

THE Pillar of Light

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...the rest of the verse evaded them. Probably a door was closed. Mrs. Vansittart seemed to be greatly perturbed. Enid, intent on the occupation of the moment, believed their little chat was ended. To round it off, so to speak, she went on quickly: "I imagine I am the most mysterious person living in my early history. I mean, Mr. Brand saw me floating towards this lighthouse in a deserted boat. I was nearly dead. The people who had been with me were gone, either starved and thrown into the sea or knocked overboard during the collision, as the boat was badly damaged. My men were marked 'E. T.' That is the only definite fact I can tell you. All the rest is guesswork. I distinctly, nobody cared to claim me. And here I am."

...Hence, the girl came unexpectedly face to face with Mrs. Vansittart. The meeting startled her. This pale, thin man, so thinly clad in the demit-toilette of evening wear on ship-board, should not be standing there. "Is anything wrong?" she cried, raising her lantern just as Enid did when she encountered the sailors. "No, no," said the other, passing a nervous hand over her face. "Constance, with alert intelligence, fancied she dreaded recognition. "Then, why are you standing here? It is too late. You will surely make yourself ill."

...breakfast until I come to you. I suppose the kitchen is your headquarters." "Yes, though Enid has far more of Mr. Pyne's company. She is cooking you some."

...men tossing about on the exterior gallery. In such wise, helped by a compositor and disabled by head-lines, does a man become a hero in these days of knightdom conferred by the Press. Constance was scrutinizing the Falcon from the trimmings-stage. Hearing Enid's chief "Good morning" to Pyne when that young lady raved up towards the kitchen to catch a glimpse of the reported vessel, she dropped her glasses for a moment. "Jack is on board," she announced. "Of course he would be there. And there is such a lot of other men—half Poncez, I think."

...The stress of the night and only enhanced the need of an ample supply of food. Everybody—even the inmates of the hospital—was outrageously hungry, and the common lotment 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 wine-glassful 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.

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CHAPTER XI. MRS. VANSITTART'S FEAR. The tribulations which clustered, in bee-like 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 draught of the entrance passage and stair-ways to the partial suffocation of the rooms with windows closed, owing to the incursions of the rising tide—this unpleasant aggregate of physical misery was serious augmented by an ever-increasing list of ailments, an almost total absence of any medical comforts, and a growing knowledge, on the part of those who were dependent on their own resources, that their ultimate relief might be deferred for days rather than hours.

...The Falcon, knowing the uselessness of attempting to creep nearer to the Gulf Rock, had gone off with her budget of starlings 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. Stanhope's servant, clad in oilskins, was clearly defined as he stood above on the port side of the Falcon's small bridge, reading off the signals and sending back spasmodic twitters of the flags which he, also, had prepared, to indicate that each room was ready.