

The PILLAR OF LIGHT

By LOUIS TRACY.
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SYNOPSIS.

CHAPTER I.—At daybreak an assistant keeper of the lighthouse, discovers in the distance a ship in distress. Stephen Brand agrees to swim out to it. In so doing he comes in contact with a shark which he kills and boards the ship. He finds on board the body of a dead man and a strange bundle under a sail. Jones the lighthouse keeper lowers a basket and hauls Brand and his strange bundle safely up. II.—The bundle contains a live baby of which which Jones assumes charge. Letters "E T" are found on child's clothing. Baby is placed in charge of nurse who has charge also of Stephen Brand's children. Child is named "Enid Trevillion." III.—Eighteen years later, Constance, daughter of Brand, and Enid go to the lighthouse with an old fisherman named Ben. They are caught in a storm and as they near the lighthouse hear the danger signal from the rock. They land safely and find that two men have been hurt. Brand sends the injured men back with Ben. IV.—Jackson and Bates are lowered into the boat and Ben takes them back to Penzance. The Daisy is met by Lieutenant Stanhope who is devotedly in love with Enid. He assists in caring for the wounded men. —V—Enid spies a boat approaching the rock. It is the Lapwing. Brand discovers that it is sailed by Stanhope. He signals for them not to land, and Stanhope returns to Penzance. The girls spend the night at the rock. VI.—During the night a furious storm renders sleep impossible. At dawn Brand makes out a ship in distress. VII.—A young American named Pyne throws a rope to Brand who makes fast to the lighthouse and by means of a pulley arrangement seven-eight are saved before the ship goes down. VIII.—Mrs. Vansittart, Pyne's aunt, is strangely moved at sight of Constance. IX.—Mrs. Vansittart seeks to meet Brand. X.—Stanhope in the Falcon appears near the lighthouse at daybreak and tries to rescue the girls.

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 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 cheese 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 'ere leucog.'"

None who heard these light hearted young people yelling with merriment would 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. "Now, Miss Enid, your turn!" cried Pyne.

Her eyes danced mischievously. "Unfortunately, by the accident of birth, I am deprived of the sense of humor," she said.

"It seems to be in the family all right," he hazarded, looking at Constance.

"Alas," said Enid, "I am an American."

"I'll smile now, if that is all," said Pyne.

"But, please, I am not joking a little bit. When you go ashore you will probably hear all about me, so I may as well take the wind out of the sails of gossip. I am a mere waif who came sailing in out of the west one day in a little boat which must have come from the new world, as no one appeared to have lost either me or it in the old. Dad picked us both up and adopted me."

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

"It is quite true," said Constance gravely. "I suppose that the mysteri-

ous 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 fought 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 feeling 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 unintelligible to him.

She held out a scrap of paper. "Mr. Trill 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.

He read: Dear Madam—A signal just received from the Falcon runs as follows: "Mr. Cyrus J. Trill is on board and sends his love to Etta and Charlie. He will make every preparation for their comfort ashore and trusts they are bearing up 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 Penzance? 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, ma'am," 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 door 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 wearying 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 week in order to marry his uncle in

Paris. Rather a disastrous beginning to a new career, is it not?"

"I hope not, indeed. Perhaps you are surmounting difficulties at the commencement rather than at the end."

"It may be. I am so much older than you that I am less optimistic. But you 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 daybreak. It is quite impossible that Mr. Trill 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. Trill 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!"

"How did he ascertain that his nephew 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



Constance was deeply touched.

am unnerved. There, child! Forgive me for troubling you. And—and—kiss me, will you, and say you wish me well!"

She moved nearer, as if driven by uncontrollable impulse. Constance, not prepared for such an outburst, was nevertheless deeply touched by this appeal for sympathy.

"I wish you all the joy and happiness which I am sure you deserve," she said, stooping to kiss the wan, shrinking face held up to her.

Mrs. Vansittart burst into a paroxysm of tears and tottered toward the door.

"No, no," she gasped as Constance caught her by the arm. "Do not come with me. I am—shaken. It will pass. For God's sake, let me go alone!"

TO BE CONTINUED.

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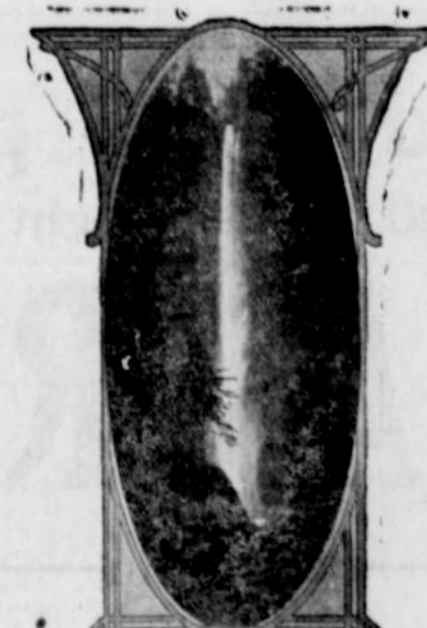
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