THE PILLAR of LIGHT

... By ...
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CHAPTER VII.

JUST as the spin of a coin may mean loss or gain in some trumpery dispute or game of the hour, in like manner apparently are the graver issues of life or death determined at times. It is not so, we know. Behind the triviality on which men fasten with amazement as the governing factor in events there lies an inscrutable purpose. Yet, to those watching the destruction of the splendid vessel, there was little evidence of other than a blind fury in the fashion of her undoing.

The hoarse words had scarce left Brand's lips before a third wave, higher and more truculent than its predecessors, sprang right over the lost ship and smothered her in an avalanche of water. No doubt this monster swept away some of the officers and crew. It was impossible to be certain of aught save the one thing—that the steamer would surely break up before their eyes. The wind, now blowing in fierce gusts; the sea, rising each minute; the clouds of spray chasing each other in eerie flights through space; the grinding, incessant, utterly overwhelming noise of the reef, made all sights and sounds indefinite, nebulous, almost fantastic.

But when the giant billow receded, leaving the ship like a dark rock in the midst of innumerable cascades, the catastrophe took place which Brand would have foreseen were his thoughts less tumultuous. With the support of the sea withdrawn from half its length the huge hull must either slip back into deep water or break in two. The slender steel shell of an ocean liner is not constructed to resist the law of gravity acting on full 5,000 tons. So the solid looking colossus cracked like a carrot, and the after part fell back into the watery chasm, there to be swallowed instantly amid a turmoil which happily drowned the despairing shrieks of far more than half of those on board.

Constance and Enid screamed bitterly in their woe, but again they were saved from utter collapse by the exigencies of the moment. Brand, who expected to see the remainder of the ship blown up by the inrushing of the sea to the furnaces, dragged them forcibly below the level of the protecting balustrade.

Yet nothing of the sort took place. A vast cloud of steam rushed upward, but it was dissipated by the next breath of the gale. This incident told the lighthouse keeper much. The vessel had been disabled so long that her skillful commander, finding the motive power of no further avail and certain that his ship must be driven ashore, had ordered the fires to be drawn and the steam to be exhausted from all boilers except one. Therefore her shaft was broken, reasoned Brand. Probably the accident had occurred during the height of the hurricane, and her steering gear, of little use without the driving force of the engines to help, might have been disabled at the same time.

When the horror stricken watchers looked again at the wreck the forward part had shifted its position. It was now lying broadside on to the seas, and the lofty foremast thrust its truck to within a few feet of them.

They were spared one ghastly scene which must surely have bereft the girls of their senses. The majority of the first class passengers had gathered in the saloon. Some clung like limpets to the main gangway; a number, mostly men, crowded together in the drawing room on the promenade deck. Farther than this they could not go, as the companion hatchways had been locked by the officer of the watch, the decks being quite impassable.

When the hull yielded, the spacious saloon was exposed to the vicious waves. Finding this new cavern opened to them, great liquid tongues sprang into the darkness and licked out hapless victims by the score. Of this appalling incident those in the lighthouse knew nothing until long afterward.

When the ship struck, the electric dynamos stopped, and all her lights went out. The lighthouse lamp, owing to its rays being concentrated by the dioptric lens, helped not at all to dissipate the dim and ghastly vision beneath, but the great frame of the fore part of the vessel served as a breakwater to some extent and temporarily withheld the waves from beating against the column.

Hence Brand, straining his eyes through the flying ruck, fancied he could make out the figure of the captain as he left the bridge and, with some of the crew, took shelter behind the structure of the library and state cabins on what remained of the promenade deck. At the same moment the frenzied occupants of the library and gangway contrived to burst open the door of the main companion.

If they had to die, they might as well die in the open and not boxed up in impenetrable darkness. As a matter of fact, the bolts were forced by a man who fired his revolver at them. The sea quickly discovered this new outlet. The next wave, passing through the saloon, sent tons of water pouring through the open hatch. One good result accrued. The strong canvas awning which prolonged the spar deck was carried away, and the group of survivors, benumbed with cold and wholly overcome by their desperate position, could see the entire height of the granite column in front crowned with its diadem of brilliance. The liberated passengers saw it for the first time.

