

# The PILLAR OF LIGHT

By LOUIS TRACY,  
Author of "The Wings of the Morning"

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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 "ET" 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. V.—Enid spies a boat approaching the rock. It is the Lapwing. Brand discovers that it is sailed by Stanhope. He signals for them not to land, and Stanhope returns to Penance. The girls spend the night at the rock. VI.—During the night a furious storm renders sleep impossible. At dawn Brand makes out a ship in distress. VII.—A young American named Pyne throws a rope to Brand who makes fast to the lighthouse and by means of a pulley arrangement sends eight are saved before the ship goes down. VIII.—Mrs. Vansittart, Pyne's aunt, is strangely moved at sight of Constance. IX.—Mrs. Vansittart seeks to meet Brand. X.—Stanhope in the Falcon appears near the lighthouse at daybreak and tries to rescue the girls. XI.—The Falcon returns the next day, bringing Mr. Traill, whom Mrs. Vansittart is to marry. He sends messages to Mrs. Vansittart and to Pyne his nephew.

Brand forbade further talk. Pyne must rest now and relieve him at 3 o'clock. The youngster needed no feather bed; he was asleep in amazingly quick time. There is a suppleless hunger which keeps people awake at night with a full larifer in the house. The crude article differs from the cultured one so greatly that the man who hungers of necessity cannot sleep too much.

Thus far the inhabitants of the lighthouse had been given quite enough nutriment to maintain life. There was no reason why any, even the most delicate, should be in real danger during the next forty-eight hours. But scientific reasoning and the animal instincts of mankind clash at times; in that lay the danger whose sullen shadow was deepening the lines in the corners of Brand's eyes.

Every hour the officer on duty and some men of the watch visited him to report that all was well below. Some of the less drunken mutineers were pitifully sober now; the others were maudlin. Beyond the few words exchanged on this and kindred topics he was left alone with his thoughts throughout the silent watch. Pyne slept heavily. Glancing at times at the youngster's stalwart figure and firm, handsome face, Brand found himself reviewing the buried years. He thought of the days when he, too, looked forth on the world with the stern enthusiasm of triumphant youth.

Long forgotten ghosts were resurrected, shattered ideals built up again. He wondered, if the decades rolled back, would he decide a second time to abandon the fine career which lay at his feet and withdraw his grief and his talents to the seclusion of lonely rocks and silent headlands.

He had been happy, as men count happiness, during the decades. No cloud had arisen to mar the complete content of his life. The blossoming of the girls into delightful womanhood was an increasing joy to him, and it was passing strange that his little household should be plunged into a whirlpool of events in the very hour when their domesticity seemed to be most assured. The changeful moods of the elements found no counterpart in his nature. He, knowing the sea, did not expect it to remain fixed in one aspect. Whether in calm or storm, the contrary would surely happen ere many days had passed. But life was a different thing. How came it that at the very close of so many years of association with the fickle ocean she should play such a trick on him and his daughters, in fold them with perils, snatch them from the quiet pleasures of the life they had planned for the future and thrust upon them, even if they escaped with their lives, a publicity which he, at any rate, abhorred and even dreaded?

He harbored no delusions on this point. He knew that the drama of the Gulf Rock was now filling the columns of newspapers all over the world. He and his beloved girls would be written about, discussed, described in fulsome language, pictured by black and white artists and eulogized by wide-awake editors eager to make much of a topic dear to the public mind.

On the rock they were undoubtedly in grave danger. Death confronted them—death at once extraordinary and ghastly. No tyrant of the middle ages, with all his paraphernalia for wringing truth or lies out of cowering wretches, had devised such a fate as threatened if the inconstant sea should choose to render the reef altogether unapproachable for many days. Yet if help came he and those dear to him were already steeped in unavoidable notoriety, bringing in its train certain vague disabilities which he had striven to avoid for over twenty years.

And all this because one fierce gale out of the many he had endured sprang into being at a moment when his mates were incapacitated and his daughters happened to pay him a surprise visit.

"It is an insane freak of fortune," he muttered, "so incomprehensible, so utterly out of focus with common events, that if I were a superstitious man I should regard it as betokening the approach of some great epoch in my life. Surely, a merciful Providence would not bring my girls here to subject them to the lingering torture of hunger and thirst. I must not think of it further. That way lies madness."

