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THE Pillar of Light

By Louis Tracy

Copyright by McLeod & Allen. CHAPTER XIV. THE WAY THEY HAVE IN THE NAVY

"Some people are never satisfied," said Pyne, while he helped the cooks by smashing a ham bone with a hammer. The bone had been picked clean out of 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 emergencies, 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 Falcon signalled this morning he was to expect a special effort to be made at half tide on the flow, and not on the ebb, as was arranged yesterday."

"Yes, that is all right as far as it goes," Pyne leaned forward with the air of one about to impart information of great value. "But the extraordinary thing is that whilst every man on board those vessels is thinking like steam how best to get into the lighthouse, we are most desperately anxious to get out of it. So you see, as I said before, some people—"

"Oh, dash!" cried Enid, "I've gone and burnt my finger all through listening to your nonsense." "Are there really many people on the cliffs?" demanded Constance. Pyne pounded the bone viciously. "I go out of my way to inform you of a number of interesting and strictly accurate facts," he protested, "and one of you burns her fingers and the other doubts my word. Yet if I called your skepticism unfeeling, Miss Enid would be angry."

"Don't know why kettle lids are so cantankerous," said Enid. "They seem to get hot long before the water does." "The hottest part of any boiler is on top," said Pyne. Enid smiled forgivingly. "I believe you would be cheerful if you were going to be electrocuted," she said, pensively. "Yet, goodness knows, it is hard to keep one's spirits up this morning. The sea is as bad as ever. What will become of us if we get no relief to-day?"

could be lifted bodily into the service-room and there utilized to seal the well. "What a howling menagerie will break loose here when they find out," thought Pyne. "It's a hard thing to say, but we ought to have the door open. Quite a stack of folks will need to be pitched outside." A comforting reflection truly, yet his face bore no token thereof, as he joined the lighthouse-keeper and several of the Chinook's officers and men on the gallery. The wind had started another couple of points to the north, and the sea, apart from the reef, was running in a heavy unbroken swell. That was the tantalizing part of it. Any ordinary ship's boat, properly managed, could live in perfect safety in the open. But the iron-toothed reef, with its tortuous channels and battling currents changing with every stage of the tide, surrounded the pier with an apparently impassable barrier, whilst the lighthouse itself offered as frowning a front as any of the black rocks which reared their weed-covered crests at low water.

Signals were being exchanged between the gallery and the Trinity tender. Brand seemed to be very emphatic in his answers to the communications made to him by Stanhope. "No, no," he muttered aloud, whilst the anxious man near him wondered why he was so impatient. "It is utterly impossible!" he said again. "No boat can do it—some one should stop him. It means certain loss of life!"

At last, becoming aware that his companions could not understand what was going on, he turned to them with the passionate explanation. "That brave fellow Stanhope says that, with two others at the helm, he intends to row near enough to the rock at half flood to endeavor to spring onto the ladder. I cannot persuade him that no man has ever yet succeeded in such a mad project. Look below, and see how each wave climbs around eighteen or twenty feet of the base. The thing is wildly impracticable. He will be swept off and smashed to pieces before our eyes, even if the boat escapes."

"If the boat can come near enough for that purpose, couldn't we heave a line aboard her?" asked one of the ship's officers. "We can try. I shall signal them to that effect. Anything is better than to sanction an attempt which is foredoomed to failure, and must result in the death of the man who tries it." Thereupon more energetic flag-waving took place. Finally Brand desisted in sheer exasperation. "I cannot convince him," he cried. "He has made up his mind. May the Lord preserve him from a peril which I consider to be a mortal one."

"Has he put forward any theory?" asked Pyne. "He was doing a lot of talking." "Yes," explained Brand, "he believes that a strong boat, rowed by the crew of the broken vessel, ought to watch her opportunity and jump close to the ladder on the backwash of a big wave, allowing its successor to lift her high enough for an active man to jump onto their lives. The rowers must pull for an hour or more, and the ladder as best he can climb to the chance of success in that way. He thinks, than in trying to make a fast line thrown by us, if it fell over the boat. It is all a question of time, he argues, and I have failed to convince him that not only he but his companions will be lost."

"Is there no chance?" inquired the second officer. "Look below," repeated Brand hopelessly, and indeed, when they obeyed him, craning their necks over the rail him, craning the seething cauldron to examine the granite tower tapered from them, no man could say that the lighthouse-keeper deplored Stanhope's decision without good reason. They understood matters a little better, perhaps, when, one by one, they re-entered the lantern, the Falcon having flitted away to make her final preparations. Brand asked them to note the nature of the nature of the pending undertaking.

