October 20, 2014



Laney

To this day, I still shudder at the thought of the old lighthouse, its rickety stairs and rusted railing creaking as I crept up and up, the flight seemingly never-ending. Chills that have nothing to do with the frosty air make their way down my spine when the image of dim light and the sounds of my sisters' piercing screams fill my mind. Nightmares of the oceanside, deadly silent, except the ghostly lapping of waves against the shore, haunt me in my sleep, as I believe they will for years to come. Although we narrowly survived, I still awake in the middle of the night in that same panic, re-living paralyzing moments that will remain vividly in my mind forever.

THE MYSTERIOUS LIGHTHOUSE

WRITTEN BY: RAMSEY ANDERSON

"Give me my toy back!" "NO, it's mine!" "I hate you! You are the stupidest person in the whole wide world!" Those were the sounds that filled the cramped car. So far, this road trip was as far from fun as it could possibly get. Little did I know that excitement was on its way, but not the kind of excitement I was looking for.

"Hey! Tone it down, I'm at a good part!" The voice belonged to Natalie, who was 15, and happened to be an avid reader. The incessant bouncing of her knee, as well as her hot pink headphones plugged into her ears indicated she was listening to music while reading her "favorite book" on her iPod.

"Dawn, when are we going to be there?" Molly whined. I leaned my head against the window and let out a deep, exasperated sigh. This drive was going to take centuries!

I awoke to a slug on my arm and knew it was Natalie. "Double sevens," she said, already getting ahead in the road trip game we liked to play.

I could make out the soft sound of waves lapping against the shore, whispering their hushed summer song. The sun reached through the car window, blinding me with its light and filling the humid Oregon air with its warmth. I craned my neck, peering out the window to get a better view of the sandy beaches and foaming waves, looming beneath us. I couldn't wait to bury my toes in

the powdery sand and dip my feet in the cool, aqua-colored water. As I gazed out at the beautiful coast, I could make out the faint figure of a lighthouse, standing atop a hill with green, lush plants surrounding it.

"Dawn, are we close?" Kierra said, in a high-pitched voice that indicated she was completely sick of driving. I couldn't blame her!

"Yes, sweetheart," I heard my mom's sweet voice say, but I knew she longed to reach the hotel as well.

"Mom," I said, "there's a lighthouse and a beach nearby if you need a break. We could stop and get out for just a minute."

"That's a great idea, Laney," she said, turning onto the rough, dirt road that led to the beach.

Again, the car was filled with excited chatter about the ocean, suggestions and plans piling up, my four step-sisters' voices filled with enthusiasm.

The car jerked to a stop, and although my legs had turned into gelatin, I hopped out, anxious to get to the beach.

"Last one there is a rotten egg," Kierra called, up for a challenge as usual. We ran, laughing and giggling down to the ocean, Molly and Kierra pausing to collect shells, glittering in the sunlight. I felt so refreshed, so lively, running along the beach, squealing like a child.

I could hear the cries of seagulls, the splashing of the waves, and the laughter of my new family. Watching the smiles on everyone's face made me think that everything with my mom's new marriage and my new sisters would turn out okay. Little did I know this vacation would be anything but okay.

As I glanced over at Marlee, her jet-black curls dancing in the wind, I saw on her face she felt bored and left out, so I walked over to her and asked if she would like to take a hike to the lighthouse on the top of the hill. I didn't know why, but I had always found lighthouses fascinating. To me, each seemed to hold a secret, contain a mystery. There was a story behind each one, and I wasn't about to miss out on this lighthouse.

After asking Marlee, Natalie decided she wanted to come, and so did the two younger girls, so the five of us headed toward the lighthouse, marching up the hill, chattering and joking, like old friends.

Mom stayed back to take photos of the "rare sight." She was a photographer and had a great knack for taking pictures of nature. So, without her, we continued, pushing our way through the thick shrubbery, the smell of salt slowly fading away.

