(4)

THE PILLAR of LIGHT

... By ...
Louis Tracy,
Author of "The Wings of the Morning"

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"In the first place you must help me to maintain iron discipline. To leave the rock today or tomorrow will be an absolute impossibility. On the next day, with luck and a steady moderation of the weather, we may devise some desperate means of landing all the active men or getting fresh supplies. That is in the hands of Providence. I want you to warn your officers and others whom you can trust, either sailors or civilians. Better arrange three watches. My daughters will have charge of the stores. By going through the lists in the storeroom I can portion out the rations for six days. I think we had better fix on that minimum."

"Of course I will back you up in every way," said Mr. Emmett, who felt chillier at this moment than at any time during the night. "I know you are acting wisely, but I admit I am scared at the thought of what may happen—if those days pass and no help is available."

Brand knew what would happen and it was hard to lock the secret in his heart. He alone must live. That was essential, the one thing carved in stone upon the tablet of his brain, a thing to be fought out behind barred door, revolver in hand.

Whatever else took place, if men and women, perhaps his own sweet girls, were dying of thirst and starvation, the light must shine at night over its allotted span of the slumbering sea. There on the little table beside him lay the volume of rules and regulations. What did it say?

"The keepers, both principal and assistant, are enjoined never to allow any interests, whether private or otherwise, to interfere with the discharge of their public duties, the importance of which to the safety of navigation cannot be overrated."

There was no ambiguity in the words, no halting sentence which opened a way for a man to plead, "I thought it best." Those who framed the rule meant what they said. No man could bend the steel of their intent.

To end the intolerable strain of his thoughts Stephen Brand forced his lips to a thin smile and his voice to say harshly:

"If the worst comes to the worst, there are more than 3,000 gallons of colza oil in store. That should maintain life. It is a vegetable oil."

Then Constance thrust her glowing face into the lighted area.

"Dad," she cried cheerfully, "the men wish to know if they may smoke. Poor fellows! They are so miserable, so cold and damp and dreary down there. Please say 'Yes.'"

CHAPTER IX.

THE purser, faithful to his trust, had secured the ship's books. He alone among the survivors of the Chinook had brought a parcel of any sort from that ill fated ship. The others possessed the clothes they were, their money and in some cases their trinkets.

Mr. Emmett suggested that a list of those saved should be compiled. Then, by ticking off the names, he could classify the inmates of the lighthouse and evolve some degree of order in the community.

It was found that there were thirty-seven officers and men, including stewards, thirty-three saloon passengers, of whom nineteen were women, counting the two little girls, and seven men and one woman from the steerage.

"It isn't usual, on a British ship, for the crew to bulk so large on the list," said Mr. Emmett huskily, "but it couldn't be helped. The passengers had to be battened down. They couldn't live on deck. We never gave in until the last minute."

"I saw that," said Brand, knowing the agony which prompted the broken explanation.

"An' not a mother's soul would have escaped if it wasn't for young Mr. Pyne," went on the sailor.

"Is that the name of the youngster who climbed the foremast?"

"That's him. It was a stroke of genius, his catching on to that way out. He was as cool as a cucumber. Just looked up when he reached the deck an' saw the lighthouse so near. Then he asked me for a rope. Planned the whole thing in a second, so to speak."

"He is not one of the ship's company?"

"No, sir; a passenger, nevvy of Cyrus J. Traill, the Philadelphian millionaire. Haven't you heard of Traill? Not much of a newspaper reader, eh? There was a lady on board, a Mrs. Vansittart, who was coming over to marry old Traill, so people said, and the weddin' was fixed to take place in Paris next week. Young Pyne was actin' as escort."

"Is she lost? What a terrible thing!"

The chief officer glanced down the purser's lists and slapped his thigh with much vehemence.

"No, by gosh! Here she is, marked O. K. Well, that beats the band!"

"So the lad has discharged his trust to his uncle?"

Mr. Emmett was going to say something, but checked the words on his lips.

"Queer world," he muttered; "queer world."

With that he devoted himself to planning out the watches. Soon he and the purser betook themselves to the depths with a roll call. As they crept below gingerly—these sailor men were not at home on companion ladders which moved not when the shock came—they met Enid for the first time. She, coming up, held the swinging lantern level with her face. They hung back politely.

"Please come," she cried in her winsome way. "These stairs are too narrow for courtesy."

They stepped heavily onward. She flitted away. Emmett raised his lantern between the purser's face and his own.

