

# THE PILLAR of LIGHT

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

"I do believe it is blowing worse than ever," said Enid, striving desperately to be unconcerned. In reality the angry wind was no longer able to behead the waves. With a rising tide and the gale assisting there would soon be a sea worthy of Turner in his maddest mood.

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

Brand hastily mopped his face with a handkerchief.

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

She eyed him narrowly. The margin of suspicion was wider.

"There is nothing else wrong?" she asked.

He approached and kissed her ear.

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

Her eyes filled. Even the hint of a reproach from him was intolerable. For the life of her she could no longer control the flood of terror which welled up beyond restraint.

"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. It is now only a quarter to 1. The worst is not over. Do you think I cannot read your dear face! Dad, if there is danger don't send us away again."

Tears were streaming down her white cheeks. Enid, holding the tray in speechless bewilderment during this outburst from her proud and self-reliant sister, set it down on the writing desk with a crash.

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

Mainly if Stephen Brand had indeed 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. Yet he laughed now until his vision was blurred. And the wonderful relief of it! What a tonic after the ordeal he had endured!

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. The astounded girls could not refuse the evidence of eyes and ears. Here was the frantic sea leaping to a height of 140 feet and more, yet their father was treating the incident as the merriest joke of many a month.

No better cure for their hysteria could be contrived. Brand was obviously not acting. The hearty pulsations of laughter had restored his ruddy color. Evidently they were alarmed about nothing.

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

Feeling somewhat ashamed of themselves, though smiling very wistfully, they obeyed him. He sipped his cocoa with real nonchalance. Another wave turned a somersault over the lantern. Brand's only anxiety was to blow at the steaming liquid and cool it sufficiently.

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 naught 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.

To urge any further effort to sleep was folly. They must remain with him and be comforted.

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.

"I sup-pup-pose so," she stammered.

"Better sup up your cocoa," said Constance. "Now I am quits with you for this afternoon."

"I'll tell you what," went on Brand confidentially. "In that locker you will find a couple of stout pilot coats. Put them on. As I cannot persuade you to

leave me you must sit down, and it is cold in here. Moreover, for the first time in twenty-one years I will smoke on duty. I have earned a little relaxation of the law."

Out of the corner of his eye he saw that Constance, if not Enid, had not missed the subtle hint in his words. But she was quite normal again. She gave no sign; helped her sister into the heavy reefer, and made herself comfortable in turn.

"Neither of you will ever regret tonight's experience—when it is nicely over," he said. "You are like a couple of recruits in their first battle."

"I am sure"—began Enid.

A huge wave, containing several hundred tons of water, smote the lighthouse and cavorted over their heads. The house that was founded upon a rock fell not, but it shook through all its iron bound tiers, and the empty cups danced on their saucers.

Not another word could Enid utter. She was paralyzed.

"That fellow—arrived—in the nick of time—to emphasize my remarks," said Brand, lighting his pipe. "This is your baptism of fire, if I may strain a metaphor. But you are far better situated than the soldier. He gets scared out of his wits by big guns which are comparatively harmless, and when he has been well pounded for an hour or so he advances quite blithely to meet the almost silent hail of dangerous bullets. So, you see, in his case, ignorance is bliss."

"Are we in bliss?" demanded Constance.

"You have been. The lighthouse has outfaced a hurricane such as has not visited England before in my lifetime. It is over. The wind has dropped to a No. 10 gale, and we have not lost even a bit of skin to my knowledge. Now the cannonade is beginning. Certainly you may have the glass broken by a rare accident, but no worse fate can befall us."

A heavy thud was followed by a deluge without. They heard the water pouring off the gallery.

Constance leaned forward, with hands on knees. Her large eyes looked into his.

"This time, dad, you are not choosing your words," she said.

"I am sorry you should think that," was the reply. "I selected each phrase with singular care. Never be misled by the apparent ease of a speaker. The best impromptu is prepared beforehand."

"You dear old humbug," she cried.

