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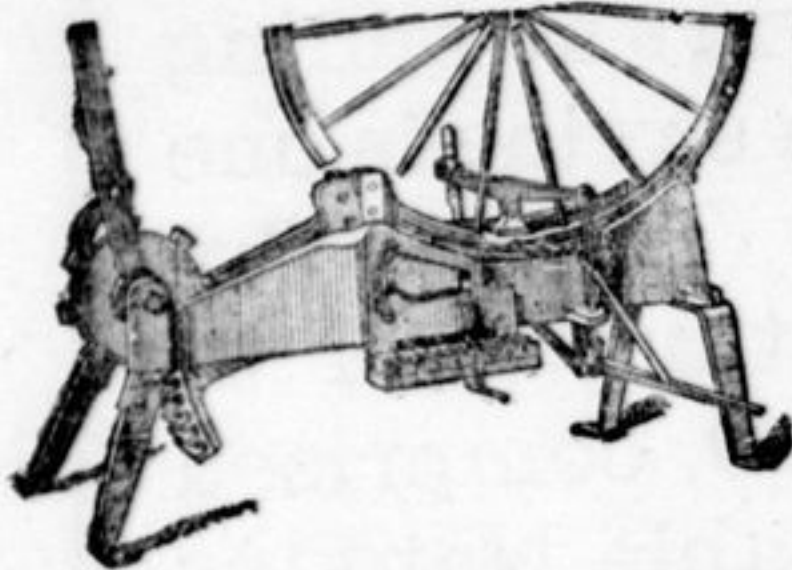
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**M. D. McGRATH**  
Near the Garafra St. Bridge

**THE Pillar of Light**

By Louis Tracy

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CHAPTER IV.  
THE VOICE OF THE REEF

There comes a time in the life of every thinking man or woman when the argosy of existence, floating placidly on a smooth and lazy stream, gathers unto itself speed, rushes swiftly onward past familiar landmarks of custom and convention, boils furiously over resisting rocks, and ultimately, if not submerged in an unknown sea, finds itself again meandering through new plains of wider horizon.

Such a perilous passage can never be foreseen. The rapids may begin where the trees are highest and the meadows most luxuriant. No warning is given. The increased pace of events is pleasant and exhilarating. Even the last wild plunge over the cascade is neither resented nor feared. Some frail craft are shattered in transit, some wholly sunken, some emerge with riven sails and tarnished embellishments. A few not only survive the ordeal, but thereby fit themselves for more daring exploits, more soul-stirring adventures.

When the two girls stood with Stephen Brand in the narrow entrance to the lighthouse, the gravity of their bright young faces was due solely to the fact that their father had announced the serious accidents which had befallen his assistants. No secret monitor whispered that fate, in her bold and merciless dramatic action, had roughly removed two characters from the stage to clear it for more striking events.

Not once in twenty years has it happened that two out of the three keepers maintained on a rock station within signalling distance of the shore have become incapacitated for duty on the same day. The thing was so bewilderingly sudden, the arrival of Constance and Enid on the scene so timely and unexpected, that Brand, a philosopher of ready decision in most affairs of life, was at a loss what to do for the best now that help, of a sort undreamed of, was at hand.

The case of Jackson, who was scalded, was simple enough. The Board of Trade medicine chest supplied to each lighthouse is a facsimile of that carried by every seagoing steamship. It contained the ordinary remedies for such an injury, and there would be little difficulty or danger in lowering the sufferer to the boat.

But Bates's affair was different. He lay almost where he had fallen. Brand had only lifted him into the storeroom from the foot of the stairs, placing a pillow beneath his head, and appealing both to him and to Jackson to endure their torture unmoved whilst he went to signal for assistance.

The problem that confronted him now was one of judgment. Was it better to await the coming of the doctor or endeavor to transfer Bates to the boat? He consulted Ben Pollard again; the girls were already climbing the steep stairs to sympathize with and tend to the injured men.

"Do you think it will blow harder, Ben, when the tide turns?" he asked. The old fellow seemed to regard the question as most interesting and novel. Indeed, to him, some such query and its consideration provided the chief problem of each day. Therefore he surveyed land, sea and sky most carefully before he replied.

"It may be a most anything afore night, Misser Brand." At another time Brand would have smiled. To-day he was nervous, distraught, wrenched out of the worn rut of things.

"I fancy there is some chance of the doctor being unable to land when he reaches the rock. Do you agree with me?" His voice rang sharply. Ben caught its note and dropped his weather-wise ambiguity.

"It'll blow harder, an' mebbe snaw agin," he said.

