

# THE PILLAR OF LIGHT

... By ... **Louis Tracy,**  
Author of "The Wings of the Morning"  
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Indeed, the protection of the stout plate glass, so thick and tough that sea birds on a stormy night dashed themselves to painless death against it, was very welcome. Moreover, though neither of the girls would admit it, there was a sense of security here which was strangely absent when they looked into the abyss beneath the stone gallery. Constance, balancing a telescope, and Enid, peering through the fieldglasses, followed the progress of the Daisy in silence, but Brand's eyes wandered uneasily from the barometer, which had fallen rapidly during the past hour, to the cyclonic nimbus spreading its dark mass beyond the Seven Stones lighthouse. The sun had vanished seemingly for the day, and the indicator attached to the base of the wind vane overhead pointed now south-west by west. It would not require much further variation to bring about a strong blow from the true southwest, a quarter responsible for most of the fierce gales that sweep the English channel.

Nevertheless this quick darting about of the fickle breeze did not usually baffle the girls. At the worst the girls might be compelled to pass the night on the rock. He knew that the tug with the two relief men would make a valiant effort to reach the lighthouse at the earliest possible moment. When the men joined him the girls could embark. As it was the affair was spiced with adventure. Were it not for the mishap to the assistant keeper the young people would have enjoyed themselves thoroughly. The new air of the wind, too, would send the Daisy speedily back to port. This in itself justified the course he had taken. On the whole a doubtful situation was greatly relieved. His face brightened. With a grave humor not altogether artificial he cried:

"Now, Constance, I did not take you aboard as a visitor. Between us we ought to muster a good appetite. Come with me to the storeroom. I will get you anything you want and leave you in charge of the kitchen."  
"And poor me!" chimed in Enid.  
"Oh, you, miss, are appointed upper housemaid, and, mind you, no followers."  
"Mercy! I nearly lost my situation before I got it."  
"How?"  
"We met Jack Stanhope and asked him to come with us."  
"You asked him, you mean," said Constance.  
"And you met him, I meant," said Enid.  
"I don't care a pin how you treated Stanhope so long as you didn't bring him," said Brand, "though, indeed, he would have been useful as it turned out."

When lunch was ready they summoned him by the electric bells he had put up throughout the building. It gave them great joy to discover in the living room a code of signals which covered a variety of messages. They rang him downstairs by the correct call for "Meal served."  
It was a hasty repast, as Brand could not remain long away from the glass covered observatory, but they all enjoyed it immensely. He left them, as he said, "to gobble up the remains," but soon he shouted down the stairs to tell them that the Daisy had rounded Carn du. He could not tell them, not knowing it, that at that precise moment old Ben Pollard was frantically signalling to Lieutenant Stanhope to change the course of the small steam yacht he had commandeered as soon as the gale had blown through the town that the Gulf Rock was flying the "help wanted" signal.

The officials did not know that Brand was compelled by the snowstorm to use rockets. All the information they possessed was the message from Land's End and its time of dispatch. Jack Stanhope's easy going face became very strenuous indeed when he heard the news.

The hour stated was precisely the time the Daisy was due at the rock if she made a good trip. Without allowing for any possible contingency save disaster to the girls and their escort, he rushed to the mooring place of the ten-ton steam yacht Lapwing, impounded a couple of lounging sailors, fired up, stoked and steered the craft himself and was off across the bay in a quarter of the time that the owner of the Lapwing could have achieved the same result.

His amazement was complete when he encountered the redoubtable Daisy bowling home before a seven knot breeze. He instantly came round and ranged up to speaking distance. When he learned what had occurred he readily agreed to return to Penzance in order to pick up the relief lighthouse keepers and thus save time in transferring them to the rock.  
"In a word, as Enid Trevillion was safe, he was delighted at the prospect of bringing her back that evening, when the real skipper of the Lapwing would probably have charge of his own boat. There was no hurry at all now.

If they left the harbor at 3 o'clock, there would still be plenty of light to reach the Gulf Rock. Ben Pollard, glancing over his shoulder as the Daisy raced toward Penzance side by side with the Lapwing, was not so sure of

ducked snoots.  
"And"—  
"And say 'boo' to naughty little girls who won't let me complete my diary," shouted Brand. "Be off, both of you. Keep a lookout for the next ten minutes. If you see any signals from the mainland or catch sight of the Lancelot, call me."

They climbed to the trimming stage of the lantern, which was level with the external gallery. Obedient to instructions, they searched the Land's End and the wide reach of Mount's bay beyond Carn du. Save a scudding sail or two beating in from the Lizard and a couple of big steamers hurrying from the east—one a transatlantic transport liner from London—there was nothing visible. In the far distance the sea looked smooth enough, though they needed no explanation of the reality when they saw the irregular white patches glistening against the hull of a Penzance fishing smack.

