

THE PILLAR of LIGHT

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

"Here's to the reconciliation of Brand and his wife," he said, with a lighter tone and more cheerful manner than he would have deemed possible five minutes earlier.

Pyne followed his example. "Say, uncle," he cried, "here's a queer item! When I first met Constance I spoke of Mrs. Vansittart, and I called her my prospective step-aunt."

"A very silly name too."

"Constance seemed to think that, or its feminine equivalent. She corrected me. 'You mean your fiancée's aunt,' she said."

"Oh, did she?"

"Yes, and here's to her being my fiancée's mother."

With the morning came doubt. A maid who was given charge of the two children told Pyne that Mrs. Vansittart had been greatly upset the previous evening. The girl was sure that the lady had passed nearly an hour in tears kneeling by the side of the bed. Then, having regained control of herself to some extent, she rang for the maid and asked at what time the first train left for London next day. She ordered her breakfast at an hour which seemed to indicate her intention to depart by that train, said that she would leave instructions with Mr. Pyne concerning the children, and gave the maid two letters which she had written. These were to be delivered at 9 o'clock. What was to be done with the letters?

As they were addressed to Pyne and his uncle respectively, he soon settled that point.

His letter read:

Dear Mr. Pyne—I am leaving for London quite early, so I will not see you again in Penzance. I have supplied the little girls with all the garments they will need during the next few days. If, on inquiry, you ascertain that they have no relatives anxious, not merely willing, to take charge of them, I shall be most pleased to assume that responsibility. In that event, kindly write me, care of my bankers. Yours very sincerely,

E. VANSITTART.

The communication to his uncle was equally brief. Mr. Trall read it to him. It ran:

Dear Mr. Trall—I cannot marry you. Please forgive me. I did not realize when you honored me with your proposal that an insuperable obstacle existed. That is all—a lame explanation, but complete so far as it goes. A woman who has wrecked her life finds it hard to choose her words. Your sincere friend,

E. VANSITTART.

They discussed these curt notes during breakfast.

"I do not like their tone," said Mr. Trall gravely. "They impress me as the hurried resolutions of a woman driven to extremities. Were it not for her request about the children I should think what you thought last night, Charlie, when that policeman turned up."

"I must have telephoned my ideas to you mighty quick," was the retort.

"My dear boy, even at this moment we don't know what she intended to do. Why did she go out? What is the nature of her sudden illness? How comes it that she is at Brand's house?"

"I may be mistaken, but I think we will be given answers to all your questions in due time. Nothing really serious can be amiss or we should have heard of it from Brand himself. Now, will you remain on guard here while I go out with Elsie and Mamie? The one thing that matters in their little lives this morning is that I shall hurry up and go doll hunting with them."

"I will hold the fort until you return. You will not be long?"

"Perhaps half an hour. While I am out I will make some inquiries as to the condition of our other friends of the Chinook."

"By the way, many of them must be destitute. It is my desire, Charlie, to pay the expenses of any such to their destination and equip them properly for the journey."

"You are a first rater, uncle, but it'll make your arm tired if you O. K. the bill all the time. Now, here's a fair offer. Let me go halves."

"Be off, you rascal! You are keeping two ladies waiting."

With seeming anxiety to atone for the excesses of the week, the weather that morning justified the claim of Cornwall to be the summer land of England. The sun shone from a blue sky flecked with white clouds. The waters of Mount's bay sparkled and danced in miniature wavelets. The air was so mild, the temperature so equable, that it was hard to credit sea and wind with the havoc of the preceding days.

The Gulf Rock disaster did not stand alone in the records of the hurricane. Even the day's papers contained belated accounts of casualties on the coasts of Normandy, Holland and far-

off Denmark. But nowhere else had there been such loss of life, while renewed interest was evoked by the final relief of all the survivors.

Pyne's appearance outside the sitting room was hailed with a yell. Notwithstanding her own perplexities Mrs. Vansittart had taken good care that the children were well provided for. They were beautifully dressed, and the smiling maid who freed them from control when the door opened said that they might go out without jackets, the day was so fine.

He descended the stairs with a cigar in his mouth and a delighted youngster clinging to each hand.

In the hall he encountered a dozen journalists waiting to devour him.



A delighted youngster clinging to each hand.

They had failed to penetrate the strategic screen interposed by the head waiter. Now the enemy was unmasked and they advanced to the attack.

Pyne was ready for them. He had already outlined his defense.

"Will one of you gentlemen, representing all, kindly give me a word in private?" he asked.

This was readily agreed to.

"Now, this is the deal I will make," he said when the two were isolated. "I will meet you all here in an hour's time. I will be interviewed, sketched, snapshotted, give you locks of my hair, my autograph, my views on the far east, the next presidential election and the fiscal question if you bind yourself to one thing."

