

The Whited Sepulchre The White Tale of Pele

BY WILL LEVINGTON COMFORT

Copyright, 1906, by Will Lexington Comfort
Copyright, 1907, by J. B. LIPPINCOTT COMPANY. All rights reserved.

CHAPTER XV.—(Continued.)

Captain Negley had just stepped into the chart room. Laird was on the bridge. Plass, the second officer, on his way to the bridge, ran into a port of assault. He was at the door of the chart room. In the instant required to drag the body to shelter and close the door of the chart room, Captain Negley was overpowered by the blizzard of steam, gas and liquid stone. When consciousness returned to him he was lying across the body of Plass, and the ship was rolling like a runaway boat.

The skipper regained his feet. In spite of terrible burns, he had little pain. His limbs, below the waist, were like wood. His left hand was yellow and inflated. Fire brands still screamed into the sea outside, but the day was returning. The indomitable Negley was first to reach the deck, the woodwork of which was burning in several places. He tried to shout, but his throat was closed by the hot dust. The body of a man was hanging over the railing of the bridge. It was Laird, with his face buried away.

The skipper tried to bring two sailors into the officer's cabin. A moment later she was bending over the unconscious form of the ship's commander in the berth. She seized him by the shoulders.

"Captain Negley! Oh, Captain—Captain Negley!"

Her voice rang higher.

The lips of the seaman moved.

"It is I—Miss Stanbury! Listen to me just once! Pugh is a coward—a coward! He is running away! Mr. Constance is still ashore, and we are miles at sea—miles out to sea!"

In a slight opening of the bandages appeared a dazed gray eye.

"Do you hear, Captain Negley? The coward is running away, and Mr. Constance is still ashore, and we are miles at sea—miles out to sea!"

Nature was trying to right herself in the brain of the stricken seaman. In the gray eve, she watched the struggle as she impressed her message. It was torture to bring him back. * * * * He asked if the fires were out. * * * * He asked for Laird and Plass. The simple problems of time and place were mountains to him. Macready entered with two sailors.

"Command Pugh to turn about! Oh, speak for me!" she implored.

Negley tried to rise. "Bring Pugh here!" he mumbled.

It was a sweet duty for Macready, whose colors had been lowered in the presence of the woman. Pugh gave an order to the man at the wheel, and followed the Irishman below. Lara had held the light in the cabin passage way. Pugh shrieked up the hands and sent to the fires and the ship's course. Out of the five sailors and three officers on deck when Pele struck, Negley alone had retained the climbing faculty.

Miss Stanbury was hurried from her chair. Appalled by the dread fact of dislocation, she lay in the primal darkness of the midlest of falling class. Macready was groping, calling for her. That she was unhurt seemed such a great matter to him and entirely insignificant to herself. Her lover had fallen. Their starry pavilion of the future was in blackness and smoke. It would have been better had Poles been together. * * *

Macready lifted her to a chair. The ports were gray instead of black, but splashed with the big seas.

"Your friend is dead, Denny," she said harshly.

"What's this you're talkin'?" "We're not at a geyser in a dirt pile as can tell him how it come an' go."

The streaming of the native women reached them from the hold. Macready could not bear the sound of a host of terrible shrieks entering the cabin. The hands clutching the arms of the chair and staring at him with the most pitiful eyes ever seen in child or woman. The swaying form of Negley was in the passage way, and something of the extent of the disaster broke upon the Irishman.

"Bring him here!" she commanded, taking Negley's arm. "There, I can manage him! Hur! Hur! Get oil and lint!"

He obeyed. The decks were covered with smoke that had been driven into his shoes. Black clouds were rolling out to sea. Deep thunder of a righteous source answered Pele's lamentations. The sailors were fighting fire and carrying their dead. The thin, shaken voice of Pugh came from the bridge. The engines were throbbing.

"Eight miles at sea! Eight miles at sea!" Macready repeated. "The long-armed sea! What must the waterfowl have been!"

In the store-room, he opened jars of oil and cartons of lint and bandages, for the use of the men; then rushed back to the cabin with a portion. Nature finds work for strong hearts that have lost their heroes. Negley's cracked and twisted boots had been removed, and the ashes cleaned from his eyes and ears and mouth. Another valiant nurse had emerged from a broken romance. The women who had failed to avert the smash of the hull of their boat were cutting away the flesh from the captain's shoulder. When the ointments and wrappings had been applied to the skipper's wounds, she helped Macready carry the unconscious man to a berth.

"Tis rainin' evenin' on the out," he muttered gently, noting that the work was life to her.

"We must be nearly in-shore by this time," she said slowly.

"Pugh's life preserver was now corked. Pugh had been cutting the Madame to sea since he lost control of her. The Irishman felt instinctively that the woman would want to go ashore, which he didn't propose to allow. On the other hand, although he had nothing to do with the running of the ship, he didn't like the idea of saving the Madame at the price of her owner's life.

"I am goin' ashore," he said firmly.

"I am goin'