Panting and gasping, my legs turned to liquid when I reached the top of the hill and stood, the flames of my hair dancing lightly in the breeze as I waited for the others. The seemingly ancient lighthouse loomed over me, casting a dim shadow on the tops of the nearby trees. The rickety old door seemed to say, "You are not welcome here," and I got a shiver down my spine at the eerie aura this old building put out. Ignoring the feeling, I told myself the chill had only to do with the

gust of wind blowing by, but the thing was, there was no wind.

"I think it's locked," I said, pulling one last time on the door.

"Yeah," Marlee sighed wearily. "Come on guys, let's just head back. I want to get to the hotel so we can swim."

"So do I, let's go."

The fear on Natalie's face was unmistakable, so vivid she couldn't hide it. I began to wonder if she, too, could fill the chills crawling up her back.

"No! I want to go inside!" This time it was Molly who was fearless.

Kierra clearly agreed, because she ran over to the door, and began tugging on it.

"Kierra, it's obviously no use, so let's just go!" I was beginning to get irritated, and all I wanted was to get to the hotel so I could swim.

Then, I heard a loud bang, followed by a thud. Dust flew up from around the fallen wood door. The ashamed look on Kierra's face was unmistakable, but I could also see the hint of a smirk play across her mouth for a half second, before she ran inside. Honestly, I couldn't blame her for her curiosity, and chances were that nobody owned the lighthouse anyway, so I decided to let her off the hook.

Molly raced inside, her cinnamon-colored hair fluttering behind her. Marlee was then followed by a reluctant Natalie, and I came last, not sure if we should be doing this. Were we intruding? I just had to learn to let some things go, so I shrugged my shoulders, and walked inside. I would never be the same again.

The minute I walked through the broken doorway, I felt ice cold. I could tell this lighthouse was old and not well-known (if at all), by the moaning of the floorboards and the musty smell that filled the air. My eyes had not yet absorbed the building when I heard a scream pierce the air. My stomach knotted, and I felt a lump form at the back of my throat. Looking to my left, I caught a glimpse of Marlee, a petrified look playing across her face as she stared at an insect the size of an ant. I couldn't help but laugh.

"Marlee, calm down, it's a tiny spider!"
A reluctant laugh followed from her mouth,
but I could tell she was still nervous.
Wanting to relieve her of her fears, I
suggested we all go upstairs, to figure out
the mystery of this old place. That was my
worst choice.

I grabbed the rusted railing, winding up and up the stairs. Suddenly, I stopped, and my heart did too.

"What?" Natalie gently shoved me up.

"Nothing, I.... I just thought I heard something."

"Oh, now you're acting like Marlee!"

"Hey!" Marlee's voice interrupted us, urging me to continue upward, but I couldn't ignore the incessant shaking of my hands, as the soft sound continued to grow, filling my mind with confusion and petrifying terror.

"Ring around the rosies, pocket full of posies."

"Y-you s-s-seriously don't hear th-that?" I asked, my voice seeming to vibrate along with the rest of my body.

"Oh my gosh, you're being delusional," Natalie mocked.

"No, Nat, I hear it, too." Marlee's face was turning pale, all the blood draining out of her cheeks.

I could see Natalie's eyes widen, but she refused to turn back. "We'll scare the little girls," was her argument to continue onward.

That was when I realized we had reached the top of the flight of stairs, and I felt my head spinning as I crept around the corner, searching for the source of the sound.

Nothing jumped out at me, and I gave a nervous laugh, embarrassed I had actually thought that would happen. Still, there was no ignoring the ghostly sound that seemed to drift through the air, as if it weren't a noise at all, but more of a thought or emotion. I could now almost clearly hear and feel this sensation, as the words of the nursery rhyme danced through the lighthouse into my ears, giving me a feeling of paranoia.

"Ashes, ashes, we all fall down."

Then, nothing. Not a sound remained, although the feeling did, haunting every inch of my mind. Peering across at Marlee, I could visibly make out the confusion she was feeling as well. We exchanged glances, horrified, but not sure what to make of the eerie words.

