

## CHAPTER XIII

### BEFORE THE DAWN

DISCIPLINE slackened its bonds that night. For one thing Mr. Emmett fell ill. Although inured 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 second officer mustered the night watch.

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

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“Vere’s de goot of blayin’ at moundin’ 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.

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

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

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

"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 store-room."

"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 weaklings and summon every sober man to help."

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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 whisky. 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 might 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."

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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 joined 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."

"That is quite reasonable. Any ordinary commotion has room to spread itself in the tide-way. Here the tide is broken up into ocean rivers, streams with boundaries as definite as the Thames. The main body sweeps up into the bottle-neck of the Channel. Another tributary comes round the north of the Scilly Isles and runs into the tidal stream again exactly at this point. The result often is that whilst little pleasure boats can safely run out into the Bay from Penzance there is a race over the rock that would break up a stranded battle-ship."

"Say, do you like this kind of life?"

"I have given my best years to it."

Pyne was smoking a pipe, one which Brand lent him. The tobacco was a capital substitute for food, especially as he had established a private understanding with Elsie and Mamie that they were to waylay him when possible and nibble a piece of biscuit he carried in his pocket.

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This arrangement was to be kept a strict secret from all, especially from Miss Constance and Miss Enid, whilst the little ones themselves did not know that the she-dragons whom Pyne feared so greatly gave them surreptitious doses from the last tin of condensed milk, retained for their exclusive benefit.

"Do you mind me saying that you are a good bit of an enigma?" he hazarded, between puffs.

"It may be so, but I like the service."

"Just so. I was never so happy as when I took a trip as fourth engineer on a tramp in the Gulf of Florida. But that didn't signify being tied to a long-nosed oiler for the remainder of my days."

"Are you a marine engineer?" inquired Brand, with some show of interest.

"I hold a certificate, just for fun. I had a mechanical twist in me and gave it play. But I am an idler by profession."

The lighthouse-keeper laughed, so naturally that the younger man was gratified. Polite disbelief may be a compliment.

"An idler, eh? You do not strike me as properly classed."

"It's the fact, nevertheless. My grandfather was pleased to invest a few dollars in real estate on the sheep farm where Manhattan Avenue now stands. My uncle has half; my mother had the other half."

"Are both of your parents dead?"

"Yes, years ago. Lost at sea, too, on my father's yacht."

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"What a terrible thing!"

"It must have been something like that. I was only six years old at the time. My uncle lost his wife and child, too, when the *Esmeralda* went down. It nearly killed him. I never thought he would marry again, but I suppose he's tired of being alone."

"Probably. By the way, now that you mention it, Mrs. Vansittart wished to see me yesterday. I could not spare a moment so I sent her a civil message. She told Constance that she thought she knew me."

"Hardly likely," smiled Pyne, "if you have passed nearly the whole of your life in lighthouses."

"I did not quite mean to convey that impression. I knew a man of her late husband's name, many years ago."

"She is a nice woman in some ways," said Pyne reflectively. "Not quite my sort, perhaps, but a lady all the time. She is not an American. Came to the States about '90, I think, and lost her hubby on a ranch in California. Anyhow, the old man is dead stuck on her, and they ought to hit it off well together. The Vansittart you knew didn't happen to marry a relative of yours?"

"No. He was a mere acquaintance."

"Odd thing," ruminated Pyne. "It has just occurred to me that she resembles your daughter, — your elder daughter, — not so much in face as in style. Same sort of graceful figure, only a trifle smaller."

"Such coincidences often happen in the human family. For instance, you are not wholly unlike Enid."

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"Holy gee!" said Pyne, "I'm too run down to stand flattery."

"Likeness is often a matter of environment. Characteristics, mannerisms, the subtle distinctions of class and social rank, soak in through the skin quite as sensibly as they are conferred by heredity. Take the ploughman's son and rear him in a royal palace, turn the infant prince into a peasant, and who shall say, when they reach man's estate, 'This is the true King.' You will remember it was said of the Emperor Augustus: *Urbem lateritiam invenit, marmoream reliquit.* 'He found the city brick, he left it marble.' The same noble result may be obtained in every healthy child properly educated."

