

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 "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. V.—Enid spies a boat approaching the rock. It is the Lapping. 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 seizes eight or ten 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. Trull, whom Mrs. Vansittart is to marry. He sends messages to Mrs. Vansittart and to Pyne his nephew. XII.—Stanhope signalled his proposal to Enid. Starvation threatens, when two boats arrive—but even with a raft it is impossible to reach the rock.

"Mr. Pyne," interrupted Constance suddenly, "do you think that any of the men can have gained access to the storeroom during the night?"

"I can't say for sure," he replied. "What has put that into your mind?"

"The purser and I examined all that was left this morning, and we both agreed that some of the things had disappeared. It is very strange."

Pyne was not wholly prepared for this being sprung on him, so he essayed to gain time.

"It doesn't appeal to me in that light. There was a miscalculation about the water. Why not about the food?"

"Because my father went through all the stores personally and portioned them out. Some flour and tinned meat have gone; I am quite sure of it. The question is, who can have taken them? The flour at least must have attracted attention if anybody tried to eat it."

"Did you say all that to the purser?" he asked, suspending his labors and looking at her steadily.

"No; he could not remember exactly what proportion of the various articles there ought to be left."

"Then take my advice, Miss Constance, and keep on forgetting," he said.

A quick flush came into her pale cheeks.

"You are not saying that without good cause?" she murmured.

"I have the best of reasons. If the least hint of such a thing goes round among the men there will be ructions."

Constance went to the door and closed it.

"Enid," she said, "I believe father and Mr. Pyne have got some dreadful

plan in their minds which they dare not tell us about."

But the American was not to be cornered in such fashion. He opened the door again and went out, pausing on the threshold to say:

"I wouldn't venture to guess what might be troubling Mr. Brand, but you can take it from me that what he says goes. Talk about grasping a nettle firmly! I believe your father will get a scorpion by the tail if he felt that way."

And with this cryptic utterance he quitted them, intending to warn Brand at the first opportunity that the time was at hand when he must harden his heart and take the decisive step of cutting off communication between the service room and the remainder of the building.

This could be done easily. The flanges of the uppermost iron staircase were screwed to the floor above and below. A few minutes' labor would remove the screws. The steps could be lifted bodily into the service room and there utilized to seal the well.

"What a howling menagerie will break loose here when they find out," thought Pyne. "It's a hard thing to say, but we ought to have the door open. Quite a stack of folks will need to be pitched outside."

A comforting reflection truly, yet his face bore no token thereof as he joined the lighthouse keeper and several of the Chinook's officers and men on the gallery.

The wind had shifted another couple of points to the north, and the sea, apart from the reef, was running in a heavy unbroken swell. That was the tantalizing part of it. Any ordinary ship's boat, properly managed, could live in perfect safety in the open.

But the iron toothed reef, with its tortuous channels and battling currents changing with every stage of the tide, surrounded the pillar with an apparently impassable barrier, while the lighthouse itself offered as frowning a front as any of the black rocks which reared their weed covered crests at low water.

Signals were being exchanged between the gallery and the Trinity tender. Brand seemed to be very emphatic in his answers to the communications made to him by Stanhope.

"No, no," he muttered aloud, while the anxious man near him wondered why he was so impatient.

"It is utterly impossible," he said again. "No boat can do it. Some one should stop him. It means certain loss of life."

At last, becoming aware that his companions could not understand what was going on, he turned to them with passionate explanation.

"That brave fellow Stanhope says that, with two others at the oars, he intends to row near enough to the rock at half flood to endeavor to spring on to the ladder. I cannot persuade him that no man has ever yet succeeded in such a mad project. Look below and see how each wave climbs around eighteen or twenty feet of the base. The thing is wildly impracticable. He will be swept off and smashed to pieces before our eyes even if the boat escapes."

"If the boat can come near enough for that purpose, couldn't we heave a line aboard her?" asked one of the ship's officers.

"We can try. I shall signal them to that effect. Anything is better than to sanction an attempt which is foredoomed to failure and must result in the death of the man who tries it."

Thereupon more energetic flag waving took place. Finally Brand desisted in sheer exasperation.

"I cannot convince him," he cried. "He has made up his mind. May the Lord preserve him from a peril which I consider to be a mortal one!"

