# THE Pillar of Light

By Louis Tracy

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(Continued)

The two young men looked at each other with frank friendliness.

"When we have a minute to spare you must take me to the gallery and explain just how you worked that trick," said Stanhope. "Brand's semaphore was to the point, but it omitted details."

"That is where I have the pull of you," responded Pyne with equal cordiality. "I don't require any telling about your work yesterday."

"Oh, people make such a fuss. What is there remarkable in guiding a boat through a rough sea?"

"I may be wrong, but it looks a heap harder than swarming up a pole."

In such wise did young Britain and young America pooh-pooh the idea that they had done aught heroic.

Indeed, their brief talk dealt next with Enid, and Lieutenant Stanhope, R.N., did not think he was outraging conventionality when he found Enid in the kitchen, and took her in his arms and kissed her.

Constance and Pyne discovered that the tug as seen through the window was a very interesting object.

"You don't feel at all lonesome?" he murmured to her.

"Not in the least."

"It must do a fellow a heap of good to meet his best girl under such circumstances."

"Mr. Stanhope and my sister have been the greatest of friends for years."

"Is it possible to catch up? The last few days on the rock ought to figure high in averages."

"Jack," cried Constance, finding this direct attack somewhat disconcerting, "did my father say that any arrangements were to be made for landing?"

"Yes, miss," interposed a sailor at the door. "The skipper's orders are: 'Women an' children to muster on the lower deck.'"

Then began a joyous yet strangely pathetic procession, headed by Elsie and Mamie, who were carried downstairs by the newly arrived lighthousemen. The children cried and refused to be comforted until Pyne descended with them to the life-boat. The women followed, in terrible plight, notwithstanding the wraps sent them on the previous day. Each, as they passed Stephen Brand, bade him farewell and tearfully asked the Lord to bless him and his.

Among them came Mrs. Vansittart. Her features were veiled more closely than ever. Whilst she stood behind the others in the entrance, her glance was fixed immovably on Brand's face. No Sybilline prophetess could have striven more eagerly to wrest the secrets of his soul from its lineaments. Nevertheless, when he turned to her with his pleasant smile and parting words of comfort, she averted her eyes, uttered an incoherent phrase of thanks for his kindness, and seemed to be unduly terrified by the idea that she must be swung into the life-boat by the crane.

She held out her hand. It was cold and trembling.

"Don't be afraid," he said gently patting her on the shoulder as one might reassure a timid child. "Sit down and hold the rope. The basket cannot possibly be overturned."

Pyne, helping to unload the tremulous passengers beneath, noted the lady's attitude, and added a fresh memorandum to the stock he had already accumulated.

"Who is that?" asked Brand from the purser, who stood beside him.

"Mrs. Vansittart."

Brand experienced a momentary surprise.

"She seemed to avoid me," he thought, but the incident did not linger in his mind.

The life-boat, rising and falling on the strong and partly broken swell, required the most expert management if the weary people on the rock were to be taken off in safety.

When Constance and Enid, followed by Stanhope, reached the boat after giving Brand a farewell hug, there was no more room. The crew pulled off towards the waiting vessel, and here a specially prepared gangway rendered the work of transhipment easy.

Mr. Traill was leaning over the bulwark as the life-boat ranged alongside. He singled out Pyne at once, and gave him a cheery cry of recognition. At first he could not distinguish Mrs. Vansittart, and, indeed, it must be confessed that he was striving most earnestly to descry one face which had come back to him out of the distant years.

When his glance fell on Enid, his nephew who was thinking how best to act under the circumstances, was assured that the father saw in the girl the living embodiment of her mother.

He thought it would be so. His own recollection of his aunt's portraits had already helped him to this conclusion, and how much more startling must a flesh and blood creation be than the effort of an artist to place on canvas the fugitive expression which constitutes the greatest charm of a mobile countenance.

Enid, having heard so much about Mr. Pyne's uncle, was innocently curious to meet him. At first she was vaguely bewildered. The sunken eyes were fixed on hers with an intensity that gave her a momentary sense of embarrassment. Luckily the exigencies of the hour offered slight scope to emotion. All things were unreal, out of drawing with previous experiences of her well-ordered life. The irregular swaying of the boat and the tug seemed to typify the new phase.