The college-bred youth had not entered into any general conversation with Brand before. He had the tact now to conceal his astonishment at the manner of his friend's speech.

"You fling heredity to the winds, then?" he asked.

Brand rose to his feet, as was his way when deeply moved.

"Thank God, yes!" he cried.

A faint hoot came to them through the chortling of the wind.

"One of our visitors," shouted Brand, "and here we are gossiping as though snugly seated in arm-chairs at the fireside."

He hurried to the gallery, putting on an oil-skin coat.

"We *must* win through, and I guess I'll play ball with my father-in-law," quoth Pyne to himself as he followed.

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This time it was the *Falcon* alone, and she signaled with a lamp that it was deemed best to defer active operations until the following afternoon. The tide at dawn would not suit.

She went off, and the two men returned to the grateful shelter of the service-room.

Brand forbade further talk. Pyne must rest now and relieve him at three o'clock. The youngster needed no feather-bed: he was asleep in amazingly quick time. There is a supperless hunger which keeps people awake at night with a full larder in the house. The crude article differs from the cultured one so greatly that the man who hungers of necessity cannot sleep too much.

Thus far, the inhabitants of the lighthouse had been given quite enough nutriment to maintain life. There was no reason why any, even the most delicate, should be in real danger during the next forty-eight hours. But scientific reasoning and the animal instincts of mankind clash at times; in that lay the danger whose sullen shadow was deepening the lines in the corners of Brand's eyes.

Every hour, the officer on duty and some men of the watch visited him to report that all was well below. Some of the less drunken mutineers were pitifully sober now: the others were maudlin. Beyond the few words exchanged on this and kindred topics, he was left alone with his thoughts throughout the silent watch. Pyne slept heavily. Glancing at times at the youngster's stalwart figure and firm, handsome face, Brand found himself reviewing the buried years. He thought of the

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days when he, too, looked forth on the world with the stern enthusiasm of triumphant youth.

Long-forgotten ghosts were resurrected, shattered ideals built up again. He wondered, if the decades rolled back, would he decide, a second time, to abandon the fine career which lay at his feet and withdraw his grief and his talents to the seclusion of lonely rocks and silent headlands!

He had been happy, as men count happiness, during the decades. No cloud had arisen to mar the complete content of his life. The blossoming of the girls into delightful womanhood was an increasing joy to him, and it was passing strange that his little household should be plunged into a whirlpool of events in the very hour when their domesticity seemed to be most assured. The changeful moods of the elements found no counterpart in his nature. He, knowing the sea, did not expect it to remain fixed in one aspect. Whether in storm or calm the contrary would surely happen 'ere many days had passed. But life was a different thing. How came it that at the very close of so many years of association with the fickle ocean she should play such a trick on him and his daughters, enfold them with perils, snatch them from the quiet pleasures of the life they had planned for the future, and thrust upon them, even if they escaped with their lives, a publicity which he, at any rate, abhorred and even dreaded.

He harbored no delusions on this point. He knew that the drama of the Gulf Rock was now filling the columns of newspapers all over the world. He and his

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beloved girls would be written about, discussed, described in fulsome language, pictured by black and white artists, and eulogized by wide-awake editors eager to make much of a topic dear to the public mind.

On the rock they were undoubtedly in grave danger. Death confronted them — death at once extraordinary and ghastly. No tyrant of the Middle Ages, with all his paraphernalia for wringing truth or lies out of cringing wretches, had devised such a fate as threatened if the inconstant sea should choose to render the reef altogether unapproachable for many days. Yet, if help came, he and those dear to him were already steeped in unavoidable notoriety, bringing in its train certain vague disabilities which he had striven to avoid for over twenty years.

