

THE PILLAR OF LIGHT

... By ...
Louis Tracy,
 Author of
 "The Wings of the Morning"
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 Edward J. Clode

he announced, "that I cannot see Lawton. Indeed, so far as I can make out, she is commanded by Stanhope, dressed in Ben Pollard's olivskins."
 "He has left Lady Margaret!" cried Constance.
 "He never went home!" essayed Enid.
 "Poor chap! He was going to take us for a drive tomorrow," said Constance.
 "To Morvah," explained Enid, with a syllabic emphasis meant for one pair of ears.
 "It is very nice of him to struggle on and have a look at us," said Brand.
 "He can come close enough to see us, but that is all. Our small megaphone will be useless."
 Indeed the Lapwing dared not approach nearer than the Trinity mooring buoy. By that time the three, protected from the biting wind by olivskins coats, were standing on the gallery. The reef was belowing up at them with a continuous roar. A couple of acres of its surface consisted of nothing more tangible than white foam and driving spray.
 Stanhope, resigning the wheel to a sailor, braced himself firmly against the little vessel's foremast and began to strike a series of extraordinary attitudes with his arms and head.
 "Why is he behaving in that idiotic manner?" screamed Enid.
 "Capital idea—semaphore—clever fellow, Jack," shouted Brand.
 Abashed, Enid held her peace.
 The lighthouse keeper, signaling in turn that he was receiving the message, spelled out the following:
 "Is all well?"
 "Yes," he answered.
 "Bates and Jackson reached hospital. Bates compound fracture. If weather moderates will be with you next tide."
 "All right," waved Brand.
 The distant figure started again:
 "L-o-v-e-t-o-E-n-i-d"
 Enid indulged in an extraordinary arm flourish.
 "A-n-d C-o-n-s-t-a-n-c-e."
 "That spoils it," she screamed. "It ought to be only kind regards to you, Connie. I believe you are a serpent."
 "Do stop your chatter," shouted Brand, and he continued the message:
 "Weather looks very bad. Little hope for tonight. Lancelot due at 6. Will see personally that no chance is lost. Goodby."
 "Goodby," was the response.
 The Lapwing fell away astern from the vicinity of the buoy.
 "Why is he doing that?" asked Constance, close to her father's ear.
 "He is too good a sailor to risk turning her in that broken water. A little farther out there is greater depth and more regular seas."
 They watched the yacht in silence. At last her head swung round toward the coast. When broadside on a wave hit her, and the spray leaped over her masts.
 "That gave them a wetting," cried Brand, and his calm tone stilled their ready fear. Indeed, there was greater danger than he wanted them to know, but the Lapwing reappeared, shaking herself and still turning.
 "Good little boat!" said Brand. The crisis had passed. She was headed, at full speed, for the bay. And not too soon. Ere she reached the comparative shelter of Clement's Island she was swept three times by green water.
 Inside the lantern, their faces ruddy with the exposure, their eyes dancing with excitement, the girls were voluble with delight. Could anything be more thrilling than their experiences that day?
 "That semaphore dodge is too precious to be lost," cried Enid. "Connie, you and I must learn the alphabet. You shall teach us this very evening, dad. Fancy me signaling you the whole length of the promenade: 'Just look at Mrs. Wilson's bonnet,' or 'Here come the Taylor-Smiths. Scoot!' Oh, it's fine!"
 She whirled her arms in stiff jointed rigidity and mimicked Stanhope's fantastic posing.
 "Why should you scoot when you meet the Taylor-Smiths?" asked Brand.
 "Because Mrs. T.-S. hauls us off to tea and gives us a gallon of gossip with every cup."
 "I thought your sex regarded gossip as the cream?"
 "Sex, indeed! Old Smith is worse than his wife. He doesn't say much, but he winks. One of his winks, at the end of a story, turns an episode into a three volume novel."
 "It seems to me I must teach you the code in my own self defense," he replied. "And now for tea. Let us have it served here."
 They voted this an admirable notion. The girls enlivened the meal by relating to him the doings and sayings of current interest ashore during the past two months. By a queer coincidence, which he did not mention, his relief was again due within a week, just as on the occasion of Enid's first appearance on the rock. The fact struck him as singular. In all probability he would not return to duty. He had completed twenty-one years of active service. Now he would retire, and when the commercial arrangements for the auriscope were completed he would take his daughters on a promised continental tour unless, indeed, matters progressed between Stanhope and Enid to the point of an early marriage.

