

# THE PILLAR of LIGHT

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

"Not much there," he commented.  
"I will take no more!" was the fierce cry.

"You ought to."  
"I refuse, I tell you! Don't torture me further."

"Any chance of a row in the morning? The purser and Mr. Emmett mount guard when the storeroom is opened."

"I acted my role well. I built up the vacancies with empty tins."

"My sakes," cried Pyne pityingly, "you deserve to win through!"

"I think my heart will break," muttered Brand. "But look! The lamp! It needs adjusting."

Indeed, a fresh gale seemed to be springing up. The wind vane having gone, the index was useless. It was not until a burst of spray drenched the lantern that Brand knew of a change taking place. The wind was backing round toward the north.

The barometer fell slightly. It portended either more wind and dry weather or less wind, accompanied by rain. Who could tell what would happen? Fair or foul, hurricane or calm, all things seemed to be the unguessable blundering of blind chance.

When the rock was left in peace after the fall of the tide Pyne promised to keep the light in order if Brand would endeavor to sleep until daybreak. Rest was essential to him. He would assuredly break down under the strain if the tension were too long maintained, and a time was coming when he would need all his strength, mental and physical.

"Here have I been snoozing in odd corners ever since I came aboard," urged the American, "and I have nothing to do but starve quietly. It's ridiculous. My funeral is dated; yours isn't. You can't be on deck all the time, you know. Now, just curl up and count sheep jumping over a wall, or any old game of the sort, until your eyes close of their own accord."

Brand yielded. He lay on the hard boards, with a chair cushion for a pillow. All the rugs rescued by Constance were now needed in the hospital. In less than a minute he was sound asleep.

"That was a close call," mused Pyne. "In another hour he would have cracked up. He's a wonder anyhow."

The lighthouse keeper slept until long after daybreak. Pyne refused to allow any one to disturb him.

Soon after 7 o'clock the watch reported that two vessels were approaching from the bay. One was the Falcon, and the sailors soon made out that the other was the Trinity tender from Plymouth.

When they were both nearing the buoy Brand was aroused.

It was evident that the brief rest had cleared his brain and restored his self confidence. Instantly he took up the thread of events, and his first words showed how pleased he was that some one of authority in the lighthouse service should be in active communication with him.

Through his glasses he distinguished Stanhope on board the Trinity steamer, standing by the side of the inspecting officer of the south coast lights. Other officials were there, but near Stanhope was a tall elderly man, unknown and certainly a stranger in Penzance.

The Falcon was now chartered by press men, so the civilian on the official boat was evidently a person of consequence. Indeed, Brand imagined, long before Pyne was able to verify the impression, that the newcomer was Mr. Cyrus J. Traill, whom he had failed to notice in the poor light of the previous evening.

He knew quite well that the experienced chief of the lighthouse service would appreciate fully the disabilities under which he labored, with eighty-one mouths to feed from a stock already far below the three months' maximum.

The first telegraphed question betrayed the prevalent anxiety.

"Hope all is well?"

What was he to say? Was it not best to speak boldly and let men know the truth, not alone as to their present desperate plight, but revealing the measures he had devised for the protection of the light? He could not make up his mind to launch out into a full explanation that instant.

So he signaled:

"Every one alive, but many cases of grave collapse."

Stanhope was again the signaler—evidently he had arranged matters with the admiral at Portsmouth—so Brand expected the prompt reply:

"How are Constance and Enid?"

"Quite well and cheerful."

The tall man near Stanhope came closer.

"Are Mrs. Vansittart and Pyne all right?"

Brand assumed that the lady was in no worse condition than others. Constance, telling him the state of the sick during a hasty visit, had not mentioned her name.

So he sent the needed assurance and went on forlornly:

"Suppose no effort can be made to open communication?"

To his great surprise the answer came:

"We are constructing a raft. When the tide falls this afternoon we will try what can be done."

Ah, how glad he was that he had not obeyed his earlier impulse and horrified the anxious rescuers by a prophecy of lingering death for many, with the prelude, perchance, of murderous excesses committed by men on the verge of madness. If that story had to be told he would not flinch, but it was a grateful thing that the hour of its telling might at least be deferred.

A long message followed, a string of loving words from relatives ashore to



"Had I a son I should wish him to be like you."

those known to be imprisoned on the rock. During the merely perfunctory reading off of the signals his active mind was canvassing the probabilities of success or failure for the venture of the afternoon. It was high water about 3 o'clock, and, in his judgment, with the wind in its present quarter, about northwest by west, the cross seas which would sweep the reef and engulf the lighthouse at half tide would render it wildly impossible for any raft ever built by man's hands to live in the immediate vicinity of the rock.

