

The Whited Sepulchre

The Tale of Pelee

By WILL LEVINGTON COMFORT

Copyright, 1906, by Will Lexington Comfort

Copyright, 1907, by J. B. LIPPINCOTT COMPANY. All rights reserved

CHAPTER XII.—(Continued.)

Breen was dazed by the altered mood of the woman. Until the present instant of their walk, he had been contemplating a serene end to a day of most brutal beginnings. They were on the eminence of the Monte Morne. Pelee, a bold, tall, chiseled jewel in a black wreath, Breen heard the woman's breathing. He had no pity for her. He had spoken with exceeding gentleness, but it was forced. In the same voice he continued, since she did not speak:

"You could not walk to Fort de France, and there is neither boat nor carriage to-night. I thought you were going to let him be happy again."

"But what is that I am to do, Miss Stansbury?" Breen replied. "As we left from the mountain, I begged him to come to you to-night, but he said that if there were any love of his saving your life, you would have shown him some sign this morning, instead."

She felt herself called to her own defense. "Could he not see that the newspaper brought a shock to me?" she quipped.

"The shock was just as great, and the next morning the newspaper just as new, to him," he said. "Did you suppose he would have introduced me to you if he had understood all about me? I am all to blame, not our good Peter. Because I brought all this trouble upon him, I came to-night to undo the tragedy of your being away from him, and yet so close to the volcano."

"And you went with him to the crater to-day?"

"Do you think I would let him kill himself?"

"Oh, no—but you said—you spoke about riding back with him from the crater," she returned hastily. The man's unyielding position wrought upon her strangely, sometimes startled, sometimes staled, her.

"I heard that he had gone up the mountain, and followed. I found him at the summit in a faint, lying at the very rim of disaster."

"You saved him from death?"

"It was an essential proceeding, since I sent him there."

"Oh, what do you mean?"

"It was my presence that prevented both from being out at sea to-night."

"It was a very little thing to bring him back from the crater, Miss Stansbury, but a big accomplishment to make him glad that I brought him back."

"Did he intend to kill himself by going there? Do you mean that I—I?"

Breen felt that she deserved vividly to apologize for failures of performance. "No, Miss Stansbury, but you deserved punishment. That a doubt could exist in your mind, regarding his integrity, pulled him out of his orbit, so to speak."

"But it was all so intricate and mysterious," she pleaded. "I didn't mean to do wrong, but you must see that a woman who can only wait, and never be told things—may not know what is best!"

His heart kindled to her now, but he was not building for the moment. "Let me tell you about Peter Constable," he said. "He is a man of great ability, but he is in New York. I am all that the papers say, and much beside which they have overlooked. Only, I have never robbed the poor, nor widows and orphans, and I never have betrayed a friend until to-day, when my history arose in its wrath and men-handled poor. Peter, The shop has vindicated her daring. With all the eagerness of brimming womanhood, she had lost her way, and the family would no longer speak with me. They drove me to the water front. I was at the edge of the end when Peter Constable called."

"Come, Miss Stansbury, let us walk on toward the launch."

Breen had judged well the instant to make this suggestion. Though afraid that she would turn back, he spoke briskly, lightly, as if she had merely paused to survey the night. She obeyed, and as he talked on, their steps grew faster and faster down the morn toward the edge of the stricken city. Breen related how his friend had put aside for him the century's rare opportunity of helping Peter in the throes of the volcano itself, he spoke familiarly, trenchantly, as only one could do who had peered into the roiling sink of chaos that day. He pictured at last the man with whom he had ridden, their last ride together, the gameness which men love, and—in tints almost ethereal—the brooding romance.

She was thrilled by this stranger who had saved her life, and who now prayed for one. By his own word, world-worn and a skeptic of human character, he had discovered his Utopia in a friend. Because she hurried to believe all Breen said, his words rang true. Higher in her heart than he had reached in any of the day's fluctuations, Constable was uplifted now and held. She did not call it love—she did not call it anything; but it was a valiant presence to cling to, as she entered with that stranger, hunted of men, theographed lane which Rue Victor Hugo had become.

"You are a prince of defenders," she whispered.

"A man less white would not need a friend to champion his cause," he replied. "Where is Peter Constable now?"

