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The Whited Sepulchre

The Tale of Pelee

BY WILL LEVINGTON COMFORT

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CHAPTER III.—(Continued.)

They had reached the highway. Constable was thinking that he would have journeyed across the world to study a laboring monster, like Pelee in his present stress, but the idea of the girl being in the shadow of danger took all the relish from the work.

"I should prefer to hear you discuss the treachery of volcanoes outside of the fire zone," she said, shivering. "It's like listening to ghost stories in a haunted house."

"I'll tell you the best way out of it," he declared. "I don't say that Pelee is about to rise and rend Saint Pierre, but I want to take you all out to sea for a few days. The Madame will behave her prettiest with you on board."

"I can't imagine anything finer, but you know mother is not a graceful sailer."

"Unfortunately, any effort of mine to prevail upon her might spoil matters," Constable said.

"Oh, I don't think that," she replied. "but it will be something of a conquest for any one to shake her trust in Pelee. Still, I'll do what I can."

"And I'll begin work to-night upon Uncle Joey. By the way, Miss Stansbury," he added in a lowered voice, "don't you think that if I choose to stay here in Saint Pierre, your mother might consent more willingly to try a few days on the Madame? You know Pelee is more than ever interesting to me now."

"That would be entirely unthinkable," she replied hastily.

Pelee rumbled again, and the girl's fingers tightened upon her arm. The heavy wooden shutters of the plantation house rattled in the windless night; the ground upon which they stood seemed to vibrate at the monster's pain. The man was conscious of the fragrance of roses and magnolia blooms above the acrid taint of the air. It was as if, through some strange freak of the atmosphere, a pressure was exerted upon the flowers, forcing a sudden explosion of perfume. The young moon was a glow, formless blotch in the fabled sky. A sigh like the whimpering of a sick child was audible from the servants' cabins behind the big house.

"You'll plead with your mother to-night?" he whispered, as they walked back.

Mrs. Stansbury was on the porch. Her nicely modulated voice, as she spoke to her daughter, struck Constable with a cold force. The women went indoors. Breen and Uncle Joey were in conversation. Constable drew his chair to the north end of the porch, and faced the mountain—a vast black beast couchant under the dim stars. Since he had gazed that direction from the ship the night before, the whole purpose of his life had changed. Then he had asked no sweeter favor of the Fates than to be permitted to observe the giant's struggle to contain the fury of his fluids. Now his thoughts were magnetized by a new substance—the substance of fear. Self, the tribune of all his reckonings heretofore, had been lifted from his brain, as a familiar volume is lifted from its case.

"I knew it," he muttered. "I knew it five years ago—that I should come back here some day, look upon that girl, and become a raver like other men. To think that I could stay away from her a year at a time!"

He regarded the double chain of lights out in the harbor—the Madame pulling at her moorings among the lesser craft, like a lustrous empress in the midst of dusky maid-servants. Between the black mountain and the illumined ship stretched a battle. It was his own particular battle. His name was called from the lists. To win was to run away. The old mastering complication was his at last. Yesterday a splendid contribution to the imperfect records of seismology, such as was now within his grasp, was identified with his highest ambition. To-day the safety of the woman towered above it, as the dome of St. Peter's above the head of a tourist. He was afraid of Pelee. Breen drew over to him and sat down upon the railing.

"What's on your mind, Peter?"

"A mountain," said Constable.

Rain did not fall in the night, and Constable was abroad with the dawn, regarding the white world and the source of the phenomenon, with the sketchy tints of earliest morning upon the huge eastern slope. He had slept little, and that with his face turned to the north. He would scarcely close his eyes before a cottage of volcanoes would pass before him, as in a dream—all the destroyers of history, each with a vivid individuality, like the types of faces of all nations—the story of each, and the smear it had made of men and the works of men.

Most of them had given warning. Pelee was warning now. His warning was written upon the veins of every leaf, painted upon the curve of every blade of grass, sheeted evenly white upon the tiles of every roof. Gray dust blown by steam from the bursting quarries of the mountain, clogging the gutters of the city, and the throats of men! It was a moving white cloud in the river, a chalky shade that marked the highest reach of the harbor tide. It settled in the hair of the children, and complicated the toll of the bees in the nectar-cups of the roses. With leagne-long currents, and in a voice that caused to tremble his dwarfed cohorts, the hills and moorings, great Pelee had proclaimed his warning in the night.

Constable was standing in the garden. "Good old Vulcan, to wait for her!" he murmured. "Sit tight for another day, and keep a stiff bridle-arm—for one more day!"

"It isn't really ash, you know," he found himself saying at breakfast, "but rock ground as fine as neat and shot out by steam through Pelee's valves."

