

The White 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 those 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 crumpling 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' laughter 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 hills, 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. Ruse Victor Hugo was effaced, the way up toward the morne undecipherable. A breathing pile of debris barred every way. It was plain that they must make their way southward along the shore.

"If I cud on'y get bolt o' that barnacle as a shark's tooth, Pugh—if I cud on'y get him here wance bare-footed," Denny gasped—"sure I'd lie happy holdin' av him! Ha!—don't step there!"

He pulled her away from a puddle of uncollected 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 loks like rain, ma'am," Macready's quick tongue offered.

They were on the shore, hearing the rise of the Morne d'Orange. Saint Pierre had rushed to the sea—at the last. The mountain had found the woman 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, nor 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—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 useless 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' front I'd be intertainin' Mr. Constable presently in the bottom av th' ship, togged out head an' fut in iron for th' occasion, an' he'd say, 'Dinny, why didn't you stand by th' lady when I told you? Perhaps you can stand by th' bunkers better, me son. Go to thim, ye gonst!' * * * Ernst, lad, you're intertainin', you're loquac'ous."

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

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 plyingly, 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 parcel?"

"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 stole 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. Faces 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 pencil 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 carryin' for the last two weeks."—Philla delphia Press.

A SONG OF THANKSGIVING.

I'm thankful that the years are long—
However long they be—
They still are laborers glad and strong
That ever work for me.
This rose I cut with careless shears
And wear and cast away—
The cosmos wrought a million years
To make it mine a day.
This lily by the pasture bars
Beneath the walnut tree,
Long ere the fire-mist formed in stars,
Was on its way to me.

The laws of property are lax—
My neighbor's farm is free—
I'm thankful, though he pays the tax,
The least of it is mine.
No sheriff's catch can loose my grip
On fields I have not sown
Or shake my sense of ownership
In things I do not own.
I'm thankful for my neighbor's wood,
His orchard, lake, and sea—
For, while my eye continues good,
I own all I can see.

I'm thankful for this mighty age,
These days beyond compare,
When hope is such a heritage
And life a large affair.
We thank the gods for low and high,
Right, wrong as well as may,
For all the wrong of days gone by
Works goodness for to-day.
Here on Time's table-land we pause
To thank on bended knee,
To thank the gods for all that was,
And is, and is to be.

I'm thankful for the glow and grace
And winsome beauty of the Near,
The greatness of the Communion,
The glory of the Here.
I'm thankful for man's high empire,
His steadfast, sturdy, old soul,
The long look of his skyward eyes
That lights a far-off goal.
And so I feel to thank and bless
Both things unknown and understood—
And thank the sturdiest thankfulness
That maketh all things good.
—Sam Walter Foss, in Success Magazine.

Mrs. Pettigill's Thanksgiving Dinner.

"The times is bad," sighed Mrs. Pettigill, looking as lugubrious as it was possible for a rosy-checked dumpling of a woman to look.

"That's so," assented her friend, Mary Ann Dawson.

"Pa says 'single misfortunes never come alone,'" continued Mrs. Pettigill. "Fast, he lost that little bit o' money he got for the medder-land, I told him 'twan't safe to put it in the bank. Then old Brindle up an' died, so we have to buy out milk. An' now Sam Higgins's young ones hev all come down with the measles, an' Sam's out of a job; so, of course, pa can't collect rent from him."

"Seems to me Deacon Pettigill don't worry much 'bout his hard luck," suggested Miss Dawson.

"Is, no! He says the Lord will provide; but I tell him the Lord expects folks to look out for themselves a little." And the good woman worked away with redoubled energy on the bedspread that she and her friend were engaged in quilting.

The quilting frame was set up in the "front room," and its mistress felt a pardonable pride in the red and green trapezoidal carpet on the floor, and the somber hair-cloth furniture ranged against the walls in uncompromising stiffness.

"I declare, Mrs. Pettigill," said the spinster, after a while, "you look all beat out. I'm 'fraid you're workin' too stiddy. It's kinder hard on you doin' this extra work just at Thanksgiving time."

"Ef you'll believe it, I ain't done nothin' for Thanksgiving."

"What! ain't done no cookin'?" gasped Miss Dawson, to whose New England soul this breach of a time-honored observance was little less than sacrilege.

"Not a mite," replied Mrs. Pettigill. "I wasn't reckonin' on doin' much, thuss bein' so hard; then Joel took a notion that Lily Jane must go to his folks for Thanksgiving' week, so I just made up my mind not to worry over the cookin'. I had calculated on roastin' a turkey or a couple of chickens, but when I asked pa which he'd rather hev, he says, 'Just let 'em have some nice codfish, with boiled beets and fried pork sauce, such as we uster hev years ago.'"

"For the land's sake! Why, I never heard of such a thing—that is, for Thanksgiving!" stammered Miss Dawson.

THE ANNUAL TRAGEDY!



"Nor nobody else, I guess," said Mrs. Pettigill, bubbling with laughter. "But, you see, Lily Jane just 'boutinates codfish, so we ain't had none I don't know when; and her pa's awful fond of it."

"Dear, dear!" thought Miss Dawson, in silent horror. "I should say they had fed the hard times. I guess I orter go. Poor soul!" she said to herself, as she walked homeward; "she carries it off well, but they must be dreadful poor."

"I wonder what makes Mary Ann Dawson act so queer," soliloquized Mrs. Pettigill. "I s'pose it must be because she's an out-an'-out old maid."