And all this because one fierce gale, out of the many he had endured, sprang into being at a moment when his mates were incapacitated and his daughters happened to pay him a surprise visit.

"It is an insane freak of fortune," he muttered, "so incomprehensible, so utterly out of focus with common events, that if I were a superstitious man, I should regard it as betokening the approach of some great epoch in my life. Surely, a merciful Providence would not bring my girls here to subject them to the lingering torture of hunger and thirst. I must not think of it further. That way lies madness."

There was at least one other troubled soul on the rock which divined some sinister portent in the storm. Mrs.

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Vansittart, even at this moment, was staring into the black void with questioning eyes.

He resolutely threw back his head as if he would hurl into the outer darkness the gibbering phantom which whispered these words of foreboding. Although the lamp needed no attention just then, he climbed to the trimming stage merely to find relief in mechanical action. He carefully examined the adjustment, and, to judge how the weather was shaping, went out into the gallery to look at the distant lights.

The three quick flashes of the Seven Stones Lightship were very clear. That was a good sign. The wind came from that quarter, and, blustering though it was, driving gigantic waves before it into the loud embrace of the reef, it maintained the good promise of the last few hours.

Seeking the comparative shelter of the east side, he gazed steadily at the Lizard. Its two fixed electric beams, nearly in line with the Gulf Rock, were dull and watery. A local squall of rain was sweeping down from the land. Changeable, threatening, unsettled — the meteorologist might apply any of these terms to the prevalent conditions.

Far out in the Channel he saw the twinkling mast-head lights of several steamers. Blow high or low, mails must travel and vessels put to sea. On such a night, at other times, he would re-enter the lighthouse with a cheery sense of its comfort and home-like aspect. Now he dreaded the brilliant interior of the service-room. Its garish aspect ill accorded with the patient

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misery, the useless repinings, the inebriate stupor which crouched beneath. If he and those committed to his charge were to be saved, either the sea must be stilled or another miracle of the loaves and fishes enacted.

There, alone on the gallery, amidst the din of howling wind and ceaseless plaint of the waves, he seemed to be apart, cut off from the sufferings within. He lifted his eyes to the sombre arch of the heavens. Men said the age of miracles had passed. Pray God it might not be so!

When Brand went out, the sudden rush of cold air through the little door leading to the balcony aroused Pyne.

That young gentleman was rudely awakened from a seriously vivid dream. He fancied that Constance and he were clinging to the tail of an enormous kite, which had been made to hover over the rock by a green imp seated in an absurdly small boat.

They were solemnly advised by other gnomes, imps with sparkling, toad-like eyes, to entrust themselves to this precarious means of escape, but the instant they dropped off the ledge of the gallery their weight caused the kite to swoop downwards. The resultant plunge into the ocean and Constance's farewell shriek were nothing more terrifying than the chill blast and whistle of the air current admitted by Brand. But Pyne did not want to go to sleep again. He did not like emerald-hued spirits which arranged such unpleasant escapades.

He straightened his stiff limbs and sat up.

He was about to feel in a pocket for his pipe — he

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experienced the worst pangs of hunger after waking in such fashion — when he saw a woman's head and shoulders emerging out of the stairway.

At first he thought it was Constance, and he wondered why she had muffled her face in the deep collar of a cloak, but the visitor paused irresolutely when her waist was on a level with the floor.

She uttered a little gasp of surprise.

"You, Charlie?" she cried. "I thought you slept in the kitchen?"

"No, Mrs. Vansittart," he said. "I am assistant-keeper and I am here most all the time with Mr. Brand. But what in the name of goodness —"

"I was restless," explained the lady hurriedly. "If I remained another minute among those women I should have screamed aloud. How peaceful you are here. Where is Mr. Brand?"

"Guess he's gone outside to squint at the weather. But come right in. I can offer you a chair. Mr. Brand wants to see you, and this is a quiet time for a chat."

"How does he know me? What did he say?"