The sight brought no hope. Between ship and lighthouse was a true maelstrom of more than sixty feet of water created by the backwash from the stonework and the shattered hull. Even if the passage could be made, of what avail was it? The iron entrance door was full fifty feet above the present level of the sea. It could only be approached by way of the rungs of iron imbedded in the granite, and every wave, even in the comparative moderation caused by the obstructing wreck, swept at least twenty feet of the smooth stone tiers. It is this very fact that prevents rock lighthouses from seldom if ever serving as refuges for shipwrecked sailors. The ascending ladder is so exposed, the sea usually so turbulent under the least stress of wind, that no human being can retain hand hold or footing.

Yet there was one faint chance of succor, and it was not a sailor who grasped it. The first that Brand knew of the desperate venture was the sight of a spectral man climbing up the shrouds of the foremast. On a steamer, whose yards are seldom used for sails, the practicable rope ladder ceases at the fore, main or mizzen top, as the case may be. Thenceforward a sailor must climb with hands and feet to the truck, a feat which may occasionally be necessary when the vessel is in dock. It is hardly ever attempted at sea.

The venturesome individual who thus suddenly made himself the center of observation carried a line with him. Not until he essayed the second portion of his perilous ascent did Brand realize what the other intended to do, which was nothing less than to reach the truck, the very top of the mast, and endeavor to throw a rope to the gallery.

And he might succeed, too—that was the marvel of it. The tapering spar came very near to them, perhaps twelve feet distant, and the wind would certainly carry the rope across the chasm if carefully thrown. A few strong and active men might use this aerial ferry. Well, better they than none. Brave fellow! Would that the Lord might help him!

Higher and nearer swung the stalwart youngster, for none but a lithe and active boy could climb a pole with such easy vigor. At last he reached the truck, and a faintly heard cheer from beneath mingled with the hysterical delight of Enid and Constance, when, with legs twined round the mast, he rested his arms for an instant on the flat knob of the truck.

Here his face came into the lower focus of the light—strong, clean shaven, clear cut features, a square, determined chin, two dark, earnest eyes and a mop of ruffled black hair, for his deerstalker cap had blown off ere he cleared the spar deck.

"Look out for the line," they heard him shout. The wind brought his voice plainly, but evidently he could distinguish no syllable of Brand's answering hail:

"Shall I make fast?"

"Can't hear a word," he cried. "If you can hear me hold a hand up."

Brand obeyed.

"Catch the line," he went on. "It is attached to a block with a running tackle. Haul in and make fast."

"The megaphone!" shouted Brand to Constance. She darted away to bring it, and when the adventurer clinging to the foremast had thrown a coil successfully, Brand took the instrument.

"Why don't you come this way? The others will follow," he bellowed.

"There are women and children down below. They must be saved first, and they cannot climb the mast," was the reply.

"All right, but send up a couple of sailors. We are short handed here."

"Right-o," sang out the other cheerily, though he wondered why three men should anticipate difficulty.

Down he went. Without waiting, Brand and the girls hauled lustily at the rope. It was no child's play to hoist a heavy pulley and several hundred feet of stout cordage. More than once they feared the first thin rope would break, but it was good hemp, and soon the block was hooked to the strong iron stanchions of the railing. To make assurance doubly sure, Brand told Enid to take several turns of the spare cord around the hook and the adjacent rails.

Meanwhile, Constance and he saw that the rope was moving through the pulley without their assistance. Then through the whirling scud beneath they made out an ascending figure clinging to it. Soon he was close to the gallery. Catching him by arms and collar they lifted him into safety. He was one of the junior officers, and Constance, though she hardly expected it, experienced a momentary feeling of disappointment that the first man to escape was not the handsome youth to whose cool daring some at least of the ship's company would owe their lives.

The newcomer was a typical Briton.

"Thanks," he said. "Close shave. Have you a light? We must signal after each arrival."

Enid brought the small lantern, and the stranger waved it twice. The rope traveled back through the pulley, and this time it carried a sailor man, who said not one word, but stooped to tie his boot lace.