"Has he put forward any theory?" asked Pyne. "He was doing a lot of talking."

"Yes," explained Brand. "He believes that a strong boat rowed to the verge of the broken water might watch her opportunity and dart in close to the ladder on the back wash of a big wave, allowing its successor to lift her high enough for an active man to jump on to the rungs. The rowers must pull for their lives the instant the wave breaks and leave him clinging to the ladder as best he can. There is more chance of success in that way, he thinks, than in trying to make fast a line thrown by

us even if it fell over the boat. It is all a question of time, he argues, and I have failed to convince him that not only he but his companions will be lost."

"Is there no chance?" inquired the second officer.

"Look below," repeated Brand hopelessly, and indeed, when they obeyed him, craning their necks over the rail to examine the seething caudron from which the granite tower tapered up to them, no man could say that the lighthouse keeper deplored Stanhope's decision without good reason.

They understood matters a little better, perhaps, when, one by one, they reentered the lantern, the Falcon having flitted away to make her final preparations. Brand asked them not to make known the nature of the pending undertaking.

"If I thought it would do any good to the suffering people I would gladly see them engulfed by the news," he said. "I confess, however, I expect nothing but disastrous failure—and gentlemen—Lieutenant Stanhope is practically engaged to be married to one of my daughters."

What was to be said? They quitted him in the silence that was the dominant note of their lives just then. Pyne alone remained. He wondered why one man should be called on to endure so much.

Though each of those present on the gallery was loyal to Brand's sorrowful request, it was impossible to prevent others from seeing that something of exceptional interest was in progress afloat and on the rock.

Brand did not know that the officials of the Trinity house had only agreed to help Stanhope's hazardous project under compulsion. The sailor informed them that he was determined to carry out his scheme with or without their assistance. So when the Falcon, the tender and a strong tug hired by Mr. Trull rounded the distant Carn du headland at 11 o'clock the lighthouse keeper felt that further protest was unavailing. It behooved him to take all possible measures to help the men who were about to dare so much to help him.

In the first place, he caused a rope to be swung from the gallery to the doorway. If any doubt were entertained as to the grave risk attending Stanhope's enterprise it was promptly dispelled by the extreme difficulty met with in accomplishing this comparatively simple task. Even a heavy piece of wood slung to the end of the ninety odd feet of cord necessary did not prevent the wind from lashing the weighted end in furious plunges seaward. At last a sailor caught the swinging block with a boat hook. The man would have been carried away by a climbing wave had not his mates perceived his danger and held him. Then two life buoys were attached to other ropes in case there might be some slight chance of using them. The tackle which the unfortunate captain of the Chinook had cast adrift was utilized to construct safety lines in the entrance way. Loops were fastened to them, in which six of the strongest men available were secured against the chance of being swept through the door to instant death.

Meanwhile the three vessels had steamed close to the mooring buoy, which, it will be remembered, lay in full view of the kitchen window. Constance gave them a casual glance. Being versed in the ways of the sea, she instantly discovered that some unusual event was afoot.

She called her sister's attention to the maneuvers of the steamers. One, the Trinity tender, lay broadside on to the incoming tide.

"They are lowering a boat, I do declare," she announced after they had watched the proceedings for a little while with growing curiosity. At the distance, nearly 600 yards, it was difficult to discern exactly what was taking place.

"No boat can live if it comes near the rock," cried Enid. And then a wild thought brought her heart to her mouth.

"Oh, Connie," she cried in a sudden access of terror, "I feel sure that Jack is doing something desperate to save us! Dad knows. They all know, but they would not tell us. That is why Mr. Pyne has not been near us for hours."

"It cannot be. No one would permit

it. Father would never give his sanction. Enid, my dear one, why do you say such things? You frighten me!"

But Constance's lips were bloodless, and her eyes dilated with the fear which she, too, would fain deny.

They were perched so high above the sea that the dancing hillocks of green water could not wholly obscure the stoutly built craft which bobbed into startling prominence round the stern of the tender.

"It is! It is!" shrieked Enid. "Look, Connie! There is Jack kneeling in the bow. Oh, dear! Oh, dear! Is he mad? Why don't they stop him? I cannot bear to look. Connie, tell me—shall I see him drowned before my eyes?"