"Oh, Connie, the reef!" said Enid suddenly in a low voice.  
They glanced at the turbid retreat of the tide over the submerged rocks. The sea was heavier, the noise louder, now that they listened to it, than when they arrived in the Daisy, little more than an hour earlier. Some giant force seemed to be wrestling there, raging against its bonds, striving feverishly to tear, rend, utterly destroy its invisible fetters. Sometimes, after an unusually impetuous surge, a dark shape, trailing witch tresses of weed, showed for an instant in the pit of the cauldron. Then a mad whirl of water would pounce on it with a fearsome spring and the fang of rock would be smothered ten feet deep.

For some reason they did not talk. They were fascinated by the power, the grandeur, the untamed energy of the spectacle. The voice of the reef held them spellbound. They listened mutely.

Beneath Brand wrote with scholarly ease:  
"Therefore I decided that it would best serve the interests of the board if I sent Bates and Jackson to Penzance in the boat in which my daughter"—he paused an instant and added an "s" to the word—"fortunately happened to visit me. As I would be alone on the rock, and the two girls might be helpful until the relief came, I retained them."

He glanced at the weather glass in front of him and made a note:  
"Barometer falling. Temperature higher."

In another book he entered the exact records. A column headed "Wind direction and force" caused him to look up at the wind vane. He whistled softly.

"S. W.," he wrote, and after a second's thought inserted the figure 6. The sailor's scale, ye landsman, differs from yours. What you term a gale at sea he joyfully hails as a fresh breeze. No. 6 is a point above this limit, when a well conditioned clipper ship can carry single reefs and topgallant sails in chase full and by. No. 12 is a hurricane. "Bare poles," says the scale.

Slowly mounting the iron ladder, he stood beside the silent watchers. The bay was nearly deserted. No sturdy tugboat was pouring smoke from her funnel and staggering toward the rock. Northwest and west the darkness was spreading and lowering.

He did not trouble to examine the reef. Its signs and tokens were too familiar to him. Its definite bellow or muttered threat was part of the prevailing influence of the hour or day. He had heard its voice too often to find an omen in it now.

"This time I must congratulate both of you," he said quietly.  
"On what?" they cried in unison, shrill with unacknowledged excitement.

"Ladies seldom if ever pass a night on a rock lighthouse. You will have that rare privilege."  
Enid clapped her hands.  
"I am delighted," she exclaimed.

"Will there be a storm, father?" asked Constance.  
"I think so. At any rate, only a miracle will enable the tug to reach us before tomorrow, and miracles are not frequent occurrences at sea."

"I know of one," was Enid's comment, with great seriousness for her. He read her thought.  
"I was younger then," he smiled.  
"Now I am fifty, and the world has aged."

CHAPTER V.

THEY descended into the service room.

"Let me see," said Enid. "It will be nineteen years on the 22d of next June since you found me floating serenely toward the Gulf Rock in a deserted boat?"  
"Yes, if you insist on accuracy as to the date. I might cavil at your serenity."

"And I was 'estimated' as a year old then? Isn't it a weird thing that a year old baby should be sent adrift on the Atlantic in an open boat and never a word of inquiry made subsequently as to her fate? I fear I could not have been of much account in those days."  
"My dear child, I have always told you that the boat had been in collision during the fog which had prevailed for several days previously. Those who were caring for you were probably knocked overboard and drowned."

"But alone, utterly alone! That is the strangeness of it. I must be an American. Americans start out to bustle for themselves early in life, don't they?"  
"Certainly in that respect you might claim the record."

Brand had not told her all the facts of that memorable June morning. Why should he? They were not pleasant memories to him. Why cumber her also with them? For the rest he had drawn up and read to her long ago a carefully compiled account of her rescue and the steps taken to discover her identity.

career with no such halo of glory," broke in Constance. "I am just plain English, born in Brighton, of parents not poor, but respectable. Mother died a year after my birth, didn't she, dad?"  
"You were thirteen months old when we lost her," he answered, bending over the clockwork attachment of the fog bell to wipe off an invisible speck of dust. Since his first term of service on the rock the light had changed from an occulting to a fixed one.  
"She is buried there, isn't she?" the girl went on. "How strange that amid our journeying we have never visited Brighton."

"If I were able to take you to her graveside, I would not do it," said Brand. "I do not encourage morbid sentiments even of that perfectly natural kind. Your mother to you, Constance, is like Enid's to her—a dear but visionary legend. In a degree it is always so between loved ones lost and those who are left. Truth, honor, work—these are the highest ideals for the individual. They satisfy increasingly. Happy as I am in your companionship, you must not be vexed when I tell you that the most truly joyful moment of my life was conferred when my little friend here first responded accurately to external influences."

He laid his hand on an object resting on a table by itself. It looked like an aneroid barometer, but the others knew it was the marine anemoscope to which he had devoted so many patient hours.  
"Is it in working order now?" asked Constance instantly, and Enid came nearer. Together they examined the small dial. It was equipped with an arrow headed pointer and marked with the divisions of the compass, but without the distinguishing letters.

These three understood each other exactly. By inadvertence the conversation had touched on a topic concerning which Brand was always either vague or silent. Both girls were quick witted enough to know that Constance's mother was never willingly alluded to either by the lighthouse keeper or by the elderly Mrs. Sheppard, who looked after them in infancy and was now the housekeeper of Laburnum cottage.