There was at least one other troubled soul on the rock which divined some sinister portent in the storm. Mrs. Vansittart, even at this moment, was staring into the black void with questioning eyes.

He resolutely threw back his head as if he would hurl into the outer darkness the gibbering phantom which whispered these words of foreboding. Although the lamp needed no attention just then, he climbed to the trimmings stage merely to find relief in mechanical action. He carefully examined the adjustment, and, to judge how the weather was shaping, went out into the gallery to look at the distant lights.

The three quick flashes of the Seven Stones lightship were very clear. That was a good sign. The wind came from that quarter, and, blustering though it was, driving gigantic waves before it into the loud embrace of the reef, it maintained the good promise of the last few hours.

Seeking the comparative shelter of the east side, he gazed steadily at the Lizard. Its two fixed electric beams, nearly in line with the Gulf Rock, were dull and watery. A local squall of rain was sweeping down from the land. Changeable, threatening, unsettled—the meteorologist might apply any of these terms to the prevalent conditions.

Far out in the channel he saw the twinkling masthead lights of several steamers. Blow high or low, mails must travel and vessels put to sea. On such a night at other times he would re-enter the lighthouse with a cheery sense of its comfort and homelike aspect. Now he dreaded the brilliant interior of the service room. Its garish

aspect ill accorded with the patient misery, the useless repinings, the inebriate stupor which crouched beneath. If he and those committed to his charge were to be saved either the sea must be stilled or another miracle of the loaves and fishes enacted.

There, alone on the gallery, amid the din of howling wind and ceaseless plaint of the waves, he seemed to be apart, cut off from the sufferings within. He lifted his eyes to the somber arch of the heavens. Men said the age of miracles had passed. Pray God it might not be so!

When Brand went out the sudden rush of cold air through the little door leading to the balcony aroused Pyne. That young gentleman was rudely awakened from a seriously vivid dream. He fancied that Constance and he were clinging to the tall of an enormous kite, which had been made to hover over the rock by a green imp seated in an absurdly small boat.

They were solemnly advised by other gnomes, imps with sparkling, toadlike eyes, to intrust themselves to this precarious means of escape, but the instant they dropped off the ledge of the gallery their weight caused the kite to swoop downward. The resultant plunge into the ocean and Constance's farewell shriek were nothing more terrifying than the chill blast and whistle of the air current admitted by Brand, but Pyne did not want to go to sleep again. He did not like emerald hued spirits which arranged such unpleasant escapades.

He straightened his stiff limbs and sat up.

He was about to feel in a pocket for his pipe—he experienced the worst pang of hunger after waking in such fashion—when he saw a woman's head and shoulders emerging out of the stairway.

At first he thought it was Constance, and he wondered why she had muffled her face in the deep collar of a cloak, but the visitor paused irresolutely when her waist was on a level with the floor.

She uttered a little gasp of surprise.

"You, Charlie?" she cried. "I thought you slept in the kitchen?"

"No, Mrs. Vansittart," he said. "I am assistant keeper, and I am here most all the time with Mr. Brand. But what in the name of goodness—"

"I was restless," explained the lady hurriedly. "If I had remained another minute among those women I should have screamed aloud. How peaceful you are here! Where is Mr. Brand?"

"Guess he's gone outside to squint at the weather. But come right in. I can offer you a chair. Mr. Brand wants to see you, and this is a quiet time for a chat."

"How does he know me? What did he say?"

Mrs. Vansittart pressed her left hand to her breast. With the other she kept the high collar over her mouth and cheeks. Pyne could only see her eyes, and the alarmed light that leaped into them increased his astonishment at her unexpected presence.

"It seems to me," he answered, "that if you just walk up four more steps and sit down you can ask him all those things yourself."

"Were you speaking of me to him?"

"I did happen to mention you."

"And he said he knew me?"

"No, ma'am. He said nothing of the sort. But, for mercy's sake, what mystery is there about it?"

"Mystery! None whatever. I was mistaken. I have never met him. I came now to explain that to him. Oh—"

She dove suddenly as the gallery door opened. Brand caught a fleeting glimpse of her vanishing form.

"Who was that?" he asked.

Pyne had found his pipe and was filling it with tobacco.

"Mrs. Vansittart," he answered.

"Paying her long deferred visit, I suppose. She chose a curious hour."

"So I thought. But she just popped her head in to tell you that she didn't know you at all."