"If I thought it would do any good to the suffering people I would gladly see them, enlivened by the news," he said. "I confess, however, I expect nothing but disastrous failure—and gentlemen—Lieutenant Stanhope and—gentlemen—engaged to be married to one of my daughters." What was to be said? They quitted him in silence that was the dominant note of their lives just then. Pyne alone remained. He wondered why alone man should be called on to endure so much. Though each of those present on the gallery was loyal to Brand's sorrowful request, it was impossible to prevent others from seeing that something of exceptional interest was in progress afloat and on the rock. Brand did not know that the officials of the Trinity House had only agreed to help Stanhope's hazardous project under compulsion. The sailor informed them that he was determined to carry out his scheme, with or without their assistance. So, when the Falcon, the tender, and a strong tug, hired by Mr. Trull, rounded the distant Carn du headland at eleven o'clock, the lighthouse-keeper felt that further protest was unavailing. It behooved him to take all possible measures to help the men who were about to dare so much to help him.

being swept through the door to instant death. Meanwhile, the three vessels had straggled close to the mooring buoy, which it will be remembered, lay in full view of the kitchen window. Constance gave them a casual glance, being versed in the ways of the sea, she instantly discovered that some unusual event was afoot. She called her sister's attention to the manoeuvres of the steamers; one, the Trinity tender, lay broadside on to the incoming tide. "They are lowering a boat, I declare," she announced, after they had watched the proceedings for a little while with growing curiosity. At a distance, nearly six hundred yards, it was difficult to discern exactly what was taking place. "No boat can live if it comes near the rock," cried Enid. And then a wild thought brought her heart to her mouth. "Oh, Connie!" she cried in a sudden access of terror, "I feel sure that Jack is doing something desperate to save us. Dad knows. They all know, but they would not tell us. That is why Mr. Pyne has not been near us for hours."

"It cannot be. No one would permit it. Father would never give his sanction. Enid, my dear one, why do you say such things? You frighten me!" But Constance's lips were bloodless, and her eyes dilated with the fear which she too, would faint deny. They were perched so high above the sea that the dancing hillocks of green water could not wholly obscure the stoutly built craft which bobbed into startling prominence round the stern of the tender. "It is, it is!" shrieked Enid. "Look, Connie! There, dear! Oh, dear! Is he the bow. Oh, dear! Oh, dear! Is he mad? Why don't they stop him? I cannot bear to look. Connie, tell me shall I see him drowned before my eyes?"

The girl was distraught, and her sister was in little better plight. Fascinated, speechless, clinging to each other like panic-stricken children, they followed the leaping boat with the glassy stare of those who gaze, open-eyed, at remorseless death. They scarce understood what was toward. As the boat, a strong craft, yet such a mere speck of stanch life in the tumbling seas, was steadily impelled nearer, they saw the tug lurch ahead of the other vessels until a line was thrown and caught by Stanhope, who instantly fastened it round his waist. The rowers wore cork jackets, but he was quite unimpeded. Bare-headed, with his well-worn trousers and a canvas cap, he had declined to hamper his freedom of movement with the cumbersome equipment so essential for anyone who might be cast adrift in that dreadful sea.

The girls even in their dumb agony, were fully conscious of a scurry of feet up and down the stairs. What did it matter? They paid heed to naught save the advancing boat, now deep in the trough of a wave, now perched precariously on a lofty crest. Whoever the rowers were, they trusted wholly to the instructions given by the gallant youth who peered so boldly into the wilderness ahead. The flying foam and high-tossed spray gave the lighthouse the semblance of alternately lifting and lowering its huge frame amidst the raring torrents that encircled it. Nerves of steel, that encircled it, were needed to meet those who would voluntarily enter that watery inferno.

Yet the men at the oars did not falter nor turn their heads. They pulled evenly and well, with the short, deep-stroke stroke of the fisherman, Stanhope, now that they were all most in the vortex where the waves met their regularity, produced a paddle wherewith to twist the boat's head to meet each turn and swirl. Stealthily the powerful tug-boat crept in the wake of the smaller craft, until it became clear to the girls' strained vision that watchful helpers, lashed in the vessel's bows, were manipulating another rope as a drag, thus helping the sailors' efforts to prevent his frail argosy from being swamped by a breaking sea.

Then a miracle did happen, a miracle of science. When the boat was yet two hundred yards away, Brand looking out from the gallery in stony despair, suddenly behaved as one possessed of a fiend. "Follow me!" he roared. "Come, every man!" He rushed into the lantern. As if he wanted wings rather than limbs, he swung himself by his hands to the floor of the service-room. Galvanized into activity, those who were with him on the ledge raced after him. They knew not what had happened. Their leader had spoken, and they obeyed. They stepped down, they pelted, taking the steep stairs with break-neck speed, until they reached the oil-room, with its thousands of gallons stored in great tanks. Big empty tins stood there, awaiting the next visit of the tender, and Brand wrenched the cover off the nearest cistern. He scooped up a tinful of the oil.

"Bring all you can carry," he shouted, and was wonderful in a man who had endured the privations and hardships of so many hours. They understood. Why had none of them thought of it earlier? In its cold granite depths the lighthouse carried that which had the power to subdue the roaring fury of the reef. The first man to reach the gallery after Brand was Pyne, who chanced to be nearest to him when the hubbub arose. He found the other man flinging handfuls of the oil as far to windward as the thick fluid would travel. "Quick!" gasped Brand. "Don't pour it out! It must be scattered." So the colza fell in little patches of smooth tranquility into the void beneath, and before Stanhope had pilot ed his boat half the remaining distance, the wave-currents surging against the rock ceased to toss their yellow manes so high, and the high-pitched masses of foam vanished completely. The seamen stationed in the entrance were astonished by the rapidity of the change. In less than a minute they found they were no longer blinded by the spindrift cast by each

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