"And that is?"

"Among the passengers saved from the Chinook is a Mrs. Vansittart. She is very ill and is being cared for by Mr. Brand and his daughters. Make no reference to her in any way whatever beyond including her name in the published lists. Promise that, and I'll talk a page."

"I am sure I can agree without consulting my colleagues," said the surprised reporter.

"Come along, kids," said Pyne. "I am delivered bound to the torture."

He passed out into the street, when Elsie's sharp eyes, searching for a shop, suddenly caught sight of Enid hurrying toward the hotel.

The child ran to meet her, and Enid, flushed with excitement, began to explain that Mrs. Vansittart was in bed suffering from collapse and in a feverish state. The doctor's verdict was that she was in some danger, but would recover if carefully tended and kept in absolute quiet.

"Is Constance with her?" asked Pyne.

"Yes."

"And where is Mr. Brand?"

"He will be here soon. He asked me to call—and tell you—and Mr. Trall—what had happened."

Enid's speech was not prone to trip. Pyne's eyes gleamed into hers.

"Mr. Brand asked you to see my uncle?" he asked cautiously.

"Yes," she faltered.

"Did he say anything else?"

"Yes—cousin."

"Let me take you right in. I guess it would make a sensation if I—here, Mamie, just hug Miss Enid good and hard for me, will you?"

While the children waited in the hall he accompanied the girl up the stairs and threw open the door of the sitting room.

"Here is somebody you want to see, uncle," he cried and rejoined the little ones.

"Hoo-roosh!" he yelled. "Now let's buy a toy store."

Enid and her father faced each other for some seconds in silent bewilderment. Then Mr. Trall rose and came near to her. She did not know what to do or say. This tall, stately man was one who should be dearer to her than

any one else in the world. She was his daughter, yet they were strangers one to the other.

"I—!" How could she utter conventional words in such a moment? Her lips quivered, and tears trembled in her eyes. Then he knew. The lace around her white neck was fastened with a little gold brooch bearing a four-leaved shamrock in emerald. He looked at her with a profound reverence and caught her by the shoulders.

"My dear," he murmured, "you are very like your mother."

"I am glad," she said and kissed him.

CHAPTER XIX.

WEEK passed. In the flicker memory of the outer world the story of the Gulf Rock light-house was becoming mellow with age. Men now talked of war in Africa, of the yellow peril, of some "accarat squabble" in a West End club.

But its vitality lingered in Penzance. There were side issues which Pyne's device had kept from the public ken, but which the town's folk pondered. Lady Margaret Stanhope, obeying her son's behests, tantalized her friends by smiling serenely and telling them nothing when they pestered her with questions—that is to say, she spoke not one word about the lady who was being nursed back to health in the light-house keeper's cottage, but filled their souls with bitterness when she hinted at marvels concerning Constance and Enid.

In such a small place, where every man's affairs are canvassed by his neighbors, it was impossible to prevent an atmosphere of mystery from clinging to Mrs. Vansittart. Again, the gossips were greatly concerned about Enid. For a young woman "in her position" to be engaged to an officer in the royal navy and admitted to the sacred ranks of the aristocracy was a wonderful thing in itself. But that she should be on open terms of the greatest intimacy not alone with the elderly Mr. Trall, but with his good looking nephew, even calling the latter Charlie and treating him as a near relative, was an amazing circumstance only surpassed by the complacency with which Lady Margaret and her son regarded it.

The actors in this comedy seemed to be sublimely indifferent to public opinion. That was the worst of it. Enid was escorted about the town by each and all of the men at all hours. Now she was at the hospital cheering Bates and Jackson or the injured people from the wreck, now arranging for the departure of some of the poorer survivors when they were able to travel, now fitting over to Marazion to see Jim Spence, and once actually visiting Mr. Jones, the innkeeper.

At last a part of the secret eked out. Enid went with her father to ask how Mr. Emmett, the sick chief officer, was getting on. They found him smoking in the front garden of the house in which Brand had lodged him.

He started when he saw them approaching, and his weather beaten face wore the puzzled look with which he regarded Enid one night on the light-house stairs.

Trall noticed the sailor's covert glances at Enid, so he said:

"By the way, Mr. Emmett, you were on the Britannic when my wife and I, her sister and two children came to England before the Esmeralda was lost?"

"Yes, sir." He paused.

During many an Atlantic crossing he and Mr. Trall had talked of that last joyous journey when he, a boy who had just joined the service, sat at their table, as was the custom of junior officers in those years.

Mr. Trall smiled. He knew what was in the other man's mind.

"Do you see a likeness in this young lady to any one you have ever known?" he asked.