Brand smiled.

"Poor lady!" he said. "She, like the rest of us, is perturbed and uneasy. I imagine she is of a somewhat hysterical temperament."

"That's so," agreed Pyne.

There were puzzling discrepancies in Mrs. Vansittart's explanation of her untimely appearance. Evidently she did not expect to meet him there. She

thought she would find the lighthouse keeper alone. The ready deduction presented itself that when she did encounter Brand she did not wish any third person to be present at the interview.

That Constance's father had no cause to look at matters in the same light he was quite certain. Anyhow, it was not his affair, and he declined to trouble his head about Mrs. Vansittart's vagaries.

So the young philosopher lit his pipe and delivered a dictum on the sex.

"Some women," he said, "are made up of contradictions. She is one. I have known her for some time, and I thought nothing could feaze her. But there must be a sort of society crust over her emotions, and the wreck broke it. Now, for my part, I like a woman with a clear soul, one in whose eyes you can catch the glint of the inner crystal."



She was crying softly.

"They are rare," said Brand. "I suppose so. Indeed, it used to be a mere ideal of mine, built up from books. But they exist, and they are worth looking for."

He waited, but perchance the other man shall take the cue thus offered, but Brand, for the twentieth time, was poring over the records of the days which followed the hurricane reported by a former keeper. The American pursed his lips.

"He has had a bad time with a woman once in his life," he mused. "It must have been Constance's mother, and that is why he doesn't believe in heredity. Well, I guess he's right."

Had he seen Mrs. Vansittart cowering on her knees outside her bedroom door, he might have found cause for more disturbing reflections. She was crying softly, with her face hidden in her hands.

"Oh, I dare not! I dare not!" she moaned. "I am the most miserable woman in the world. It would have been better if I had gone down with the vessel. The Lord saved me only to punish me. My heart will break. What shall I do? Where shall I hide?"

And her sobbing only ceased when the noise of ascending footsteps drove her into the company of sorrowful women, who would nevertheless have forgotten some of their own woes did they but realize her greater anguish.

## CHAPTER XIV.

"SOME people are never satisfied," said Pyne, while he helped the cooks by smashing a ham bone with a hammer. The bone had been picked clean of meat and marrow on the first day after the wreck, but it occurred to Enid that if it were broken up and boiled she might procure some sort of nourishment for the two children, who were fast running down in condition.

"What is the matter now?" inquired Constance, whose attentive eyes were hovering between the cooking stove and a distilling kettle.

All the flour and biscuits, with the exception of two tins reserved for extremities, had been used. She was striving to concoct cakes of chocolate out of cocoa, an article more plentiful than any other food of its kind in stock, but water could not be spared.

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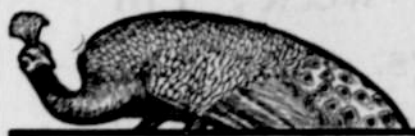
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and eating dry powder was difficult to parched palates.

"There are two tugboats, a trawler and a Trinity service boat not half a mile away," said Pyne, "and the cliffs at Land's End are peppered with people."

"Surely that is satisfactory. Dad told me that the Falcon signaled this morning he was to expect a special effort to be made at half tide on the flow and not on the ebb, as was arranged yesterday."

"Yes, that is all right so far as it goes." Pyne leaned forward with the air of one about to impart information of great value. "But the extraordinary thing is that while every man on board those vessels is thinking like steam how best to get into the lighthouse, we are most desperately anxious to get out of it. So you see, as I said before, some people—"

"Oh, dash!" cried Enid. "I've gone and burnt my finger, all through listening to your nonsense."

"Are there really many people on the cliffs?" demanded Constance.

Pyne pounded the bone viciously.

"I go out of my way to inform you of a number of interesting and strictly accurate facts," he protested, "and one of you burns her fingers and the other doubts my word. Yet, if I called your skepticism unfeeling, Miss Enid would be angry."

"I don't know why kettle lids are so tantankerous," said Enid. "They seem to get hot long before the water does."

"The hottest part of any boiler is on top," said Pyne.

Enid smiled forgiveness. "I believe you would be cheerful if you were going to be electrocuted," she said pensively. "Yet, goodness knows, it is hard to keep one's spirits up this morning. The sea is as bad as ever. What will become of us if we get no relief today?"

TO BE CONTINUED.

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