

THE Pillar of Light

By Louis Tracy

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CHAPTER I. FLOTSAM.

All night long the great bell of the lighthouse, standing on a stout beam projecting seaward beyond the outer platform, had tolled its warning through the fog.

Overhead, the magnificent lantern, its eight-ringed circle of flame burning at full pressure, illumined the drifting vapor with an intensity that seemed to be born of the sturdy granite pillar of which it was the fitting diadem.

At last an irresistible ally sprang to the assistance of the uncomprehensible light. About the base of the middle water a gentle breeze from the Atlantic followed the tide and swept the shimmering waves toward the northeast.

On the horizon, the turquoise rim of the sea lay with the sheen of folded silk against the sifter clouds of the sky. Toward the sea a group of islands to which drifting banks of mist clung in molten despair were stretched in a shallow of dreamy purple.

A man, pacing the narrow gallery beneath the lantern, halted for a moment to flood his soul afresh with a beauty made entrancing by the knowledge that a few brief moments would resolve it into madder and more familiar charms.

He was engaged, it is true, in the unromantic action of filling his pipe—a simple thing, beloved alike of poets and navvies.

English coast were already scanning the trimly ragged outlines of the Selly Isles, and searching with their glasses for the Land's End and the Lizard.

In a few hours they would be in Southampton; that afternoon in London—London, the Mecca of the world, from which two years ago he fled with a lightning skin in terror.

Strange, how differently men are constituted, and women! Bess had a hard look came into his eyes. His mouth set in a stern contempt.

But as the harp of David caused the will spirit to depart from Saul, so did the music of the morning chaise, with the lurking devil of memory which sprang upon the lighthouse-keeper with the light of the vessel.

He smiled again, a trifle bitterly, perhaps. Behind him the singer roared genially.

"Soon we'll be in London Town, Sing, my lads, ye ho, ho, And see the King in his golden crown, Sing, my lads, ye ho."

The man on the platform seemed to be aroused from a painful reverie by the jingle so curiously a propos to his thoughts. He tapped his pipe on the iron railing, and was about to enter the lantern—and so to the region of sleep beneath—when suddenly his fingers, trained to an acuteness not dreamed of by shore folk, rested on some object seemingly distant a mile or less, and drifting slowly nearer with the tide.

During one fearful night in the March equinox, when the fierce heat of the lamp within and the icy blast of the gale without had temporarily deranged the occulting machinery, Jones experienced an anxious watch.

Not for an instant could he forego attendance on the lamp, for a single second to the alert it was necessary to keep the light at full pressure. The surplus oil, driven up from the tanks by weights weighing down the shaft of the burner, or the metal might yield to the fervent power of the column of flame.

The occulting hood, too, must be helped when the warning click came, or it would jam and fall to fall periodically, with the change of the light, to the bewilderment and grave peril of any unhappy vessel striving against the exterior turmoil of wind and wave.

So Jones passed four hours with his head and shoulders in the temperature of a Turkish bath and the lower part of his body chilled to the bone. He thought nothing of it at the time. This was duty.

Watching the boat, Jim centered over in the telescopic field, and looked anxiously for a sharp arrow-shaped ripple on the surface of the sea. The breeze which had vanquished the fog now kissed the smiling water into dimples, and his keen sight was perplexed by the myriad wavelets.

Each minute the condition of affairs on board became more defined. Beneath some oars ranged along the starboard side he could see tiny bits, such as canned biscuits and compressed beef. The shapless mass in the bows puzzled him. It was partly covered with the white canvas of the damaged portion of the upper works, and it might be a jib-sail fallen there when the mast broke. The birds were busy and excited. He did not like that.

Nearly half an hour passed. The Princess Royal, a fine vessel of yacht proportions, sprang for the afternoon trail, and about eight miles away, south-west by west. According to present indications steamer and derelict would be abreast of the Gulf Rock light at about midnight. A small birth of shore, would give a wide berth to a rock-strewn shoal.

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Jones was genuinely excited now. "My God!" he cried, "what is it?" "A shark!" yelled Jim. "I know it. I warned him. Eh, but his game is the cap'n."