"What do you think of that?" he whispered, awe stricken.

The man of accounts smiled broadly.

"Pretty girl!" he agreed, with crudely emphatic superlatives.

Emmett shook his head. He murmured to himself: "I guess I'm tired. I see things."

Enid handed an armful of dry linen to the damp, steaming women in the lower bedroom. She was hurrying out. Some one overtook her at the door. It was Mrs. Vansittart.

"Miss Brand," she said, with her all sufficing smile, "give me one moment."

They stood in the dark and hollow sounding stairway. The seas were lashing the column repeatedly, but the night's ordeal was nearly ended. Even a timid child might know now that the howling terror without had done its worst and failed. From the cavernous depths, mingling with the rumble of the storm, came the rhythm of a hymn. Those left in gloom by the withdrawal of Mr. Emmett's lantern were cheering their despondent souls.

Surprised, even while Enid awaited the older woman's demand, the listeners heard the words:

"Awake, my soul, and with the sun
Thy daily stage of duty run;
Shake off dull sloth, and joyful rise
To pay thy morning sacrifice."

The rough tones of the men were softened and harmonized by the distance. It was a chant of praise, of

"Miss Brand, give me one moment."

thanksgiving, the offering of those who had been snatched from death and from mortal fear more painful than death.

The singing ceased as suddenly as it began. Mr. Emmett and the purser were warning the first watch.

The interruption did not seem to help Mrs. Vansittart. She spoke awkwardly, checking her thoughts as though fearful she might be misunderstood or say too much.

"I am better," she explained; "quite recovered. I gave up my bunk to one who needed it."

"I am sure we are all doing our best to help one another," volunteered Enid.

"But I am restless. The sight—of your sister—aroused vague memories. Do you mind—I find it hard to explain—your name is familiar. I knew—some people—called Brand—a Mr. Stephen Brand—and his wife."

She halted, seemingly at a loss. Enid, striving helplessly to solve the reason for this unexpected confidence, but quite wishful to make the explanation easier, found herself interested.

"Yes," she said. "That is quite possible, of course, though you must have been quite a girl. Mrs. Brand died many years ago."

Mrs. Vansittart flinched from the feeble rays of the lantern.

"That is so—I think I heard of—of Mrs. Brand's death—in London, I fancy, but they had only one child."

Enid laughed.

"I am a mere nobody," she said. "Dad adopted me. I came here one day in June, nineteen years ago, and I must have looked so forlorn that he took me to his heart, thank God!"

Another solemn chord of the hymn floated up to them:

"Let all thy converse be sincere,
Thy conscience as the noonday clear."

The rest of the verse evaded them. Probably a door was closed.

Mrs. Vansittart seemed to be greatly perturbed. Enid, intent on the occupation of the moment, believed their little chat was ended. To round it off, so to speak, she went on quickly:

"I imagine I am the most mysterious person living—in my early history, I mean. Mr. Brand saw me floating toward this lighthouse in a deserted boat. I was nearly dead. The people who had been with me were gone—either starved and thrown into the sea or knocked overboard during a collision, as the boat was badly damaged. My linen was marked 'E. T.' That is the only definite fact I can tell you. All the rest is guesswork. Evidently nobody cared to claim me, and here I am."

Mrs. Vansittart was leaning back in the deep gloom, supporting herself against the door of the bedroom.

"What a romance!" she said faintly.

"A vague one, and this is no time to gossip about it. Can I get you anything?"

Enid felt that she really must not prolong their conversation, and the other woman's exclamation threatened further talk.

"No, thank you. You'll excuse me, I know. My natural interest"—

But Enid, with a parting smile, was halfway toward the next landing, and Mrs. Vansittart was free to re-enter the crowded apartment where her fellow sufferers were wondering when they would see daylight again. She did not stir. The darkness was intense, the narrow passage drafty, and the column thrilled and quivered in an unnerving manner. She heard the clang of a door above and knew that Enid had gone into the second apartment given over to the women. Somewhere higher up was the glaring light of which she had a faint recollection, though she was almost unconscious when unbound from the rope and carried into the service room.

