

THE PILLAR of LIGHT

... By ...
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Author of
"The
Wings
of the
Morning"
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(CONTINUED.)

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 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 on 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 lawfulness," 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 the captain unerringly. I don't suppose 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 merriment rippled 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 flags 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 in the decorations."

Undauntedly, but much flurried 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

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visited the oil room. A wild night such as he anticipated demanded full pressure at the lamp. If the air became supersaturated, 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 array 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 crew."

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 oilskins."

"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 oilskin coats, were standing on the gallery. The reef was billowing 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 to 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, a—"

"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 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.

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 counted 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 mammas 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 flitting 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 lighthouses 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 orgy 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 eastern 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 demonstrated how dazzlingly brilliant the latter could be on a dark, clear night by showing them the fine light on the Lizard.

"But in hazy weather the oil wins," he said, with the proper pride of every man in his own engine. "Fishermen sailing into Penzance along a course equidistant from the two points tell me that if they can see anything at all on a foggy night they invariably catch a dull yellow radiance from the rock."

(Continued on Page Six.)