"How intensely graphic!" Mrs. Stansbury observed.

"It's a graphic morning," said Breen, "and Peter is virile from a night of meditation. I believe he has made a covenant with the mountain."

Constable had met the eyes of the daughter, and found no hope there. He had taken his uncle apart and charged him to labor for the cause of flight.

"Ursula," the planter began gravely, addressing Mrs. Stansbury. "Peter has asked us to spend a few days with him in the Caribbean, on board the Madame. I confess that I don't like the way Pelee is acting, and the heat is telling on us all. The prospect of a refreshing breath of the Trades is a mighty pleasant one to me. Doesn't it sound so to you?"

"As a specialist in volcanoes, I should think Mr. Constable would find it impossible to leave at such a time," the older woman answered smoothly. "The mountain needs his doctor more than ever now."

"I have not yet attained unto such a scientific passion that I can forget my friends entirely," Constable said earnestly. "For my part," the girl hastened to say, "Mr. Constable's invitation is immensely alluring."

Mrs. Stansbury's eyelids contracted ever so little, and she lingered upon the words of her ultimatum, as if there were a tang of pleasure in the utterance. "The Panther arrives day after tomorrow morning, with the New York mail. I would not under any condition think of leaving Saint Pierre before receiving Mr. Stansbury's letters."

Constable stared at the face of the daughter. He read there terror of the mountain, and pity for himself. He arose, not daring to trust himself to speak again. Breen found him in his room a few minutes later.

"Peter," he said softly, "has it ever occurred to you that the map of Europe and the history of France might greatly have been altered if our beloved Josephine had been gifted with a will like that?"

CHAPTER IV.

In the Rue de Rivoli there was a little stone fruit shop. The street was short, narrow, crooked and ill paved—a cleft in Saint Pierre's terrace work. Just across from the vault-like entrance to the shop, the white, scarred cliff arose to another flight of the city. Between the shop and the living rooms behind there was a little court, shaded by mango-trees. Dwarfed banana shrubs flourished in the shade of the mangoes, and singing birds were caged in the lower foliage. Since the sun could find no entrance, the shop was dark as a cave, and as cool. One window, if an aperture like the clean wound of a thirteen-inch gun could be called a window, opened to the north; and from it, by the grace of a crook in the Rue de Rivoli, might be seen the mighty calibered cone of Pelee.

Pere Rabeau's fruit was very good, and some of it was very cheap. The service was much as you made it, for if you were known you were permitted to help yourself. In this world there was no one of station too lofty to go to Pierre Rabeau's; you would meet no one there whom it was not a privilege to say "Bon jour."

"Come and see my birds," the crafty Rabeau would say, if he approved of you.

"Where do you live?" you might ask, being a stranger.

"In the coolest hotel of Saint Pierre," was the invariable answer.

And presently, if you were truly alive, you would find yourself in the little stone shop, listening to the birds. In due course Soronia would appear in the shadow doorway and it would seem that the bird songs were hushed as she crossed the court.

If the little stone shop were transplanted in New York, artists would find it and have difficulty in getting in and out, for the crowd of nights. Thither Constable and Breen made their way on this burning morning which Mrs. Stansbury darkened with her decision. The pair sat down in the cheerful coolness, Constable at the little window, so that he could look at the mountain.

"Breen, I dare not leave them here for forty-eight hours, until the Panther comes," Constable said.

"Do you really think Pelee can't hold out that long?"

Constable shook his head impatiently. "I'm not a monomaniac—at least, not yet," Breen said, and his voice suggested the world of pent savagery in his brain. "The ways of volcanoes are past the prevision of men. I do not say that Pelee will blow his head off this week, or this millennium. I say I'm afraid for this girl. I say there are results of explosions in that monster, the smallest of which could make this city look like a leper's corpse upon the beach. I say that the internal fires are burning high; that they are already fingering the vital cap; that Pelee sprung a leak last night, and that the same force which lifted this cheerful archipelago from the depths of

the sea is pressing against the leak at this instant. I say that Vesuvius warned before he broke; that Krakatoa warned and then struck; that down the ages these safety valves scattered over the face of earth have trembled before giving way. Pelee is trembling now, and there is a woman here whose safety is—important to me. She is two miles away this moment, and I am as powerless as a man in a street fight, with his lady's arms about him. What shall I do?"

"Peter, there is a short cut," Breen said.

"Tell me!" Constable urged.

"Are you zealous and hero-souled?" "Try me."