And at that moment, not knowing it, she had been near to Stephen Brand, might have spoken to him, looked into his face. What was he like? she wondered. Had he aged greatly with the years? A lighthouse keeper! Of all professions in this wide world how came he to adopt that? And what ugly trick was fate about to play her that she should be cast ashore on this desolate rock where he was in charge? Could she avoid him? Had she been injudicious in betraying her knowledge of the past? And how marvelous was the likeness between Constance and her father! The chivalrous, high minded youth she had known came back to her through the mists of time. The calm, proud eyes, the firm mouth, the wide expanse of forehead were his. From her mother—the woman who "died many years ago," when she, Mrs. Vansittart, was "quite a girl"—the girl inherited the clear profile, the wealth of dark brown hair and a grace of movement not often seen in Englishwomen.

Though her teeth chattered with the cold, Mrs. Vansittart could not bring herself to leave the vaultlike stairway. Once more the hymn singers cheered their hearts with words of praise. Evidently there was one among them who not only knew the words, but could lead them mightily in the tunes of many old favorites.

The opening of a door—caused by the passing to and fro of some of the ship's officers—brought to her distracted ears the concluding bars of a verse. When the voices swelled forth again she caught the full refrain:

"Raise thine eyes to heaven
When thy spirits quail,
When, by tempests driven,
Heart and courage fail."

Such a message might well carry good cheer to all who heard, yet Mrs. Vansittart listened as one in a trance to whom the divinest promise was a thing unasked for and unrecognized. After passing through the greater peril of the reef in a state of supine consciousness, she was now moved to extreme activity by a more personal and selfish danger. There was she, a human atom, to be destroyed or saved at the idle whim of circumstance; here, with life and many things worth living for restored to her safe keeping, she saw imminent risk of a collapse with which the nebulous dangers of the wreck were in no way comparable. It would have been well for her could she only realize the promise of the hymn, "Our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory."

Not so ran Mrs. Vansittart's jumble of thoughts. The plans, the schemes, the builded edifice of many years, threatened to fall in ruin about her. In such bitter mood there was no consolation. She sought not to find spiritual succor, but bewailed the catastrophe which had befallen her.

It assuredly contributed to that "affliction which is but for a moment" that Constance should happen just then to run up the stairs toward the hospital. Each flight was so contrived that it curved across two-thirds of the superficial area allotted to the stairway. Any one ascending made a complete turn to the right about to reach the door of the room on any given landing and the foot of the ladder to the next.

Hence the girl came unexpectedly face to face with Mrs. Vansittart. The meeting startled her. This pale woman, so thinly clad in the demitoilet of evening wear on shipboard, should not be standing there.

"Is anything wrong?" she cried, raising her lantern just as Enid did when she encountered the sailors.

"No, no," said the other, passing a nervous hand over her face. Constance, with alert intelligence, fancied she dreaded recognition.

"Then why are you standing here? It is so cold. You will surely make yourself ill."

"I was wondering if I might see Mr. Brand," came the desperate answer, the words bubbling forth with unrestrained vehemence.

"See my father?" repeated the girl. She took thought for an instant. The lighthouse keeper would not be able to leave the lamp for nearly three hours. When dawn came she knew he would have many things to attend to—signals to the Land's End, the arrangement of supplies, which he had already mentioned to her, and a host of other matters. Four o'clock in the morning was an unconventional hour for an interview, but time itself was topsy turvy under the conditions prevalent on the Gulf Rock.

"I will ask him," she went on hurriedly, with an uncomfortable feeling that Mrs. Vansittart resented her judicial pause.

"Thank you."

To the girl's ears the courteous acknowledgment conveyed an odd note of menace. If the eyes are the windows of the soul surely the voice is its subtle gauge. The more transparently simple, clean minded the hearer, the more accurate is the resonant impression. Constance found herself vaguely perplexed by two jostling abstractions. If they took shape it was in mute questioning. Why was Mrs. Vansittart so anxious to revive or, it might be, probe long buried memories, and why did her mobile smile seem to vein a hostile intent?

But the fresh, gracious maidenhood in her cast aside these unwonted studies in mind reading.

"He has so much to do," she explained. "Although there are many of us on the rock tonight he has never been so utterly alone. Won't you wait inside until I return?"

"Not unless I am in the way," pleaded the other. "I was choking in there. The air here, the space, are so grateful."

So Constance passed her. Mrs. Vansittart noted the dainty manner in which she picked up her skirts to mount the stairs. She caught a glimpse of the tailor made gown, striped silk underskirt, well fitting, low heeled, wide welted expensive boots. Trust a women to see all these things at a glance, with even the shifting glimmer of a storm proof lantern to aid the quick appraisement.

As the girl went out of her sight a reminiscence came to her.