However, the issue lay with others now. He knew that they would do all that brave men would dare. He was tempted to make known the inspiring news to all hands, but refrained, because he feared ultimate failure. Beneath his feet was a human volcano. Stirred too deeply, it might become active and dangerous.

So the apathetic multitude in his charge, hungrily awaiting a scanty morsel of food which only provoked what it failed to gratify, must rest content with the long statement written out by the purser and read by him at the door of each room.

Pyne took to Mrs. Vansittart the news of his uncle's presence on the steamer.

"If you would like to see him," he said, "I have no doubt Mr. Brand will let you stand on the gallery for a little while."

She declined, excusing herself on the ground of weakness.

"In this high wind," she said, "it will be very cold out there, and any further exposure would make me very ill."

"That's true enough," he agreed, though he wondered why she raised no question concerning the message she wished him to convey to Mr. Traill.

Had she forgotten the urgency of her words overnight? He had carried her instructions quite faithfully to Brand and the latter smiled at the fantasy.

"Time enough to think of such things when we are assured of the lady's departure," he said, and they left it at that.

Thinking to interest her, Pyne told her of the crowd on the Falcon.

"Mostly reporters, Brand thinks," he said. "What a story they will build up in the New York papers! It will be more fun than a box of monkeys to get hold of this week's news and read all the flapdoodle they are printing."

But Mrs. Vansittart was not to be roused from her melancholy. She

considered the least pleasant suggestion. It was a new thing in her life. Today she was inert, timid, a woman who cowered away from the door and was obviously anxious that he should leave her to the quiet misery of the packed bedroom.

As the day passed, a wearisome iteration of all that had gone before, a new feature in the relations of the crowded community made itself disagreeably apparent. Men drew apart from each other singly or in small groups. An inconsolable gloom settled on the women. By some means the knowledge spread that they might all starve to death in the heart of this cold dungeon. They began to loathe it, to upbraid its steadfastness with spoken curses or unrestrained tears. The sanctuary of one day was becoming the tomb of the next. No longer was there competition to look at land or sea from the open windows. Everywhere was settling down a pall of blank, horrible silence and suspicion.

Even Constance yielded to the common terror once when the men of the watch escorted the bearer of a tray load of provisions to the occupants of the coal cellar.

"Enid," she whispered, "did you see the light in their eyes? What is it? Does hunger look that way?"

"It must be so, yet it is almost unbelievable. They are far removed from real starvation."

"One would think so. But it is so hard to realize things beforehand. And they have nothing to do. They are brooding all the time. We are slaves to our imagination. Many a sick person is allowed to eat far less than these men have been given, and the deprivation is not felt at all."

"What will become of us, Constance, if we are detained here for many days?"

"Dear one, do not ask me. We must not think of such things."

"But dad is thinking of them. I watched his face when I took him a scrap of food just now, and"—

"Hush, dear. Let us pray—and hope."

There was a clatter of feet down the iron stairs. The men of the watch were hustling to unbar the iron door. A solidly built, circular raft had been lowered from the Trinity tender.

An assistant keeper, wearing a cork jacket, with a rope about his waist, was clinging to a stumpy mast in the center. Two stout guide ropes were manipulated from the deck of the vessel, and the flat, unwieldy mass of timber was slowly drifting nearer to the lighthouse with the tide.

The door of the column opened toward the east, so the wind, with its pelting sheets of spray, was almost in the opposite quarter, and the stout granite shaft itself afforded some degree of protection for the entrance.

The scheme signaled from the steamer was a good one. None but a lunatic would endeavor to approach the rock itself, but there was a chance that the raft might be made to drift near enough to the door to permit a grapple to be thrown across the rope held by the gallant volunteer on the raft.

It was his duty to attach the two ropes and thus render it possible for a stronger line to be drawn from the vessel to the pillar. There was no other way. The lighthouse did not possess a rope of sufficient length to be drawn back by the raft without the intervention of some human agency.

This was precisely the puny, half despairing dodge that the reef loved to play with. Catlike, it permitted the queer, flat bottomed craft to approach almost within hail. Then it shot forth a claw of furious surf, the heavy raft was picked up as if it were a floating feather, turned clean over and flung many fathoms out to sea, while both of its guiding cables were snapped with contemptuous ease.

The assistant keeper, kept afloat by his jacket, was hauled, half drowned, back through the choking froth, while the wave which overwhelmed the raft curled up a spiteful tongue and almost succeeded in dragging out several of the men stationed in the doorway.

With a clang the iron shutter was rushed into its place, and when the sailor was rescued the Trinity boat steamed away to try to secure the raft.

So joyous hope gave way once more to dark foreboding, and the only comfort from the parting signal:

"Will try again next tide."

CHAPTER XIII.