Now the quiet deadliness of the scene which followed the reappearance of Enid and herself from their bedroom was manifest to her. Enid, too, was looking from one to the other in eager striving to grasp the essentials of an episode rapidly grouping its details into sequence. Brand knew that if he per-



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ried his daughters' questioning they would be on their knees by his side forthwith, and he wished to avoid any further excitement.

"Please attend, both of you," he growled, with mock severity. "I am going to tell you something that will console you."

His voice was drowned by some part of the Atlantic whirling over the lantern.

"This kind of thing does not go on all the time," he continued. "Otherwise we should have five hours of spasmodic conversation. As soon as the tide rises sufficiently to gain an uninterrupted run across the reef we will have at least two hours of comparative quiet. About 4 o'clock there will be a second edition for an hour or so. I suppose that any suggestion of bed"—

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"Will be scouted," exclaimed Enid. "A nice pair of beauties you will be in the morning," he grumbled artfully. Not even Constance was proof against this new burden of woe. She glanced around.

"You say that," she cried, "knowing that the nearest looking glass is yards away."

He pointed with his pipe. "In the second drawer of the desk you will find a heliograph. It is only a toy, but will justify me."

They ran together and found the little circular mirror. The next wave passed unheeded. Smiling, he went up to the lamp. Even yet there was hope they might go to bed when the respite came.

After much talk of disordered hair, wan cheeks, rings round the eyes, cracked lips and other outrageous defects which a pretty woman mourns when divorced from her dressing table, Constance called him.

"Here is a queer thing," she said. "Have you heard any steamer hooting?"

"No," he answered. Bending between the two of them, he saw that the pointer of the auriscope bore due southwest, though the last siren of which they had any knowledge sounded from the opposite direction.

He picked up a little trumpet resembling the horn of a motor car. "I use this for tests," he explained. Its tiny vibrator quickly brought the needle round toward his hand.

"It is improbable in the highest degree that any steamer is near enough to affect the auriscope," he said. "On a night like this they give the coast a wide berth."

He quitted them again. The girls, having nothing better to do, watched the dial to see if any change occurred. He heard them use the small trumpet three times. Then Enid sang out:

"Oh, do come, dad! It goes back to the southwest regularly!"

He joined in the watch. The needle was pointing north in obedience to the sound waves created in the room. Suddenly it swung round nearly half the circumference of the dial.

"Hush!" he said. They listened intently, but the roar of wind and water was too deafening. They could hear naught else. He went to the southwest point of the glass dome, but the lantern was so blurred with rivulets of water that he could see nothing save a tawny vastness where the light fell on the flying spindrift.

To make sure he tested the auriscope again and with the same result.

"A vessel is approaching from the southwest," he announced gravely. "Evidently she is whistling for help. I hope she will not attempt to approach too near the reef. I must have a look out."

He put on an oilskin coat and tied the strings of a sou'wester firmly beneath his chin.

The small door of the lantern opened toward the bay, so he had no difficulty in gaining the gallery. The girls watched him forcing his way against the wind until he was facing it and gazing in the direction of the Scilly Isles.

"Perhaps some poor ship is in danger, Connie," whispered Enid. "It makes me feel quite selfish. Here was I, thinking of nothing—but my own peril, yet that little machine there was faithfully doing its duty."

"It was not alone in its self abandonment. We shall never know, dearest, how much father suffered when he sent us off with a jest on his lips. I am sure he thought the lantern would be blown away."

"And he with it! Oh, Connie!" "Yes. He believed if that awful thing took place while we were below we might escape. I can see it all now. I had the vaguest sort of suspicion, but he hoodwinked me."

"Had we known we would not have left him!" cried Enid passionately.

"Yes, we would. Think of him, sticking to his post. Was it for us to disobey?"

Overcome by their feelings, they stood in silence for a little while. Through the thick glass they could dimly distinguish Brand's figure. A great wave assailed the lantern, and Enid screamed loudly.

"Don't, dear!" cried Constance shrilly. "Father would not remain there if it were dangerous."

Nevertheless they both breathed more freely when they saw him again, an indeterminate shape against the luminous gloom.

Constance felt that she must speak. The sound of her own voice begat confidence.