For the sake of the younger girls, and also for my curiosity, I quietly paced across the white, wooden room, past the glittering bulb, which seemed to have a dull illumination. Kicking up dust, I made my way over to a torn wall, and knelt down beside a chest. Intricate designs played across the front, and looking around, I realized I was not the only girl in awe. I could see the

amazement and curiosity, a dim shadow on each of the girl's faces.

"Well," I asked, attempting to break the tension. "Should I open it?"

This time, it was Kierra who acted as if she felt exactly how I did. "Laney," she practically whispered (which never happened), "I'm... a little scared. I d-don't think you should open it."

So it wasn't just me. It couldn't have been. They all felt the same unknown, mysterious horror, but some were obviously more skilled at hiding it.

I still am not sure what it was, then, that compelled us each to stay, but we did, each curious about the secrets the lighthouse held.

It was Marlee who spoke up, delicately holding a piece of ripped, yellowed paper between her fingers, displaying a black-and-white photograph of a young girl, maybe 8 years of age. "Um, I found something?" The statement came out sounding more like a question.

Unable to control myself, I reached for the paper, snatching it from her hands.

The title stated, Missing orphan suspected dead.

I shuddered. What did this lighthouse have to do with orphans? I didn't know, and frankly, I didn't want to, so I closed my eyes and turned my head, letting the paper flutter to the dusty floorboards.

Confusion playing across her face, Marlee slowly picked up the paper, and began to read in a whisper. Not knowing what compelled me to do so, I glued my eyes to the words, reading quickly over her shaking shoulder. Caroline Blair, 8 years of age, was recently reported missing. The young girl previously resided at Cherry Creek Orphanage on the Oregon Coast, near Pelican Shores lighthouse. It is suspected the Orphanage owner may have something to do with the death. However, stronger suspicions suggest...

Next to me, I felt Kierra and Marlee jump, and begin frantically whipping their heads around, clearly searching for something. That was when I heard it. The nursery rhyme, this time, accompanied by the low, soft groan of wood creaking under the pressure of what could only be feet. Suddenly, I felt a slight breeze drift through the room, and heard a TAP TAP TAP on the window. My breathing became forced and heavy, as my eyes darted from ceiling to floor, searching for the source of the sound.

Molly was growing more white by the minute, looking like her skin had been made entirely of snow. I felt cold pinpricks spreading across my back like pins and needles poking at me, making me spine feel a strange tingling sensation.

Still, I searched, peeking through the curtains, staring at the light bulb. Nothing. Not a single person, or even a spider dangling from the dense cobwebs strung in corners on the ceiling.

Suddenly, as if she had seen something, a horrified expression crossed Molly's face, her eyes wide, and her jaw gaping. Without a backward glance, she scampered out of the room, arms flailing out behind her. Everything that happened next seemed a blur to me, as I grabbed Marlee's arm and ran, my heart pounding so fast, I thought it would beat right out of my chest. Luckily, it didn't, and by the time I reached the lighthouse doorway, I was panting, my mind racing, as the same ghostly words replayed through my mind, filling my ears. I

must have heard a thousand blood-curdling screams, each one a sharp knife, digging into the back of my mind, and forming a lump in my throat.

As I turned back rather reluctantly, waiting for everyone's fleeing feet to reach mine, I could make out a scream that sounded much different than the others. It wasn't a scream of horror. The owner of that haunting voice didn't sound a bit scared. It was more of a scream of dismay that drifted through the wind, the ghostly noise almost inaudible, but not quite. It was when my sisters caught up with me that I realized, it was the same voice, soft and sweet, yet dark and mysterious that had nearly whispered the verses of Ring Around the Rosies.

I sighed as the car came to a stop, still smelling the salty water that lingered in our hair. With lips still sealed about our encounter, each one of us climbed slowly out of the car, exhausted from playing in the waves.

We lugged our bags into the warm, cozy lobby, where the scent of spiced pumpkin filled the air. Although it seemed nice, I could tell the hotel was a bit run down, with dents filling the walls, and the carpet torn at the corners. Honestly, I didn't mind. As exhausted as we all were, we anxiously looked forward to a swim in the pool.

