



Rebecca Strand was sixteen the first time she saw her father kill a ghost.

She was woken by a hand on her shoulder, and opened her eyes to Papa's face, flickering in the glow of his lantern. He held out her shawl and said, "Get up. I need your help."

Her first thought was: At last!

Immediately she leapt from the warmth of her bed and listened for the weather. No rain lashed against her window. No wind howled. She fastened the woolen shawl around her nightdress.

"Is a ship in trouble?" she asked.

"We need to hurry."

She followed him downstairs and outside. In the calm sky glowed a full moon and stars sharp as gemstones. Not even a hint of mist hovered over the lake. It was hard to imagine a ship foundering on such a night.

Still, boats ran aground on the island's sandy shoals all the time. Jutting from its beaches were the broken ribs of old, wrecked hulls. Many times over the years, her parents had helped drag survivors ashore and into the shelter of their home. But her mother had died of fever two years ago, and last month her older brother, Bernard, had ventured off to Kingston to apprentice as a stonemason. It was just her and her father now, so maybe,

finally, she'd have a chance to prove herself.

But as her eyes swept the smooth water, she saw nothing amiss. Her father headed straight for the lighthouse. For a second she wondered if something was wrong with the lamp itself--had it gone out?--but then the beam swung around, cutting its white path through the night.

“Papa? What’s wrong?”

At the huge red door of the lighthouse, he turned the iron clasp and entered. Stepping inside, Rebecca shivered. Even though it was summer, cold radiated from the thick stone. Her father was already vaulting up the spiral stairs, and she hurried after him.

The hot, thrilling whiff of lamp oil hit her as she climbed up inside the lamp room. Atop its stout iron column, the blazing beacon turned, sending its beam through the high windows. The Gibraltar Point Lighthouse was the tallest of all the lake lights, rising from the western point of the island that sheltered Toronto’s harbor. Across the water were the glimmering lights of the city, home now to almost thirty thousand souls.

Her father hung his lantern from a hook and immediately took up his spyglass. He opened the door and ducked outside onto the narrow catwalk that encircled the lamp room. Rebecca followed.

“I had a warning from the Niagara Light,” Papa said, scanning the water to the south.

Rebecca looked across the vast sweep of Lake Ontario. From this height, you might sometimes see the spray rising from the falls. And on clear nights like this, you could often catch the pale flicker of the Niagara Light on the American shore.

“What kind of warning?” She’d never known lighthouses signaled one another; but this was exactly the sort of thing she’d been hoping Papa would teach her one day. Now maybe with her brother Bernard gone--

“Something’s coming.”

Her skin prickled. The way her father said it, she knew he didn’t mean bad weather. Papa lowered his spyglass and turned to her. He was a solemn man by nature, but she had

never known him to look so grave.

“Tonight must be the night you learn.”

Joy instantly overwhelmed any nervousness. “I’m ready! Papa, I want to know everything!”

She’d been born on this sandy crescent of an island, and her whole life, her father had been keeper of the Gibraltar Point Light. Even though she’d never been permitted to help--that privilege had always gone to Bernard--she was sometimes allowed to watch them tend the lamp. She knew how to replenish the whale oil and trim the wick; she understood the ingenious pulleys and gears that made the beacon revolve. The lighthouse itself felt like a vital gear in her own life. Just as the sun rose each morning, each night the lighthouse beam swept across her curtained window, every two minutes. It was as fine a lullaby and guardian as any child could want. For as long as she could remember, she’d wanted to be a keeper.

“You may not thank me,” Papa said, “for the things I’m going to tell you.”

On the catwalk, she had a powerful premonition that her life was about to change forever.

“You know that I tend the light, to warn ships away from the shoals,” her father said, “to guide them into safe harbor. But there’s more.”

Abruptly, as if he’d heard something, he turned. Following the beacon’s beam, he lifted his spyglass to his eye. He did not hold the rail to steady himself, but stood with his legs wide, like a sailor balanced on the prow of a ship, awaiting a storm--or worse.