Pyne swung himself to the steamer's deck before the gangway was made fast, thereby provoking a loud outcry from the deserted children.

Grasping his uncle's hand, he said:

"Wait until you read Brand's letter. No one else knows."

So, Mr. Traill, with fine self-control, greeted Mrs. Vansittart affectionately, and handed her over to a stewardess, who took her to a cabin specially prepared for her. Her low-spoken words were not quite what he expected.

"Don't kiss me," she murmured, "and please don't look at me. In my present condition I cannot bear it."

Relatives of the shipwrecked passengers and crew, many of whom were waiting in Penzance were not allowed on board. This arrangement was made by Mr. Traill after consulting a local committee organized to help the unfortunates who needed help so greatly. The unanimous opinion was expressed that a few lady members of the committee, supplied with an abundance of clothing, etc., would afford prompt relief to the sufferers, whilst the painful scenes which must follow the meeting of survivors with their friends would cause confusion and delay on the vessel.

Pyne watching all these things, saw that Mrs. Vansittart did not meet his uncle with the eagerness of a woman restored to the arms of the man she was about to marry.

She was distraught, aloof in her manner, apparently interested only in his eager assurance that she would find an assortment of new garments in the cabin.

The millionaire himself was too flustered to draw nice distinctions between the few words she spoke and what he expected her to say. When she quitted him he walked towards the group of young people. They were laughingly exchanging news and banter as if all that had gone before were the events of a lively picnic. At last, he met Enid.

Pyne introduced his uncle, and it was a trying experience for this man to stand face to face with his daughter. In each quick flash of her delighted eyes, in every tone of her sweet voice, in every winsome smile and graceful gesture, he caught and vivified long-dormant memories of his greatly loved wife of nineteen years ago.

Somehow he was glad Mrs. Vansittart had not lingered by his side. The discovery of Enid's identity involved considerations so complex and utterly unforeseen that he needed time and anxious thought to arrange his plans for the future.

The animated bustle on deck prevented anything in the nature of sustained conversation. Luckily, Mr. Traill himself, whose open-handed generosity had made matters easy for the reception committee, was in constant demand.

Mrs. Sheppard had sent a portmanteau for Constance and Enid, so they, too, soon scurried below with the others.

The life-boat returned to the rock, where the four lighthouse men sent to relieve Brand were now helping the sailors to carry the injured men downstairs and assisting the sick to reach the entrance.

As soon as this second batch was transferred to the tug, the vessel started for Penzance; the Trinity tender would land the others.

There was a scene of intense enthusiasm when the steamer reached the dock. The vociferous cheering of the townspeople smothered the deep agony of some who waited there, knowing all too well they would search in vain for their loved ones among these whom death had spared.

The two girls modestly escaped at the earliest moment from the shed used as a reception-room. All the inhabitants knew them personally or by sight; they attracted such attention that they gladly relinquished to other hands any further charge of the shipwrecked people. So, after a few words of farewell for the hour, Stanhope piloted them to a waiting carriage and drove away with them.

Mrs. Vansittart did not emerge from her cabin until the deck was deserted. She found Mr. Traill looking for her. In a neat black dress and feather hat she was rehabilitated.

"Why didn't you show up earlier?" he asked in good-humored surprise. "The breeze on deck was first-rate. It brought the color into many a pale cheek. And the way in which the crowd let itself go was splendid. Look at these waiting thousands—quivering yet with excitement!"

"I am worn out," she said quietly; "take me to your hotel. You have engaged rooms there, I suppose?"

"Of course."

"When do you purpose leaving Penzance?"

"Well—er—that is part of the explanation I promised you."

"We can talk matters over in the hotel. Where is your nephew?"

For the first time he marked her air of constraint.

"Believe me, Etta," he said hurriedly, "that what I have to tell you will come as a great surprise, but it should be a pleasant one."

"Anything that gratifies you will be welcomed by me," she said simply. "You have not said where Charlie is."

"Hiding in that shed. He refused Mr. Stanhope's offer of a rig-out on board. In his present disguise he passes as a stoker, and everybody wants to see the man who saved all of you."

