

# The PILLAR OF LIGHT

By LOUIS TRACY.  
Author of "The Wings of the Morning"

## CHAPTER XI.

THE tribulations which clustered in bedlike swarms in and around the Gulf Rock lighthouse during those weary hours were many and various. Damp clothing, insufficiency of food, intermittent fevers ranging from the chill draft of the entrance passage and stairways to the partial suffocation of rooms with windows closed owing to the incursions of the rising tide—this unpleasant aggregate of physical misery was seriously augmented by an ever increasing list of sick people, an almost total absence of any medical comforts and a growing despondency to think that their ultimate relief might be deferred for days rather than hours.

No mere man can understand, and a woman of ordinary experience can but dimly imagine, the difficulty and arduousness of the task undertaken by Constance and Enid.

To cook and supply food for eighty-one persons with utensils intended for the use of three, to give each separate individual an utterly inadequate portion, so skillfully distributed that none should have cause to grumble at her or her neighbor's better fortune—these were culinary problems at once complex and exhaustive.

By adopting fantastic devices, bringing into service every man's wit and ingenuity, they found it was possible to feed twenty at a time. This meant the preparation of four distinct meals, each requiring an hour's work. Long before the last batch, which included themselves, was lamenting the absurd discrepancy between appetite and antidote in the shape of anything to eat, the first was ravenous again.

The women complained the least. In the occupants of the two bedrooms the girls encountered a passive fortitude which was admirable. It was an extraordinary scene which met their eyes when they entered either of these stuffy apartments. Many of the rescued ladies had not given a thought to changing the demitise of evening wear on board ship for more serviceable clothing when the hurricane overtook the vessel. They all, it is true, possessed cloaks or wraps of some sort, but these garments were still sodden with salt water and therefore unwearable, even if the oppressive warmth in each room rendered such a thing possible. Their elegant costumes of mullin, cotton, silk or satin were utterly ruined. Lucky were the few whose blouses or bodices had not been rent into tatters.

Some of the worst sufferers in this respect were now the best provided. Blankets and sheets had been ruthlessly torn up and roughly stitched into articles of clothing. Mrs. Vansittart, for instance, who first suggested this via media, wore an exquisite Paris gown and a loose dressing jacket arranged of yellow blanket, the component parts of which she persuaded the other women to sew together on the model provided by her own elegant figure.

A few quick witted ones who followed her example exhausted the available stock, and pillowcases and rugs would have undergone metamorphosis in the same way had not Constance come to the rescue by impounding them, declaring that they must be reserved for the use of those sufferers who needed warmth and rest.

The men passed their time in smoking, singing, yarning and speculating on the chance of the weather clearing. Ultimately, when the banging of the waves again made the column feel unsafe, a small section began to plan petty attempts to pilfer the provisions. It is the queer mixture of philosophy and beast in the average human being that makes it possible for the same man in due mood to risk his life quite voluntarily to save others and in another to organize selfish theft.

After an ingenious seaman had been detected in an attempt to pick the storeroom lock, and when a tray of cold ham was deliberately upset while a football scrimmage took place for the pieces, Mr. Emmett stopped these exhibitions by arming the watch with assorted weapons from the workshop and issuing stern orders as to their use in case of need.

Here again the warring elements which form the human clay were admirably displayed. On duty, under the bonds of discipline, the coarse grained forehead hand who had gobbled up a surreptitious lump of fat pig during the first successful scuffle would brain the daring rascal who tried to better his condition by a similar trick a second time. Discipline sometimes converts a skulker into a hero.

When the state of the tide permitted, storm shutters were opened and a free draft of air allowed to enter through the door. Then all hands eyed the sea anxiously. The wind was strong and piercing, and the reef maintained its ceaseless roaring. Whenever a window opened toward the land there was a small crowd waiting to peep through it. At last the sense of confinement gradually permeating the inmates of the lighthouse actually resulted in the formation of queues, with stated intervals for moving on. There was a momentary relief in looking at the land. The cliffs, the solitary white houses, the little hamlets half hidden in cozy nooks, seemed to be so absurdly near. It was ridiculous to imagine that help could be long deferred.