Constance was annoyed. How could she have been so thoughtless as to cause her father a moment's suffering by bringing up painful reminiscences! But he helped her, being master of himself.

He adjusted a switch in the instrument.  
"I had no difficulty in constructing a diaphragm which would intercept all sounds," he said. "The struggle came when I wanted an agent which would distinguish and register a particular set of sounds, no matter what additional din might be prevalent at the same time. My hopes were wrecked so often that I began to despair, until I chanced to read one day how the high tension induction coil could be tuned to disregard electrical influences other than those issued at the same pitch. My anxiety, until I had procured and experimented with a properly constructed coil, was very trying. I assure you."

"I remember wondering what on earth it was," volunteered Enid. "It sounded like a mathematical snake."  
"And I am sorry to say that even yet I am profoundly ignorant as to its true inwardness," smiled Constance.  
"Yet you girls delight in poets who bid you hearken to the music of the spheres. I suppose you will admit that the ear of, say, Ben Pollard is not tuned to such a celestial harmony. However, I will explain my anemoscope in a sentence. It only listens to and indicates the direction of fog horns, sirens and ships' bells. A shrill steam whistle excites it, but the breaking of seas aboard ship, the loud flapping of a propeller, the noise of the engines, of a gale, or all these in combination, leave it unmoved."

"I remember once, when we were going from Falmouth to Porthalla in a fog, how dreadfully difficult it was to discover the whereabouts of another steamer we passed en route," said his daughter.  
"Well, with this little chap on the bridge, the pointer would have told the captain unerringly. I don't suppose it will be thick while you are here, or you would see it pick up the distant blasts of a steamer long before we can hear them and follow her course right round the arc of her passage. It is most interesting to watch its activity when there are several ships using their sirens. I have never had an opportunity of testing it on more than three vessels at once, but as soon as I could deduce a regular sequence in the seemingly erratic movements of the indicator I marked the approach and passing of each with the utmost ease."

"Would that stop collisions at sea?"  
"Nothing will do that, because some ships' officers refuse at times to exercise due care, but with my instrument on board two ships, and a time chart attached to the drums, there would be no need for a board of trade inquiry to determine whether or not the proper warning was given. To the vast majority of navigators it will prove an absolute blessing."

"You clever old thing!" cried Enid. "I suppose you will make heaps of money out of it."  
"The inventor is the last man to make money out of his inventions, as a rule," said Brand. "I suppose I differ from the ordinary poor fellow inasmuch as I am not dependent for a livelihood on the success of my discovery."

"There's not the least bit of chance of there being a fog tonight?" queried Enid so earnestly that a wave of merriment rippled through the room.  
"Not the least. In any event, you two girls will be in bed and sound asleep at 10 o'clock."

"Perish the thought!" cried Constance. "Bed at 10, during our first and only night on a lighthouse!"  
"You will see," said her father. "You

cannot imagine how the clock tawdles in this circumscribed area. Work alone conquers it. Otherwise, men would quit the service after a month's experience."  
"Ship ahoy!" screamed Enid. "Here comes the Lapwing round Carn du. Mr. Lawton must have lent her to bring the relief. How kind of him."  
"The Lapwing cannot approach the rock," said Brand. "I will signal 'Landing impossible today.' It will save them a useless journey."

He selected the requisite flags from a locker, the phrase he needed being coded. Soon the strong breeze was trying to tear the bunting from the cordage, and though they could not hear the three whistles with which the little yacht acknowledged the signal, they could easily see the jets of steam through their glasses.

Constance happened to overlook the table on which stood the anemoscope. "This thing has actually recorded those whistles," she cried in wonder. "What sort of whistle has the Lapwing?" asked Brand.  
"A loud and deep one, worthy of a leviathan. It was a fad of Mr. Lawton's. They say his siren consumes more steam than his engines."

Her father laughed.  
"Anyhow, he is sticking to his course," he announced. "I may as well take in the observations."

Undauntedly, but much hurried by a sea ever increasing in strength as the force of the ebb tide encountered the resistance of the wind, the Lapwing held on. With wind and sea against her she would have made slow work of it. As it was, there was help forthcoming for both journeys unless the wind went back to the north again as rapidly as it had veered to the southwest.

She would not be abreast the rock for nearly an hour, so Brand left the girls in charge of the lookout while he visited the oil room. A wild night such as he anticipated demanded full pressure at the lamp. If the air became supersaturated, breakage of the glass chimneys might take place, and he must have a good stock on hand. Water and coal, too, were needed. The double accident to Bates and Jackson had thrown into arrears all the ordinary duties of the afternoon watch.

Naturally the pair in the lantern found the progress of the yacht exasperatingly slow.  
"A nice Lapwing," said Enid scornfully. "I will tell Mr. Layton he ought to rechristen her the Baftam. All her power is in her crew."  
When Brand joined them matters became livelier. More accustomed than they to the use of a telescope, he made discoveries.

(To be Continued)

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