

THE PILLAR of LIGHT

... By ...
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"The Wings of the Morning"
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(CONTINUED.)

"Connie," she whispered when they were safely out of hearing from the service room, "I never saw a worse case. Talk about the young men suddenly smitten you read of in novels—Her sister whirled round.

"How can you be so silly?" she blazed forth.

"Why did you libel Jack so readily?" tittered Enid.

The other, utterly routed, went on in dignified silence. She did not speak again until they surveyed the store apportioned for the coming feast.

"Eighty-one!" she murmured. "What a monstrous deal of people for a half-penny worth of bread!"

"What is the use of repining?" sang Enid, with a fortissimo accent on the penultimate syllable. "For where there's a will there's a way. Tomorrow the sun will be shining, although it is cloudy today."

But Constance was not to be drawn a second time. Her clear brain was troubled by a formless shadow. It banished from her mind all thought of a harmless flirtation with the good looking youngster who had brought a blush of momentary embarrassment to her fair face.

How dreadful it would be to meet hunger with refusals! Perhaps there were worse things in the world than the midnight ordeal of an angry sea.

Indeed, when Pyne did join them in accord with his intention, he soon perceived the extent of the new danger. The stress of the night had only enhanced the need of an ample supply of food. Everybody, even the inmates of the hospital, was outrageously hungry, and the common allotment was half a cup of tea and half a ship's biscuit.

For the midday meal there would be two ounces of meat or bacon, one potato and another half biscuit with about a wineglassful of water. For supper the allowance was half a cup of cocoa and two ounces of bread, which must be baked during the day. Not quite starvation, this menu, but far from satisfying to strong men and worn-out women.

The Falcon, knowing the uselessness of attempting to creep nearer to the Gulf Rock, had gone off with her budget to startle two continents. Stanhope's last message was one of assurance. He would do all that lay in man's power. The lighthouse soon quieted down to a state of passive reaction. Pyne, refusing to be served earlier, carried his own and Brand's scanty meal on a tray to the service room.

The unwearied lighthouse keeper was on the balcony, answering a kindly signal from the Land's End, where the coast guards were not yet in possession of the news from Penzance.

He placed the tray on the writing desk and contemplated its contents ruefully.

"I guess that banquet won't spoil for keeping," he said to himself. "I'll just lie round and look at it until the boss quits making speeches by the yard."

A couple of minutes passed. Brand was hoisting the last line of flags, when the American heard faltering footsteps on the stairs.

"Don't follow so close, Mamie," said a child's voice. "My arm hurts just 'nuff for anything when I move."

A tousled head of golden hair emerged into the light. It was one of the two little girls, whom Pyne had not seen since they were swung aloft from the sloping deck of the Chinook.

Their astonishment was mutual. The child, aged about eight, recognized in him a playmate of the fine days on board ship. She turned, with confident cry:

"I told you so, Mamie. It was up. You said down. Here's the big glass house—and Mr. Pyne."

She quickened her speed, though her left arm was in a sling. Pyne, dreading lest she should fall, hastened to help her.

"It's all right, Mr. Pyne," she announced, with an air of great dignity. "I make one step at a time. Then I ketch the rail. See?"

"You've got it down to a fine point, Elsie," he said. "But what in the world are those women folk thinking of to let you and Mamie run loose about the place?"

Elsie did not answer until Mamie stood by her side. Judged by appearances, Mamie was a year younger. Apart from the nasty bruise on Elsie's left arm and shoulder, the children had escaped from the horrors of the wreck almost unscathed in body and certainly untroubled in mind.

"Mamie came to my room for breakfast," explained Elsie at last. "We're awful hungry, an' when we axed for 'nother bixit Mrs. Taylor she began to cry. An' when I said we'd go an' find mamma she cried some more."

"I'm, 'we're awtul hungry," agreed Mamie. "An', please, where's mamma?"

Pyne needed no further explanation. The little ones had lost their mother. Her disfigured body, broken out of all recognition, was tossing about somewhere in the undercurrents of the channel. None of the women dared to tell the children the truth, and it was a heartrending task to deny them food. So they were permitted to leave their refuge, with the kindly belief that they would come to no harm and perchance obtain a further supply from one of those sweet faced girls who explained so gently that the rations must run short for the common good.

Pyne glanced up at the lantern. Outside he could see Brand hauling down the signal. He sprang to the tray and secured his half biscuit and teacup. "Come along, Elsie," he said, crooking his left arm for her. "Follow close, Mamie. Mind you don't fall."

"Your mamma is asleep," he assured them in a whisper on the next landing. "She just can't be woke up for quite a long time."

Then he navigated them to the door of the second bedroom, where Mrs. Taylor was. He broke the hard biscuit in two pieces and gave one to each child.

"Here, Mamie, you carry the cup and go shares in the tea."

"I don't like tea," protested Mamie. "If I can't have coffee I want some milk."

"Well, now, you wait a little bit, and you'll be tickled to death to see what I'll bring you. But drink the tea. It's good and hot. Skip inside, both of you."

He held the door partly open, and they vanished. He heard Mrs. Taylor say:

"Didn't I tell you those two little dears would do their own business best?"

He regained the service room to find Brand steeping the remains of his biscuit in an almost empty cup. The lighthouse keeper greeted his young friend with a smile.

"I suppose that you, like the rest of us, never had such an appetite in all your days," he said.

"Oh, I'm pretty well fixed," said Pyne, with a responsive grin.