He had foreseen that Stanhope would probably ask Enid to be his wife. He knew the youngster well and liked him. For the opposition that Lady Margaret might offer he cared not a jot. He smiled inwardly—as the convenient phrase has it—when he reviewed the certain outcome of any dispute between himself and her ladyship. He would surprise her.
 Brand the lighthouse keeper and Brand urging the claims of his adopted daughter would be two very different persons.
 Of course all Penzance knew that he was a gentleman, a scientist in a small way and a man of means. Otherwise Constance and Enid would not have occupied the position they held in local society. Those unacquainted with English ways oftentimes make the mistake of rating a man's social status by the means he possesses or the manner of his life in London. No greater error could be committed. The small, exclusive county town, the community which registers the family connections of many generations, is the only reliable index. Here to be of gentle birth and breeding—not bad credentials even in the court of King Demos—confers Brahmanical rank, no matter what the personal fortunes of the individual.
 Brand, it is true, did not belong to a Cornish county family, but there were those who conned him shrewdly. They regarded him as a well meaning crank, yet the edict went forth that his daughters were to be "received," and received they were, with pleasure and admiration, by all save such startled elderly mannanas as Lady Margaret Stanhope, who expected her good looking son to contract a marriage which would restore the falling fortunes of the house. All unconscious of the thoughts diting through his brain, for Brand was busy trimming a spare lamp, the two girls amused themselves by learning the semaphore alphabet from a little handbook which he found for them.
 When the night fell, dark and lowering, the lamp was lighted. They had never before seen an eight wick concentric burner in use. The shore light-houses with which they were acquainted were illuminated by electricity or on the catoptric principle, wherein a large number of small Argand lamps, with reflectors, are grouped together.
 To interest them, to keep their eyes and ears away from the low water ory of the reef, he explained to them the capillary action of the oil. Although they had learned these things in school, they had not realized the exactness of the statement that oil does not burn, but must first be converted into gas by the application of heat. On the Gulf Rock there were nearly 3,000 gallons of colza oil stored in the tanks beneath, colza being used in preference to paraffin because it was safer, and there was no storage accommodation apart from the lighthouse.
 Requiring much greater heat than mineral oil to produce inflammable gas, the colza had to be forced by heavy pressure in the cistern right up to the edge of the wicks and made to flow evenly over the rims of the burner, else the fierce flame would eat the metal disks as well.
 He read them a little lecture on the rival claims of gas and electricity and

remner then so exhausted that they would sleep in blissful calm through the ordeal to come.
 As he could not leave the lamp, and they refused to eat apart from him, the dinner, in three courses, was a breathless affair. Going up and down five flights of stairs with soup, joint and pudding, while one carried the tray and the other swung a hand lantern in front, required time and exertion. They were cheerful as grigs over it.
 Enid, whose turn it was to bring up the plates of tappan, pleaded guilty to a slight sensation of nervousness.
 "I could not help remembering," she said, "what an awful lot of dark iron steps there were beneath me. I felt as if something were creeping up quickly behind to grab me by the ankles."
 "You should go up and down three times in the dark," was Brand's recipe. "When you quitted the door level for the third ascent you would cease to worry about impossible grabs."
 Constance looked at her watch.
 "Only 8 o'clock! What a long day it has been!" she commented.
 "You must go to bed early. Sleep in my room. You will soon forget where you are. Each of the bunks is comfortable. Now I will leave you in charge of the lamp while I go and lock up."
 They laughed. It sounded so homelike.
 "Any fear of burglars?" cried Enid.
 "Yes; most expert cracksmen—wind and rain and sleet," he added quietly. "I must fasten all the storm shutters and make everything snug. Don't stir until I wake you in the morning."
 "Poor old dad!" sighed Constance. "What a vigil!"
 He was making new entries in the weather report when she remarked thoughtfully:
 "It is high water about half past 1, I think?"
 He nodded, pretending to treat the question as of no special import.
 "From all appearances there will be a heavy sea," she went on.
 "Just an ordinary bad night," he said coolly.
 "Do the waves reach far up the lighthouse in a gale?" she persisted.
 Then Brand grasped the situation firmly.
 "So that your slumbers may be peaceful," he said, "I will call your kind attention to the fact that the Gulf Rock light has appeared every night during the past twenty-five years, or since a date some four years before you were born, Constance. It contains 4,000 tons of granite and is practically monolithic, as if it were carved out of a quarry. Indeed, I think its builder went one better than nature. Here are no cracks or fissures or undetected flaws. The lowest course is bolted to the rock with wrought iron clamps. Every stone is dovetailed to its neighbors and clasped to them with iron, above, below and at the sides. If you understand conic sections I could make clearer the scientific aspect of the structure, but you can take it from me you are far safer here than on a natural rock many times the dimensions of this column."
 "That sounds very satisfactory," murmured Enid, sleepily.
 "I am overwhelmed," said Constance, who grasped the essential fact that he had not answered her question.
 Soon after 9 o'clock he kissed them good night. They promised not to sit up talking. As a guarantee of good behavior, Enid said she would ring the electric bell just before she climbed into her bunk.
 The signal came soon and he was glad. He trusted to the fatigue, the fresh air, the confidence of the knowledge that he was on guard, to lull them into the security of unconsciousness.
 The behavior of the mercury puzzled him. In the barometer it fell, in the thermometer it rose. Increasing temperature combined with low pressure was not a healthy weather combination in January. Looking back through the records of several years, he discovered a similar set of conditions one day in March, 1891. He was stationed then on the northeast coast and failed to remember any remarkable circumstance connected with the date, so he consulted the lighthouse diary for that year. Ah! Here was a possible explanation. The chief keeper, a stranger to him, was something of a meteorologist.
 He had written: "At 4:15 p. m. the barometer stood at 27.16 degrees and the thermometer at 45.80 degrees. There was a heavy sea and a No. 7 gale blowing from the S. S.-W. About 5 o'clock the wind increased to a hurricane and the sea became more violent than I have seen it during five years' experience of this station. Judging solely by the clouds and the flight of birds, I should imagine that the cyclonic center passed over the Scilly Isles and the Land's End."
 Then next day:
 "A steady northeast wind stilled the sea most effectually. Within twenty-four hours of the first signs of the hurricane the channel was practicable for small craft. A fisherman reports that the coast is strewn with wreckage."
 Brand mused over the entries for awhile. With his night glasses he peered long into the teeth of the growing storm to see if he could find the double flash of the magnificent light on the Bishop Rock, one of the Atlantic breakwaters of the Scilly Isles. It was fully thirty-five miles distant, but it flung its radiance over the waters from a height of 143 feet, and the Gulf Rock lamp stood 130 feet above high water mark. A landsman would not have distinguished even the nearer revolutions of the St. Agnes light, especially in the prevalent gloom, and wisps of spindrift were already striking the lantern and blurring the glass.
 Nevertheless he caught the quick flashes reflected from clouds low, to his surprise. As yet there was a chance