At this juncture Soronia entered the shop from the little court of the song birds, filling the eyes of the Americans. A dark, ardent, alluring face; flesh like dull gold, made wonderful by the faintest tints of ripe fruit; eyes that could melt and burn and laugh; a fragile figure, but radiantly bloom, and as worthily draped as a young pain in a vine richly blossoming. Such, vaguely, was Soronia. She made one think of a strange, regal flower, an experiment of Nature, wrought in the most sumptuous shadow of a tropic garden. She was gone. Breen's face bore a drained look.

"An orchid?" he whispered. "Will the vision be repeated? Do I wake or sleep?"

"Old Pere Rabeau married a French woman," Constable observed.

"Some Daphne of the islands, she must have been, since Pere Rabeau does not seem designed to father a sunrise," Breen added, his eyes lost in the shadows of the court, from whence the bird songs came.

"Pere Rabeau was a worthy soldier of France, I have heard," said Constable. "I have never seen the mother, but every year I have seen Soronia—for a moment like this. She was but a child when I came first—five years ago—but a radiant child even then."

"Five years ago," Breen mused. "Five years ago I had not ceased to paint. I should have put her on canvas. There was a moment of silence, then Constable said in a low voice, "I must go back. Tell me the shorter way."

"Peter, you are a man, and she a woman. Forgive me, but I know what has sprung into your heart in the past twenty-four hours from the seeds that have been there five years. Tell her—tell her all about those five years and the one day—what they have meant to you, and your dream of the future. If you tell her mightily enough, she will follow her to the Madame, and cast no longing look behind! I shall stay here for an hour or two."

Constable left the shop. He was very miserable, full of undirected wrath. Never in his life before had there been a time when a stiff shoulder, dollars, an athletic mind, or all these, had failed entirely to move an obstacle in his way. Here he was ground by impotence absolute. The suggestion of Breen entailed such a deep and vital thing that he dared not think of it, here in the glaring day, with the panting crowd about him. It was against the very structure of his mind to act precipitately in this, of all matters, most delicate. It is true that he meant now to win Lara Stansbury, if such a stately citizen lay within range of a man of his caliber; but he had vouchsafed to strike only after a flawless investment were laid.

Breen did not return for luncheon, and the name of Pelee was not heard. In his room, afterward, Constable fell asleep, with his face to the north. He awoke out of a horrid dream, in which black fingers were tightening, like a garrote, upon his throat. It was the ash and sulphur fumes again. Pelee was obscured by the fresh fog. Instantly, upon awakening, the old thoughts and dreams resumed their hateful swing in his brain.

The sight of the Madame, lying out in the harbor, her nestle-room pointed like a black, fleshless finger across the sunset, whipped him again to the sense of action which had no means of expression. Thoughts of the night—the locked doors, the still halls, the wall of children from the native cabins, sleeplessness without hope, vigilance without meaning, and this new master-romance shining far and bright and alone, like a brave star above wind-hurled clouds—out of these were moulded thoughts of little mercy, as the shadows grew long upon the whitening lawn.

Pelee's moods were variable that afternoon. The twilight brought ease again, and with the old freshness of evening came a glad hour of reaction. There was a rippling wave of merriment from the dark quarters, and a score of children went blithely forth to bathe in the sea. Never before was the volatile tropic soul so imperiously evidenced—simple hoarse which glow at little things, whose swift tragedies come and go like blighting winds, which slay but leave no wound.

Constable was ashamed for the moment. Throughout the day his eyes had fixed in stubborn gloom upon a cataphem. Up the stairway, airily as a languor, came a bright melody from the piano. He was thrilled, and held, and his mind was stirred with tenderness. She was like her island people, quick to enter the groves of serenity when the black cloud had blown by. Could Breen be right? he thought. The suggestion appealed to him now in a new high light. Were there not some words which had never yet found the ears of woman from the lips of man—some key to instant supremacy in the undiscovered country of a lovely woman's nature?

(To be continued.)

Ambiguities.

"I would like to see more moving verse from your pen," said the admirer.

"Do you mean something pathetic," asked the poet, "or something about springtime moves?"—Kansas City Times.

EVENTS OF THE DAY

Newsy Items Gathered from All Parts of the World.

PREPARED FOR THE BUSY READER

Less Important but Not Less Interesting Happenings from Points Outside the State.

A forest fire threatens to burn the house at Ballston, N. Y., where Grant died.

Forest fires in Pennsylvania have already burned over 30,000 acres, and are still burning.

A New York lawyer has just been arrested for defrauding a woman many years ago.

W. B. McAllister, of Omaha, has been appointed land agent for the Southern Pacific.

Four out of a party of seven lost their lives when a launch was wrecked on the Long Island sound.

The students of the Missouri school for the blind have taken to roller skating, and make quite a success of it.