"Well, sir, I hope it will not hurt your feelings, and it's a good many years ago now, but I could have sworn—well, I must out with it. She is the living image of your wife."

"Indeed that cannot hurt my feelings, as she is her daughter."

"Her daughter! Your daughter!" gasped Emmett.

A small serving maid with the ears of a rabbit was listening spellbound at the open window. Here indeed was a choice tidbit for the milkman and the postman and the butcher's and grocer's boys. From this lower current the stream of talk flowed upward until it reached the august drawing room of Mrs. Taylor-Smith.

She drove in frantic haste to Lady Margaret's villa and fired questions broadside.

"Oh, yes," said Jack's mother suavely. "It is quite true. Of course I have known it from the first. According to present arrangements, the marriage will take place in the spring. Enid's marriage settlement will be nearly a quarter of a million."

Like most women, she loved that word. A million, even in fractions, is so glib, yet so unattainable.

The only person who was slightly dissatisfied with the progress of events was Pyne. Constance never appeared. She shared with Mrs. Sheppard the care of her mother. Enid, blithe and guileless in the public eye, did the housekeeping and represented the household.

Brand, too, save for a couple of visits to the hotel, remained invisible. He did not mention Mrs. Vansittart's name. He was pale and worn, a man

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at war with himself. The young Philadelphian—for Pyne's family home was in the Quaker City, though his estate lay principally in New York—was not pleased by the slight signs perceptible behind the screen of Brand's reserve.

"Constance takes after her father," he told himself. "There may be trouble about her mother. In the scurry I may get left. I must think this out."

At last came a day of warm sunshine when Enid announced that the invalid by the doctor's orders was carried downstairs.

"Has Mr. Brand seen her yet?" asked Pyne.

"No," replied Enid, with a little cloud on her fair face. "He never mentions her. And how we wish he would. He is suffering, but keeps silent, and neither Constance nor I can make any suggestion."

"But what will be the outcome?"

"How can I tell? That night after we left the hotel he told us the story of his married life. It did not seem to be utterly impossible to straighten matters, but we knew nothing of her career during so many years. Was she married again? I have asked my father. He believes she was, but is not certain."

"Father" was Mr. Trall; Brand remained "dad." Thus did Enid solve the difficulty.

"Is she aware that Constance knows she is her mother?"

"We think so. Indeed we are sure."

She has been so ill and is yet so fragile that we dare not excite her in the least degree. So Constance has been very careful, but every look, every syllable, shows that her mother is in no doubt on that point."

"It's a pretty hard nut to crack," said Pyne. He blew cigar smoke into rings. Seemingly the operation aided reflection.

"Say, Enid," he went on, "if the weather is fine tomorrow do you think Connie would come out for a drive?"

"I don't know. Certainly she needs some fresh air. What between her anxiety and her mother's illness they are beginning to look like sisters."

"Just mention to Connie in her father's presence that if the sun shines at 11 I will be along in a dogcart. Mrs. Vansittart will be downstairs by that time."

"Yes."

"And if Connie comes out with me

you just find an errand in town. Rope Jack into the scheme or any old dodge of that sort. Take care Mr. Brand knows of it. By the way, send Mrs. Sheppard out too."

"What in the world?"

"You're just too pretty to think hard, Enid. It causes wrinkles. Do as I ask, there's a good girl."

Enid was delighted to find that Brand strongly supported the suggestion that Constance should take the drive. Pyne, sharp on time, drew up a smart pony in front of the cottage and did not twitch a muscle when Constance, velled and gloved, ran down the pathway.

"Excuse me getting down," said Pyne. "I dispensed with a groom. I guess you know the roads round here."

She climbed to the seat beside him. "It is very good of you to take this trouble," she said, and when he looked at her a slight color was visible through the veil.

"How is your mother?" he asked abruptly.

He felt rather than saw her start of surprise.

She did not expect the relationship to be acknowledged with such sudden candor.

"She is much better," she assured him.

"That's all right," he announced, as if a load were off his mind, and then, somewhat to her mystification, he entertained her with the news.

Elsie and Mamie had quitted Penzance the previous evening, an aunt having traveled from Boston as soon as the first tidings of the wreck reached her.

"She was a young, nice looking aunt, too," he said cheerfully. "And I was powerful fond of those two kiddies." "The association of ideas might prove helpful," she suggested, with a touch of her old manner.

"That is what struck Elsie," he admitted. "She said she didn't know why I couldn't marry Aunt Louisa right off, and then we could all live together sociably."

"Oh! And what did the lady say?" "She thought it was a great joke until I said that unfortunately I had made other arrangements. Then she guessed her nieces had got a bit out of hand."

"Ho"
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