

The First Chapter of THE MYSTERY OF THE DEVIL'S GULCH..PLEASE ENJOY THE ENTIRE BOOK.

Chapter One

The full moon's light danced across the rippling ocean as Heceta Head Lighthouse flashed its powerful beam through the darkness. I love lighthouses. I was fascinated by them even before the dreadful accident. Never in my wildest dreams did I think I would end up living in a lighthouse with my Grandfather, Captain Gregory O'Toole.

There is so much to tell and maybe so little time to tell it in. I never paid attention to the old locked sea trunk stuck way back behind the wood burning stove in the corner, and yet it held the key to so many questions that I needed answers to.

Windy, stormy weather is common along the rugged Oregon coastline. I was outside trying to get Daisy and Thunder out of the rain. Daisy is a spirited brown and white pinto. I loved taking pieces of apple and carrots to her everyday. I would sit on the corral fence, talk all about my life as Daisy watched me with her large, chocolate brown eyes. Thunder is a large white Arabian. He is one of the most beautiful horses I have ever seen. My grandfather raised him from a colt with his mother

Cloud. Thunder could be hard to handle in storms. He reared up and pawed the ground. A tall, redheaded stranger with wide blue eyes appeared with Alice Elkhorn and her daughter Blue Star. He calmed both horses down immediately. We were able to put them in the shelter safe from the brewing storm.

We ran to the lighthouse door as my Grandfather motioned for us to come in. "Rachel, how many times have I told you not to try and handle those horses alone!" my Grandfather roared.

"I didn't" I stammered. "He helped me," I said as I pointed to the tall boy behind me.

"My name is Peter Harris," said the young man.

"Oh, are you Sam Harris's nephew?"

"Yes sir, I've come from Minnesota to help him remodel the old homestead," replied Peter.

"You know, that house is almost as old as this lighthouse. People used to stop there when they traveled between Florence and the lighthouse in bad weather," my Grandfather commented calmly now.

My uncle told me it used to take the old timers all day to get down to Florence from up there," replied Peter.

The wind howled as Alice and Blue Star followed Peter in through the door. "Well young man, that was quite impressive horsemanship," said Alice as she pulled her hooded poncho off, revealing her long, gray streaked braid. The light sparkled on a large necklace with a silver turtle connected to an impressive bear claw

that had been passed down to her from her Siustlaw father. She was only a little over five feet tall, but you could feel how powerful she was in her own way.

"I'll say. You took charge so fast we didn't have to do anything. I've never seen anybody handle horses like that before," Blue Star chimed in, pulling back her long black hair into a tight pony tail.

Peter turned red and seemed embraced by the attention. he mumbled, "Oh, thank you. I've been around horses my whole life."

Blue Star took off her yellow rain jacket and untied her white tennis shoes. "Captain O'Toole, can I put these near the stove to dry?" she asked.

"Well of course you can honey. Make yourself at home," Grandfather said.

"That white Arabian is some horse , sir. You don't see many like him just hanging out in a corral. At least I haven't," said Peter.

"Rachel's Grandmother had a beautiful white mare called Cloud. She came from a long line of amazing horses, Peter," Alice said as she got comfortable in one of the three rocking chairs in the room. "My father used to tell me of a great white stallion that led a large herd of wild horses through the Cascade Mountains and hills. Many tried to capture him, but no one could. Some would call him the Ghost Stallion because he would show up at strange times, wake up the whole tribe, and then disappear."

"What do you me strange times, Alice?" I asked.

"Well, usually when the tribe was in danger or it was time to move to safety for some reason," Alice said.

"Anyway, my father found one of the mares left behind and hurt in the forest. He nursed her back to health, and she gave birth to a beautiful little filly. He called her Cloud. Your Grandmother Maria fell in love with that filly, so my father gave it to her as a gift."

"I've seen pictures of her riding a beautiful white horse down the beach," I said quietly.

"Yes, Maria loved animals. She was always feeding birds, walking the dogs, and riding Cloud when she had time."

My Grandfather had just come down from his lighthouse duties and was ready to scoop out his wonderful mystery stew with homemade biscuits and hot tea. He laughed and said, "Yes, and then that beautiful calm mare had this white colt that was so wild we had to call him Thunder."

There was a pounding at the old wooden door and then, with a rush of icy wind, Adam Lafitte pushed his way into the warm lighthouse.

"Captain O'Toole, I got stuck down on the highway near Devil's Gulch. Can I wait out the storm here with you all?" he asked.

My grandfather laughed and said, "Adam, you crazy kid, what were you doing down at Devil's Gulch? You know how dangerous the cliffs are even in sunny weather."