"Have you a closed carriage here?"

"Yes."

"Let us go. Charlie can come with us."

Again he was conscious of a barrier between them, but he attributed her mood to the strain she had undergone.

In the shed they found Pyne; with him were the orphaned children; there was none to meet them. Kind offers were made to care for them until their relations should be forthcoming, but the man to whom they clung would not listen to any such proposal.

"I guess they're happy with me," he said. "I will see them through their present trouble."

Childlike, they had eyes and ears only for the prevalent excitement. At last Elsie asked him:

"Where's mamma? You said she was sick. But the men haven't carried her off the ship, an' she wasn't in the boat."

"Don't you worry, Elsie," he said. "I'm going to take you to a big house where you will find everything fixed just right."

His uncle and Mrs. Vansittart approached. The lady's face was no longer hidden.

"What are you going to do with those children?" she inquired.

"There's none here to claim them," he said. "I can't let them leave me in that haphazard way."

"Let me help you. It is a woman's privilege."

She stooped towards the tiny mites.

"You dear little babes," she said softly, "I can take mother's place for a time."

They knew her quite well, of course, and she seemed to be so much kinder and nicer now in her smart clothes than she was in the crowded disorder of the bedroom.

Mamie looked at Elsie, and the self-reliant Elsie said valiantly:

"Mamie 'n' me 'll be glad, if Mr. Pyne comes too."

Mr. Traill, who had never before seen tears in Mrs. Vansittart's eyes, found a ready excuse for her womanly sympathy.

"It seems to me," he said genially, "we are all of the mind. Come this way, Etta. And mind you stick close to us, Charlie, or the hall porter will throw you out if you attempt to enter the hotel in that costume."

He rattled on cheerfully, telling them how clothiers and milliners, and all the storekeepers in the town if they were needed, would wait on them at the hotel.

"In a couple of hours," he said, "you both can obtain sufficient things to render you presentable for a day or two. Don't forget we dine at eight. We ought to be a jolly party. I have asked Stanhope and his mother and those two girls to join us."

"Oh," cried Mrs. Vansittart faintly, "you must excuse me. I—"

"Now, Etta, my dear, you will not desert us to-night. Why, it seemed to me to be the only way in which we could all come together at once. I am only too sorry that Mr. Brand cannot be present. Surely he might have been spared from further duty at the lighthouse after what he has endured."

"They offered to relieve him at once, but he declined," said Pyne.

He looked out of the window of the carriage in which they were driving to the hotel. Constance had told him of the dinner arrangement, but he wished to ascertain if the definite absence of the lighthouse-keeper would tend to reassure Mrs. Vansittart.

He was not mistaken. She did not reply at once. When she spoke it was with a sigh of relief.

"I will not be very entertaining, I fear, but the young people will have plenty to tell you."

"For goodness' sake, Etta, don't class yourself among the old fogies," cried Mr. Traill. "Look at me, fifty five and lively as a grasshopper."

"Please, is Mamie 'n' me 'vited too?" whispered Elsie to Pyne.

"You two chicks will be curled up among the feathers at eight o'clock," he told her. "Don't you go and worry about any dinner-parties. The sooner you go to sleep, the quicker you'll wake up in the morning, and then we're going out to hunt—for what, do you think?"

"Candles," said Mamie.

"Toys," cried Elsie, going one better.

"We're just going to find two of the loveliest and frilliest and pinkiest-cheeked dolls you ever saw. They'll have blue eyes as big as yours, Elsie, and their lips will be as red and round as yours, Mamie. They'll talk and say—and say all sorts of things when you pinch their little waists. So you two hurry up after you've had your supper, say your prayers and close your eyes, and when you open them you'll be able to yell for me to find that doll-store mighty sharp."

"Say, Charlie," cried his uncle, "I never heard you reel off a screw like that before. Now, if I didn't know you were a confirmed young bachelor, I would begin to have suspicions. Anyhow, here's the hotel."

Two hours later, when uncle and nephew met in the private sitting-room where busy waiters were making preparations for dinner, Traill drew the younger man to the privacy of a window recess.

"Charlie," he confided, "affairs are in a tangle. Do you realize that my marriage was fixed for to-day?"