The seaward wing of a steamer, carrying flowers from the Sicily Isles to Bouzaire for Covent Garden, caused a flutter, but the sight of a Ponceau fishing smack scudding under jib and close reefed foresail between the rock and Guttenberg point created intense excitement. Noah, gazing across the flood for the return of the dove with the olive branch, could not be more pleased than these castaways in their

granite ark when the brown sailed boat came within their view. The window in the coal cellar opened fair toward the Land's End, and the grimy occupants of this compartment could look their fill at the messenger of life. A rich New Yorker in vain offered \$100 to any man who gave up his place in the line after the himself, by the operation of the time limit, was remorselessly sent away from the narrow loophole. Dollars and pounds sterling have a curiously depreciated value under such circumstances.

The men of the watch were always questioned for news by the unemployed majority. They related the comings and goings of the Falcon, carried sympathetic inquiries from story to story, promiscuous passing to and fro being forbidden owing to the narrowness of the stairs, and selected every trifling piece of news as a part to reach the top-most height and feast their eyes on the extensive panorama visible from the storm-girt gallery. Had they watched the coast line less and the reef more their observations would have had value.

Quite early in the day the prisoner handed to the occupants of each room a full list of passengers and crew, with only three instances were husband and wife both saved. The awful scene in the saloon accounted for this seeming discrepancy. Dazed men and senseless women were wrenched from each other's clasp either by the overwhelming seas or during the final wild fight for life at the head of the companion stairway. A wreck, a fire in a theater, say little of the marriage tie.

The third and last meal of the day was eaten in silence and gloom. All the spare lamps were diverted to the kitchen, because Brand, during a further detailed survey of the stores, made in company with Mr. Emmett and the purser, discovered that there was an alarming deficit of fresh water in the cistern.

In the hurry of the earlier hours a serious miscalculation had been made in transmitting cubic feet into gallons. It became an instant necessity to use every heating appliance at command and start the distillation of a drinkable fluid.

The Gulf Rock light did not possess a proper apparatus. The only method that could be adopted was to improvise a coil from canvas sewed into a tube. The exterior was varnished and wrapped in wet cloths to assist the condensation of the steam; hence, every kettle and pot being requisitioned for this paramount need, cocoa could be supplied to the women alone, while the taste of the water even thus disguised was nauseating. No more potatoes could be boiled. Raw, they were almost unobtainable. And potatoes happened to be the food most plentiful.

The genuine fresh water, reduced to a minimum in the cistern, was only a little better in condition unless it was filtered, and Brand decided that it ought to be retained for the exclusive use of those seriously ill. Patients were multiplying so rapidly that the hospital cases crowded, and all fresh cases as they occurred, perforce remained where they were.

Neither Constance nor Enid felt the time hang heavily on her hands. Both were too busy, though the new order regarding the food supply transferred their attention from active cooking to the replenishing of utensils, which must be kept full of salt water at boiling point.

Pyne was an invaluable assistant. In the adjustment of refractory canvas tubes over hot spots, in the manipulation of the condensing plant so that it might act efficiently, in the trimming of lamps and the stoking of the solitary coal fire he insisted on taking to himself the lion's share of the work.

He always had a pleasant quip or funny story to brighten their talk. "You can conquer trouble with a grin," he said. "Worry doesn't cut ice."

Enid, of course, chaffed him about his American accent, which she protested, she would acquire after a week's practice.

"It is so quaint to our ears," she went on. "I never before grasped the reason why Mark Twain makes me laugh. All he does is to act as a phonograph. Every American is a born humorist."

"There's something in that," admitted Pyne. "We do try to disinter a joke. Say, have you girls ever heard how an English professor explained the Yankee drawl?"

"No?" they cried.

"He said it represented the effort of an uneducated man to make a speech. Every time his vocabulary gave out he lifted his voice to show he wasn't half through with his ideas."

"Oh," said Constance, "that is neither kind nor true, surely."