Long dry spells have dried up many rivers in the East, and forest fires cover the whole Atlantic coast with smoke.

The trans-Atlantic liner Mauretania lost a propeller blade in a storm, and for hours lay helpless. There was a panic among the passengers.

Zia Bey, head of the Turkish secret police under the old regime, has had to flee the capital for his life, and says he is coming to Oregon to live.

The battleship fleet has sailed from Albany, Australia, for Manila.

Von Buelow declares Germany is in favor of peace and arbitration.

A retired steel magnate of New Jersey was shot and killed by his confidential clerk.

Orville Wright was badly hurt and his companion killed while making a trip in his aeroplane.

A Swedish explorer has just reached Simla, India, after nearly a year spent in the interior of Tibet.

Colonel Stewart has been ordered back to his lonely post at Fort Grant, without taking the riding test.

Mexican and Japanese sailors fought desperately on a wrecked ship to escape from drowning, but all were finally saved.

Letters have been made public which tend to prove that Senator J. B. Foraker is in the pay of the Standard Oil company.

It is said alarming cholera reports have been sent out from certain cities in China in order to get contributions from superstitious Chinese.

J. J. Hill says the day of cheap wheat is over, that the food problem is a serious one, and that the government should be building schools of agriculture as well as warships.

Taft will make three big campaign tours.

Chicago's population is placed at 1,924,060 by the recent school census.

CHOLERA IN ST. PETERSBURG.

Government May Have to Proclaim Mar a' Law.

St. Petersburg, Sept. 21.—St. Petersburg is in the deadly grasp of Asiatic cholera, which already has exceeded in severity and number of deaths the visitation of 1893. The disease is increasing daily at an alarming rate, and unless the authorities show in the future a much greater degree of ability to cope with the situation than they have in the past, there is every reason to fear that it will get out of hand. The government's threat to apply the provisions of martial law has driven the municipal officials to bend all their energies to clearing the city of the scourge.

The aldermanic council Saturday voted \$250,000 to enlarge the hospital space, to purchase and distribute disinfectants, the supply of which in St. Petersburg is well nigh exhausted, and to expedite the interment of bodies, which has been notoriously slow. The deathhouses are overcrowded and many corpses lie unburied.

Under his authority, the prefect of St. Petersburg, General Dracheffsky, on Saturday prohibited the sale of liquor throughout the city, including the government vodka shops, until the government had further ordered that hereafter the sale of the liquor shall be suspended at 2 P. M. on Saturday until 1 A. M. Monday. This action has been taken in order to diminish alcoholic excesses, which very materially increase the liability to cholera infection and the general spread of the disease.

USE PRIVATE SCHOOLS.

Mrs. Rockefeller Says Public Institutions Are for Poor.

Milwaukee, Wis., Sept. 22.—Mrs. William Rockefeller, who, with her husband, is in this city, said yesterday that she believed the children of the rich should be sent to private rather than to public schools.

"All I have ever tried to be is just an ordinary mother," said Mrs. William Rockefeller, at the Pfister Hotel. "I have two sons and two daughters, and they are just four ordinary boys and girls. I have brought them up the best I knew how, and used all the common sense I had to think of the best ways and means to make them good average men and women."

"Did my boys go to public schools? No; that would have been most selfish in a city like New York, where our schools are crowded. It is only fair that parents who can afford it should send their children to private schools, and thus allow room in the public schools for children who must depend upon the public schools for their entire education."

"My boys were sent, like thousands of other New York children, to private schools, where they were in daily contact with other children. They studied like ordinary boys and had the same ambitions in their school work. When they had finished school they were sent away to college."

MAKE LAST STAND.

Nevada Only State in Union That Allows Gambling.

Reno, Nev., Sept. 22.—The gamblers of the United States will make their final stand for freedom in Nevada next month. At that time a special election is to be held in Reno to give the people an opportunity to vote on the question whether or not the gambling houses of this city should be closed.

For six months the fight has been in the making, each side making every preparation for the contest. Nevada is now the only state in the union where gambling is licensed. Montana legislated it out of existence some time ago. Arizona followed suit, and the toleration which kept gambling going in Denver and Salt Lake has been withdrawn.

Nevada only remains, and nearly every prominent gambler in the country is now located in this state.

Firefighters Lose Ground.

Albany, N. Y., Sept. 22.—Although New York has one of the best equipped forest fire fighting organizations in the country, fresh fires are being reported daily from the Adirondacks and Catskill regions. Unless there is a heavy rain soon the damage may approximate that of the destructive fires of 1903, when over 450,000 acres were burned over, entailing a loss of \$800,000 in standing timber, logs and pulp wood. Every effort is being made to hold the present fires in control. In 132 towns in the Adirondacks and Catskill regions 743 fire wardens are at work.

