

# The Whited Sepulchre

The Tale of Pelee

By WILL LEVINGTON COMFORT

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## 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 to relieve or assist Laird, was held 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 vivid stone. When consciousness returned to him he was lying across the body of Plass, and the ship was rolling like a runaway buoy.

The skipper regained his feet. In spite of terrible burns, he felt little pain. His limbs, below the knees, were like wood. His left hand was yellow and inflamed. Fire brands still screamed from 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 burned away.

The shock of his burns was beginning to overpower the captain when Pugh, the third officer, untouched by fire, appeared from below. In a horrid tongueless way, Negley fired the other to act, and staggered into the cabin passageway. Pugh shrieked up the hands and set to the fires and the ship's course. Out of the five sailors and three officers on deck when Pelee struck, Negley alone had retained the thinking faculty.

Miss Stansbury was hurled from her chair. Appalled by the dread fact of dissolution, she lay in the primal darkness in the midst of falling glass. Macready was groping, calling for her. That she was unburnt 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 ruin. It would have been better had Pelee found them 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'? 'Tis no bit av a geyser in a dirt pile as can tell him how t' come an' go."

The screaming of the native women reached them from the hold. Macready opened the door, and a blast of terrible heat entered the cabin. The woman was 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 passageway, 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! Run and get oil and lint!"

He obeyed. The decks were covered with a paste that burned through his shoes. Black clouds were rolling out to sea. Deep thunder of a righteous source answered Pelee'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. "Th' long-armed mountain—what must the infighting 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 cleansed from his eyes and ears and mouth. Another valiant nurse had emerged from a broken romance. The woman who would have fainted yesterday at the smell of burnt flesh was cutting away the clothing 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' evenchooalities out," he muttered genially, noting that the work was life to her.

"We must be nearly inshore by this time," she said slowly.

Denny's fervor was now corked. Pugh had been putting the Madame out to sea, since he got 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 dunno," he answered carefully. "Tis har'd t' see fur th' rain."

His soft magic failed.

"But the ship is moving!" she exclaimed. "Denny, open the door!"

Macready gave way. She heard the steady beat of the engines, and the big sea driving past. She reached out of the passageway, regardless of the flood, and peered over the main deck railing. There was no smoke, no familiar shadow of hills, but a leaden, tumultuous sky and the rollers of the open sea, beaten by a torrential shower. She crossed the charred planking to the starboard side, drenched to the skin in an instant. There was no Pelee, no Saint Pierre! Macready tried to draw her to cover, but she turned upon him furiously.

"You have let them put to sea—you, his friend—while he is held back there, waiting for his ship?"

"What could poor Denny, that bosses th' galley ma'am, do toward runnin' the ship? Thin' byes 'ud say, 'Git back t' your patty-pans, you wive!' But I've thried, sure, t' kape th' lady from harum this day. You know Captain Negley?"

"Where's the first officer?"

"Dead, ma'am."

"And the second officer?"

"Th' same."

"Who's putting out to sea?"

"Third Officer Pugh, in the name av his dirthy sowl."

"Is that Pugh on the bridge?"

"Ut la."

A moment later the officer in oil skins

turned to face an apparition, wind-swept and drenched as if risen from the sea, who pulled at his coat and called above the deluge:

"Turn back to the city! Didn't they tell you that Mr. Constable is there and needs his ship?"

"Go below, miss. I'm trying to save his ship for him."

In a stunned way she stared at the officer. "Don't you know he was to be back in two hours?"

Pugh whirled around to Macready, who was standing behind the woman. "You don't seem able to manage one passenger," he said in an ugly tone. "I'm short-handed. But I'll get help for him!"

The Irishman was too wise to reply.

"But you must turn back!" the woman cried hopelessly. "Captain Negley would never leave his owner to die back there!"

Captain Negley is not in command now," Pugh said, his small eyes burning wickedly. "Get below or I'll call the sailors to help you down. I don't need a woman and a shivering valet to help me run the ship."

Lara turned to the ladder, brushed back the drenched hair from her eyes, and said coldly, slowly, "I see there is a coward in command!"

(To be continued.)

of Constable's pith helmets was upon her head; his rain coat was buttoned about her, the sleeves rolled up to her hands; and a pair of his shoes was laced over her own. It was difficult to move about in this regalia, but it kept off the withering draughts. The boat was lowered.

A half-hour later, they were forced to put back to the ship. Ernst was whimpering at the oars, his lips twisted in agony. Macready was silent, an eloquent signal of his failing endurance. Lara had not swooned; her will was not broken, but conditions had been encountered which flesh could not conquer. The boat was pulled about to the lee of the steamer, and at a port-hole glass she saw the sneering face of Pugh, still in irons.

There in the boat the three renewed their strength, and another terrific downpour came to aid them. Lara sat in the stern, hands and lips tense, during the cloudburst. It was nearly two in the afternoon when the boat was bailed, the stock of ice replenished, and a second start made. The sailors gave them a cheer.

Deeper and deeper in toward the gray, low beach the little boat was pulled, its occupants the first to look upon the heaped and running over measure of Saint Pierre's destruction. Denny and Ernst took turns at the oars, sometimes pulling a single blade together. Rare running mates, they were, odd as two white men could be, but matched to a hair in courage. Ernst bent to his work, a grim, stoic mechanism. Denny jerked at the oars, and found breath and energy remaining to assail Pugh with his barbed and poisoned tongue. The woman in the stern of the boat, knelt before them praising, cooling their faces with ice, her words often incoherent, but her spirit unconquerable.

(To be continued.)

## NOT A MENACE.

### We Are Better Off for Some Immigrants We Receive.

"You like dis—perhaps?" said the pretty Syrian woman, holding out some crocheted lace toward the lady of the house. It was in a New York home, and there was possibly something incongruous about the beautiful surroundings and the poorly clad woman seated on the floor in the midst of her laces and embroideries. The incongruity did not strike either mistress or visitor, however, for each was, in her way, dignified and simple.

"Do you make these things here?" asked the lady, interestingly.

"I have made them at home, in Syria. I have not long been in your country—two days once."

"Ah! Did you have to pay much duty on them?" The lady was thinking of her own experiences with the customs officers.

A smile lighted the little Syrian's face as she answered. "I pay not one cent. Some say to me, 'Emptie your pillow and sew all your things inside, like we.' But I tell them, 'No, I will not begin new life in a new country with deceit. We are Christian.' I went to the customs man and I say, 'Please see my things. They are all I have, but they cost not much money.'

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