"Well," agreed Pyne slowly, "that is the view of a friend of mine took of the remark. So he asked the professor if he had a nice agreeable sort of definition, all ready for use, of the way Englishmen clipped their syllables. The other fellow allowed that he hadn't pondered on it. 'I guess,' said my friend, 'it represents the effort of an educated ass to talk English.'"

Though the laugh was against them, they were forced to snigger approval. "I think," said Constance, "that our chief national failing is pomposity, and your story hits it off exactly. In one of our small Cornish towns we have a stout little mayor who made money in sea and bacon. He went to see the Paris exhibition, and an Exeter man, meeting him unexpectedly at the foot of the Eiffel tower, hailed him with delight. 'Hello, Mr. Mayor,' he began. 'Hush,' said the mayor, glancing around mysteriously. 'I'm here incognito.' None who heard these light hearted young people yelling with merriment could imagine that they had just dined off a piece of hard baked bread made without yeast and washed down with water tasting of tar and turpentine.

Pyne did not know whether to take her seriously or not until he caught confirmation in a pair of tranquil eyes, which he gazed into with every opportunity.

"It is quite true," said Constance gravely. "I suppose that the mysterious affinity between parents and long lost children which exists in story books is all nonsense in reality. No family could be more united and devoted to each other than we are, yet Enid is not my sister, and my father is hers only by adoption. He found her, half dying, drifting past this very rock, and before he could reach her he fainted and killed a dreadful shark. We are very proud of dad, Mr. Pyne. You see, he is our only relation. Enid knows neither her father nor mother, and my mother died when I was a baby."

"Great Scott!" cried Pyne. He turned quickly toward the door. Mrs. Vansittart, very pale, with eyes that looked unnaturally large in the faint light, stood there. For an instant he was startled. He had not seen Mrs. Vansittart since they came to the rock, and he was shocked by the change in her appearance. He did not like her. His alert intelligence distrusted her, but it was not his business in life to select a wife for his uncle, as he put it, and he had always treated her with respectful politeness. Now, owing to some fleeting aspect which he could not account for, some vague resemblance to another which he did not remember having noticed before, he viewed her with a certain expectant curiosity that was equally unalloyedly

She held out a scrap of paper. "Mr. Traill is here," she said quietly. "Here," he repeated, wondering what she meant and perplexed by her icy self contained tone, while he thought it passing strange that she had no other greeting for him.

"Well," she said, "that is the best word I can find. He is near to us—as near as a steamer can bring him. Mr. Brand has received a signaled message. He wrote it out and sent it to me by a man. I inquired where you were and was told you were engaged in the kitchen."

For some reason Mrs. Vansittart seemed to be greatly perturbed. Her presence put an end to the gaiety of the place quite effectually.

The young man took the paper in silence.

Dear Madam—A signal just received from the Falcon runs as follows: "Mr. Cyrus J. Traill on board and sends his love to Etta and Charlie. He will make every preparation for their comfort ashore and trusts they are leaving us well under inevitable hardships. Yours faithfully, STEPHEN BRAND."

Pyne strode to the door. "I must see if I can't get Mr. Brand to answer the old boy," he cried. "Perhaps you have attended to that already."

She did not make way for him to pass. "No," she said. "I came to seek you on that account. If not too late, will you tell your uncle that I do not wish to delay a moment in Ponceau? He will please me most by arranging for a special train to await our arrival at the station."

"What's the hurry?" he demanded. "A woman's whim, if you like, but a fixed resolve nevertheless."

"Will you travel in that rig-out?" he asked quizzically. "It is an easy matter to call at a shop if we reach shore by daylight. Then I can purchase a cloak and hat to serve my needs; otherwise it is matterless how I am attired. Will you do this?"

"Why, certainly."

She gave a little gasp of relief. In another instant Pyne would have gone, but Enid, who happened to glance through the window which opened toward the northwest, detained him.

"There is no hurry now, for sure," she said. "The Falcon is halfway to Carn du by this time. I do not suppose she will return until it is too dark to do more than signal important news very briefly."

"But this is important," cried Mrs. Vansittart shrilly. "It is of the utmost importance to me."