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"I shall need some help here in that case, so I will retain the young lad." Of course you can manage the boat easily enough without them?" Pollard grinned reassuringly. "We'll run straight in w' theicy wind," he said. So they settled it that way, all so simply.

A man sets up two slim masts a thousand miles apart and flashes comprehensible messages across the void. The multitude gapes at first, but soon accepts the thing as reasonable. "Wireless telegraphy" is the term, as one says "by mail."

A whole drama was flowing over a curve of the earth at that moment, but the Marconi station was invisible. There was no expert in telepathic sensation present to tell Brand and the fisherman that their commonplace words covered a magic code. Jackson, white and mute, was lowered first. The brave fellow would not content himself with nursing his agony amidst the cushions aft. When Bates, given some slight strength by a stiff dose of brandy, was carried, with infinite care, down three flights of steep and narrow stairs, and slung to the crant in an iron cot to be lowered in his turn, Jackson stood up. Heedless of remonstrances, he helped to steady the cot and adjust it amidstships clear of the sail.

"Well done, Artie," said Brand's clear voice. "Oh, brave!" murmured Enid. "We will visit you every day at the hospital," sang out Constance. Jackson smiled, yes, smiled, though his bandaged arms quivered and the seared nerves of his hands throbbed excruciatingly. Speak aloud he could not. Yet he bent over his more helpless mate and whispered hoarsely: "Cheer up, old man. Your case is worse'n mine. An' ye did it for me."

Pollard, with a soul gnarled as his body, yet had a glimpse of higher things when he muttered: "D'ye think ye can hold her, mate, whilst I hoist the cloth?" Jackson nodded. The request was a compliment, a recognition. He sat down and hooked the tiler between his arm and ribs. Ben hauled with a will; the Daisy, as if she were glad to escape the cascades of green water swirling over the rock, sprang into instant animation. The watchers from the lighthouse saw Ben relieve the steersman and tenderly arrange the cushions behind his back. Then Brand closed the iron doors and the three were left in dim obscurity.

They climbed nearly a hundred feet of stairways and emerged on to the cornice balcony after Brand had stopped the corker which controlled the hammer of the bell. What a difference up here! The sea, widened immeasurably, had changed its color. Now it was a sullen blue gray. The land was nearer and higher. The Daisy had shrunk to a splash of dull brown on the tremendous ocean prairie. How fierce and keen the wind! How disconsolate the murmur of the reef!

Brand, adjusting his binoculars, scrutinized the boat. "All right ahead," he said. "I think we have adopted the wiser course. They will reach Penzance by half-past two." His next glance was towards the Land's End signal station. A line of flags fluttered out to their right of the staff.

"Signal noted and forwarded," he read aloud. "That is all right; but the wind has changed." Enid popped inside the lantern for shelter. It was bitterly cold. "Better follow her example, Connie," said Brand, to his daughter. "I will draw the curtains. We can see just as well and be comfortable."

Indeed, the protection of the stout plate glass, so thick and tough that sea-birds on a stormy night dashed themselves to painless death against it, was very welcome. Moreover, though neither of the girls would admit it, there was a sense of security here which was strangely absent when they looked into the abyss beneath the stone gallery. Constance balancing a telescope, Enid peering through the field-glasses, followed the progress of the Daisy in silence, but Brand's eyes wandered uneasily from the barometer, which had fallen rapidly during the past hour, to the cyclonic nimbus spreading its dark mass beyond the Seven Stones Lightship. The sun had vanished, seemingly for the day, and the indicator attached to the base of the wind vane overhead pointed now south-west by west. It would not require much further variation to bring about a strong blow from the true southwest, a quarter responsible for most of the fierce gales

that sweep the English Channel. Nevertheless, this quick darting about of the fickle breeze did not usually betoken lasting bad weather. At the worst the girls might be compelled to pass the night on the rock. He knew that the tug with the two relief men would make a valiant effort to reach the lighthouse at the earliest possible moment. When the men joined him the girls could embark. As it was, the affair was spiced with adventure. Were it not for the mishap to the assistant-keepers the young people would have enjoyed themselves thoroughly. The new air of the wind, too, would send the Daisy speedily back to port. On the whole, a doubtful situation was greatly redoubled by the fact that the girls had been lowered. With a leveled. His face brightened. With a grave humor not altogether artificial, he cried: "Now, Constance, I did not take you aboard as a visitor. Between us we ought to muster a good appetite. Come with me to the storeroom. I will get you anything you want and leave you in charge of the kitchen."

"And poor me!" chimed in Enid. "Oh, you, miss, are appointed upper house-maid. And mind you, no followers."

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THE CHRONICLE, 25c till Jan. 1st, 1911

Continued on page 7.

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