Mrs. Vansittart pressed her left hand to her breast. With the other she kept the high collar over her mouth and cheeks. Pyne could only see her eyes, and the alarmed light that leaped into them increased his astonishment at her unexpected presence.

"It seems to me," he answered, "that if you just walk up four more steps and sit down you can ask him all those things yourself."

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"Were you speaking of me to him."

"I did happen to mention you."

"And he said he knew me?"

"No, ma'am. He said nothing of the sort. But, for mercy's sake, what mystery is there about it?"

"Mystery! None whatever. I was mistaken. I have never met him. I came now to explain that to him. Oh—"

She dived suddenly as the gallery door opened. Brand caught a fleeting glimpse of her vanishing form.

"Who was that?" he asked.

Pyne had found his pipe and was filling it with tobacco.

"Mrs. Vansittart," he answered.

"Paying her long-deferred visit, I suppose. She chose a curious hour."

"So I thought. But she just popped her head in to tell you that she didn't know you at all."

Brand smiled.

"Poor lady!" he said. She, like the rest of us, is perturbed and uneasy. I imagine she is of a somewhat hysterical temperament."

"That's so," agreed Pyne.

There were puzzling discrepancies in Mrs. Vansittart's explanation of her untimely appearance. Evidently, she did not expect to meet him there. She thought she would find the lighthouse-keeper alone. The ready deduction presented itself that when she did encounter Brand she did not wish any third person to be present at the interview.

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That Constance's father had no cause to look at matters in the same light he was quite certain. Anyhow, it was not his affair, and he declined to trouble his head about Mrs. Vansittart's vagaries.

So the young philosopher lit his pipe and delivered a dictum on the sex.

"Some women," he said, "are made up of contradictions. She is one. I have known her for some time and I thought nothing could phaze her. But there must be a sort of society crust over her emotions, and the wreck broke it. Now, for my part, I like a woman with a clear soul, one in whose eyes you can catch the glint of the inner crystal."

"They are rare," said Brand.

"I suppose so. Indeed, it used to be a mere ideal of mine, built up from books. But they exist, and they are worth looking for."

He waited, lest perchance the other man should take the cue thus offered, but Brand, for the twentieth time, was poring over the records of the days which followed the hurricane reported by a former keeper. The American pursed his lips.

"He has had a bad time with a woman once in his life," he mused. "It must have been Constance's mother, and that is why he doesn't believe in heredity. Well, I guess he's right."

Had he seen Mrs. Vansittart cowering on her knees outside her bedroom door, he might have found cause for more disturbing reflections. She was crying softly, with her face hidden in her hands.



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"Oh, I dare not, I dare not!" she moaned. "I am the most miserable woman in the world. It would have been better if I had gone down with the vessel. The Lord saved me only to punish me. My heart will break. What shall I do? Where shall I hide?"

And her sobbing only ceased when the noise of ascending footsteps drove her into the company of sorrowful women who would nevertheless have forgotten some of their own woes did they but realize her greater anguish.

CHAPTER XIV

THE WAY THEY HAVE IN THE NAVY

"SOME people are never satisfied," said Pyne, whilst he helped the cooks by smashing a ham bone with a hammer. The bone had been picked clean of meat and marrow on the first day after the wreck, but it occurred to Enid that if it were broken up and boiled she might procure some sort of nourishment for the two children, who were fast running down in condition.

"What is the matter now?" inquired Constance, whose attentive eyes were hovering between the cooking stove and a distilling kettle.

All the flour and biscuits, with the exception of two tins reserved for extremities, had been used. She was striving to concoct cakes of chocolate out of cocoa, an article more plentiful than any other food of its kind in stock, but water could not be spared, and eating dry powder was difficult to parched palates.

"There are two tug-boats, a trawler, and a Trinity service-boat not half a mile away," said Pyne, "and the cliffs at Land's End are peppered with people."

"Surely that is satisfactory. Dad told me that the