of the incoming tide bringing better weather, and he bent again over the record of the equinoctial gale in 1891. Soon he abandoned this hope. The growing thunder of the reef as the tide advanced gave the first unmistakable warning of what was to come. As a mere matter of noise the reef roared its loudest at half tide. He understood now that a gale had swept across the Atlantic in an irregular track. However the winds may rage the tides remain steadfast, and the great waves now rushing up from the west were actually harbingers of the fierce blast which had created them.
 Of course the threatened turmoil in nowise disconcerted him. It might be that the rock would remain inaccessible during many days. In that event the girls would take the watch after the lamp was extinguished, and they must learn to endure the monotony and discomforts of existence in a storm bound lighthouse. They would be nervous unquestionably—perhaps he had forgotten how nervous—but Brand was a philosopher, and at present he was most taken up with wonderment at the curious blend of circumstances which resulted in their presence on the rock that night.
 Ha! A tremor shook the great pillar. He heard without the frenzied shriek of the first repulsed roller which flung itself on the sleek and rounded wall. Would the girls sleep through the next few hours? Possibly, if awake, they would attribute the vibration of the column to the wind. He trusted it might be so. Shut in as they were, they could not distinguish sounds. Everything to them would be a confused hum, with an occasional shiver as the granite braced its mighty heart to resist the enemy.
 But what new note was this in the outer chaos? An ordinary gale shuddered and whistled and chanted its way past the lantern in varying tones. It sang, it piped, it bellowed, it played on giant reeds and crashed with symbols. Now—he looked at the clock, after midnight—there was a sustained screech in the voice of the tempest which he did not remember having heard before. At last the explanation dawned on him. The hurricane was there, a few feet away, shut off from him by mere sheets of glass. The lighthouse thrust its tall shaft into this merciless tornado with grim steadfastness, and around its smooth contours poured a volume of unearthly melody which seemed to surge up from the broad base and was flung off into the darkness by the outer sweep of the cornice.
 The wind was traveling seventy, eighty, maybe a hundred miles an hour. Not during all his service nor in earlier travels through distant lands had he ever witnessed a storm of such fury. He thought he heard something crack overhead. He looked aloft, but all seemed well. Not until next day did he discover that the wind vane had been carried away, a wrought iron shank nearly two inches thick having snapped like a piece of worsted at the place where the tempest had found a fault.
 He tried to look out into the heart of the gale. The air was full of flying foam, but the sea was beaten flat. If the growling monster beneath tried to fling a defiant crest at the tornado the whole mass of water, many tons in weight, was instantly torn from the surface and flung into nothingness. Some of these adventurers, forced up by the reef, hit the lighthouse with greater force than many a cannon ball fired in battles which have made history. Time after time the splendid structure wineed beneath the blow.
 If Stephen Brand were ever fated to know fear he was face to face with the ugly phantom then. The granite column would not yield, but it was quite within the bounds of possibility that the entire lantern might be carried away and he with it.
 He thought, with a catching of his breath, of the two girls in the tiny room beneath. For one fleeting instant his mortal eyes gazed into the unseen. But the call of duty restored him. The excessive draft affected the lamp, its arbor must be checked. With a steady hand he readjusted the little brass screws—they were so superbly indifferent to all this pandemonium—just little brass screws, doing their work and heeding naught beside. Suddenly there came to him the triumphant knowledge that the pure white beam of the light was heaving its path through the savage assailant without as calmly and fearlessly as it lit up the ocean wilds on a midsummer night of moonlight and soft zephyrs.
 "Thank God for that!" he murmured aloud. "How can a man die better than at his post?"
 The ring of iron beneath caught his ears. He turned from the lamp. Constance appeared, pale, with shining eyes. She carried the lantern. Behind her crept Enid, who had been crying.
 "Is this sort of thing normal, or a special performance arranged for our benefit?" said his daughter, with a fine attempt at a smile.
 "Oh, dad, I am so frightened!" cried Enid. "Why does it howl so?"

