

# THE Pillar of Light

By Louis Tracy

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Then a miracle did happen, a miracle of science. When the boat was set two hundred yards away, Brand, looking out from the gallery in stony despair, suddenly believed 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 were not far behind when they reached the oil room, and there happened. Their leader had spoken, and they obeyed.

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

"Big empty this 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 the roaring fury of the reef.

The first man to reach the gallery after Brand was Pym, who chanced to be nearest to him when the hubbub arose. He found the other man flinging handfuls of the oil as far as his eyes could reach.

"Quick!" gasped Brand. "Don't pour it out! It must be scattered." So the coils fell in little patches of smooth tranquillity into the water below, and before Stanhope had pitted his boat half the remaining distance, the waves-currents surging about the reef, the yellow mists 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 spray that 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 that? What magic 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 rings ran down the wall. There was a mighty clash of the opposite forces and a further upward rearing of shattered torrents before the reunited mass fell away to give place to its successor.

Full twenty feet of the granite layers were thus sub-merged and exposed whenever a big combat traveled sheer over the reef.

ceed. The extraordinary and, to him, quite inexplicable, change in conditions which he had studied during the hours passed on the bridge of the Falcon or the Trinity tender, made it possible to remain longer in the vicinity of the rock than he had dared to hope.

Therefore he knew it was advisable to adopt the certain means of communication of the narrow rope in preference to the uncertainty of his own power to reach and climb the ladder.

"Plunging out his right arm, he motioned the men in the lighthouse to be ready to leave a coil. The wind was the chief trouble now, but he must chance that.

"Fast pulled he yelled over his shoulder as a monstrous wave braced over the reef and enveloped the column.

"Ay, ay," sang out his crew. Up went the boat on the crest and a fearsome cavern spread before his eyes, revealing the seaweed that clung to the lowest tier of the masonry.

At the same instant he caught a fleeting glimpse of a lofty billow rearing back from the rocks on the north.

Down sank the boat until the door of the lighthouse seemed to be an awful distance away. She rose again, and Stanhope stood upright, his knees wedged against the wooden door.

"Pull!" he yelled, and the ropes, which were in front and another to the right showed that the antagonism of the two volumes of water gave the expected lull.

"Pull!" The boat shot onward. Once, twice, three times, the oars dipped with precision. These rowers, who were with their backs turned to what might be instant death, were brave and staunch as if he looked it unflinchingly in the face.

"Heave!" roared Stanhope to the white-visaged second officer standing in the doorway far above him.

The rope whirled through the air, the boat rose still higher to meet it, and the coil struck Stanhope in the face, lashing him savagely in the final spile of the baffled gale which pumpled man had conquered.

Never was blow taken with such Christian charity. Stanhope cried, and the oarsmen, not knowing what had happened, but against the tough blades. The tug's sailors at the drag, though the engines grinding at half-speed were keeping them steadily against the reef not more than a hundred and fifty yards in the rear, failed for an instant to understand what was going on.

But when the captain had seen the cast and read its significance. "Haul away!" he bellowed in a voice of thunder, and to cheer them on he added the words which showed that he was no landsman.

Stanhope flung his knot of the lighthouse line to the loop taking off his do. "Back!" he called, and the men, fifty yards or so of the lighthouse, the girls could see it no longer.

When it dropped out of sight for the last time, Stanhope could not endure the strain. Though her feet were clamped in her mouth she forced a despairing cry.

"Enid!" she screamed, "lean out through the window. It is your place." "I cannot! Indeed, I cannot! I will be killed! Oh, save him, kind Providence, and take my life in its stead!"

Constance lifted the frenzied girl in her strong arms. This was no moment for sulking. "I loved a man," she cried, "and he was about to die for my sake. I should count it a glory to see him die. The brave words gave Enid some measure of comprehension. Yes, that was it. She would watch her lover while he faced death, even though her heart stopped beating when she saw the end came.

He emerged from the water. The man stopped, almost spent. He gave an off-handed sailor's salute.

"Haul away, sir!" he yelled, and his voice cracked with excitement. In fact they were not so much excited as they were few in number and to be pitted exceedingly. There are times when a man must cheer and a woman's eyes glisten with joyous tears.

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The first to grasp Stanhope's hand when he swung himself onto the deck of the tender was Mr. Cyrus J. Trail.

"Well done, my lad!" he greeted him. "I thought it was all up with you. Did you see her?"

