

The Pillar of Light

Nevertheless, he was the richer for a sovereign as he went out.

Mr. Traill helped himself to a whiskey and soda.

"Here's to the reconciliation of Brand and his wife," he said, with a lighter tone and more cheerful manner than he would have deemed possible five minutes earlier.

Pyne followed his example.

"Say, uncle," he cried, "here's a queer item. When I first met Constance I spoke of Mrs. Vansittart, and I called her my prospective step-aunt."

"A d—d silly name, too."

"Constance seemed to think that, or its feminine equivalent. She corrected me, 'You mean your fiancée's aunt,' she said."

"Oh, did she?"

"Yes, and here's to her being my fiancée's mother."

* * * * *

With the morning came doubt. A maid, who was given charge of the two children, told Pyne that Mrs. Vansittart had been greatly upset the previous evening. The girl was sure that the lady had passed nearly an hour in tears kneeling by the side of her bed. Then, having regained control of herself to some extent, she rang for the maid and asked at what time the first train left for London next day. She ordered her breakfast at an hour which seemed to indicate her intention to depart by that train, said that she would leave instructions with Mr. Pyne concerning the children, and gave the maid two letters which she had written. These

Enid Wears an Old Ornament

were to be delivered at nine o'clock. It was now nine o'clock. What was to be done with the letters?

As they were addressed to Pyne and his uncle respectively, he soon settled that point.

His letter read:

"Dear Mr. Pyne—I am leaving for London quite early, so I will not see you again in Penzance. I have supplied the little girls with all the garments they will need during the next few days. If, on inquiry, you ascertain that they have no relatives anxious, not merely willing, to take charge of them, I shall be most pleased to assume that responsibility. In that event, kindly write to me, care of my bankers.

Yours very sincerely,

E. VANSITTART."

The communication to his uncle was equally brief. Mr. Traill read it to him. It ran:

"Dear Mr. Traill—I cannot marry you. Please forgive me. I did not realize, when you honored me with your proposal, that an insuperable obstacle existed. That is all—a lame explanation—but complete so far as it goes. A woman who has wrecked her life finds it hard to choose her words.

Your sincere friend,

E. VANSITTART."

They discussed these curt notes during breakfast.

"I do not like their tone," said Mr. Traill, gravely. "They impress me as the hurried resolutions of a woman driven to extremities. Were it not for her request about the children, I should think what *you*

The Pillar of Light

thought last night, Charlie, when that policeman turned up."

"I must have telephoned my ideas to you mighty quick," was the retort.

"My dear boy, even at this moment we don't know what she intended to do. Why did she go out? What is the nature of her sudden illness? How comes it that she is at Brand's house?"

"I may be mistaken, but I think we will be given answers to all your questions in due time. Nothing really serious can be amiss, or we should have heard of it from Brand himself. Now, will you remain on guard here whilst I go out with Elsie and Mamie? The one thing that matters in their little lives this morning is that I shall hurry up and go doll-hunting with them."

"I will hold the fort until you return. You will not be long?"

"Perhaps half an hour. Whilst I am out I will make some inquiries as to the condition of our other friends of the *Chinook*."

"By the way, many of them must be destitute. It is my desire, Charlie, to pay the expenses of any such to their destination, and equip them properly for the journey."

"You are a first-rater, uncle, but it'll make your arm tired if you O.K. the bill all the time. Now here's a fair offer. Let me go halves."

"Be off, you rascal. You are keeping two ladies waiting."

With seeming anxiety to atone for the excesses of the

Enid Wears an Old Ornament

week, the weather that morning justified the claim of Cornwall to be the summer land of England. The sun shone from a blue sky flecked with white clouds. The waters of Mount's Bay sparkled and danced in miniature wavelets. The air was so mild, the temperature so equable, that it was hard to credit sea and wind with the havoc of the preceding days.

The Gulf Rock disaster did not stand alone in the records of the hurricane. Even the day's papers contained belated accounts of casualties on the coasts of Normandy, Holland, and far-off Denmark. But nowhere else had there been such loss of life, whilst renewed interest was evoked by the final relief of all the survivors.