“What do you see?” Rebecca demanded.

“Quicker than I thought,” he muttered. He held the spyglass out to Rebecca. “Look.”

Her hands shook as she brought it to her eye.

“Do you see?” he asked.

All she beheld was silvered water, glinting in the moonlight. Then the lighthouse beam picked out something bobbing on the surface. At first Rebecca thought it was a piece of timber washed out from the mill. Her stomach clenched.

“A body!”

Then the lighthouse beam had passed, and all she saw was dark water.

“Where did it go?” She shifted the spyglass to and fro, with no luck.

“Wait for the light to return,” said her father.

When the beam swept past once more, the body reappeared. It was facedown in the water. A sodden blouse; long, weed-matted hair. An arm weakly churned the water.

“She’s alive!” Rebecca cried, looking away from the spyglass. Her father had already rushed back inside the lamp room. She hurried after him. “Papa, we need to get the boat!”

She didn’t understand why he wasn’t sounding the alarm, or bolting to the beach. The poor woman had obviously been washed overboard, or her ship had foundered. “Papa?”

From around his neck, he slipped off the tarnished lighthouse pendant he always wore. He inserted it like a key into the sturdy iron column that supported the lamp. Rebecca heard the sound of metal pieces clicking into place. Suddenly the lamp stopped revolving. From the sides of the column two iron handles shot out with a clang. Gripping them, Papa swiveled the beacon, directing the beam as he wished.

“I never knew you could do that!” Rebecca exclaimed.

“Go outside, find her,” her father instructed.

Bewildered, she returned to the catwalk. Lifting the spyglass, she found the woman. Maybe Papa wanted to focus more light on her before the rescue. Both the woman’s arms were paddling feebly, though her face was still submerged.

“Is the light bright upon her?” Papa called from the lamp room.

“Yes! But she’s so weak--”

“Watch now!”

The woman lifted her head clear of the water and revealed her face. All the breath rushed out of Rebecca’s body. It was like no face she’d ever beheld, the terrible eyes filled with such malice. The light was bright on the woman’s face, and her eyes shut tight, and her tattered hands lifted as if warding off an attack. Holes began to open in her flesh.

“The light’s killing her!” Rebecca cried.

“She’s already dead,” her father replied.

As it disintegrated, the body sank. Rebecca sucked air back into her lungs, then turned to her father, who’d come outside to stand with her. “What was that?”

“A ghost.”

He said it like any other word. A chair. A cat. A house. She caught herself shaking her head no, but her brain could not think of any reasonable explanation for what she’d just seen--or hadn’t seen.

“I couldn’t see it at first,” she said, remembering. “Not until the beam passed over it.”

“Yes. The brightness of our lamp reveals ghosts.”

She stared at the beacon in astonishment. All her life she’d thought it was just a simple lamp--a powerful one, yes, but that was all.

“And it . . . melts them?” she asked.

“Sends them where they are meant to be, be it Heaven or Hell.”

Rebecca touched her hand to her chest. “It made me feel like I couldn’t breathe.”

“Some are terrifying to behold. It’s part of their power.”

Questions pelted her brain. Through her bewilderment, she felt a sting of indignation. “Mother always said there were no ghosts! You did too!”

“I lied,” Papa said, taking the spyglass and scanning the bay. “To keep the secret of our Order.”

“Order?” Rebecca said.

“We don’t have much time.” He handed back the spyglass and returned to the lamp room. “She’s not the only one.”

She hurried after him. “There’s more?”

“I’ll need your help, Rebecca. My vision is not what it once was.”

This, she knew, was true. Despite his spectacles, he squinted, even to see things close at hand. He complained sometimes of headache.

“You must be my eyes tonight, Rebecca,” he told her. “Can I trust you?”

“You can trust me.”

“Can you be quick?”

“I have always been quick, Papa.”

Her legs were trembling, but she drew strength from her father, tall and steady as the lighthouse itself. If he could withstand the oncoming storm, so could she.