"You thought it best not to join them?"

"You know that I would gladly go now and attempt it, but I can't refuse the better way. I can't tell you what happened. Something stilled the sea like magic. Look at it now!"

Assuredly the waves were breaking again around the pillar with all their wonted ferocity, but one among the Trinity House officers noticed a smooth, oily patch floating past her vessel.

"Joy!" he shouted. "Brand helped you at the right moment. He threw some gallons of colza overboard."

Trail, a bronzed, spare, elderly man, tall and straight, with eyes set deep beneath heavy eyebrows, went to Jim Spence and asked him what he was helping to sling the faty up to the davits.

"I said five hundred between you," he briefly answered. "The rope holds, and the three people I am interested in reach the shore alive. I will make it five hundred apiece."

Ben Pollard's pale, thin face became several times as pale. He remained so permanently his friends thought, but Jim Spence only grinned.

"You don't know the cap'n, sir. He'll save every mother's son—an daughter, now—now he has a line aboard."

Then the ex-sailor, chosen with Ben Brand among dozens of volunteers owing to his close acquaintance with the reef, beheld him.

"You're treatin' Ben an' me magnificently, sir," he said, "but the credit is due to Mr. Stanhope. We only obeyed orders."

The millionaire laughed like a boy. "I have not forgotten Mr. Stanhope," he said. "I am sure your confidence in Mr. Brand will be justified. You watch me smile when I see up your share."

On board the tug, and on the gallery of the lighthouse, there was no time for talk. The vessel, with the most skillful handling, might remain where she was for about four hours. She was marked by the tug with a hundred fathoms within the dangerous zone, and the boy, and there was much to be done in the time.

are in no further peril. This is what I wish you to hear."

"Nothing but the most amazing and unlooked for circumstances would cause me to ask you to postpone the date of our marriage for at least a month after you reach shore. This is not the time, nor are your present surroundings the place for telling you why I make this request. Suffice it to say that I think, indeed, I am sure, a great happiness has come into my life, a happiness which you, as my wife soon to be, will share."

The American, whilst Mrs. Vanstarr was intent on her excerpts from his uncle's letter, studied all that was visible of her face. That which he saw there guzzled him. She had suffered no more than others, so he wondered why she wore such an air of listless melancholy.

Throughout the lighthouse gloom was dispelled. The sick became well, the lethargic became lively. Even the timplers of methylated spirits, deadly ill before, had worked like Trojans at the rope, as eager to rehabilitate their shattered character as to land the much-needed stores.

What trouble had befallen this woman so gracious, so facile, so worshipful in her system, that she uttered an utterance during the years he had known her, that she remained listless when all about her was life and joyance, she, the cynosure of every eye, in her costumes and graceful carriage, covering from recognition? Here was a mystery, though she had repudiated the world, and a mystery which she had defeated his subconscious efforts at solution.

She lifted her eyes to his. Her expression took on its compelling pity by its utter desolation.

"What does he mean?" she asked, plaintively. "Why has he not spoken clearly? Can you not tell me what is this great happiness, which has entered, so strangely, into his life and mine?"

"I have never met any man who knew exactly what he meant to say, and exactly how to say it, better than Cyrus J. Trail," said Pym.

"Pym, that only my nephew and you have received this information. The agonized suspense which the ladies must have endured on the rock is a trial more than sufficient to tax their powers. If as I expect, Mr. Stanhope meets you first, he will be guided wholly by your advice as to whether or not the matter shall be made known to your Enid—to my Edith—before she leaves."

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secretly, with Elsie. "There didn't seem to be 'nuff to eat," she explained, seriously, "so Mr. Pym kep' a bit of biscuit in his pocket, an' Mamie 'n' me had a chew every time we saw him."

"H'm," murmured the man, glancing up at his young friend as he walked around the trimming-stage with the delighted Mamie. "I suppose he asked you not to tell anybody, but 'we wasn't to tell Miss Constance or Miss Enid," they told us we wasn't to tell him our tea. That is all, Panny, isn't it?"

Brand knew that these little ones were motherless. His eyes dimmed somewhat. Like all self-contained men, he detested any exhibition of sentiment.

"I say," he cried huskily to Pym, "you must escort your friends back to their quarters. No more idling, please."

"An' you will really send for us tomorrow to see the milkman?" said Elsie. Notwithstanding his sudden gruffness, she was not afraid of him. She looked longingly at the great lamp and the twinkling diamonds of the dioptric lens.