Adam laughed and said, "What's that smell, Captain?"

I laughed too and said, "Oh Adam, you've had Grandfather's mystery stew before."

"Many an unsuspecting tourist has walked along the beach when the tide is out, and then without warning a sneaker wave roars in and washes the tourist away!" said Grandfather forcefully.

"What's a sneaker wave?" asked Peter.

"Sneaker waves are rogue waves that come up out of nowhere. They are so big that they can knock a person down and often time wash them out to sea within minutes. They are especially dangerous in enclosed coves and areas with high rocky cliffs like Devil's Gulch." said Alice.

There were times like this that I would let my eyes wander around the beautiful old lighthouse. Every nook and cranny was crammed full of books, candles, lanterns, seashells, a telescope, yellow rain slickers, photographs of so many people both from the past and present, and a wonderful copper teapot that whistled cheerily when the water was hot enough for tea or coffee. I especially liked the big green fern that hung in the corner of the main room.

My Grandfather invited everybody to join us for dinner. We settled in for long hours of waiting out the storm that was now pelting the lighthouse with sheets of rain. Grandfather settled into his bright blue rocking chair, running his thumbs up and down his red suspenders which was always a sign we were in for a story or two.

"Well, according to the elders of the Siuslaw tribe, long, long ago a strange ship sailed close to the shore just north of Devil's Gulch. They say there were white men who would carry things in a small boat to the rocky beach and leave them in the caves along the shore." started my Grandfather.

"Men? Sir, could they have been pirates?" asked Peter curiously.

"Possibly, Peter. Because as the legend goes they would sail away, and then many moons later they came back again. The legend tells that one day during a violent storm the ship came close to the shore. It crashed on the rocks beneath where the lighthouse sits now. And ever since that time there have been repeated sightings of a large schooner that suddenly disappears after a few minutes."

"Yes, our people have many legends about this whole area, especially Devil's Gulch. Strange things happen around there and have for many years," Alice said as she sipped her tea.

The twisted trees and black volcanic rock of Devil's gulch gave the area an eerie feeling. The trees created a canopy so thick that the ground is almost dry where people can walk along the twisted, narrow path through the ancient forest near the cliffs. So it didn't surprise me that strange things happen up there.

I loved listening to my Grandfather talk. I looked at the five people sitting close to the potbelly stove listening attentively to his stories. The stark contrast

between the two teenage boys and my Grandfather was interesting to me. Adam was dark and compact. He had brown, curly, unruly hair with intense brown eyes and bushy eyebrows that seemed to express his feelings.

I fondly let my eyes trace my Grandfather's weather beaten face, blue eyes and his shock of white hair. He was a large man and he stroked his white beard constantly while he was retelling his favorite stories to the boys. His voice boomed even when he spoke softly, and he waved his pipe around every time he was particularly expressive about one of his points in a story. His trademark to the people in the area was his bright, red suspenders and his pronounced limp when he walked fast.

Peter seemed more relaxed and at ease with his quiet studious manner. He was clearly comfortable in his 6' frame. He laughed as he ducked in and out of the 130 year old lighthouse commenting, "People must've been shorter in the 1800s' than they are now." He sat quietly, periodically jotting down notes in a worn leather journal while my Grandfather spoke. When we questioned him he explained.

"My Dad was a journalist," Peter said with a smile. "I tagged along with him whenever he would let me. He was always writing down notes in his ragged, black leather journal about something that had just happened, or a person, or place, so he could remember it later when he needed to for an article or story. He wrote for several magazines. Somewhere along the line I started writing things down too."

I could tell it was hard for him to talk about his father, so I hesitated a moment and then asked, "Does your father live in Minnesota, Peter?"

"No-o, not any more. He died a year ago in a hit and run car accident. They never found the driver." he said grimly.

Lightening flashed and thunder roared outside our safe haven in the sturdy lighthouse. Bear started to pace nervously . He was my Grandfather's black and white border collie and dearest companion.

"Now Bear old buddy, settle down. You know you're safe in here with us. Just relax," said my Grandfather warmly. Bear curled up under the small round table next to my Grandfather's feet, still looking worried but quieting down reluctantly.

"You know, this weather reminds me of a day just like this one many years ago when a stranger came knocking on the door. He seemed really out of place. My wife, Maria made him sit down and eat something because he looked so tired and disheveled." began my Grandfather.

"How was he out of place, sir?" asked Blue Star.