"Then you are fortunate. There is usually a wretched little fiend lurking in a man's inner consciousness which prompts him to desire the unattainable. Now, I am a poor eater, as a rule, yet this morning I feel I could tackle the toughest steak ever cut off a superannuated cow."

"I don't deny," admitted Pyne, "that the idea of a steak sounds good. That is, you know," he went on languidly, "it might sort of appeal to me about 1 o'clock."

"I should have thought you could do with one now, especially after the hard night we have gone through. Perhaps you are a believer in the French system and prefer a light breakfast."

Brand finished the last morsel of biscuit and drank the cup dry.

"It's a first rate proposition—when you are accustomed to it," said Pyne. "But talking about eating when there's little to eat is a poor business anyway. Don't you find that?"

"I do indeed."

Brand rose and tapped the barometer, adjusting the sliding scale to read the tenths.

"Slightly better," he announced. "If only the wind would go down or even change to the norward."

"What good would a change of wind do?" inquired Pyne, greatly relieved himself by the change of topic.

"It would beat down the sea to some extent, and then they might be able to drift a buoy, with a rope attached, close enough to the rock at low tide to enable us to reach it with a cast of a grappling iron."

"Do you mean that we could be ferried to the steamer by that means?"

"That is absolutely out of the question until the weather moderates to a far greater extent than I dare hope at present. But, once we had the line, we could rig up a running tackle and obtain some stores."

"Is it as bad as all that?" said the younger man after a pause. They looked at each other. The knowledge that all true men have of their kind leaped from eye to eye.

"Quite that bad," answered Brand. Pyne moistened his lips. He produced a case containing two cigars. He held it out.

"Let us go shares in consolation," he said.

Brand accepted the gift and affected a livelier mood.

"By lucky chance I have an ample supply of tobacco. It will keep the



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men quer," he said. "By the way"—and he lifted a quick glance at Pyne—"do you know anything about chemistry?"

"Well—er—I went through a course at Yale."

"Can colza oil be converted into a food?"

"It contains certain fats," admitted Pyne, taking dubious stock of the question.

"But the process of conversion, the chemical reaction, that is the difficulty. Bisulphide of carbon is a solvent, and the fatty acids of most vegetable



"Come along, Elsie."

oils can be isolated by treatment with steam superheated to about 600 degrees F."

Brand threw out his hands with a little gesture of helplessness. Just then Constance appeared.

"Dad," she cried, "did not Mr. Pyne tell you of my threat?"

"No, dear one. I am not living in terror of you, to my knowledge."

"You must please go to sleep, both of you, at least until 10 or 11 o'clock. Mr. Emmett is sending a man to keep watch here. He will not disturb you. He is bringing some rugs and pillows, which you can arrange on the floor. I have collected them for your special benefit."

"At this hour? Impossible, Connie."

"But it is not impossible, and this is the best hour available. You know quite well that the Falcon will return at high water, and you must rest, you know."

She bustled about with the busy air of a housewife who understood the whole art of looking after her family. But something puzzled her.

"Mr. Pyne," she inquired, "where is your cup?"

"I—er—took it down," he explained.

For some reason Constance felt instantly that she had turned the tables on him since their last encounter. She did not know why. He looked confused for one thing; he was not so glib in speech for another.

"Down where?" she demanded. "Not to the kitchen. I have been there since you brought up your breakfast and dad's on the same tray."

"I breakfasted alone," remarked

Brand calmly. "Mr. Pyne had feasted earlier."

"But he had not," persisted Constance. "I wanted him to—"

She stopped. This impudent American had actually dared to wink at her, a confidential, appealing wink which said plainly, "Please don't trouble about me."

"You gave your tea and biscuit to somebody," she cried suddenly. "Now, who was it? Confess?"

"Well," he said weakly, "I did not feel—er—particularly hungry, so when I met those two little girls fooling around for an extra supply I—er—thought nobody would mind if—er—"

"Father," said Constance, "he has not had a mouthful!"

"Then take him downstairs and give him one. You must have found my conversation interesting, Mr. Pyne, while I was eating, but before you go let me add a word in season. Stand or fall, each must abide by the common rule."

Pyne, with the guilty feeling of a detected villain, explained to Constance how the cup might be rescued.

"I shall keep a close eye on you in future," she announced as they went below.

"Do," he said. "That is all I ask for."

"I am a very strict person," she went on. "Dad always encouraged us in the sailor's idea of implicit obedience."

"Kick me. It will make me feel good," he answered.

Entering the second bedroom, where Elsie and Mamie were seated contentedly on the floor, she stooped and kissed them. And not a word did she say to Enid as to the reason why Mr. Pyne should be served with a second breakfast. She knew that any parade of his selfishness would hurt her, and he, on his part, gave her unspoken thanks for her thought.

Conversation without words is an art understood only by master minds and lovers, so these two were either exceptionally clever persons or developing traits of a more common genus, perhaps both.

CHAPTER XI.

THE tribulations which clustered in beelike swarm in and around the Gulf Rock lighthouse during those weary hours were many and various. Damp clothing, insufficiency of food, interior temperatures 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 knowledge, on the part of those not too despondent 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 his or her neighbor's better fortune—here

were culinary problems at once complex and exhaustive.

By adopting fantastic devices, bringing into service empty jam pots and sardine tins, 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 demitoelet 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 muslin, 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 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 arrangement of yellow blanket, the component parts of which she persuaded two 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, slugging, 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 philosopher and beast in the average human being that makes it possible for the same man in one mood to risk his life quite voluntarily to save others and in another to organize selfish theft.

After an ingenuous 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 ebullitions 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 foremost hand who had gobbled up a

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