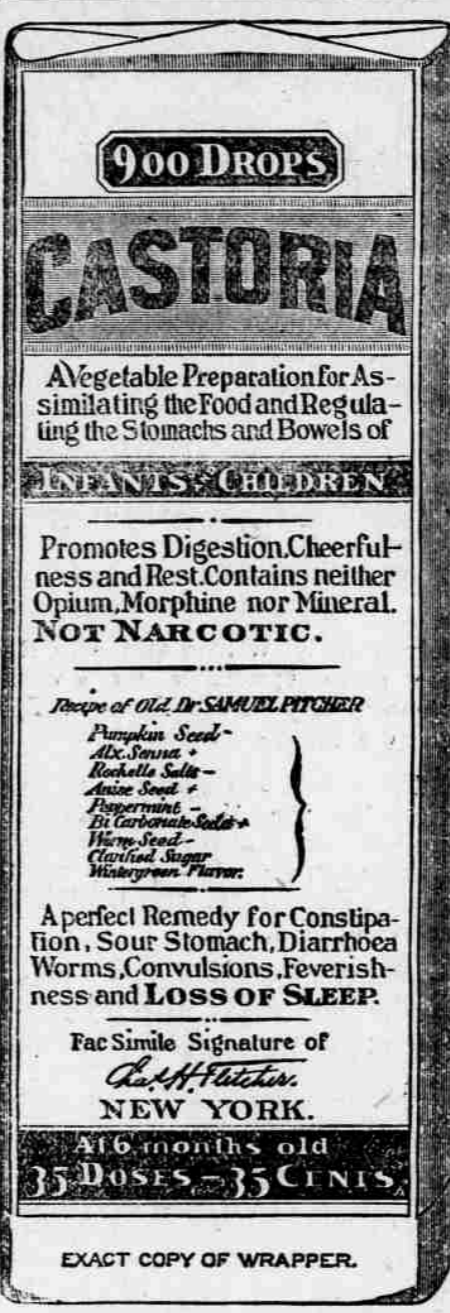
Some natures would have found relief in prayer. Gladly would Constance and Enid have sunk on their knees and besought the Master of the winds to spare them and those at sea. But Brand, believing that a catastrophe was imminent, decided that in order to save the girls' lives he must neither alarm them nor lose an unnecessary instant.
 To desert the light—that was impossible personally. If given the least warning he would spring toward the iron rail that curved by the side of the stairs to the service room and take his chance; otherwise he would go with the lamp. There was no other alternative; the girls must leave him at once.
 The laugh with which he greeted their appearance gave him time to scheme.
 "I ought to scold you, but I won't," he cried. "Are you plucky enough to descend to the kitchen and make three nice cups of cocoa?"
 Just think what it cost him to speak in this bantering way, careless of words, though each additional syllable might mean death to all three.
 His request had the exact effect he calculated. For once Constance was deuced and looked her surprise. Enid, more volatile, smiled through her tears. So it was not quite as bad as they imagined, this gale. Their father could never be so matter of fact to the face of real peril to all of them.

Cocoa! Fatty a man having his thoughts to cocoa while they were expecting the lighthouse to be hurled into the English channel!
 He turned again to manipulate the brass screws.
 "Now, do not stand there shivering," he said, "but harden your hearts and go. Use the oil stove. By the time it is ready!"
 "Shivering, indeed!"
 Constance, of the Viking breed, would let him see that he had no monopoly of the family motto, "Audeo." She, too, could dare.
 "Down you go, Enid!" she cried. "He shall have his cocoa, poor man!"
 He looked over his shoulder and caught his daughter glancing at him from the wall of the stairs.
 (To be Continued.)

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