"That's so," was the laconic answer.

"Of course the wedding was postponed by fate, and, to add to my perplexities, there is a new attitude on Mrs. Vansittart's part. It puzzles me. We have been friends for some years, as you know. It seemed to be a perfectly natural outcome of our mutual liking for each other that we should agree to pass our declining years together. She is a very beautiful and accomplished woman, but she makes no secret of her age, and the match was a suitable one in every respect."

"You can see as far through a stone wall as most people."

Pyne knew that his uncle's sharp eyes were regarding him steadily, but he continued to gaze into the street.

There was a moment's hesitation before Mr. Traill growled:

"You young dog, you have seen it, too. Mrs. Vansittart avoids me. Something has happened. She has changed her mind. Do you think she has heard about Edith?"

"Edith! Oh, of course—Enid must be christened afresh. No; that isn't it. It would not be fair to you to say that I think you are mistaken. But, from what I know of the lady, I feel sure she will meet you fairly when the time comes."

"Ah, you agree with me, then?"

"In admitting a doubt—in advising the delay you have already suggested—yes."

"She told you what I had written?"

"More than that, she asked me if I was aware of its explanation."

"And you said?"

"Exactly what I said to you. You are both sensible people. I can hardly imagine that any misunderstanding can exist after an hour's talk."

Mr. Traill looked at his watch. A carriage stopped at the hotel.

"Here's Stanhope, and his mother," cried Pyne; so his uncle hurried off to receive his guests.

Lady Margaret was a well-preserved woman of aristocratic pose. But her serenity was disturbed. Although the land was ringing with the fame of her son's exploit, and her mother's heart was throbbing with pride, there had been tearful hours of vigil for her. Not without a struggle had she abandoned her hope that he would make a well-endowed match.

When Constance and Enid arrived she was very stately and dignified, scrutinizing, with all a mother's incredulity, the girl who had caused her to capitulate.

But Enid scored a prompt success. She swept aside the almost unconscious reserve with which Jack's mother greeted her.

"You knew," she murmured wistfully. "We did not. They would not tell us. How you must have suffered until the news came that he had escaped."

Lady Margaret drew the timid girl nearer and kissed her.

"My dear," she whispered, "I am beginning to understand why Jack loves you. He is my only son, but you are worthy of him."

Mrs. Vansittart's appearance created a timely diversion. She had obtained a black lace dress. It accentuated the settled pallor of her face, but she was perfectly self-possessed, and uttered a nice womanly compliment to the two girls, who wore white demi-tollette cotsumes.

"You look delightful," she said. "When all is said and done, we women should never despise our wardrobe. That marvelous lighthouse had one grave defect in my eyes. It was dreadfully callous to feminine requirements."

Here was a woman rejuvenated, restored to her natural surroundings. They accounted for the subtle change in her by the fact that they had seen her hitherto under unfavorable conditions. Even Pyne, not wholly pleased with her in the past, found his critical judgment yielding when she apologized sweetly to Lady Margaret for her tardiness.

"There were two little children saved from the wreck. Poor little mites, how they revelled in a hot bath! I could not leave them until they were asleep."

"I needed two hot baths," said Pyne. "No. 1 dug me out of the shell, and No. 2 helped me to recognize myself."

During dinner there was much to tell and to hear. Mrs. Vansittart said little, save to interpose a word now and then when Constance or Enid would have skimmed too lightly the record of their own services.

They did not hurry over the meal. All were in the best possible spirits, and the miseries of the Gulf Rock might never have existed for this lively company were it not that four among them bore clear tokens of the deprivations they had endured.

A waiter interrupted their joyous chatter at its highest. He bent over Mr. Traill and discreetly conveyed some communication.

"I am delighted," cried the millionaire heartily. "Show him in at once."

He rose from his chair to do honor to an unexpected guest.

"You will all be pleased to hear," he explained, "that Mr. Brand is ashore, and has come to see us."

Mrs. Vansittart stifled the cry on her lips. The slight color which had crept into her pale cheeks yielded to the deathly hue. It chanced that the others were looking expectantly towards the door and did not notice her.

Brand entered. In acknowledging Mr. Traill's cordial welcome he smilingly explained his presence.