Two Towns Wiped Out.

Chicago, Sept. 22.—Long-distance telephone messages to the Tribune from Rhinelander, Wis., state that the towns of Daggan and Woodborow have been destroyed by forest fires. The 4000 residents of the two towns are fleeing through the burning woods to Rhinelander, panic-stricken. Many people of Woodborow are missing.

A practical joker at Windsor, Mo., touched off a car of powder, killing seven persons and injuring 50.

The president of the Chicago school board favors spanking as the best method of overcoming the "frat evil."

Stockholders and directors of the Chicago, Milwaukee & St. Paul railroad are coming to the Pacific coast.

STEAMER IS FOUND

Missing Ship Aeon Wrecked on Island in Pacific.

ALL ON BOARD REACH SHORE

Captain Takes Engine From Ship's Cargo, Fits Up Ship's Boat and Goes for Help.

Victoria, B. C., Sept. 19.—Cabled advices from Fanning island state that the steamer Aeon, which left San Francisco July 6 for Aucland, via Apia, and was considerably overdue, was carried on Christmas island by the strong currents setting on shore, and became a total wreck. The ship's company, 50 in all, took to the boats and landed at a small settlement facing the lagoon, all safe.

There are four women and two children, mostly wives of officers of the United States battleship squadron, who took passage to join their husbands in Australia, including Mrs. Patrick, wife of Chaplain Patrick, and family. All are camping on Christmas island awaiting rescue.

The Aeon is fast on the coral island, partially full of water and wrecked beyond all hope of salvage, but the 500 bags of mail aboard were likely to be recovered. The cargo included salmon and 2,000,000 feet of redwood and some gasoline engines. One of these was fitted in a ship's boat to take Captain Downie, the second officer and two engineers to Fanning island, lying 14 miles northwest, to cable news of the disaster.

Some of the survivors and general merchandise was recovered and taken ashore with the ship's boats, and a stock of water secured, the supply on Christmas island being poor. Captain Downie had a difficult time reaching Fanning island. The engine fitted in the ship's boat refused to work, and the boat was rowed back to Christmas island, where it was refitted.

After a long trip he reached Fanning island this morning. The crew was treated kindly by the staff of the Fanning island cable station. The steamer Manuka, of the Canadian-Australian line, fortunately is making a call at Fanning island to land supplies on her present voyage, and is due Tuesday next. It is expected she will make a call at Christmas island and take off the survivors of the Aeon, who will be landed in Sydney by the Manuka.

Meanwhile the survivors have plenty of food and water, and there is shelter for the women in the houses of a working camp of some pearl fishermen employed by a British company.

From the day the Aeon left San Francisco nothing had been heard of her until the dispatch telling of the safety of the passengers on Christmas island. This island is located near the equator, about 1000 miles south of Honolulu, and 3000 miles southwest of San Francisco. It is nearly 1000 miles northeast of Apia, and it is supposed that the vessel was disabled in her machinery and drifted or in some other manner managed to make the island in safety. Fanning island is just south of Christmas island, and both are British possessions.

Christmas island has only a few inhabitants, is off the track of even wind-jammers, and is one of the world's most isolated spots.

Wrights Will Not Give Up.

Dayton, O., Sept. 18.—When asked if the accident yesterday would deter either Orville or his brother, now in France, from further flights, Lorin Wright replied:

"Decidedly no. My brothers will pursue these tests until the machines are as nearly perfect as it is possible to make them, if they are not killed in the meantime, and we have never felt much apprehension, knowing that both boys are cautious in the extreme."

The aged father of the injured man is at Greens Fork, Ind., and will not be advised of the accident until morning. Lorin Wright and his sister, Catherine, await with much anxiety the outcome of their brother's injuries.

Two New Electric Lines.

Spokane, Wash., Sept. 19.—Two big electric lines are planned to connect this city with the Columbia River near the mouth of the Spokane. It has been announced that Jay P. Graves and his associates purpose to run a line to Davenport, then north to the Spokane and Columbia rivers. Now the Big Bend Transit company states that work is about to begin on its line, which will extend from Spokane to the big river. The Big Bend Company has decided to increase its capital stock from \$100,000 to \$3,000,000.

Upholds Ancient Law.

Lansing, Mich., Sept. 19.—In an opinion filed yesterday the Michigan supreme court sustained the constitutionality of the maximum freight rate law of 1872, which has been ignored by the railroads as obsolete and denounced by them as unjust, unreasonable and confiscatory.