

THE PILLAR of LIGHT

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

"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 wail 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 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 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 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 unintelligible to him.

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.

He read:

Dear Madam—A signal just received from the Falcon runs as follows: "Mr. Cyrus J. Traill 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 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 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. 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!"

"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. Deem-

ing 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

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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

am unnerfed. 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!"

CHAPTER XII.

Pyne found Enid rosy red and inclined to be tearful. The dying light of day was still strong enough in the service room to permit these things to be seen.

"No bad news, I hope?" he inquired, though the sight of Stephen Brand seated at his desk and placidly writing was reassuring.

The question steadied her to an extent.

"It is nothing of any consequence," she said and darted past him.

Brand looked up from his journal. He smiled, though the American thought there was a hint of pain in his eyes.

"I am going to lose one of my girls," he said. "Oh, no; this is not a loss by death, but by marriage. If I were a Frenchman I would describe it as gaining a son. Enid has just received what is tantamount to a proposal."

"By flag wagging?" Pyne was naturally astounded.

"Yes. You would not expect one of the people from the Chinook to be so enterprising?"

"I don't know," said Pyne, punctuating each word with a deliberate nod.

"Well, in any case, I would not have forwarded the application after an acquaintance of eighteen hours," observed Brand, with equal deliberation.

"They're two powerful fine girls," said Pyne, steering clear of the point.

"They have just been telling me how Miss Enid happened along. It reads like a fairy tale."

"She was given to me by the winds and waves, yet she is dear to me as my own child. I shall miss her greatly—if all goes well here."

"I've cottoned on to both of them something wonderful. But, if I am not intruding into private affairs, how comes it that Miss Enid is being telegraphed for? Of course I can understand the gentleman being in a hurry. I would feel that way myself if the conditions were favorable."

Pyne could be as stolid as a red Indian when the occasion demanded it. Brand found no hint in his face of the hidden thought in his words.

"Have they said anything to you of a man named Stanhope?" inquired the lighthouse keeper, resuming the entry in his diary after a sharp glance upward.

"Yes. They pointed him out to me this morning in the navy. I think; fellow with a title and that sort of thing."

"No. His mother is Lady Margaret Stanhope, being an earl's daughter, but his father was a knight. He has been paying attentions to Enid for a year and more to my knowledge and to his

mother's exceeding indignation, I fancy."

"That is where we on the other side have the pull of you."

"Have you? I wonder. However, Lady Margaret's views have not troubled me. I will deal with her when the time comes. At present it looks fairly certain that Master Jack has settled matters on his own account. I may be mistaken, of course. How do you interpret this?"

He closed the journal and handed to Pyne a memorandum taken down letter by letter by a sailor as Brand read the signal:

"Mother sends her love to Enid."

"Did mother ever convey her love to Enid before?" asked Pyne.

"No."

"Then I call that neat. I take off my hat to Stanhope. He and mamma have had a heart to heart talk."

Brand leaned his head on his hands, with clinched fists covering his ears. There was a period of utter silence until the lighthouse keeper rose to light the lamp.

Pyne watched him narrowly.

"I may be trespassing on delicate ground," he said at last. "If I am, you are not the sort of man to stand on ceremony. In the States, you know, when the authorities want to preserve a park section they don't say, 'Please do not walk on the grass.' They put up a board which reads, 'Keep off.' We never kick. We're used to it."

"My notice board, if required, will be less curt, at any rate," replied Brand, and they faced each other. Though their words were light, no pleasant conceit lurked in their minds. There was a question to be asked and answered, and it held the issues of life and death.

"What did you mean just now by saying, 'If all goes well here'? Is there any special reason why things should not go well?"

The young Philadelphian might have been hazarding an inquiry about a matter of trivial interest, so calm was he, so smooth his utterance. But Brand had made no mistake in estimating this youngster's force of character, nor did he seek to temporize.

He extended an arm toward the reef. "You hear that?" he said.

"Yes."

"It may boil that way for weeks."

"So I have been told."

"By whom?"

"Mr. Emmett told me."

"Ah! He and I have discussed the matter already. Yet I imagine that neither he nor any other man in the place save myself grasps the true meaning of the fact."

"I've been theorizing," said Pyne. "It occurred to me that this light isn't here for amusement."

He looked up at the lamp and smiled. The pillar in those days must have been a haunt of illusions, for Brand, like Constance and Pyne himself in the case of Mrs. Vansittart, thought he caught an expression familiar to his eyes long before he had seen that clear cut, splendidly intelligent face.

But there was no time for idle speculation. He glanced into the well of the stairs to make sure that no one was ascending.

Then he approached nearer to Pyne and said in an intense whisper:

"It is folly to waste words with you. I have reasoned this thing out, and now I will tell you what I have decided. I will take the watch from 8 until 12. At 12 you will relieve me and I will go below to secure provisions and water sufficient to maintain the lives of my daughters, you and myself for a few hours longer than the others. By right, if I followed the rules I have promised to obey, I alone should live. That is impossible. A Spartan might do it, but I cannot abandon my girls and yet retain my senses. I trust you because I must have a confederate. If the weather does not break before tomorrow night we must barricade the stairs—and fight—if necessary."

His face was drawn and haggard, his eyes blazing. He shook as one in the first throes of fever. He seemed to await his companion's verdict with an overpowering dread lest any attempt should be made to question the justice of his decree.

"Yes. I figured it out that way, too," said Pyne. "It's queer, isn't it, to be in such a fix when there's all sorts of

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