told you you must not talk when I am talking? Tommy—But, mamma, you won't let me stay up after you go to bed!—Sketch.

"Do you think he can afford to keep an auto?" "He ought to. He's been an amateur photographer for three years and that didn't break him!"—Detroit Free Press.

Stranger—Been a cyclone or an earthquake round here recently? Teacher—Now this here's a college town, an 'un of the students had a birthday party.—Harper's Weekly.

Missus—Now, remember, Bridget, the Joneses are coming for dinner. Cook—Leave it to me, mum. I'll do me worst! They'll never trouble you again!—Illustrated Bits.

"You say you acted like a perfect lady throughout?" "Sure, yer honor; when he tips his hat to me an' me set knowin' him, I ups with a rock an' coves in his face!"—Houston Post.

Medium (impressively)—It's the spirit of your late husband, madam. He wishes to speak with you. Mrs. Peck—It can't be poor Henry; he never had no spirit.—Boston Transcript.

Teacher—What is it, Tom? Tom—Jimmy's swearing! Teacher—What did he say? Tom—Well, marn, if you say over all the cuss words you know, I'll tell you when you come to it.—Kansas City Star.

The American globe-trotter—Talk about traveling. Why, in America trains go so fast that it takes two people to talk about 'em—some to say "Here she comes," and the other to say, "There she goes."—The Sketch.

Mrs. O'Hoolihan—This paper says there do be sermons in stones. Pishad d' yer think at that? O'Hoolihan—Of dunnis about the sermons, but many a good argument has come out of a brick. O'm' thinks!—Chicago News.

"I tell you," said Stinick, "men are getting so doubtful these days that you can't trust your best friends!" "And what's worse," interrupted Burroughs, gloomily, "you can't get your best friends to trust you."—Philadelphia Press.

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