"My superiors sent me emphatic orders to clear out," he said, "so I had no option but to obey. I conveyed Mr. Emmett to suitable quarters and hastened home, but found that the girls were playing truant. My housekeeper insisted that I should eat, else she would not be satisfied that I still lived, but I came here as quickly as possible."

At that instant his glance, traveling from one to another of those present, fell on Mrs. Vansittart.

He stood as one petrified. The kindly words of his host, the outspoken glee of the girls at his appearance, died away in his ears in hollow echoes. His eyes, frowning beneath wrinkled brows, seem to ask if he were not the victim of some unnerving hallucination. They were fixed on Mrs. Vansittart's face with an all-absorbing intensity, and his set lips and clenched hands showed how utterly irresistible was the knowledge that, indeed, he was not deceived—that he was gazing at a living, breathing personality, and not at some phantom product of a surcharged brain.

She, too, yielding before the suddenness of an ordeal she had striven to avoid, betrayed by her laboring bosom that she was under the spell of some excitement of overwhelming power.

She managed to gain her feet. The consciousness that Constance, Enid, Lady Margaret even, were looking at her and at Brand with amazed anxiety, served to strengthen her for a supreme effort.

"Mr. Stephen Brand—and I—are old acquaintances," she gasped. "He may misunderstand — my presence here—to-night. Indeed—in this instance—I am not to blame. I could not—help myself. I am always—trying to explain—but somehow—I never succeed. Oh'"

With an agonized sigh she swayed listlessly and would have fallen had not Pyne caught her.

But she was desperately determined not to faint—there. This was her world, the world of society. She would not yield in its presence.

Her eyes wandered vaguely, helplessly, from the face of the man towards the others. Constance had hastened to her assistance, and the knowledge that this was so seemed to stimulate her to a higher degree. With fine courage she grasped the back of a chair and summoned a wan smile to her aid.

"You will forgive me—if I leave you," she murmured. "I am so tired—so very tired."

She walked resolutely towards the door. Brand drew aside that she might pass. He looked at her no more. His wondering daughter saw that big drops of perspiration stood on his forehead.

Mr. Traill, no less astonished than the rest offered to conduct Mrs. Vansittart to her room.

"No," she said, "I will go alone. I am used to it now, after so many years."

There was a ring of heartfelt bitterness in her voice which appealed to more than one of the silent listeners.

As the door closed behind her, Brand seemed to recover his senses.

"I must ask your pardon, Mr. Traill," he said, quietly. "I assume that the lady who has just left us did not expect to see me here to-night. It would be idle to deny that the meeting was a shock to both of us. It revived painful memories."

Mr. Traill, scarce knowing what he said, so taken aback was he, exclaimed hastily:

"Mrs. Vansittart claimed you as an old acquaintance. The odd thing is that you, at any rate, did not discover that fact earlier."

The lighthouse-keeper looked round the table. He saw pain in many eyes, but in Pyne's steady gaze there was encouragement.

"Mrs. Vansittart!" he said slowly. "Is that her name? I did not know. How should I, the recluse, hear of her? And in your first message to the rock you called her Etta. When I knew her her name was Nanette, for the lady who calls herself Mrs. Vansittart was my wife, is yet for aught I know to the contrary."

"Father!" Constance clung to him in utmost agitation. "Do you mean that she is my mother?"

"Yes, dear one, she is. But let us go now. I fear my home-coming has brought misery in its train. I am sorry indeed. It was wholly unexpected. Poor Nanette! She ever deceived herself. I suppose she hoped to avoid me, as if fate forgot the tears in the comedy of life."

"Can I not go to her?" asked Constance, white-faced and trembling.

"No, my child, you cannot. Has she claimed you? She cast you off once. I might have forgiven her many things—never that. Come, Enid! What need for your tears? We faced worse troubles together three days ago, and you, at any rate, can look forward to happiness. Good-by, Lady Margaret, and you, too, Mr. Traill. I will see you to-morrow, I hope. Forgive me for my unconscious share in this night's suffering."

## CHAPTER XVII.

### MRS. VANSITTART GOES HOME

Stephen Brand and the two girls passed silently down the broad stairs of the hotel unaccompanied by any of the others. There was nothing incomprehensible in this, nor any savor of discourtesy.