"How many are left?" inquired Brand of the officer.

"About eighty, all told, including some twenty women and children."

"All wet to the skin?"

"Yes; some of them unconscious, perhaps dead."

"Can you hold out?"

"Yes. A nip of brandy"—

"I will send some. We must leave you now. These with me are my daughters."

At last the crust of insular self possession was broken. The man looked from one to the other of the seeming lighthouse keepers.

"Well, I'm"— he blurted out in his surprise. "That American youngster wondered what the trouble was."

A shapeless bundle hove in sight. It contained two little girls tied inside a turpaulin and lashed to the rope. This evidently was the plan for dealing with the helpless ones.

Brand instantly divided his force. Enid he dispatched to make hot cocoa in the quickest and most lavish manner possible. Constance was to give each new arrival a small quantity of stimulant (the lighthouse possessed a dozen bottles of brandy and whisky) and act as escort. The women and children were to be allotted the two bedrooms. Any bad cases of injury or complete exhaustion could be disposed of in the visiting officer's room, while all the men fit to take care of themselves were to be distributed between the entrance, the coal room, the workshop and the stairways. The kitchen, storeroom and service room were to be kept clear, and the storeroom door locked. Eighty! Brand was already doing problems in simple arithmetic.

A similar problem, with a different point to be determined, was occupying the active mind of the "American youngster" who had solved the knottiest proposition put forward during that eventful night.

He watched the forwarding of the shrieking, shuddering or inanimate women. He timed the operation by his watch, as the reflected light from the lamp was quite sufficient for the purpose.

Then he approached the captain.

"Say, skipper," he cried, "how long do you give the remains of her to hold out?"

"It is not high water yet," was the answer. "Perhaps half an hour. Forty minutes at the utmost."

"Then you'll have to boost this thing along a good deal faster," said the cheerful one. "They're going up now at the rate of one every two minutes. That's thirty in half an hour. Fifty of us will travel a heap quicker at the end of that time if your calculation holds good."

The captain, who appeared to be in a stupor of grief, roused himself.

A few short and sharp orders changed the aspect of affairs. Frightened and protesting ladies were securely tied together and hoisted, four at a time, like so many bags of wheat. When it came to the men's turn even less ceremony and greater expedition were used.

Indeed, already there were emphatic warnings that much valuable time had been lost in the early stage of the rescue. Though the wind was now only blowing a stiff gale, the sea, lashed to frenzy by the hurricane, was heavier than ever. The ship was vanishing visibly. A funnel fell with a hideous crash and carried away a lifeboat. The rest of the spar deck and nearly the whole of the forward cabins were torn out bodily. By repeated thumping on the reef the vessel had settled back almost on to an even keel, and the foremast, which had so providentially neared the summit of the lighthouse, was now removed far beyond the possibility of a rope being thrown.

The survivors on deck worked with feverish energy. The time was drawing short. They did not know the second that some unusually tempestuous wave would devour them utterly.

"Now, Mr. Pyne, you next," cried the chief officer, addressing the young Philadelphian, who, mirabile dictu, had found and lighted a cigar.

"Guess I'll swing up along with the captain," was the answer.

"Up with him!" shouted the captain fiercely, himself helping to loop Pyne to the fourth officer.

All others had gone. The officers were leaving the ship in order of seniority, the juniors first. Just as the quartet were about to swing clear of the ship the captain grasped Pyne's hand.

"Thank you, lad," he said, and away they went.

There were left on the vessel the third, second and first officers, the purser and the captain. The others wanted the captain to come with them. He resisted, held out for his right to be the last to quit a ship he had commanded for more than twenty years and hourserly forbade any further argument.

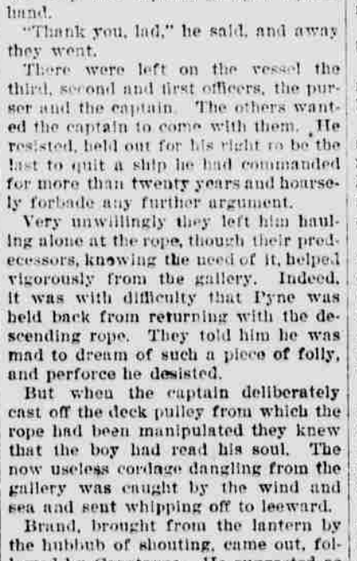
Very unwillingly they left him hauling alone at the rope, though their predecessors, knowing the need of it, helped vigorously from the gallery. Indeed, it was with difficulty that Pyne was held back from returning with the descending rope. They told him he was mad to dream of such a piece of folly, and perforce he desisted.