From the base of the beacon’s column, her father flipped down a hinged metal plate so that it lay flat against the floor. He stepped onto it and slipped his shoes into two thick

leather straps.

“What’re you doing now?” Rebecca asked.

She got her answer soon enough. With an upward twitch of Papa’s right foot against the strap, the entire lamp column telescoped up, lifting her father with it so his head almost touched the ceiling. With a twitch of Papa’s left foot, the column lowered a touch. Using the iron handles, he swiveled the beam to and fro, taking aim with this strange spectral cannon.

“The angle of attack is superior up here,” he said.

“Do all lighthouses do this?” Rebecca asked.

“I’ve made some modifications.” He squinted into the night. “Now, go be my eyes!”

She hesitated and startled herself by asking, “Does this mean I get to be keeper?”

“Are you bargaining with me?” he demanded, looking at her sternly but, she thought, also with a new respect.

“If I can do this, will you let me?”

“After tonight, you may not want to. Now go!”

Rebecca ran outside to the catwalk and scanned the water with the spyglass. In the beam’s light, a shape suddenly materialized. Her heart clenched.

“There!” she cried, and her father halted the beam. “Back to the south! Yes!”

The light now fully upon it, the ghost raised its terrible head, and Rebecca was certain she could hear a shriek from its fathomless mouth. Under the glare of the lamplight, the ghost flailed and quickly dissolved.

“Gone . . . it’s gone!” she said over her shoulder. But her relief was short-lived. As the beam made another sweep off the point, she gasped at the sight of three bloated shapes,

churning the water.

“Near the mouth of the harbor!”

“They’re heading for the city,” her father barked, aiming the lamp.

Rebecca shuddered at the idea of these things crawling ashore.

“West!” she shouted back to her father, and then, “A little to the southeast,” and when that ghost had dissolved, “To the northwest . . . that’s the last of them!” She leaned, spent, against the doorway. “Is this what you do every night?”

Her father’s eyes crinkled in a quick smile. “Not every night, no.”

Rebecca thought of all the people of Toronto, sleeping in their beds, oblivious. Until tonight, she’d been one of them. Blissfully ignorant that the night contained such terrors.

“What do they want?” she asked. “These ghosts.”

“They’re filled with anger,” Papa said, sweeping the light back and forth across the harbor. “Some died with hatred smoldering in their hearts, some are furious they’re no longer living. These wish us harm. Keep your eyes on the water, Rebecca. We are not yet finished.”

She returned her gaze to the harbor and its entrance. Burned into her mind’s eye was the tortured and cruel face of that first ghost she’d spied.

“Are all ghosts so vicious?”

“No. Most are peaceful; some are lonely, and confused. Others have things to set right before they can properly rest. But they’re not dangerous.”

“But these other ones, you said they can harm us?”



Of course she'd heard ghost stories, but she had a feeling they were all about to be proved wrong.

“They are weak for the most part. They can barely shift dust. But over time some become stronger. Maybe they can turn the page of a book, or blow out a candle. Maybe knock a burning ember from an oven, and burn down a city.” He squinted. “Where is he?”

“Who?” she demanded.

He swung the beam hard, away from the city, out to the open lake. “Look to the south, Rebecca!”

She ran around the gallery to follow his beam, lifted the spyglass to her eye. “Papa!” she yelled.

It was not a single body, but a monstrosity made of many. Arms and legs jutted crookedly at all angles, and the creature scuttled over the lake like a terrible water beetle. It was headed not for the city this time, but the island--and the lighthouse.

“It's coming straight at us!” she cried.

The beam seared a hole in the ghost's carapace, and the creature skittered away.

For the first time in her life, Rebecca heard her father curse. “The others were just a distraction. Be my eyes, Rebecca!”

“To the west!” she cried. “Back two yards!”

But every time she shouted directions, the ghost darted away from the light.

“Angle it down more!” she called out.

“It won't go much lower!”

“It's almost ashore!” Terror welded her feet to the catwalk. With her free hand she clutched the railing, as though bracing for a tidal wave.

The ghost scrambled onto the beach like a vast human centipede