In the first place, Mr. Traill was so profoundly shocked by the lighthouse-keeper's revelation that he collapsed into a chair and remained there, bowed and wordless, for many minutes. Both Pyne and Stanhope did move towards the door, but Enid, watchful, self-sacrificing, eager to save those she loved from further pain, telegraphed an emphatic order to Stanhope to remain where he was, and Pyne murmured to him:

"Guess she's right, anyhow. We'll all feel a heap better in the morning."

The person who exhibited the clearest signs of distress was Lady Margaret. Her position was one of extraordinary difficulty. Three of the actors in the breathless scene which had been sprung on her with the suddenness of an explosion were absolute strangers in her life before that evening.

Brand she knew, indeed, but only by sight. She had met Constance and Enid occasionally, at arm's length, so to speak, regarding them truly as dangerous young persons where marriageable sons were concerned. Enid had justified her suspicions, and her ladyship had yielded so far as to give her approval to an engagement she could not prevent.

Circumstances had conspired to force her hand. Stanhope, being an outspoken young man, had made no secret of his desperate resolve to rescue Enid, so the newspapers supplied the remainder of the romance, and even Lady Margaret herself had contributed to it under the magnetic influence of the hour.

It was one thing, however, to be thrilled with the adventures of the rock-bound people, but quite another to figure prominently in connection with a social scandal of the first magnitude. She knew Penzance too well to hope that the incident would sink into oblivion. Obviously, the matter could not rest in its present stage. She must expect disagreeable disclosures, significant head-shakings of those who knew little and wanted to know more. All the tea-table artillery of a small town would be focused on her defensive position were she loyal to the girl whom her son had chosen as his helpmate.

This same son, too, after he had recovered from the amazement of Mrs. Vansittart's dramatic departure and Brand's admission, betrayed a composure that was distinctly irritating.

"You won't mind if we smoke, mother," he said, "The situation requires tobacco. Don't you feel like that, Pyne?"

"If Lady Margaret doesn't object, I admit that different sorts of poison might act as tonics," answered Pyne. "Here, uncle, try a brandy and soda. Lady Margaret, a glass of champagne. I've been expecting a disturbance, but didn't look for it to-night."

"Why do you say that, Charlie?" asked Mr. Traill, rising and stretching his limbs as a man who tests his bones after a heavy fall.

"It was hanging around, just as one prophesies a storm after an electrical feeling in the air. Mrs. Vansittart recognized Brand, and made her calculations accordingly. Let us give her the credit due to her. As soon as she discovered him, the marriage project was off."

"I had that kind of impression myself. Glad I mentioned it to you, now."

"Of course you are. I'll bet any reasonable sum that Mrs. Vansittart intended to leave Penzance to-morrow as soon as she had made you understand that she could not, under any circumstances, become my aunt."

A ghost of a smile flitted across Mr. Traill's face. His nephew's way of putting things was delightfully unequivocal.

"What we are apt to lose sight of," continued Pyne, "is the manner in which Brand received what must have been a staggering blow. He met his wife to-night after a separation of more than twenty years. And how he took it! When he spoke, it was really in her behalf. The thing is too amazing. Of course, now that the thunder and lightning have started, the sky will clear all the sooner."

"Unhappily, such affairs do not arrange themselves so readily," snapped Lady Margaret. She was becoming more angry with each wave of reflection. "Young men like you do not realize the effect of such—such unpleasant exposures on family life. How will the early history of her parents affect the future of Constance Brand? As for the other girl—"

Her ladyship threw up her hands in helpless abandonment. To her mind, the adoption of poor Enid, the sea-waif, assumed a darker appearance now that Brand's matrimonial adventures revealed sinister features.

Jack Stanhope caught her by the shoulder.

"Mother," he cried, "before you say another word let me tell you something you ought to know. Enid is Mr. Traill's daughter!"

Now this good woman loved her son dearly. All her thoughts were of him and for him. Her look of blank incredulity yielded to the confirmation she saw writ on all three faces.

She burst into tears.

"Apparently I am the last person to be taken into anybody's confidence," she sobbed.