HIS LEGAL WIFE

"I hope you will" returned the Spanish woman, earnestly. "You have overdone yourself, my dear lady. Certainly I will take the nourishment in to her. How good it smells!"

"Our patient ate half the boat," she said. "Her husband gave it to her from the spoon. Dead but in a shallow below, only so grave and shallow. I know he suffered worlds on account of his little wife, Miss Nina. He said if he could not see you, I want to see the nurse, and thank her for her kindness to a sick stranger."

"I do not want any present from him, my good friend, and I will be content to receive his thanks through you," answered Nina. "I only did my duty. Oh! as the doctor said I am very glad she has come."

"I believe you have had enough to do anything you wish, and heart enough to do wonders for one you loved. Gratton ought to be a happy man."

"Thank God! It was a blessed escape. Parson was right. He was unworthy of you. But you loved him, and you have suffered from his base desertion."

answered, softly, as she moved from him toward the door.

"You are going out!" he exclaimed. "May I go with you?" She hesitated, looking into his agitated face and growing more self-controlled.

"Certainly, if you wish to," she answered, quite calmly.

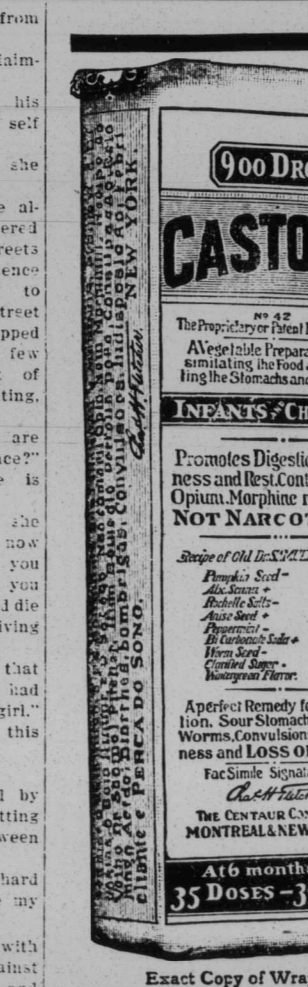
"In another moment they were alive together. Neither remembered for awhile that it was in the streets of a city where death and pestilence reigned. They were recalled to their surroundings at the next street crossing, where they were stopped by a hearse followed by a few mourners that passed in front of them. While they stood waiting, he turned to her.

"Nina, why in Heaven's name are you here in this dreadful place?" he asked. "Here, where there is death in every breeze?"

"Why did I bring you here?" she returned, remorsefully. "I feel now that I ought never to have sent you that telegram. But I thought you would be miserable if she should die without your seeing and forgiving her."

"I am glad from my heart that you sent the message, though I had long ago forgiven Lucille, poor girl."

"I saved her life; the doctor said so. 'God alone can save life,' she



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you cease to care for him?" "I had ceased to care for him long before I knew it. That night when he left me alone out on the wild water—that night that the veil from my eyes, I could not love a coward."

"That forgotten night?" murmured Lee, looking at her with dream tenderness. "Nina, tell me, if you had known of Gratton's baseness then, would you—would you have divorced yourself from me?"

"I have not seen him in many months," she said. "Not since Nina. Have you left him or has he left you?"

"I did not go on the journey; I have not been abroad, and now to meet you here—alone—"

"My poor friend! All this has been a bitter trial to you. You loved her so truly," he smiled.

"Do you mean this, Nina? Do you really feel that the divorce was a mistake?" "Yes, I do," she said, almost below her breath. In an instant his arms were around her.

"Dearest," he whispered, "it is a mistake that can soon be set right. We can be married again, this time for love and life, as God meant marriage to be. Will you be my wife, Nina, my own true wife?"

Her eyes answered him. Beneath their lifted lids he read the supreme emotion that best expresses itself in silence.

The remarriage of 1846 was, whom the law had joined together, and the law had separated, took place one week later, on the first day that Lucille was able to sit up.

When using stale bread for padding always soak it in a cold liquid. Bread that has been soaked in cold milk or water is light and crumbly, whereas that soaked in hot liquids is heavy.