"Yes, I will not forget. Good-bye, now, dearie."

The visit of the children had given him a timely reminder. As these two were now, so had his own loved ones been in years that might not be recalled.

The nest would soon be empty, the young birds flown. He realized that he would not see many days ashore before the young American to whom he had taken such a liking would come to him and put forward a more enduring claim to Constance than Mr. Trail made with regard to Enid. Well, he must resign himself to these things, though no man ever lost two daughters under stranger conditions.

When Pym returned, Brand was sharp, but it had ended.

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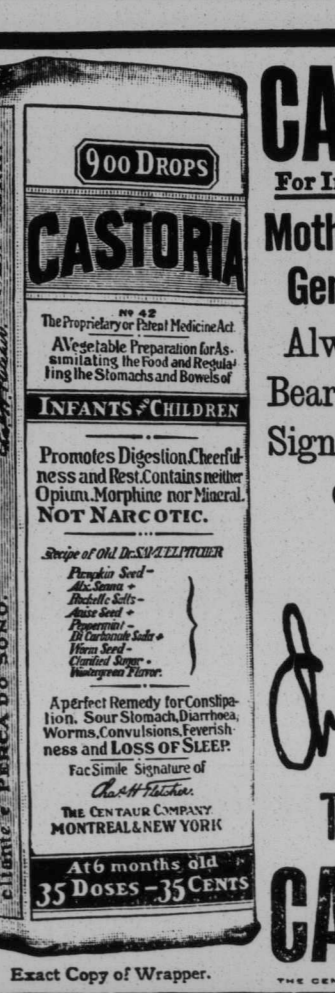
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Exact Copy of Wrapper.

These facts, combined with the date and Mr. Jones's description of the damaged boat, lead me to believe that the girl is my own daughter, Edith Trail, whom you have mercifully preserved to gladden the eyes of a father who mourned her death, and the death of her mother, for nineteen years.

"I can say no more at present. I am not making inferences not justified in other ways. Nor am I setting up a father's claim to rob you of the affections of a brave and accomplished daughter. I will be content, more than content, if she can give to me a title of the love she owes to you, for, indeed, in Mr. Stanhope and in all others who know you, you have eloquent witnesses.

"Yours most sincerely, Cyrus J. Trail.

"P.S. Let me add, as an afterthought, that only my nephew and you have received this information. The agonized suspense which the ladies must have endured on the rock is a trial more than sufficient to tax their powers. If as I expect, Mr. Stanhope meets you first, he will be guided wholly by your advice as to whether or not the matter shall be made known to your Enid—to my Edith—before she leaves."

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CHAPTER XVI. STEPHEN BRAND EXPLAINS. They were interrupted. Elsie, with her golden hair and big blue eyes, pink cheeks and parted lips, appeared on the stairs. All that was visible was her head. She looked like one of Murillo's angels. "Please, can Mamie 'n' me see the man?" she asked, a trifle awed. She did not expect to encounter a stern-faced official in uniform. "What man, dearie?" he said, and instantly the child gained confidence, with that prompt abandonment to a favorable first impression which marks the exceeding wisdom of children and dogs. She directed an encouraging sotto voce down the stair: "Come right along, Mamie." Then she answered, clasping the hand of Pym extended to her, but eyeing Brand the while: "The man who brought the milk." She wondered why they laughed, but the lighthouse-keeper caught her up in his arms. "He has gone away, sweetheart," he said, "but when he comes in the morning I shall send for you and you will see him. You are the little girl who was injured, eh? Are you getting better?" Elsie, having seen Mamie safely extracted from the stair-way, became voluble. "My elbow is stiff, but it doesn't hurt. I was feelin' pretty bad 'fore the milk came, but Mamie 'n' me had a lovely lot, an' some beautiful jelly. Pym, wasn't it, Mamie?" "Squizzit!" agreed Mamie here. "I think I'd like being here if there was more room," said the child. "Why isn't there any washin'?" Mamie 'n' me is always bein' washed 'cept when we're here." "Surely you have not kept your face as clean as it is now ever since you left the ship?" "Oh, no," put in Mamie. "We've just been rubbed with a hanky." "Not 'zactly," said truthful Mamie. "Mr. Pym told us to wait near the door." "That's an old story now," interceded Pym quickly. "Climb up on 'y' shoulder and have a look at the water. Perhaps there may be a ship."

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