"I will put you in the care of Ernest in the launch, and then bring him to you," he said.

"Where is Mr. Constable?" she demanded pertinaciously.

"In a little shop up in the Rue de Rivoli."

She did not fail in this last pitiful assault, though the dreadful final sentences of her mother came back. This night was set apart in her life for the learning of the truth.

"I shall not wait at the launch. I shall go to him—there—up in the terrace. Why not?"

"It is the far better way," Breen paused steadily. "I only thought to save you from the climb."

The horrid insinuations could find no hold in her brain. They hovered afar off, like vipers crippled in the rondest. Breen's ready answer was a stinging defense.

"Let us hurry," she panted.

"A man less white would not need a friend to champion his cause," he replied. "Where is Peter Constable now?"

"I will put you in the care of Ernest in the launch, and then bring him to you," he said.

"Where is Mr. Constable?" she demanded pertinaciously.

"In a little shop up in the Rue de Rivoli."

She did not fail in this last pitiful assault, though the dreadful final sentences of her mother came back. This night was set apart in her life for the learning of the truth.

"I shall not wait at the launch. I shall go to him—there—up in the terrace. Why not?"

"It is the far better way," Breen paused steadily. "I only thought to save you from the climb."

The horrid insinuations could find no hold in her brain. They hovered afar off, like vipers crippled in the rondest. Breen's ready answer was a stinging defense.

"Let us hurry," she panted.

"A man less white would not need a friend to champion his cause," he replied. "Where is Peter Constable now?"

"I will put you in the care of Ernest in the launch, and then bring him to you," he said.

"Where is Mr. Constable?" she demanded pertinaciously.

"In a little shop up in the Rue de Rivoli."

She did not fail in this last pitiful assault, though the dreadful final sentences of her mother came back. This night was set apart in her life for the learning of the truth.

"I shall not wait at the launch. I shall go to him—there—up in the terrace. Why not?"

"It is the far better way," Breen paused steadily. "I only thought to save you from the climb."

The horrid insinuations could find no hold in her brain. They hovered afar off, like vipers crippled in the rondest. Breen's ready answer was a stinging defense.

"Let us hurry," she panted.

"A man less white would not need a friend to champion his cause," he replied. "Where is Peter Constable now?"

"I will put you in the care of Ernest in the launch, and then bring him to you," he said.

"Where is Mr. Constable?" she demanded pertinaciously.

"In a little shop up in the Rue de Rivoli."

She did not fail in this last pitiful assault, though the dreadful final sentences of her mother came back. This night was set apart in her life for the learning of the truth.

"I shall not wait at the launch. I shall go to him—there—up in the terrace. Why not?"

"It is the far better way," Breen paused steadily. "I only thought to save you from the climb."

The horrid insinuations could find no hold in her brain. They hovered afar off, like vipers crippled in the rondest. Breen's ready answer was a stinging defense.

"Let us hurry," she panted.

"A man less white would not need a friend to champion his cause," he replied. "Where is Peter Constable now?"

"I will put you in the care of Ernest in the launch, and then bring him to you," he said.

"Where is Mr. Constable?" she demanded pertinaciously.

"In a little shop up in the Rue de Rivoli."

She did not fail in this last pitiful assault, though the dreadful final sentences of her mother came back. This night was set apart in her life for the learning of the truth.

"I shall not wait at the launch. I shall go to him—there—up in the terrace. Why not?"

"It is the far better way," Breen paused steadily. "I only thought to save you from the climb."

The horrid insinuations could find no hold in her brain. They hovered afar off, like vipers crippled in the rondest. Breen's ready answer was a stinging defense.

"Let us hurry," she panted.

"A man less white would not need a friend to champion his cause," he replied. "Where is Peter Constable now?"

"I will put you in the care of Ernest in the launch, and then bring him to you," he said.

"Where is Mr. Constable?" she demanded pertinaciously.

"In a little shop up in the Rue de Rivoli."

She did not fail in this last pitiful assault, though the dreadful final sentences of her mother came back. This night was set apart in her life for the learning of the truth.

"I shall not wait at the launch. I shall go to him—there—up in the terrace. Why not?"

"It is the far better way," Breen paused steadily. "I only thought to save you from the climb."