"I have never really understood dad until tonight," she said. "What an ennobling thing is a sense of duty. He would have died here quite calmly. Enid, yet he would avoid the least risk out there. That would be endangering his trust. Oh, I am glad we are here. I have never lived before this hour."

Enid stole a wondering glance at her sister. The girl seemed to be gazing into depths immeasurable. Afterward the words came back to her mind—"That would be endangering his trust."

Brand faced the gale a full five minutes. He returned hastily.

"There is a big steamer heading this way—a liner, I fancy," he gasped, half choked with spray. "I fear she is disabled. She is firing rockets, and I suppose her siren is going constantly, though I cannot hear it."

He ran to the room beneath. Flushed with this new excitement, the girls donned their oilskin coats and arranged their sou'westers. When he hurried up the stairs he was carrying four rockets. He noted their preparations.

"Don't come out until I have fired the alarm signal," he shouted, "and tie your dresses tightly around your knees."

They heard the loud hissing of the rockets, and the four reports traveled dully from the sky. Three white starbursts and one red told the Land's End coast guards that a ship in need of help was near the Gulf Rock. Probably they had already seen the vessel's signals. In any event they would not miss the display from the lighthouse.

Walking with difficulty, the girls crept out on to the balcony.

Brand had already gone to the windward side. The first rush of the gale made them breathless, yet they persevered and reached him. They were greeted by a climber, but their father, with a hand on their shoulders, pressed them down, and the spray crashed against the lantern behind them. He knew they would take no harm. When the vessel passed, their boots and stockings would be soaked. Then he could insist that they should go to bed.

At first they distinguished nothing

save a chaotic blend of white and yellow foam, driving over the reef at an apparently incredible speed. Overhead the black pall of the sky seemed to touch the top of the lantern. Around, in a vast circle carved out of the murky wilderness, the wondrous beam of the light fought and conquered its unwearied foes. Constance caught the three quick flashes of the Seven Stones lightship, away to the right. She fancied she saw a twinkling ahead, but this was the St. Agnes light, and neither girl could make out other light nor sound until Brand pointed steadily toward one spot in the darkness.

Before they could follow his indication they were compelled to duck to avoid another wave. Then, as if it had just popped up out of the sea, they divined a tiny white spark swinging slowly across a considerable area. It was by that means that Brand had estimated the size and nearness of the steamer, and soon they glimpsed the red and green side lights, though ever and anon these were hidden by the torrents of water sweeping over her decks. Of the vessel they could see nothing whatever.

Steadily she rolled along her fearful path. Having once found her, there was no difficulty in estimating the rapidity of her approach. Enid, whose eyes were strong and farsighted, fancied she caught a fitful vision of a big black hull laboring in the yellow waves.

Though it was difficult to speak, she crept close to Brand and screamed:

"Is she drifting on to the reef?" "I fear so," he answered.

"Then she will be lost!"

"Yes, unless they manage to pass to southward."

Luckily for poor human nature, mental stress and physical effort rarely unite forces. The mere attempt to resist the wind, the constant watchfulness needed to avoid the ambitious seas, though these, strange to say, appeared to be diminishing in size and volume as the tide rose, served to dull the horror of the threatened tragedy.

Brand quitted them for an instant to glue his eyes to the lantern after wiping a space on the glass. He must see if the lamp needed tending. Satisfied by the scrutiny, he stood behind the girls, who had shrunk closely together the moment he retired.

"They are trying to steer clear of the reef," he shouted. "Twice they have got her head around, but the sea is too strong for them. I am afraid she is doomed."

Now they unquestionably saw the great body of the ship. Her funnels showed most clearly, making sharply defined black daubs on the heaving desert of froth. The plunging whirls of the masthead light were enough to prove how the unfortunate vessel was laboring in what might prove to be her final agony.

And the pity of it! The wind was dropping. In another hour the weather might moderate appreciably, the tide would sweep her away from the horrible reef and help would be forthcoming. Indeed, even then a powerful steam trawler was preparing to fight her way out of Penzance harbor, with brave men on board ready to take any risk to save a ship in distress.

(To be Continued)

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