

# THE PILLAR OF LIGHT

By Louis Tracy.

Author of "The Wreck of the Marconi" and "The Light of the Lighthouse".

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CHAPTER XI.

"It is quite true," said Constance gravely. "I suppose that the mysterious affinity between parents and long lost children which exists in story books is all nonsense in reality. No family could be more united and devoted to each other than we are, yet I am not my sister, and my father is hers only by adoption. He found her, half dying, drifting past this very rock, and before he could reach her he fought and killed a dreadful shark. We are very proud of that, Mr. Fyne. You see, he is our only relation. I don't know whether her father or mother, and my mother died when I was a baby."

"Great Scott!" cried Fyne.

He turned quickly toward the door. Mrs. Vanstarr, very pale, with eyes that looked unnaturally large in the faint light, stood there. For an instant he was startled. He had not seen Mrs. Vanstarr since they came to the rock, and he was shocked by the change in her appearance. He did not like her. His alert intelligence distrusted her, but it was not his business in life to select a wife for his uncle, as he put it, and he had always treated her with respectful politeness. Now, owing to some feeling aspect which he could not account for, some vague resemblance to another which he did not remember having noticed before, he viewed her with a certain expectant curiosity that was equally unintelligible to him.

She held out a scrap of paper.

"Mr. Trull is here," she said quietly.

"Here?" he repeated, wondering what she meant and perplexed by her icy, self-contained tone, while he thought it passing strange that she had no other greeting for him.

"Well," she said, "that is the best word I can find. He is near to us—as near as a steamer can bring him. Mr. Brand has received a signalled message. He wrote it out and sent it to me by a man. I inquired where you were and was told you were engaged in the kitchen."

For some reason Mrs. Vanstarr seemed to be greatly perturbed. Her presence put an end to the gaiety of the piece quite effectually.

The young man took the paper in silence.

Dear Madam—A signal just received from the Falcon runs as follows: "Mr. Cyrus T. Trull on board and sends his love to Mrs. and Charles. He will make every preparation for their comfort ashore and trusts they are hearing us well under inevitable hardships." Yours faithfully, STEPHEN DRAND.

Fyne strode to the door.

"I must see if I can't get Mr. Brand to answer the old boy," he cried. "Perhaps you have attended to that already."

She did not make way for him to pass.

"No," she said. "I came to seek you on that account. If not too late, will you tell your uncle that I do not wish to delay a moment in Penzance? He will please me most by arranging for a special train to await our arrival at the station."

"What's the hurry?" he demanded.

"A woman, whom, if you like, but a fixed resolve nevertheless."

"Will you travel in that rig-out?" he asked quizzically.

"It is an easy matter to call at a shop if we reach shore by daylight. Then I can purchase a cloak and hat to serve my needs; otherwise it is needless how I am attired. Will you do this?"

"Why, certainly."

She gave a little gasp of relief. In another instant Fyne would have gone, but Miss, who happened to glance through the window which opened toward the northwest, detained him.

"There is no hurry now, for sure," she said. "The Falcon is halfway to Cape Cod by this time. I do not suppose she will return until it is too dark to do more than signal important news very briefly."

"But this is important," cried Mrs. Vanstarr sharply. "It is of the utmost importance to me."

"I will be glad to be helped, madam," said Fyne civilly. "I don't see that I can help you, but I can't see that any time will be wasted."

The electric bell rang in the room, causing Mrs. Vanstarr to jump violently.

"Oh, what is it?" she screamed.

"My father is calling one of us up," explained Constance. "It may be a message from Jack. You go, Enid."

Enid hurried away. She had scarcely reached the next floor before Mrs. Vanstarr, who seemed to have made in full company, as if sweetly.

"Convey my deep obligations to Mr. Brand, won't you, Charles? Indeed, you might go now and write out the text of my message to your uncle. Some early opportunity of dispatching it may offer."

"All right," he said in the calm way which an affectionately concealed his feelings. "I'll do it."

"By no means. I came here quite unbidden. Miss Brand and I can chat for a little while. It is most worrying to be kept all day and all night in one little room. Even the change to another little room is grateful."

Fyne bowed, and they heard his steady tread as he ascended the stairs.

"Quite a nice boy, Charles," said Mrs. Vanstarr, coming forward into the kitchen, with the melody of queer-looking, beating, steaming contrivances.

"Yes, we think he is exceedingly nice," said Constance. She wondered why the other woman seemed always to stand in the shadow by choice. The strongest light in the darkest chamber came from the grate, and Mrs. Vanstarr deliberately turned away from it.

"If he goes well he will soon be my nephew by marriage," came on the girl's lips. "I called New York yesterday."

in order to marry his uncle in Paris. Rather a disastrous beginning to a new career, is it not?"

"I hope not, indeed. Perhaps you are surmounting difficulties at the commencement rather than at the end."

"It may be. I am so much older than you that I am less optimistic. But you did not grasp the significance of my words. I said I was to be married to Paris."