The horrid insinuations could find no hold in her brain. They hovered afar off, like vipers crippled in the rondest. Breen's ready answer was a stinging defense.

"Let us hurry," she panted.

"A man less white would not need a friend to champion his cause," he replied. "Where is Peter Constable now?"

"I will put you in the care of Ernest in the launch, and then bring him to you," he said.

"Where is Mr. Constable?" she demanded pertinaciously.

"In a little shop up in the Rue de Rivoli."

She did not fail in this last pitiful assault, though the dreadful final sentences of her mother came back. This night was set apart in her life for the learning of the truth.

"I shall not wait at the launch. I shall go to him—there—up in the terrace. Why not?"

"It is the far better way," Breen paused steadily. "I only thought to save you from the climb."

The horrid insinuations could find no hold in her brain. They hovered afar off, like vipers crippled in the rondest. Breen's ready answer was a stinging defense.

"Let us hurry," she panted.

"A man less white would not need a friend to champion his cause," he replied. "Where is Peter Constable now?"

"I will put you in the care of Ernest in the launch, and then bring him to you," he said.

"Where is Mr. Constable?" she demanded pertinaciously.

"In a little shop up in the Rue de Rivoli."

She did not fail in this last pitiful assault, though the dreadful final sentences of her mother came back. This night was set apart in her life for the learning of the truth.

"I shall not wait at the launch. I shall go to him—there—up in the terrace. Why not?"

"It is the far better way," Breen paused steadily. "I only thought to save you from the climb."

The horrid insinuations could find no hold in her brain. They hovered afar off, like vipers crippled in the rondest. Breen's ready answer was a stinging defense.

"Let us hurry," she panted.

"A man less white would not need a friend to champion his cause," he replied. "Where is Peter Constable now?"

"I will put you in the care of Ernest in the launch, and then bring him to you," he said.

"Where is Mr. Constable?" she demanded pertinaciously.

"In a little shop up in the Rue de Rivoli."

She did not fail in this last pitiful assault, though the dreadful final sentences of her mother came back. This night was set apart in her life for the learning of the truth.

"I shall not wait at the launch. I shall go to him—there—up in the terrace. Why not?"

"It is the far better way," Breen paused steadily. "I only thought to save you from the climb."

The horrid insinuations could find no hold in her brain. They hovered afar off, like vipers crippled in the rondest. Breen's ready answer was a stinging defense.

"Let us hurry," she panted.

"A man less white would not need a friend to champion his cause," he replied. "Where is Peter Constable now?"

"I will put you in the care of Ernest in the launch, and then bring him to you," he said.

"Where is Mr. Constable?" she demanded pertinaciously.

"In a little shop up in the Rue de Rivoli."

She did not fail in this last pitiful assault, though the dreadful final sentences of her mother came back. This night was set apart in her life for the learning of the truth.

"I shall not wait at the launch. I shall go to him—there—up in the terrace. Why not?"

"It is the far better way," Breen paused steadily. "I only thought to save you from the climb."

The horrid insinuations could find no hold in her brain. They hovered afar off, like vipers crippled in the rondest. Breen's ready answer was a stinging defense.

"Let us hurry," she panted.

"A man less white would not need a friend to champion his cause," he replied. "Where is Peter Constable now?"

"I will put you in the care of Ernest in the launch, and then bring him to you," he said.

"Where is Mr. Constable?" she demanded pertinaciously.

"In a little shop up in the Rue de Rivoli."

She did not fail in this last pitiful assault, though the dreadful final sentences of her mother came back. This night was set apart in her life for the learning of the truth.

"I shall not wait at the launch. I shall go to him—there—up in the terrace. Why not?"

"It is the far better way," Breen paused steadily. "I only thought to save you from the climb."

The horrid insinuations could find no hold in her brain. They hovered afar off, like vipers crippled in the rondest. Breen's ready answer was a stinging defense.

"Let us hurry," she panted.

"A man less white would not need a friend to champion his cause," he replied. "Where is Peter Constable now?"

"I will put you in the care of Ernest in the launch, and then bring him to you," he said.

"Where is Mr. Constable?" she demanded pertinaciously.

"In a little shop up in the Rue de Rivoli."