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The Last Lighthouse Giant

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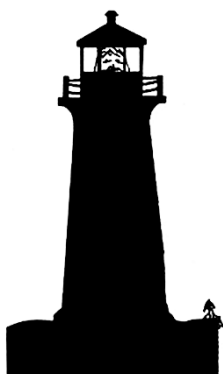
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PART ONE

THE LANTERN



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Ages ago, giants arrived on the coasts of the world. Brick by brick, they built tall round houses on the dark headlands, and from the high windows the lighthouse giants shone bright lanterns out to sea to guide ships safely past their homes.

CHAPTER ONE

BLANCO



Slowly, Blanco turned the lantern. The beam swept across the tossing sea. It fell upon a steamship, the S.S. Scuttlebutt, rounding the cape. Black smoke billowed from its twin smokestacks. Its great side paddlewheel churned furiously through the raging water.

“Thunder and lightning!” the giant shouted. “That ship is running too close to the reef! It’s headed straight for the rocks!”

Keeping the lantern’s light beam fixed on the steamer, Blanco waved his hand in front of the glass chimney, the old lighthouse code for danger.

Flash! Flash! Flash!...Flash! Flash!

“See my light, Cap’n,” he cried. “Read my signal.” But the side-paddler remained on its fatal course.

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The lighthouse giant lowered the lantern. Careful not to singe his bushy red beard, he turned a knob to raise the wick. The flame flared brighter.

Once more, Blanco aimed the beam at the doomed ship. Again, he swept his palm up and down through the beam.

Flash! Flash! Flash!

“Steer to port, Cap’n. You’re too far in.”

Was it too late? Should he reach for the cork life rings?

Flash! Flash!...Flash! Flash!

Slowly, the ship began to turn, veering westward. The spotlight followed every movement.

Blanco drew a long breath. “Aye.”

From the sea below, the steamboat captain blasted his horn in salute.

Phoooooot!

Only doing my duty, captain, Blanco signaled back.

But the lighthouse giant did not rest. More ships would sail the southern Oregon coast that night. More ships needed guidance around the rocky reef off Cape Humbug. West, north, east, and south, Blanco turned his fish-oil lantern. West, north, east, and south, the beam swept over the ocean and cliffs, faithful until dawn.

CHAPTER TWO

JENNY



Jenny Hughes, age ten, leaped from the wagon. She cupped her hands around her mouth and tilted her head back.

“Blanco! Is the coast clear?” she shouted toward the top of the lighthouse.

From the high windows came a booming reply. “Aye, Jenny-friend.”

“Then come outside. Time for supper.”

Jenny’s father, Jacob Hughes, set down the reins of the two chestnut horses, Star and Fish. He climbed from the flatbed wagon. Together, they lifted a large copper kettle from the back. Fish chowder sloshed over the rim as they set the pot near the edge of the cliff.

“That was some storm last night, big fellow,” Jacob

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called out. "Any problems?"

Blanco's bearded face appeared at the window. His eyes were red and swollen.

"All ships passed safely, Mr. Hughes," he said.

Jacob tipped back his bowler hat with a thumb. "Thanks to your beacon, no doubt," he said. "Since you built your house on the cape, there hasn't been a single shipwreck along this stretch of coastline."

Jenny checked the long canvas hammock strung between two cedar trees, Blanco's usual sleeping spot.

"Did you get any sleep last night, Blanco?" she asked.

The giant hid a yawn behind his hand. "I'm good, Jenny-friend," he said. "Just a bit hungry."

"The chowder is nice and thick today," Jenny said. "The townspeople were generous with their vegetables. Nellie Plum even added an extra sack of potatoes."

Her father laughed, out of the giant's earshot. "Generous?" he muttered. "With the storm, the shopkeepers in Port Beaver just had more spoiled food to throw in the kettle. I doubt a single one of them gave our lighthouse giant a single thought last night. None of them ever do. You'd think they'd be grateful for Blanco's service, but they treat him like a dangerous outcast."

"I like helping Blanco," Jenny told her father. "He wouldn't hurt a sand flea."

Jenny's father hugged his daughter. "Your mother would have been proud. She and Blanco were good friends, too."

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Jenny knew her mother only from photographs. She died of Spanish flu when Jenny was a baby. Since then, Jacob and their Swedish housekeeper, Lova, had raised her on the Hughes Dairy Ranch.

Jacob lifted Jenny's bicycle from the back of the wagon. "Be home by dark," he said. "Lova's plucked a chicken for dinner."

After her father drove off, Jenny cupped her hands and called toward the top of the tall, round house again. "Come on out, Blanco. Your chowder's getting cold."

A head the size of a haystack appeared in the doorway. On hands and knees, the sixty-foot-tall giant crawled out. He wore a flannel shirt and baggy blue jeans held up by red suspenders.

Once outside, Blanco stretched his long arms. He rose onto his toes and drew in a lungful of sea air. He scratched his shock of red hair.

"How good it is to be outside, Jenny-friend," he said. "How I love the smell of sea air and the feel of salty wind against my face."

"Me, too," said Jenny. "I never want to live far from the ocean. I love the changing colors of the wrinkly water and the boom of waves crashing on the reef."

The giant sat on the edge of the cliff. He dangled his bare feet over the side. From below came the barking of sea lions basking on the black rocks. Overhead, seagulls swirled and squawked.

Jenny sat beside Blanco. A cool breeze swept back her dusty-brown hair. She pulled a sprig of lavender from

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her overall pocket and held it under her nose. The lighthouse giant needed a bath. Seagull droppings, dried salt, and bits of seaweed clung to his red beard. Grime from the fish-oil lantern streaked his face, food stained his shirt, and mud coated his pants.

“Tomorrow is washing day, Blanco,” Jenny said. “But you’ve had a long night, so first you must eat. Afterward, you should get some sleep.”

The giant pulled a three-foot-long wooden spoon from his shirt pocket. He had carved it from the branch of a myrtle tree. Cradling the copper kettle in one hand, he dipped the spoon into the fish stew. With a loud sucking sound, he slurped it up. A few white drops dribbled into his beard.

“The chowder is good today, Jenny-friend,” he said. “Aye, very tasty.”

“Did you see the big scoop of butter I floated on top?” Jenny said. “I churned it myself and fresh milk from the cows this morning.”

Blanco slurped another spoonful of chowder and wiped his mouth on the sleeve of his flannel shirt.

“Aye,” he said. “Delicious.”

Jenny held the lavender sprig closer to her nose. “Yes, Blanco, tomorrow is washing day. Tomorrow, you’re going down to the Beaver River for a bath.”