But when the captain deliberately cast off the deck pulley from which the rope had been manipulated they knew that the boy had read his soul. The now useless cordage dangling from the gallery was caught by the wind and sea and sent whipping off to leeward.

Brand, brought from the lantern by the hubbub of shouting, came out, followed by Constance. He suggested as a last resource that they should endeavor to fire a line across the vessel by means of a rocket.

They agreed to try, for the spectacle of the captain, standing bareheaded on all that was left of the bridge, moved them to a pitch of frenzy not often seen in an assemblage of Anglo-Saxons, and especially of sailors.

Brand turned to procure the rocket, but a loud cry caused him to delay. The expected wave had come, the vessel was smothered in a vortex of foam, the tall foremast tottered and fell, and when the water subsided again all that



"I was wondering what had become of you."

was visible of the great steamer was some portion of her hull and the solidly built bow, which was not wrenched from the keel plate until another hour had passed.

The agonized cry of a strong man is a woeful thing. Constance, by reason of the gathering at the side of the gallery, was unable to see all that was taking place, but the yell which went up from the onlookers told her that something out of the common even on this night of thrills had occurred.

"What is it, dad?" she asked as her father came to her.

"The end of the ship," he said. "The captain has gone with her."

"Oh, dear, why wasn't he saved?"

"I think he refused to desert his ship. His heart was broken, I expect. Now, Connie, duty first."

Indeed, she required no telling. As each of the shipwrecked men entered the lantern she handed him a glass of spirits, asked if he were injured and told him exactly how many flights of stairs he had to descend. But cocoa and biscuits would be brought soon, she explained. Greatly amazed, but speechless for the most part, the men obeyed her directions.

One of the last to claim her attention was the young American, Mr. Pyne. Her face lit up pleasurably when she saw him.

"I was wondering what had become of you," she said. "My sister has asked me several times if you had arrived, and I imagined that I must have missed you by some chance."

Now, all this was Greek to him, or nearly so. Indeed, had it been intelligible Greek, he might have guessed its purport more easily.

Holding the glass in his hand, he looked at her in frank, open eyed wonder. To be hailed so gleefully by a good looking girl whom he had never to his knowledge set eyes on was somewhat of a mystery, and the puzzle was made all the more difficult by the fact that she had discarded the weather proof accouterments needed when she first ventured forth on the gallery.

"I'm real glad you're pleased. My name is Charles A. Pyne," he said slowly.

It was Constance's turn to be bewildered. Then the exact situation dawned on her.

"How stupid of me," she cried. "Of course you don't recognize me again. My sister and I happen to be alone with my father on the rock tonight. We were with him on the balcony when you acted so bravely. You see, the light shone clear on your face."

"I'm glad it's shining on yours now," he said.

"You must go two floors below this," said she severely. "I will bring you some cocoa and a biscuit as quickly as possible."

"I am not a bit tired," he commented, still looking at her.

"That is more than I can say," she answered, "but I am so delighted that we managed to save so many poor people."

"How many?"

"Seventy-eight. But I dare not ask you how many are lost. It would make me cry, and I have no time for tears. Will you really help to carry a tray?"

"Just try me."

At the top of the stairs Constance called to her father:

"Anything you want, dad?"

"Yes, dear. Find out the chief officer and send him to me. He can eat and drink here while we talk."

CHAPTER VIII.

"PLEASE be careful. These stairs are very steep," said Constance, swinging the lantern close to her companion's feet as they climbed down the topmost flight.

"If I fall," he assured her, "you will be the chief sufferer."

"All the more reason why you should not fall. Wait here a moment. I must have a look at the hospital."