The girl was distraught, and her sister was in little better plight. Fascinated, speechless, clinging to each other like panic stricken children, they followed the leaping boat with the glassy stare of those who gaze open eyed at remorseless death.

They scarce understood what was toward.

As the boat, a strong craft, yet such a mere speck of stanch life in the tumbling seas, was steadily impelled near or they saw the tug lurch ahead of the other vessels until a line was thrown and caught by Stanhope, who instantly fastened it round his waist. The rowers were cork jackets, but he was quite unprotected. Battered, with his well knit limbs shielded only by a Jersey, loose fitting trousers and canvas shoes, he had declined to hamper his freedom of movement with the cumbersome equipment so essential for any one who might be cast adrift in that dreadful sea.

The girls, even in their dumb agony were dully conscious of a scurry of feet up and down the stairs. What did it matter? They paid heed to naught save the advancing boat, now deep in the trough of a wave, now perched precariously on a lofty crest. Whoever the rowers were, they trusted wholly to the instructions given by the gallant youth who peered so boldly into the wilderness ahead. The flying foam and high tossed spray gave to the lighthouse the semblance of alternately lifting and lowering its huge frame amid the furious torments that enraptured it. Nerves of steel, strong hearts and true, were needed by those who would voluntarily enter that watery inferno.

Yet the men at the oars did not falter nor turn their heads. They pulled evenly and well, with the short, deep swiken stroke of the fisherman, and Stanhope, now that they were almost in the vortex where the waves lost their regularity, produced a paddle wherewith to twist the boat's head to meet each turn and swirl.

Stealthily the powerful tugboat crept in the wake of the smaller craft, until it became clear to the girls' strained vision that watchful helpers, lashed in the vessel's bows, were manipulating another rope as a drag, thus helping the sailor's efforts to prevent their frail arghoy from being swamped by a breaking sea.

Then a miracle did happen, a miracle of science. When the boat was yet 200 yards away, Brand, looking out from the gallery in stony despair, suddenly behaved as one possessed of a fiend.

"Follow me!" he roared. "Come, every man!"

He rushed into the lantern. As if he wanted wings rather than limbs, he swung himself by his hands to the floor of the service room.

Galvanized into activity, those who were with him on the ledge raced after him. They knew not what had happened. Their leader had spoken and they obeyed.

Down, down they pelted, taking the steep stairs with breakneck speed, until they reached the oil room, with its thousands of gallons stored in great tanks.

Big empty tins stood there, awaiting the next visit of the tender, and Brand wrenched the cover of the nearest cistern. He scooped up a tinful of the oil.

"Bring all you can carry," he shouted, and was off again with an energy that was wonderful in a man who had endured the privations and hardships of so many hours.

They understood. Why had none of them thought of it earlier? In its cold granite depths the lighthouse carried that which had the power to subdue

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the roaring fury of the reef.

The first man to reach the gallery after Brand was Pyne, who chanced to be nearest to him when the hubbub arose. He found the other man flinging handfuls of the oil as far to windward as the thick fluid would travel.

"Quick!" gasped Brand. "Don't pour it out. It must be scattered."

So the colza fell in little patches of smooth tranquillity into the white void beneath, and before Stanhope had piloted his boat half the remaining distance the wave currents surging about the rocks ceased to toss their yellow mane so high, and the high pitched masses of foam vanished completely.

The seamen stationed in the entrance were astonished by the rapidity of the change. In less than a minute they found they were no longer blinded by the spindrift cast by each upward rush right into the interior of the lighthouse. The two nearest to the door looked out in wonderment. What devilment was the reef hatching now, that its claws should relax their clutch on the pillar and its icy spray be withheld?

Each wave, as it struck to westward of the column, divided itself into two roaring streams which met exactly where the iron rungs ran down the wall. There was a mighty clash of the opposing forces and a further upward rearing of shattered torments before the reunited mass fell away to give place to its successor.

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He names the following witnesses to prove his continuous residence upon and cultivation of said land, viz: John T. McIntyre, of Salmon, Oregon, George Oaks of Salmon, Oregon, E. Truman of Salmon, Oregon, J. A. Odell of Salmon, Oregon.

ALGERNON S. DRESSER, Register.

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