"No wonder I was startled," she communed. "That sailor's coat she wears helps the resemblance. Probably it is her father's."

Then the loud silence of the lighthouse appalled her. The singing had ceased or was shut off by a closed door. One might as well be in a tomb as surrounded by this tangible darkness. The tremulous granite, so cold and hard, yet alive in its own grim strength, the murmuring commotion of wind and waves swelling and dying in ghostlike echoes, suggested a grave, a vault close sealed from the outer world, though pulsating with the far-away existence of heedless multitudes. Thus, brooding in the gloom, a tortured soul without form and void, she awaited the return of her messenger.

Constance, after looking in at the hospital, went on to the service room. Her father was not there. She glanced up to the trimming stage, expecting to see him attending to the lamp. No. He had gone. Somewhat bewildered, for she was almost certain he was not in any of the lower apartments, she climbed to the little door in the glass frame.

Ah! There he was on the landward side of the gallery. What was the matter now? Surely there was not another vessel in distress. However, being relieved from any dubiety as to his whereabouts, she went back to the service room and gave herself the luxury of a moment's rest. Oh, how tired she was! Not until she sat down did she realize what it meant to live as she had lived and to do all that she had done during the past four hours.

Her respite was of short duration. Brand, his oilskins gleaming with wet, came in.

"Hello, sweetheart! What's up now?" he cried in such cheerful voice that she knew all was well.

"That was exactly what I was going to ask you," she said.

"The Falcon is out there," he replied, with a side nod toward Mount's bay.

Constance knew that the Falcon was a sturdy steam trawler, a bulldog little ship, built to face anything in the shape of gales.

"They can do nothing, of course," she commented.

"No. I stood between them and the light for a second, and they evidently understood that I was on the lookout, as a lantern dipped several times, which I interpreted as meaning that they will return at daybreak. Now they are off to Penzance again."

"They turned safely then?"

"Shipped a sea or two, no doubt. The wind is dropping, but the sea is running mountains high."

He had taken off his oilskins. Constance suddenly felt a strong disinclination to rise. Being a strong willed young person, she sprang up instantly.

"I came to ask you if you can see Mrs. Vansittart," she said.

"Mrs. Vansittart!" he cried, with a genuine surprise that thrilled her with a pleasure she assuredly could not account for.

"Yes. She asked if she might have a word with you."

He threw his hands up in comic despair.

"Tell the good lady I am up to my eyes in work. The oil is running low. I must hie me to the pump at once. I have my journal to fill. If there is no sun I cannot heliograph, and I have a host of signals to look up and get ready. And a word in your ear, Connie, dear. We will be 'at home' on the rock for the next forty-eight hours. Give the lady my very deep regrets and ask her to allow me to send for her when I have a minute to spare some hours hence."

She kissed him.

"You dear old thing," she cried. "You will tire yourself to death, I am sure."

He caught her by the chin.

"Mark my words," he laughed. "You will feel this night in your bones longer than I. By the way, no matter who goes hungry, don't prepare any breakfast until I come to you. I suppose the kitchen is your headquarters?"

"Yes, though Enid has had far more of Mr. Pyne's company. She is cook, you know."

"Is Pyne there too?"

"He is laundry maid, drying clothes."

"I think I shall like him," mused Brand. "He seems to be a helpful sort of youngster. That reminds me. Tell him to report himself to Mr. Emmett as my assistant—if he cares for the post, that is."

He did not see the ready spirit of mischief that danced in her eyes. She pictured Mr. Pyne "fixing things" with Mr. Emmett "mighty quick."

When she reached the first bedroom floor Mrs. Vansittart had gone.

"I thought it would be strange if she stood long in this draft," mused Constance. She opened the door. The lady she sought was leaning disconsolate against a wall.

"My father"— she began.

"I fear I was thoughtless," interrupted Mrs. Vansittart. "He must be greatly occupied. Of course I can see him in the morning before the vessel comes. They will send a ship soon to take us off?"

"At the earliest possible moment," was the glad answer. "Indeed, dad has just been signaling to a tug which will return at daybreak."

There was a joyous chorus from the other inmates. Constance had not the requisite hardihood to tell them how they misconstrued her words.

As she quitted them she admitted to herself that Mrs. Vansittart, though disturbing in some of her moods, was really very considerate. It never occurred to her that her new acquaintance might have suddenly discovered the exceeding wisdom of a proverb concerning second thought.