The visiting officer's room, which also served the purposes of a library and recreation room in normal times, now held fourteen injured persons, including two women, one of them a stewardess, and a little girl.

Most of the sufferers had received their wounds either in the saloon or by collision with the cornice of the lighthouse. The worst accident was a broken arm, the most alarming a case of cerebral concussion. Other injuries consisted for the most part of cuts and bruises.

Unfortunately, when the ship struck, the surgeon had gone aft to attend to an engineer whose hand was crushed as the result of some frantic lurch caused by the hurricane. Hence the doctor was lost with the first batch of victims. Enid discovered that among the few steerage passengers saved was a man who had gained some experience in a field hospital during the campaign in Cuba. Aided by the plain directions supplied with the medicine chest of the lighthouse, the ex-hospital orderly had done wonders already.

"All I want, miss," he explained in answer to Constance's question, "is some water and some linen for bandages. The first outfit in the chest is not half sufficient."

She vanished, to return quickly with a sheet and a pair of scissors.

"Now," she said to Mr. Pyne, "if you come with me I will send you back with a pail of water."

She took him to the kitchen, where Enid, aided by a sailor, pressed into service, was dispensing cocoa and biscuits. Pyne, who remained in the stairway, went off with the water and Constance's lantern. The interior of the lighthouse was utterly dark. To move without a light and with no prior knowledge of its internal arrangements was positively dangerous. All told, there were seven lamps of various sizes available. Brand had one, four were distributed throughout the apartments tenanted by the survivors of the wreck, two were retained for transit purposes, and the men shivering in the entrance passage had no light at all.

Constance took Enid's lantern in order to discover the whereabouts of Mr. Emmett, the first officer, the tray carrying sailor offering to guide her to him.

When Pyne came back he found Enid in the dark and mistook her for Constance.

"They want some more," he cried at the door.

"Some more what?" she demanded. It was no time for elegant diction. Her heart jumped each time the sea sprang at the rock. It seemed to be so much worse in the dark.

"Water," said he.

"Dear me! I should have thought everybody would be fully satisfied in that respect."

He held up the lantern.

"Well, that's curious," he cried. "I imagined you were the other young lady. The water is needed in the hospital."

"Why didn't you say so?" she snapped, being in reality very angry with herself for her flippancy. She gave him a full pail, and he quitted her.

Constance, having delivered her father's message to Mr. Emmett, was greeted with a tart question when she re-entered the kitchen.

"Why on earth didn't you tell me that young man was attending to the injured people? Is he a doctor?"

"I think not. What happened?"

"He came for a second supply of water and nearly bit my head off."

"Oh, Enid! I am sure he did not mean anything. Didn't you recognize him? It was he who climbed the mast and flung the rope to us."

"There," said Enid, "I've gone and done it! Honestly, you know, it was I who was rude. He will think me a perfect cat."

"That isn't what people are saying," explained Mr. Pyne, whose approach was deadened by the outer noise. "There's a kind of general idea floating round that this locality is an annex of heaven, with ministering angels in attendance."

In the half light of the tiny lamps he could not see Enid's scarlet face. There was a moment's silence, and this very self possessed youth spoke again.

"The nice things we all have to tell you will keep," he said. "Would you mind letting me know in which rooms you have located the ladies?"

Constance, as major domo, gave the information asked for:

"They are in the two bedrooms overhead. Poor things! I am at my wits' end to know how to get their clothing dried. You see, Mr. Pyne, my sister and I have no spare clothes here. We only came to the rock this afternoon by the merest chance."

"That is just what was troubling me," he answered. "I am sort of interested in one of them."

"Oh," said Constance, "I do wish I could help; but, indeed, my own skirts are wringing wet."

"From what I can make out, then, my prospective step-aunt will catch a very bad cold."

The queer phrase puzzled the girls, but Constance, rarely for her, jumped at a conclusion.

"Your prospective step-aunt. You mean, perhaps, your fiancee's aunt?" she suggested.

"I don't know the lady. No, ma'am. I was right first time. Mrs. Vansittart is going to marry my uncle, so I keep an eye on her stock to that extent."

