

THE PILLAR of LIGHT

By Louis Tracy, Author of 'The Wings of the Morning' Copyright, 1904, by Edward J. Clode

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SYNOPSIS.

CHAPTER I.—At daybreak an assistant keeper of the lighthouse, discovers in the distance a ship in distress. Stephen Brand agrees to swim out to it. In so doing he comes in contact with a shark which he kills and boards the ship. He finds on board the body of a dead man and a strange bundle under a sail. Jones the lighthouse keeper lowers a basket and hauls Brand and his strange bundle safely up. II.—The bundle contains a live baby of which which Jones assumes charge. Letters "E T" are found on child's clothing. Baby is placed in charge of nurse who has charge also of Stephen Brand's children. Child is named "Enid Trevillion." III.—Eighteen years later, Constance, daughter of Brand, and Enid go to the lighthouse with an old fisherman named Ben. They are caught in a storm and as they near the lighthouse hear the danger signal from the rock. They land safely and find that two men have been hurt. Brand sends the injured men back with Ben. IV.—Jackson and Bates are lowered into the boat and Ben takes them back to Penance. The Daisy is met by Lieutenant Stanhope who is devotedly in love with Enid. He assists in caring for the wounded men.

They passed into the narrow stairway. Their voices and footsteps sounded hollow. It was to the floor beneath that Bates had fallen.

"I don't think I like living in a lighthouse," cried Enid. "It gives one the creeps."

"Surely there are neither ghosts nor ghouls here," said Constance. "It is modern, scientific, utilitarian in every atom of its solid granite."

But Enid was silent as they climbed the steep stairs.

Once she stopped and peeped into her father's bedroom.

"That is where they brought me when I first came to the rock. My father whispered: 'It used to be Mr. Jones' room. I remember dad saying so.'"

Constance, on whose shoulders the reassuring cloak of science hung somewhat loosely, placed her arm around her sister's waist in a sudden access of tenderness.

"You have improved in appearance since then, Enid," she said.

"What a wizenoid little chip I must have looked. I wonder who I am."

"I know who you soon will be if you don't take care."

Enid blushed prettily. She glanced at herself in a small mirror on the wall. Trust a woman to find a mirror in any apartment.

"I suppose Jack will ask me to marry him," she mused.

"And what will you reply?"

The girl's lip parted. Her eyes shone for an instant; then she buried her face against her sister's bosom.

"Oh, Connie," she whined, "I shall hate to leave you and dad. Why hasn't Jack got a brother as nice as himself?"

Whereupon Constance laughed loud and long.

The relief was grateful to both. Enid's idea of a happy solution of the domestic difficulty appealed to their easily stirred sense of humor.

"Never mind, dear," gasped Constance at last. "You shall marry your Jack and invite all the nice men to dinner. Good gracious! I will have the pick of the navy. Perhaps the admiral may be a widower."

With flushed faces they reached the region of light. Brand was writing at a small desk in the service room.

"Something seems to have amused you," he said. "I have heard weird tales ascending from the depths."

"Connie is going to splice the admiral," explained Enid.

"What admiral?"

"Any old admiral."

"Indeed I will not take an old admiral," protested the elder.

"Then you had better take him when he is a lieutenant," said Brand.

This offered too good an opening to be resisted.

"Enid has already secured the lieutenant," she murmured, with a swift glance at the officer.

structions, 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 Penance 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 caudron. 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 intently.

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 Penance in the boat in which my daughter—"

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 landman, 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 boat 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. His 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 clasped 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 trig 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 hustle 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

1906 DECEMBER 1906 calendar grid showing days of the week and moon phases.

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.

"I entered on an active and useful 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 auriscope 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 or 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 auriscope 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 you 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 mercurial ripples 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 dawdles 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 flag 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 auriscope.

"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 it in the decorations."

Undaunted, 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 super-saturated, 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. Lawton he ought to rechristen her the Bantam. All her power is in her crow."

When Brand joined them matters became livelier. More accustomed than they to the use of a telescope, he made discoveries.

"The two supernumeraries are there," he announced, "but I cannot see Lawton. Indeed, so far as I can make out, she is commanded by Stanhope, dressed in Ben Pollard's olivines."

"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 Morrah," explained Enid, with a syllabic emphasis meant for one path 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 oilskin 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

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replied. "And now for tea. Let us have it served here." They voted this an admirable notion. The girls envied 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 long 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. [TO BE CONTINUED.] Good Printing? Call on The Herald.