"Fraid it can't be helped, madam," said Pyne civilly. "Anyhow, we're not ashore yet, and I can't see that any time will be wasted."

The electric bell jangled in the room, causing Mrs. Vansittart to jump visibly.

"Oh, what is it?" she screamed. "My father is calling one of us up," explained Constance. "It may be a message from Jack. You go, Enid."

Enid hurried away. She had scarcely reached the next floor before Mrs. Vansittart, who seemed to have moods in full compass, said sweetly: "Convey my deep obligations to Mr. Brand, won't you, Charlie? Indeed, you might go now and write out the text of my message to your uncle. Some early opportunity of dispatching it may offer."

"All right," he said in the calm way which so effectually concealed his feelings. "Shall I escort you to your room?"

"By no means. I came here quite unassisted. Miss Brand and I can chat for a little while. It is most everything to be pent all day and all night in one little room. Even the change to another little room is grateful."

Pyne bowed, and they heard his steady tread as he ascended the stairs. "Quite a nice boy," Charlie," said Mrs. Vansittart, coming forward into the kitchen, with its medley of queer looking, hissing, steaming contrivances.

"Yes. We think he is exceedingly nice," said Constance. She wondered why the other woman seemed always to stand in the shadow by choice. The strongest light in the darkened chamber came from the grate, and Mrs. Vansittart deliberately turned away from it.

"If all goes well he will soon be my nephew by marriage," went on the other. "I quitted New York yesterday in order to marry his uncle in Paris. Rather a disastrous beginning to a new career, is it not?"

Pyne did not grasp the significance of my words. I said I was to be married in Paris."

"Yes," said Constance, still at a loss to catch the drift of an announcement which Mrs. Vansittart seemed so anxious to thrust upon her.

"Well, the Chinook was wrecked last night, or, rather, early this morning. The name of the ship was not made known throughout the world until long after daylight. It is quite impossible that Mr. Traill should have reached this remote corner of England from Paris in the interval."

For one moment the girl was puzzled. Then a ready solution occurred to her.

"Oh, of course, that is very simple. Mr. Traill was awaiting your arrival in Southampton, thinking to take you by surprise, no doubt. That is sure to be the explanation. What a shock! The first telegram must have given him the news."

"How did he ascertain that he and I were alive?"

"The very first thing father did was to telegraph the names of all the survivors. I know that is so because I saw the message."

"Ah! He is a man of method, I suppose. You are proud of him, I heard you say."

"I think there is no one like him in all the world. We are so happy at home that sometimes I fear it cannot last. Yet, thank God, there is no excuse for such nightmare terrors."

Mrs. Vansittart cooed in her gentle way.

"Indeed, you have my earnest good wishes in that respect," she said. "Do we not owe our lives to you? That is an excellent reason for gratitude, if a selfish one. But some day soon you will be getting married and leaving the parental roof."

"I do not wish to die an old maid," laughed Constance, "yet I have not discovered a better name than my own up to the present."

She fancied that Mrs. Vansittart winced a little at this remark. Deeming her visitor to be a bundle of nerves, she jumped to the conclusion that the other woman read into the words some far-fetched disparagement of her own approaching marriage.

"Of course," she continued, affably tactful. "I will hold another view when the right man asks me."

"Were you in my place," murmured her visitor, apparently thinking aloud rather than addressing Constance, "you would not be fearful of misfortune? You would not read an omen of ill luck into this dramatic interruption of all your plans? After many years of widowhood I am about to be married again to a man who is admirable in every way. He is rich, distinguished in manner and appearance, a person of note not only in the States, but on the continent. No woman of my years might desire a better match. Why could not the way be made smooth for me? Why should the poor Chinook, out of the hundreds of mail steamers which cross the Atlantic yearly, be picked out for utter disaster? It is a warning—a threat from the gods!"

The unconscious bitterness of her tone moved the girl to find words of consolation.

"I would not question the ways of Providence in the least," she said. "Surely you have far more reason for thankfulness than for regret."

"Regret! I am not regretting, but I have gone through such trials that I

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