"How stupid of me!" she explained, while a delighted giggle from Enid did not help to mend matters. So Constance became very stately.

"I will ask Mrs. Vansittart to come out and speak to you"— she began.

"No, no! I don't wish that. You might tell her I am all right. That is the limit. And—may I make a suggestion?"

"Pray do."

"It will help considerably if the women folk take it in turn to get into the beds or bunks. Then some of their linen could be dried at the stove. I will take charge of that part of the business if I may; otherwise some of them will die."

The girls agreed that this was a capital idea. Constance went upstairs. In the first room she inquired:

"Is Mrs. Vansittart here?"

"Yes," said a sweet but rather querulous voice.

A lady who had already appropriated the lower bunk raised herself on an elbow.

The little apartment, like every part of the building save the rooms reserved by Brand's directions, was packed almost to suffocation. This, if harmful in one respect, was beneficial in another. The mere animal warmth of so many human beings was grateful after the freezing effect of the gale on people literally soaked to the skin.

The girl, not unmoved by curiosity, held the light so that it illumined Mrs. Vansittart. A woman of forty, no matter how good looking and well preserved she may be, is in sorry plight under such conditions. Constance saw a beautiful face, deathly white and haggard, yet animated and clearly chiseled. The eyes were large and lustrous, the mouth firm, the nose and chin those of a Greek statue. Just now there were deep lines across the base of the high forehead. The thin lips, allied to a transient hawklike gleam in the prominent eyes, gave a momentary glimpse of a harsh, perhaps cruel disposition. A charming smile promptly dispelled this fleeting impression. Instantly Constance was aware of having seen Mrs. Vansittart before. So vivid was the fanciful idea that she became tongue tied.

"Do you want me?" asked the stranger, with a new interest and still smiling. Constance found herself wondering if the smile were not cultivated to hide that faintly caught suggestion of the bird of prey. But the question restored her mental poise.

"Only to say that Mr. Pyne"— she began.

"Charlie—is he saved?"

Mrs. Vansittart certainly had the faculty of betraying intense interest. The girl attributed the nervous start, the quick color which tinged the white cheeks, to the natural anxiety of a woman who stood in such approximate degree of kin to the young American.

"Oh, yes," said the girl, with ready sympathy. "Don't you know that all of you owe your lives to his daring? He asked me to—to say he was all right, and—that he hoped you were not utterly collapsed."

The addendum was a kindly one. No doubt Mr. Pyne had meant her to convey such a message. Mrs. Vansittart, it was evident, had received a shock. Perhaps she was a timorous, shrinking woman, averse to the sudden stare of others.

"I know nothing," she murmured. "It was all so horrible. O God, shall I ever forget that scene in the saloon? How the people fought. They were not human. They were tigers, fierce tigers, with the howls and the baleful eyes of wild beasts."

This outburst was as unexpected as her staccato question. Constance bent over her and placed a gentle hand on her forehead.

"You must try to forget all that," she said soothingly. "Indeed, it must have been very terrible. It was dreadful enough for us, looking down at things through a mist of foam. For you—But there! You are one of the few who escaped. That is everything. God has been very good to you!"

She was stooping low and holding the lantern in her left hand.

Suddenly Mrs. Vansittart's eyes gleamed again with that lambent light so oddly at variance with her smile. The slight flush of excitement yielded to a ghostly pallor. With surprising energy she caught the girl's arm.

"Who are you?" she whispered. "Tell me, child, who are you?"

"My father is the lighthouse keeper," said Constance. "I am here quite by chance. I"—

"But your name! What is your name?"

"Constance Brand."

"Brand did you say? And your father's name?"

"Stephen Brand. Really Mrs. Vansittart, you must try to compose yourself. You are overwrought, and"—

She was about to say "feverish." Indeed, that was a mild word. The strange glare in Mrs. Vansittart's eyes amazed her. She shrank away, but only for an instant. With a deep sigh, the lady sank back on the pillow and fainted.

Constance was then frightened beyond question. She feared that the seizure might be a serious one under the circumstances. To her great relief another woman, who could not help overhearing the conversation and witnessing its sequel, came to the rescue.