"Madam," said Mr. Traill, bending over her, "in this instance, at least, you have no cause to feel aggrieved. Neither the girl herself, nor her sister by adoption, nor Mrs. Vansittart, to whom, until the past half-hour, I considered myself to be engaged, is aware of the undoubted fact which your son has just told you. Let me say that I, as her father, am proud to think she has won the affections of such a man as Stanhope. There is no reason why you, his mother, should not be equally satisfied with the pedigree and prospects of my daughter."

His calm assumption of a rank equal if not superior to her own was convincing to a woman of her temperament. Assuredly that evening was a memorable one to her ladyship. The repose of Vere de Vere was rudely shocked for once. Nevertheless, the knowledge that her lifelong ambition had been realized in a way little dreamed of by any of those most concerned was in itself consoling. Mr. Traill, quite unconsciously, loomed large in the social eye of Penzance, and the widowed lady had not been so long withdrawn from the wealth-worshiping world of London as to be wholly unleavened with the worship of the golden calf.

So it was with quickened interest that she set herself to listen to the story of Enid's parentage, and, if her fear of local gossip-mongers shrank as her perception of Enid's real social position increased, much may be forgiven to the motherly sentiment that no wife can be too good for an excellent son.

Meanwhile Brand and the sorrow-laden girls, ushered by obsequious servants to the entrance-hall, were constrained to comfort themselves with true British phlegm in view of the interest caused by their appearance.

The hour was not late, about half-past nine. Even whilst the ball porter was summoning a cab the news spread, within and without that the lighthouse-keeper and his daughters, whose exploits filled the minds of all men, were standing near the door.

Several people, complete strangers, came to them and offered warm congratulations. A smart journalist pressed forward and wove his own complimentary utterances into an interview. A crowd gathered quickly on the pavement. Policemen, those marshalls of every English demonstration, cleared a path for them through the throng. So, with smiling words on their lips and anguish in their hearts, they made a triumphal exit. How little could the friendly enthusiasts who cheered them realize that these three had been atrophied by the deadly malevolence of fate in the very hour when a great achievement had ended happily.

Enid suffered almost as keenly as Brand and his daughter. Their joys and sorrows were hers. The startling nature of Brand's avowal rendered it difficult for either Enid or Constance to piece together certain fragmentary memories of Mrs. Vansittart's odd behavior during her enforced sojourn on the rock. So thoroughly had she shattered those dimly outlined impressions by the quietly vivacious charm of her manner at dinner that they both experienced a jumble of sensations. A terrified woman, in wet and torn clothing, cowering in the gaunt interior of a storm-girt lighthouse, is a very different being when attired in expensive garments and surrounded by the luxuries of a first-class hotel.

It was a relief to drive to their cottage in silence, yet, so easily moulded is our human clay, it was a greater relief when the tension of the noisy rattle of the cab was relaxed. It cost some effort to assure Mrs. Sheppard, a buxom, motherly soul of sixty or thereabouts, that they could not possibly eat any supper. The effort was forthcoming. They pleaded weariness, and at last they were alone.

Constance knelt by her father's side when he dropped listlessly into the armchair placed in his accustomed corner.

"Now, dad," she said, bravely unemotional, "there will be no more tears. Tell me all that I ought to know."

Enid drew a hassock to his feet and seated herself there, clasping her hands about her knees.

"Whatever she did I am sorry for her," said the girl decisively. "And she cannot have been a really bad woman, dad, or you would not have loved her once."

Brand sighed deeply. His strong will had deserted him for a little while. He shrank from the ordeal before him. Why should he be called on to sully the mirror of his daughter's innocence by revealing to her the disgrace of her mother?

Constance caught something of the dread in his soul.

"Don't tell me if it hurts you, dad. I am content to bear more than I have borne to-night if it lessens your sufferings," she whispered.

He placed an arm around each of them.

"It is God's will," he said, "that I should have to face many trials at a period when I expected nothing but some few years of quiet happiness."

"Nothing in this world can part us from you," said Constance.

"Oh, nothing," agreed Enid solemnly nestling closer. Her earnestness was helpful. He smiled wistfully.

"You forget, Enid, that there is a grave chance of you, at any rate, leaving me for another," he said.