"Well, mother," said Deacon Pettigill on Thanksgiving morning, "I hope you ain't goin' back on that codfish dinner?"

"Dear, no, pa; but it is an awful queer dinner. I've half a mind to make an Indian pudding to keep the codfish company."

"Just the thing," declared the deacon, with a satisfied air.

At that moment there came a rousing knock at the door. It was little Tommy Tompkins, who lived close by. He had brought a two-quart pail of cranberries.

"Uncle John sent me a basket of cranberries," he said bashfully; "an' ma 'lowed you might like to taste of 'em, 'cause they're Cape Cod cranberries."

"That was real kind of yer ma," said Mrs. Pettigill, as she emptied the pail and filed it again with rosy-checked apples. "There! Maibee yer ma wouldn't mind havin' a few of our None-suchas; an' I'll fill yer pockets with butternuts, an' I'll fill yer pockets with butternuts, an' I'll fill yer pockets with butternuts."

Before the good woman could prepare her codfish and vegetables for cooking, she saw Farmer Gibson's old white horse and yellow market wagon stopping in front of the door.

"Well, I'm in somethin' of a hurry," said the farmer, a little awkwardly, taking a big parcel from his wagon as he spoke. "I was on my way home from Westbury market, an' I just thought maybe you could use this turkey I had left over."

"Why, I dunno but what I'll take it off yer hands," said Mrs. Pettigill.

"I ain't askin' yer ter buy it, Mrs. Pettigill," said the bluff farmer, with increasing confusion. "I wantter give it ter yer. I couldn't sell it nhow," he added, "an' it would just spile."

"It certainly is good of yer," said Mrs. Pettigill. "But you must let me give you a keg of our new cider; it's just right for drinkin'."

Scarcely was the dinner well under way

when there was another knock, and Lois Graham, the minister's little daughter, made her appearance with a basket on her arm.

"Oh, Mrs. Pettigill," she cried, eagerly, "Grandma sent me some of her very own mince pies for Thanksgiving, and mamma wants to know if you wouldn't accept two of them with her love?"

"Well, I never!" ejaculated Mrs. Pettigill. "'Twas uncommon kind in your mother. I'll just fill your basket with apples and butternuts."

Five minutes later pretty Tilly Graham, who lived next door to Miss Dawson, presented herself with a heaping dish of hot doughnuts.

"Mother was tryin' a new recipe," the young girl said, "an' she thought you wouldn't mind her sendin' you a few, as you was so busy."

"I swim! that looks somethin' like," said the deacon as he came home from church.

His wife prudently refrained from mentioning the various donations. She congratulated herself that as it was now past noon they would probably be allowed to dine in peace. Vain delusion! Scarcely were they seated at the table when Miss Dawson appeared, bearing a delicious looking chicken pie.

"You see," she said, breathlessly, "I know you hadn't no time for chicken fixin's, so I just baked this pie when I had the oven hot up."

"I'm sure you was just as thoughtful as you could be, Miss Dawson," returned Mrs. Pettigill. "An' I'll accept the pie ef you'll stop an' help us eat it."

After some urging the spinster consented, and out of compliment to her the chicken pie was cut. But as she glanced at the platter of flaky codfish, cooked to just the right degree of tenderness, flanked by dishes of crimson beets, meaty potatoes and feathery blancet, she confessed, "I do believe I'd rather hev some of that than the pie." And when she had finished her repast with a dish of Mrs. Pettigill's golden-brown Indian pudding she declared, "I dunno when I've relished a meal so much."

"Just come here a minnit," said Mrs. Pettigill, conducting her guest to the pantry, after the deacon had gone out.

"Now, whatever do you s'pose is the meaning of that?" she pointed to the array of eatables with a look of perplexity on her rosy face.

"For the land's sake!" cried the spinster, blushing guiltily.

Mrs. Pettigill surveyed her visitor wonderingly.

"Why, you don't mean to say—" she began, and then she burst into a laugh.

"Mary Ann Dawson, I most think you're a goose," she said, when she had recovered her breath. "Do I look 's though I didn't hev 'nough ter eat?"

"I never said any such a thing," stammered Miss Dawson. "I just happened to mention to the minister's wife an' Miss Graham 'bout your bein' so busy; an' you know you was talkin' considerable 'bout the hard times an'—an'—the codfish," faltered Miss Dawson. "But I never thought—"

"Ist you needn't take it to heart," interrupted Mrs. Pettigill. "But I dawsn't tell pa. Howsmevver, I guess I give 'em as good as they sent. There's one thing I can't make out, though, an' that is 'bout Farmer Gibson. He lives a good two miles from here, so he couldn't very well hear anything."

"Maybe I can explain that," said Miss Dawson, with a conscious blush. "You see, Mr. Gibson and me's calculatin' to get married 'bout Christmas time."

"Well, ef that don't beat all!" ejaculated Mrs. Pettigill. "I guess he'll be a real good provider, an' I'm sure I hope you'll be happy. Now, s'pose he might be comin' over to your house to-night?"

"I s'pose he might," returned Miss Dawson.

"Well, ef you'll jest get him to call an' take these donations over to Sam Higgins' we won't say another word 'bout 'em. Well, I do declare," soliloquized Mrs. Pettigill, after her friend had gone. "Ef that don't beat all. And him a confirmed old bachelor, and her an out-an'-out old maid!"—People's Home Journal.

WHO SAID PUMPKIN PIE?