"Don't be alarmed," she said. "Mrs. Vansittart is very highly strung. She fainted in the saloon. She does not realize that Mr. Pyne not only saved her, but nearly every woman here, when the door was broken open. Now, don't you worry, my dear. I will look after her. You have a great deal to do, I am sure."

Constance realized that the advice was good. She could not attend to one and neglect many.

Telling the women of the plan to dry their underclothing in sections, she asked them to help her by arranging matters so that their garments should be divided into lots. Then she went to the second bedroom and made the same suggestion. The case of the sufferers in the hospital required more drastic measures. The little girl she stripped with her own hands and clothed her in one of Brand's flannel shirts and a commandeered reefer jacket.

Two of Brand's spare suits and a couple of blankets enabled the two injured women, who were able to walk, to get rid of their wet garments in the crowded room beneath, and the lockers of Jackson and Bates made it possible for the men who most needed attention to be made comfortable by the invaluable hospital orderly.

Constance was kept busy flying up and down to the kitchen, while Enid, having met all immediate demands in the matter of a hot beverage and something to eat, supplemented her labors.

Pyne worked like a Trojan. As each pile of sodden garments was delivered to him he squeezed out as much water as possible with his hands and then applied himself to the task of baking them dry. He did this, too, in a very efficient way, speedily converting the kitchen into a miniature Turkish bath. At the end of an hour he had succeeded so well that more than one-half of the females were supplied with tolerably dry and warm underclothing. With their heavier garments of course nothing could be done.

Once, on the stairs, Enid detained Constance for a moment's chat.

"Mrs. Vansittart is odd," she said.

Constance, so taken up was she with many errands, had forgotten the lady.

"How thoughtless of me," she cried. "Is she better?"

"Yes, but when I went in just now to give her her clothes she said to me, 'Are you the sister of the other—of Constance Brand?' It was no time for explanations, so I just said 'Yes.' She gave me such a queer look and then smiled quite pleasantly, apologizing for troubling me."

Constance laughed.

"Perhaps she knew dad years ago," she said.

"What do you think Mr. Pyne said about her?"

"How can I tell? Did you speak of her to him?"

"I told him she had fainted when you delivered his message. He said, 'Guess she can faint as easy as I can fall off a house.' Isn't he funny?"

"I think he is splendid," said Constance.

The wreck was now wholly demolished. The first big wave of the retreating tide enveloped the lighthouse and smote it with thunderous malice. Screams came from the women's quarters.

"Go, Enid," said Constance. "Tell them they have nothing to fear. They must expect these things to happen for nearly two hours. Tell them what dad said. Twenty-five years, you know."

Brave hearts! What infinite penetration inspired the man who first said, "Noblesse oblige!"

"Who are you?" she whispered.

Constance looked in at the kitchen. Pyne loomed through a fog of steam.

"Pay no heed to these"—she was interrupted by another mighty thump and cataract roar—"these blows of Thor's hammer," she cried.

"Play me for an anvil," he returned.

She descended to the depths to reassure the men. Talking with shrill cheerfulness at each doorway was easy. It helped her to go down, down, feeling stone and iron trembling as every surge was hurled many feet above her head. At last she stood on the lowest floor. Beneath her feet was naught but granite and iron bars. Here was solidity. How grateful to know of this firm base, rooted in the very world. Her heart leaped to her mouth, but not with fear. She was proud of the lighthouse, strong in the knowledge of its majestic strength.

Nevertheless in this place, the source of her own sense of security, she found uneasiness among the men. They were all sailors in this lowest habitable region. Their preconceived ideas had been rudely reversed. The ship, the noble structure which defied the storm by yielding to its utmost fury, had for them no terrors. But the stark pillar which flinched from no assault bewildered them. It was impossible to believe that it could withstand the strain. Ha! Listen to that. The battering ram of ocean applied to a thin shaft of stone. Surely it must be pounded into fragments.

Said one with indefinite bellow amid the black turmoil: "I can't stand this, mates."

"Up aloft for me!" cried another.

"Let's die with our eyes open, anyhow," chimed in a third.