She blushed.

"That is the worst of girls getting married," she protested. "They are supposed to be delighted because they are going to live with strange people. Girls who are of that mind cannot be happy at home. If I thought that being married to Jack implied separation from you and Constance—"

"You would give him up and weep your eyes out." He pressed her pouting lips together as he went on: "Now, my dear ones, I wish both of you to be prepared for very unexpected changes. Two most important events in your lives have taken place within a few hours. Constance, if you saw your mother to-night, Enid also saw her father. I have known for two days that Enid's father is Mr. Traill."

For an instant, it must be confessed, Constance and Enid alike feared that the mental and physical strain he had undergone had temporarily deranged him. It was not sheer incredulity but real terror he saw in their eyes. Somehow, their self-effacement in his behalf touched him more keenly than anything else had done during this troubled period.

He bowed his head. A strong man in agony cannot endure the scrutiny of loving eyes.

"Enid," he said brokenly, "my words to you must be few. Good fortune needs but slight explanation. The proofs of my statement I do not possess, but Mr. Traill's letter to me could not have been written by such a man if he were not sure of his facts. Here it is. Read it aloud."

He handed her her father's plain-spoken communication. Constance, incapable of deeper depths of amazement than those now probed, looked over her sister's shoulder. Together they deciphered the somewhat difficult handwriting of a man whose chief task for years had been to sign his name.

This drawback was good in its result. They persevered steadily to the end. Then Enid, the comforter, broke down herself.

"It cannot be true, dad," she cried. "I have been one of your daughters all my life. Why should I be taken from you now?"

"I believe it is quite true," said Brand quietly and the need there was to console her was beneficial to himself. "Mr. Traill speaks of proofs. You have met him. I exchanged barely a word, a glance, with him, but it is not believable that he would make these solemn statements without the most undeniable testimony."

"Indeed, Enid," murmured Constance, "it sounds like the truth, else he would never have spoken so definitely of my father's claim on your affections."

Brand stroked the weeping girl's hair.

"One does not cry, little one, when one is suddenly endowed with a wealthy and distinguished relative. Now, I did not spring this revelation on you without a motive. If a cleavage has to come let us, at least, face every consideration. Providence, by inscrutable decree, ordained that my wife and I should meet after twenty-one years. That cannot have been a purposeless meeting. In my careless youth, when I assigned all things their scientific place, I have scoffed at presentiments and vague portents of coming evils. I retract the immature judgment then formed. During the height of the hurricane, when I feared the very lantern would be hurled into the sea, I was vouchsafed a spiritual warning. I could not read its import. These things baffle a man, especially one whose mind leans toward materialism. Nevertheless, I knew, though not in ordered comprehension, that my life was tending towards a supreme crisis. As the storm died, so I became normal, and I attributed a glimpse of the unseen to mere physical facts. I was wrong. The coming of that ill-fated vessel was heralded to me. I lacked the key of the hidden message. Now I possess it. On board that ship, Constance, was your mother. How strange that her advent should be bound up also with the mystery of Enid's parentage?"

"Father, dear, if you can bear it, tell me of my mother. She knew me, and that is why she asked me to kiss her."

"She asked you to kiss her?" Each word was a crescendo of surprise.

"Yes. One night she came to me. Oh, I remember. She wished Mr. Pyne to telegraph to his uncle. When he quitted us to take the message she, too—how weird it all seems now—admitted that she experienced something of the intuitive knowledge of the future you have just spoken of."

"I am not surprised. Poor Nanette! She was always a dreamer, in a sense. Never content, she longed for higher flights. She was a woman in ambition 'ere she ceased to be a child. When I married her, she was only eighteen. I was ten years older. My thought was to educate her to a somewhat higher ideal of life than the frivolities of a fashionable world. It was a mistake. If a girl harbors delusions before marriage the experience of married life is not a cure but an incentive. A less tolerant man would have made her a safer husband."

Constance would listen to nothing which would disparage him.

"I hate to be unjust to her even in my thoughts, but where could she have found a better husband than you, dad?"

"Millionaire indeed!" protested Enid, breaking in with her own tumultuous thoughts. "I would not exchange you for twenty millionaires."

(To be continued)

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