Pyne's appearance outside the sitting-room was hailed with a yell. Notwithstanding her own perplexities, Mrs. Vansittart had taken good care that the children were well provided for. They were beautifully dressed, and the smiling maid who freed them from control when the door opened said that they might go out without jackets, the day was so fine.

He descended the stairs, with a cigar in his mouth and a delighted youngster clinging to each hand.

In the hall he encountered a dozen journalists waiting to devour him. They had failed to penetrate the strategic screen interposed by the head waiter. Now the enemy was unmasked and they advanced to the attack.

Pyne was ready for them. He had already outlined his defence.

The Pillar of Light

"Will one of you gentlemen, representing all, kindly give me a word in private?" he asked.

This was readily agreed to.

"Now this is the deal I will make," he said, when the two were isolated. "I will meet you all here in an hour's time. I will be interviewed, sketched, snapped, give you locks of my hair, my autograph, my views on the Far East, the next Presidential election, and the fiscal question, if you bind yourself to one thing."

"And that is?"

"Among the passengers saved from the *Chinook* is a Mrs. Vansittart. She is very ill, and is being cared for by Mr. Brand and his daughters. Make no reference to her in any way whatever beyond including her name in the published lists. Promise that and I'll talk a page."

"I am sure I can agree without consulting my colleagues," said the surprised reporter.

"Come along, kids," said Pyne. "I am delivered bound to the torture."

He passed out into the street, when Elsie's sharp eyes, searching for a shop, suddenly caught sight of Enid hurrying towards the hotel.

The child ran to meet her, and Enid, flushed with excitement, began to explain that Mrs. Vansittart was in bed, suffering from collapse and in a feverish state. The doctor's verdict was that she was in some danger, but would recover if carefully tended and kept in absolute quiet.

Enid Wears an Old Ornament

"Is Constance with her?" asked Pyne.

"Yes."

"And where is Mr. Brand?"

"He will be here soon. He asked me to call — and tell you — and Mr. Traill — what had happened."

Enid's speech was not prone to trip. Pyne's eyes gleamed into hers.

"Mr. Brand asked you to see my uncle?" he said cautiously.

"Yes," she faltered.

"Did he say anything else?"

"Yes — cousin."

"Let me take you right in. I guess it would make a sensation if I — here, Mamie, just hug Miss Enid good and hard for me, will you?"

Whilst the children waited in the hall, he accompanied the girl up the stairs and threw open the door of the sitting-room.

"Here is somebody you want to see, uncle?" he cried, and rejoined the little ones.

"Hoo-roosh!" he yelled. "Now let's buy a toy-store."

Enid and her father faced each other for some seconds in silent bewilderment. Then Mr. Traill rose and came near to her. She did not know what to do or say. This tall, stately man was one who should be dearer to her than anyone else in the world. She was his daughter, yet they were strangers one to the other.

"I — I —" How could she utter conventional words in such a moment? Her lips quivered and tears

The Pillar of Light

trembled in her eyes. Then he knew. The lace around her white neck was fastened with a little gold brooch bearing a four-leafed shamrock in emeralds. He looked at her with a profound reverence, and caught her by the shoulders.

"My dear," he murmured, "you are very like your mother."

"I am glad," she said, and kissed him.

CHAPTER XIX

THE HOUSE THAT STOOD UPON A
ROCK

A WEEK passed. In the fickle memory of the outer world the story of the Gulf Rock lighthouse was becoming mellow with age. Men now talked of war in Africa, of the Yellow Peril, of some baccarat squabble in a West-end club. But its vitality lingered in Penzance. There were side issues which Pyne's device had kept from the public ken, but which the town's folk pondered. Lady Margaret Stanhope, obeying her son's behests, tantalized her friends by smiling serenely and telling them nothing when they pestered her with questions. That is to say, she spoke not one word about the lady who was being nursed back to health in the lighthouse-keeper's cottage, but filled their souls with bitterness when she hinted at marvels concerning Constance and Enid.

In such a small place, where every man's affairs are canvassed by his neighbors, it was impossible to prevent an atmosphere of mystery from clinging to Mrs. Vansittart. Again, the gossips were greatly concerned about Enid. For a young woman "in her position"