"Yes," said Constance, still at a loss to catch the drift of an announcement which Mrs. Vanstarr seemed so anxious to thrust upon her.

"Well, the Chicago was wrecked last night, or rather, early this morning. The name of the ship was not made known throughout the world until long after daybreak. It is quite impossible that Mr. Trull should have reached this remote corner of England from Paris in the interval."

For one moment the girl was puzzled. Then a ready solution occurred to her.

"Oh, of course, that is very simple. Mr. Trull was awaiting your arrival in Southampton, thinking to take you by surprise, no doubt. That is sure to be the explanation. What a shock the first telegram must have given him!"

"How did he ascertain that his nephew was alive?"

"The very best thing father did was to telegraph the names of all the survivors. I know that is so because I saw the message."

"Ah! He is a man of method. I suppose you are proud of him. I heard you say."

"I think there is no one like him in all the world. We are so happy at home that sometimes I fear it cannot last. Yet, thank God, there is no excuse for such nightmare terrors."

Mrs. Vanstarr cooed in her gentle way.

"Indeed, you have my earnest good wishes in that respect," she said. "Do we not owe our lives to you? That is an excellent reason for gratitude, if a selfish one. But some day soon you will be getting married and leaving the parental roof."

"I do not wish to die an old maid," laughed Constance. "yet I have not discovered a better name than my own up to the present."

She faded at this remark. Deeming her visitor to be a bundle of nerves, she jumped to the conclusion that the other woman ran into the world some far-fetched disarrangement of her own approaching marriage.

"Of course," she continued, affably tactful. "I will hold another view when the right man asks me."

"Were you in my place," murmured her visitor, apparently thinking aloud rather than addressing Constance, "you would not be fearful of misfortune? You would not read an omen of ill luck into this dramatic interruption of all our plans? After many years of widowhood I am about to be married again to a man who is admirable in every way. He is rich, distinguished in manner and appearance, a person of note not only in his native land, but on the continent. No woman of my years might desire a better match. Why could not the way be made smooth for me? Why should the poor Chinook, out of the hundreds of small steamers which cross the Atlantic yearly, be picked out for utter disaster? It is a warning—a threat from the gods!"

The unconquered bitterness of her tone moved the girl to find words of consolation.

"I would not question the ways of Providence in the least," she said. "Surely you have far more reason for thankfulness than for regret."

"Regret! I am not regretting, but I have gone through such trials that I am unnerved. There, child! Forgive me for troubling you. And—kiss me, will you, and say you wish me well?"

She moved nearer, as if driven by uncontrollable impulse. Constance, not prepared for such an outburst, was nevertheless deeply touched by this appeal for sympathy.

"I wish you all the joy and happiness which I am sure you deserve," she said, stooping to kiss the girl, who was shrinking back.

Mrs. Vanstarr burst into a paroxysm of tears and tottered toward the door.

"No, no," she gasped as Constance caught her by the arm. "Do not come with me. I am—doken. It will pass. For God's sake, let me go alone!"



Constance was deeply touched.

(To be continued.)

A New Bird.

The latest information regarding the progress of the scientific expedition which was sent to central Africa from London by the South Kensington museum some months ago for the purpose of conducting zoological research among the Mountains of the Moon is dated from Ruwenzori, the middle of June, at which time the explorers were still in that region, says the London Graphic. All the party were in excellent health. Having ascended for the first time two peaks of Ruwenzori which have an altitude of over 16,000 feet, the expedition was engaged at the time of writing in making collections in the range. The gigantic fruit eating bat, which is among the earlier zoological discoveries, has now reached England and is found to be new to science. The expedition is not expected to return to England until next year.