Indeed, Mrs. Vansittart now bitterly regretted the impulse which led her to betray any knowledge of Stephen Brand or his daughter. Of all the follies of a wayward life, that was immeasurably the greatest in Mrs. Vansittart's critical scale.

But what would you? It is not often given to a woman of nerves, a woman of volatile nature, a shallow worldling, yet versed in the deepest wiles of intrigue, to be shipwrecked, to be plucked from a living hell, to be swung through a hurricane to the secure insecurity of a dark and hollow pillar standing on a Calvary of storm tossed waves, and then, while her senses swam in utmost bewilderment, to be confronted with a living ghost.

Yet that was precisely what had happened to her.

Fate is grievous at times. This haven of refuge was a place of torture. Mrs. Vansittart broke down and wept in her distress.

CHAPTER X.

A PRIMROSE light in the east heralded a chilly dawn. The little world of the Gulf Rock bestirred itself in its damp misery at the news. The fresh watch, delighted by the prospect of activity, clattered up and down the iron stairs, opened all available windows, unclamped the door when Brand gave the order and busied itself exceedingly with the desultory jobs which offered to so many willing hands.

It was now by the nautical almanac dead low water on the reef, but the strong southwesterly wind, hurling a heavy sea completely over the rocks, showed that the standards of war and peace differ as greatly in the matter of tides as in most other respects.

(To be Continued)

The Gazette for Job Work

Fair Attractions.

Cleanly, well supplied with good well water, under a beautiful grove of oak trees which supply an abundance of shade, close to postoffice, railroad depot, with electric car service every ten minutes to all parts of the city, grocery store, feed store and in fact every convenience one conld desire is the Oregon State Fair camping grounds at Salem. The improvements have worked a miracle in this department of the fair grounds.

Modern sanitary sewerage has been installed throughout the grounds, the trees have been white-washed and present a beautiful appearance. Electric lights by the hundreds have been strung through the camping grounds with a double row over the main walk to the main entrance gates. Thirteen hundred camps upon this site during the fair of 1904 are even more than the average person would estimate after having passed through but the above number will be greatly increased during the Fair of 1906. Arrangements for the leasing of tents have been made, so one can pack in a trunk or two all that will be needed outside of shelter. No one place in Oregon presents so good an opportunity for the "old timers" to meet and enjoy a visit that brings back many of the early and interesting experiences and pleasures of pioneer days.

Visitors at the Fair during the week, September 10 to 15, will not only find the various lines of agriculture, horticulture, mechanical and fine arts exhibits of interest, but also a demonstration of all the leading topics in all of our rural districts at this time, namely "good roads." Just out side of the north fence line of the State Fair grounds can be seen from beginning to end the building of a modern highway. The United States government experts are at work upon a mile of experimental road.

This piece of work is well under way and a quarter of a mile is now ready for use. The plan is first a systematic grading and drainage which is thoroughly done, then a 5-inch coating of coarse crushed rock thoroughly rolled, when wet and the final coating of finer crushed rock sprinkled and rolled until the print of a team or wagon cannot be noticed after having passed over the finished surface. This feature alone is worthy of a trip to the Fair.

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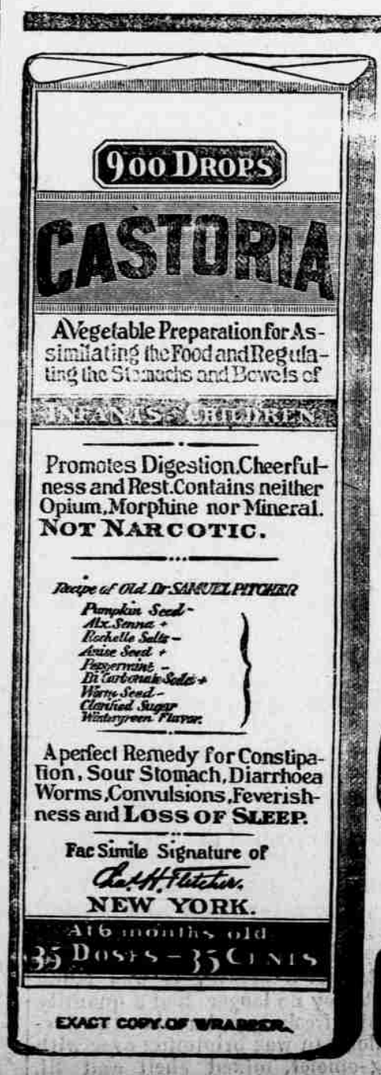

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