"Well, at first it was hard to put your finger on, you know. He just didn't seem to fit in exactly. He talked about San Francisco and the 1906 earthquake like it had just happened a few months before. He was looking for a friend of his. A scientist who had invented a time machine, at least that is what he said. He talked about

time travel and life's possibilities," Grandfather said with a smile.

"Oh, come on Captain O'Toole. You don't believe in time travel!" laughed Adam.

"Well, he does have several books on it, including H.G. Wells THE TIME MACHINE here on the shelf," said Peter as he pulled the well worn book off the bookshelf.

"I always wondered about H.G. Wells and his books," Peter said half out loud and half to himself.

"What did you say, Peter?" asked Alice with a quiet knowing her eyes.

"Well, you know all those books he wrote were so completely outrageous for his time, the 1800s I think. And yet now we have almost all the things he described. I wonder how he did that?" Peter said shaking his head slowly.

"Captain O'Toole, I've never met anyone like you. The people in my family don't believe in anything but cold hard cash," Adam said with a sort of sadness in his voice.

My Grandfather gently looked at Adam and said, "Oh lad when you have lived as long as I have you learn that life has so many possibilities. We all make choices everyday that create our lives."

After Peter and Adam went home Grandpa and I cleaned up the small kitchen together, singing songs he had taught me as a child. I went to bed and fell fast asleep immediately. The next morning I got up quickly and took a walk with Bear along the Beach.

The caves and cliffs were shrouded with a heavy gray mist up and down the coastline. The Heceta Head Lighthouse was named for Don Bruno de Heceta, the Spanish explorer and navigator who first saw the extraordinary, rugged area in 1775. It was on mornings like this one that it was easy to believe pirates hid their treasures along this coast with its surrealistic and spooky shoreline.

Many visitors say they have never seen a coastline as rugged and majestic as ours. The beach is littered with driftwood, fallen trees, and rocks that have been worn smooth by the mighty Pacific Ocean.

When I first moved here I couldn't believe how many shades of green Mother Nature could provide in the trees, giant ferns, and thick underbrush.

There were so many colorful flowers, hanging moss, owls, sea gulls, pelicans, eagles, ravens, sea lions, otters, and amazing whales that migrate up and down the coast every year. All of the natural beauty together created a magical world for me.

Up the road from the lighthouse is a beautiful hot spring pool hidden in the mountains. Grandpa took me there a couple of years ago when I first came to live with him. We went camping. That was the first time I ever saw a black bear. We had gotten up at sunrise to get an early start home, when much to our surprise a mother bear and her two cubs were eating berries. We went one way and the bears went the other. I have had so many wonderful adventures with my Grandfather. He may have

white hair, but he has a young heart and I love him dearly.

The seagulls and pelicans danced across the crashing waves, searching for food. I was aimlessly walking, deep in thought, when I saw an old green van stopped in front of our lighthouse gate. A strange, but familiar tingle went down my spine. I looked around. Coming towards me was a short, scraggly looking man. His face seemed odd to me. He was waving and smiling, but his gray eyes were small and dangerous looking under his wire rimmed glasses. He wore a beat up red baseball cap over his stringy brown hair.

"Howdy Miss, I'm just traveling through. My name is Ernie Tyler," he said as he stuck out his hand.

I didn't shake his hand, I just felt cold and scared as I said, "Hello."

"I read about a pirate's treasure in this area and a lighthouse keeper called Captain O'Toole. Do you know anything about a treasure or the Captain?" he asked.

"What? No-o." I stammered.

Just then Bear, our black and white Border Collie ran barking and growling up to the lighthouse. I saw two men pulling my Grandfather towards the green van at the gate. When I turned around Ernie Tyler had disappeared.

I ran up the beach as fast as I could, but I was too late. The van sped up the road and out of sight before I could get to the gate. Hysterically I dialed 911 only to realize that the phone was dead. The line had been cut.

Tears, fear and sheer panic gripped me. I just couldn't lose my Grandfather too. Out loud I just screamed and sobbed. Visions of that dreadful night two years before filled my head.

I could see my beautiful mother's face and her clear blue eyes laughing at me just moments before the drunk driver crashed into our car killing both of my parents. She had my Grandfather's eyes. My whole body ached from sadness that overwhelmed me again, now feeling completely alone with no one to turn to for help.

Then Bear's hair bristled and his barking brought me to my senses as I realized someone had opened the lighthouse door and was walking up the spiral staircase where I was. I grabbed the fireplace poker to defend myself.

"Rachel, Are you all right? Where are you?" Peter said as he came up the stairs.

"Wait, don't hit me! What happened here? The place looks like a hurricane hit it."