DISCIPLINE slackened its bonds that night. For one thing, Mr. Emmett fell ill. Although injured to hardship in the elemental strife, being of the stocky mariner race which holds the gruff Atlantic in no dread, he had never before been called on to eat sodden bread, to drink condensed steam flavored with varnish and to chew sustenance from the rind of raw bacon. These drawbacks, added to the lack of exercise and the constant wearing of clothes not yet dry, placed him on the sick list.

Again there were ominous whispers of unfair division in the matter of food. It was not within the realm of accomplishment that the purser, Constance, Enid and others who helped to apportion the eatables could treat all alike. Some fared better than others in quality if not in quantity. The unfortunate ones growled and talked of favoritism.

A crisis was reached when the sec-

ond officer mustered the night watch.

When one sheep leads the others will follow. A stout German from Chicago asked bluntly:

"Vere's de goat of blayin' at mound-in' gart? Dere is bud von ting to gart, und dat is der kidchen."

Community of interest caused many to huddle closer to him. Here was one who dared to say what they all thought. Their feet shuffled in support. The officer, faithful to his trust, was tempted to fell the man, but he thought the circumstances warranted more gentle methods.

"Why are you dissatisfied?" he sternly demanded. "What do you suspect? Are you fool enough to imagine that you are being cheated by people who are dividing their last crust with you?"

"How do ve know dat? Dose girls—dey are chokin' mit Mr. Pyne all der day. Dey can'd do dat und be hungry like us."

"You unmitigated ass!" said the disgusted officer. "There is food here for three people. They have fed eighty-one of us for two days and will keep us going several more days. Can't you figure it out? Isn't it a miracle? Here! Who's for guard and who not? Let us quit fooling."

And the doubters were silenced for the hour.

The hymn singer endeavored to raise a chorus. He was not greeted with enthusiasm, but a few valiant spirits came to his assistance. A couple of hymns were feebly rendered—and again silence.

"Say when," observed Pyne calmly when he entered the service room to find Brand trimming the spare lamp.

"Not tonight," said Brand.

"Why not? Hell may break loose at any moment downstairs."

"What has occurred? I heard something of a dispute when the watch mustered at 8 o'clock."

"Things are worse now. One of the men found a gallon of methylated spirit in the workshop."

"Good heavens! Did he drink any of it?"

"He and his mates have emptied the tin. Eight are helplessly drunk, the others quarrelsome. The next thing will be a combined rush for the storeroom."

"But why did not the second officer tell me?"

"He thought you had troubles enough. If he could depend on the remainder of the crowd he would rope the sinners. Says he knows a slave knot that will make 'em tired."

Brand's eyes glistened.

"The fools," he said, "and just as the weather is mending too."

"You don't mean that?"

"Listen."

He glanced up at the glass dome. Heavy drops were pattering on it. They looked like spray, but Pyne shouted gleefully:

"Is it rain?"

"Yes. I was just going to summon the watch to help in filling every vessel. By spreading canvas sheets we can gather a large supply if it rains hard. Moreover, it will beat the sea down. Man alive, this may mean salvation! Tie those weanklings and summon every sober man to help."

With a whoop, Pyne vanished. He met Constance on the stairs, coming to see her father before she stretched her weary limbs on the hard floor of the kitchen.

She never knew exactly what took place. It might have been politeness, but it felt uncommonly like a squeeze, and Pyne's face was extraordinarily close to hers as he cried:

"It's raining. No more canvas whiskey. Get a hustle on with every empty vessel!"

He need not have been in such a whirl, however.

When the shower came it did not last very long, and there were many difficulties in the way of garnering the thrice blessed water. In the first place, the lighthouse was expressly designed to shoot off all such external supplies; in the second, the total quantity obtained did not amount to more than half a gallon.

But it did a great deal of good in other ways. It brightened many faces, it caused the drunkards to be securely trussed like plucked fowls and dumped along the walls of the entrance passage, and it gave Brand some degree of hope that the rescue operations of the next day would be more successful.

When the rain cleared off the moon flickered in a cloudy sky. This was a further omen of better fortune. Perhaps the jingling rhyme of Admiral Fitzroy's barometer was about to be justified:

Long foretold,  
Long last,  
Short notice,  
Soon past.

And the hurricane had given but slight warning of its advent.

"I feel it in my bones that we shall all be as frisky as lambs tomorrow," said Pyne when he rejoined Brand after the scurry caused by the rain had passed.

"We must not be too sanguine. There is a chance now. I won't deny that, but the sea is treacherous."

"This reef licks creation. At Bar Harbor, in Maine, where a mighty big sea can kick up in a very few hours, I have seen it go down again like magic under a change of wind."

[TO BE CONTINUED.]

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