But a light flashed in the rolling orbs of the man who was already on the stairs. Astounded, he drew back. Constance stood in their midst, a mere girl, radiant, smilingly unconcerned, addressing them in calm words broken only by the fitful noises.

"Sorry your quarters—so very unpleasant. Only last a—couple of hours. Twenty-five years—far worse gales Want any more cocoa?"

"Thank you kindly, miss, we're quite comfortable." This from the man who wished to die with his eyes open.

"Please, miss, may we smoke?" said he who couldn't stand it.

Constance hesitated. Blithely unconscious that a whiff of mutiny had swept through the storm tossed folk, she pondered the problem. She saw no harm in it.

"Yes," she said. "Smoke by all means. I will ask my father, and if it should be dangerous I will come back and let you know. In a few hours it will be daylight and if the sea falls he will come and open the door."

By sheer inspiration she had uttered the formula destined to annihilate the necromantic bluster of the hammering waves. Open the door! So this ponderous racket was a mere tidal trick, a bogy, which each passing minute would expose more thoroughly.

"All right, miss, an' Gawd bless yer!" growled one who had not spoken hitherto. There was a chorus of approval Constance gave a little gulp. The cultured and delicate lady lying in the bunk above had not spoken so.

"Indeed," she gasped, "God has blessed some of us this night."

Then she fled, further utterance failing her.

Nearer the sky Brand tended the lamp and discussed matters with Chief Officer Emmett. The sailor, with the terse directness of his class, told how the Chinook had made an excellent voyage from New York until she ran into bad weather about 400 miles west of the Lizard.

"It seems to me," he said, "as if we dropped on to the track of that hurricane after it had curved away to the norrard and that the blamed thing swooped down on us again when we were abreast of the Bishop light."

Brand nodded. This surmise agreed with his own theory of the storm as indicated by the sea.

Mr. Emmett held out a clinched fist with thumb jerked toward the reef.

"I wouldn't breathe a word if he wasn't gone," he said, "but the old man was drivin' her too hard. I knew it, and the chief knew it"—he meant the chief engineer—"but he wouldn't listen to either Mac or me. Fact is, he was fair crazy to set up a new record for the boat. She's been crossin' the Atlantic forty times a year for upward of twenty years, and the recent alterations, although they added fifty feet to her length, only increased her engine power in proportion."

"You surprise me," broke in Brand. "You speak as if the Chinook were nearly as old as this lighthouse, yet I have never even heard her name before."

"You know her well enough all the same," said the other ruefully. "This is her maiden voyage since she was altered, an' they rechristened her, too—always an unlucky thing to do, I say. Bless your heart, man, she is the old Princess Royal. Eh? What's that?"

He guffawed mournfully at Brand's involuntary exclamation.

"Certain! Well, surely I ought to know. I have passed most of my service with the company in her, and when I took a crew to Cramp's to navigate her to New York after she was smartened up I little imagined I would see her laid by forever the next time we saw the lights of old England. My goodness, even what was left of the old girl ought to know her way better'n that."

"But what did really happen?"

"Drivin' her, I tell you—drivin' her full pelt to land the mails at Southampton twelve hours ahead of schedule. With that awful sea liftin' her and a shaft twenty feet longer, what could you expect? Poor Perkins! A rare hard worker too. Now he's gone down with his ship an' over 200 passengers an' crew."

"Judging by the number saved I feared that more were lost."

"It's the off season, you know. The passenger list was light. For the Lord's sake, think of what it might have been in May or June!"

"It is bad enough as it is. All has not ended with the disappearance of the vessel."

The sailor shot a sharp glance at Brand.

"You can't be thinkin' any one was to blame"— he commenced. But Brand waved aside the fancied imputation.

"Blame!" he said. "With a broken shaft! In that whirlwind! No, no. I sent for you to talk over the new difficulty which has to be faced. There are food, water and fuel here for three men for two months. If you do a little sum you will find that the available stores on the basis of full rations will maintain eighty-one people for two days and a quarter."

"But we're only six miles from the mainland." Mr. Emmett had not yet grasped the true meaning of the figures.

"I have been here more than once for six weeks at a stretch, when, for all the assistance we could receive, we