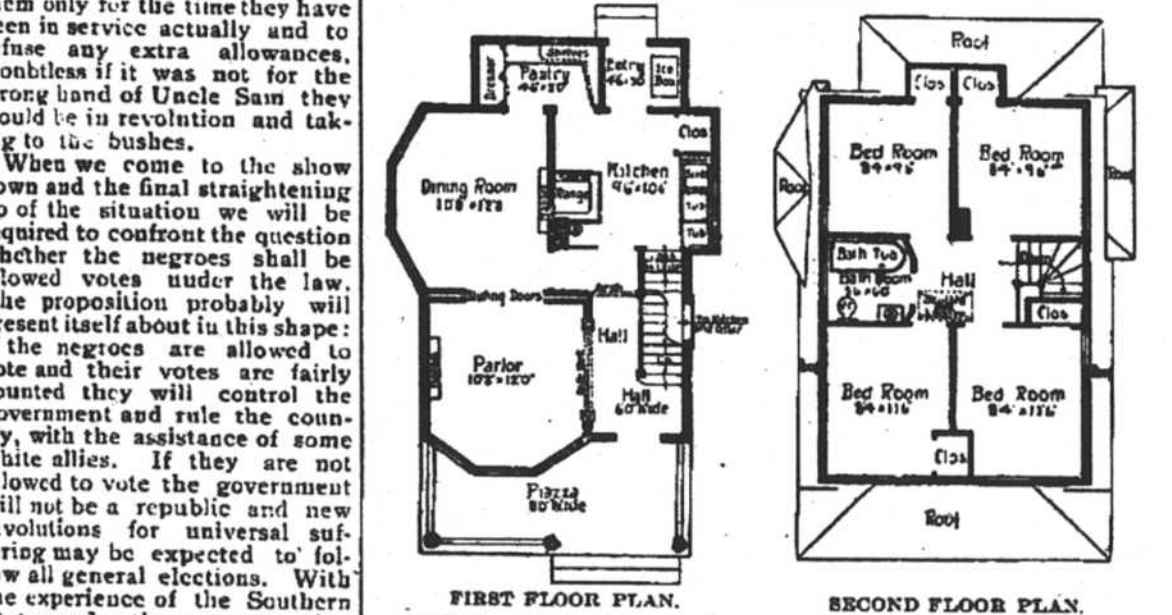
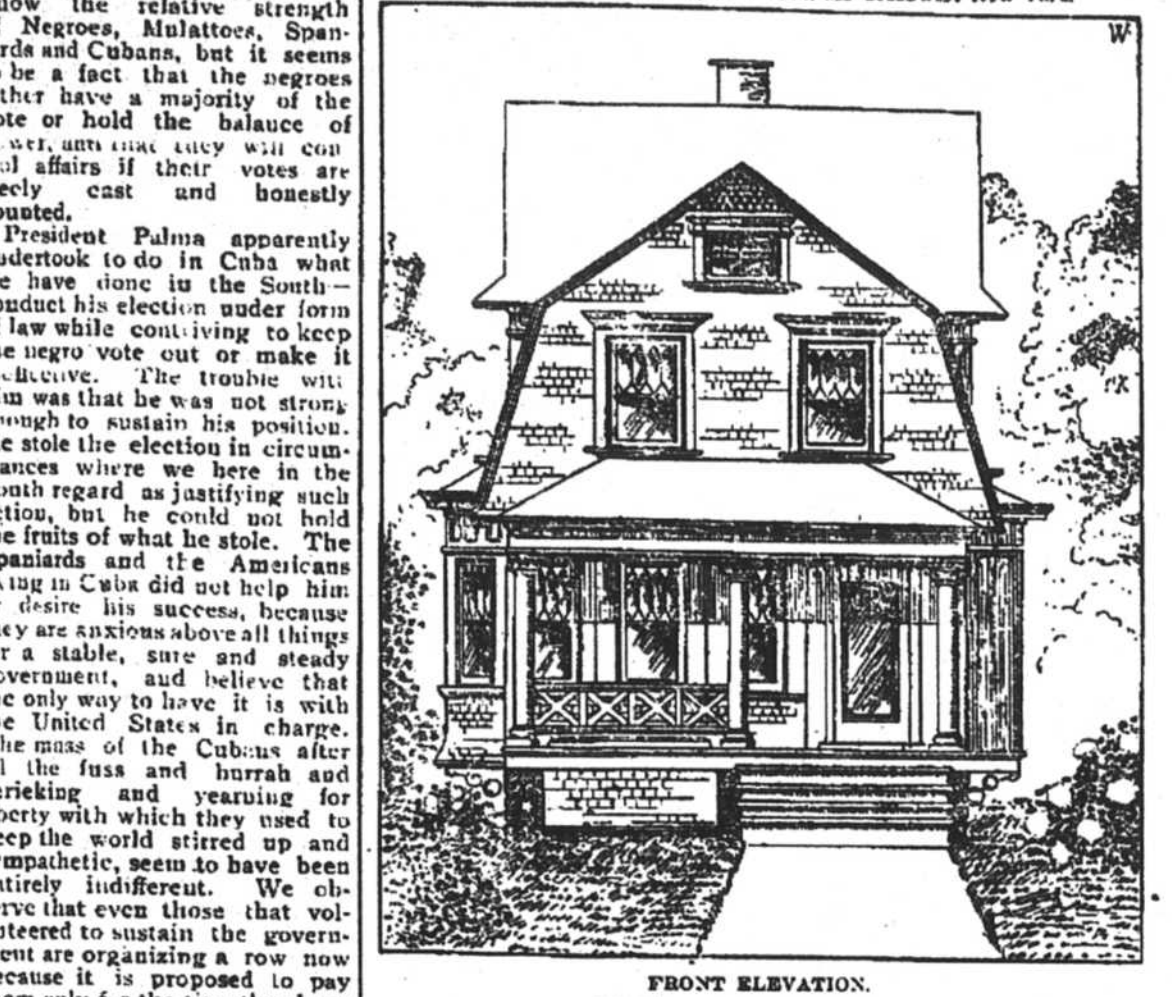
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