

THE PILLAR OF LIGHT

By Louis Tracy, Author of 'The Wings of the Morning'

SYNOPSIS.

CHAPTER I.—At daybreak an assistant keeper of the lighthouse, discovers in the distance a ship in distress...

the ordeal to come. As he could not leave the lamp, and they refused to eat apart from him...

Brand the lighthouse keeper and Enid urged 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.

Brand, it is true, did not belong to a Cornish country family, but there were those who counted him shrewdly.

When the night fell, dark and lowering, the lamp was lighted. They had never before seen an eight-wicked concentric burner in use.

All unconscious of the thoughts flitting through his brain, for Brand was busy trimming a spare lamp...

To interest them, to keep their eyes and ears away from the low water orgy of the reef, he explained to them the capillary action of the oil.

Requiring much greater heat than mineral oil to produce inflammable gas, the colza had to be forced by heavy pressure...

He read them a little lecture on the rival claims of gas and electricity and demonstrated how dazzlingly brilliant the latter could be on a dark, clear night...

At the proper time he banished them to the kitchen to prepare dinner, a feast diverted from the hour of noon by the chances of the day.

1907 JANUARY 1907

Calendar grid for January 1907 showing days of the week and moon phases.

stance connected with the date, so he consulted the lighthouse diary for that year. Ah! Here was a possible explanation.

He had written: 'At 4:15 p. m. the barometer stood at 27.13 degrees and the thermometer at 45.80 degrees.'

Then next day: 'A steady northeast wind stilled the sea most effectively. Within twenty-four hours of the first signs of the hurricane the channel was practicable for small craft.'

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 unguilicent light on the Bishop Rock, one of the Atlantic breakwaters of the Selly Isles.

Nevertheless he caught the quick flashes reflected from clouds low, but unbroken. As yet there was a chance of the incoming tide bringing better weather.

Of course the threatened turmoil in novice disconcerted him. It was that the rock would remain inaccessible during many days.

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The wind was traveling seventy, eighty, nayhap a hundred miles an hour. Not during all his service...

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...

If Stephen Brand were ever fated to know fear he was face to face with the ugly phantom then.

He thought, with a catching of his breath, of the two girls in the tiny room beneath. For one fleeting instant his mortal eyes raged into the unseen.

The ring of iron beneath caught his ears. He turned from the lamp. Constance appeared, pale, with shining eyes.

CHAPTER VI. IT says a good deal for Stephen Brand's courage that he was able to laugh just then, but it is a fine thing for a man in a moment of supreme danger to be called on to comfort a weeping woman.

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.

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"Good gracious, dad," cried Constance, "how pale you are! And your forehead is wet. What have you been doing?"

"Forgive me, dad," she murmured, "but I thought, and I still think, that we were and are in a position of the utmost peril. I can't help knowing that it is high water about 2 o'clock."

"Down you go, Enid," she cried. "He shall have his cocoa, poor man!"

Constance, of the viking breed, would let him see that he had no monopoly of the family motto, "Audaco." She, too, could dare.

"Oh, dear," she wailed, "I don't want my cocoa if we're gug-gug-going to be

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They were gone. Perchance it was his last sight of them in this life. Three times the stalwart framework creaked.

What a curious jumble of emotions jostled in his brain. A step from the sublime to the ridiculous! Not even a step. They were inextricably interwoven, the wool and the warp of things.

"I had no sense of fear," said he, "but my teeth began to ache."

Brand, a student, even of himself, discovered that his dominant sensation was one of curiosity.

"If it has to be," said his nervous system, "let it come quickly." He felt like a man lying on the operating table waiting for the chloroform.

Suddenly the bright flame of the lamp lessened. The use that was his second nature caused him to raise the wicks and admit more draft.

Up clattered Enid with the steaming beverage, Constance, the lantern bearer, providing the rear guard.

"I do believe it is blowing worse than ever," said Enid, striving desperately to be unconcerned.

"During some of the heavy gusts," he explained, "I was compelled to stand on the trimming stage. And the micrometer valve required adjustment."

"There is nothing else wrong?" she asked.

"Since when did my little girl begin to doubt me?" he said quietly.

"Here's to you, Enid. Still we live," he cried, and drained his cup.

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drowned? Certainly if Stephen Brand had imagined two minutes earlier that he was about to laugh long and loudly in a genuine surrender to an uncontrollable spasm of mirth he would have feared lest his wits were leaving him.

It chanced just then that an emancipated wave embraced the granite column, hit the cornice and deluged the lantern, its disintegrated mass striking the glass with force enough to break any ordinary window.

"Here, Enid, drink your parting cup!" he cried. "Have no fear. It is only the docthor drave before many another feast."

Feeling somewhat ashamed of themselves, though smiling very wistfully, they obeyed him. He sipped his cocoa with real nonchalance.

Yet was he watching them and hammering out the right course to adopt. He alone understood that to the novice the amazing ordeal from which the lighthouse had successfully emerged was as naive compared with the thunderous blows of the waves, the astounding reverberations of the hollow pillar, the continuous deluge of spray striking the lantern, which the infuriated sea would inflict on them.

Being reasonable girls, of fine spirit under conditions less benumbing, it was better that they should grasp the facts accurately. They would be timid, of course, just as people are timid during their first attempt to walk 'twixt rock and cataract at the falls of Niagara, but they would have confidence in their guide and endure the surrounding pandemonium.

"Here's to you, Enid. Still we live," he cried, and drained his cup.

[TO BE CONTINUED.]



They were cheerful as crises over it.