As soon as mom checked us in, the small area filled with excited yells, the girls seeming to have forgotten the chills that ran down our spines just an hour earlier. I certainly hadn't.

"Dawn, can we go swimming RIGHT NOW?" Molly asked, ever the enthusiast. She

and Kierra were running like chickens with their heads cut off when she gave in, telling them they may only swim for an hour at the most. I laughed as they tore down the hallway, toward our room, arms flailing out behind them.

Despite all the excitement, I still had a million questions lingering in my mind, haunting me every second. Curiosity took over, and I couldn't help staying behind to ask the short, old woman at the desk if she knew anything about the lighthouse.

"I have no idea which lighthouse you are talking about," she stated, with a heavy British accent, her long, pointed nose sticking up in the air like that of a snowman. "You foolish young girl, you have no manners to be asking me questions about things I know not a bit about! I have more important things to take care of!" Her voice hinted that she was irritated with me and clearly knew nothing I wanted to hear, so I left that ridiculous old lady to her "More important things," and moved on, still hearing a ghostly scream at the back of my mind, the sound that would linger there for years to come.

I lay in the hotel bed that night, tossing and turning, images of the lighthouse, with its cracked windows and dust that piled up like snow dancing through my head. I could hear the verses of the same child's nursery rhyme, its rhythm becoming as familiar as the steady crashing of each wave outside the window.

Who was Caroline Blair? Had someone killed her? Was it her spirit that haunted the lighthouse?

A thousand questions raced through



my mind, and my head spun thinking about it all. Finally, I pushed the thought out of my head, and thought of another question in my life. What would happen with my mom's new marriage? How could I learn to love and get along with all these new people? It seemed rather stupid, but it was the only thought that took my mind off haunting images and bone chilling sounds.

Suddenly, I shot straight up out of bed, and threw on some tennis shoes. I needed answers, and I had an idea. Quietly, I crept over to Natalie and Marlee's bed, careful not to set foot on any loose floorboards.

"Natalie! Marlee!" My whisper sounded

more like a strangled cry. Quietly, I shook both of them.

"Waaaat?" Marlee groaned, making Natalie turn over.

"Shhhh, you have to be quiet. Listen, I need to go to the lighthouse, and you're both coming with me, but you can't say a word to anyone."

"There's no way I'm going back there. You think I'm crazy?"

"Well," I started.

"Nevermind, don't answer that question, but I AM NOT coming with you!"

I yanked her arm vigorously. "Yes, you

ARE! I need answers, and someone has to come with me. Don't you want to know what that was about?"

"No, Marlee, I think she's right. WE need to find out what that was about, and even if we don't want to go, we can't let her go alone." I was surprised at Natalie's decision, thinking she would be the one to stay back. Immediately, she got up, and pulled on her shoes, dragging Marlee with her.

Because we didn't want to make anyone in the hotel suspicious, I cracked open the window and climbed out, feeling the cool wind and a light rain splatter my face. Marlee and Natalie stayed close behind as we started our trek across the beach, kicking up sand as we walked. I still had no idea what awaited us.

I glanced down at the rocks below and gulped. I could feel the knot in my stomach tighten, the sweat beading on my forehead, as I tried not to look at the stormy seas underneath us. Ahead lay an even more treacherous danger, one I knew I couldn't turn away from now. Lightning and thunder pierced the air, illuminating the lighthouse on top of the hill. In the faint glow, it looked deadly, more like a monster than a building. As we neared it, the tall white wood towering over me like a giant, I felt a chills that had nothing to do with the cool rain, stinging my face and blurring my vision.

I peered through the dark doorway, and let out a shaky breath. "What are you waiting for?" Natalie asked, trying to hide her fear, but failing terribly.

Biting my lip, I placed one foot inside,

then the other, followed by my two sisters.

I forced a nervous laugh. "No screaming about spiders this time Marlee, okay?"

Another blast of lightning hit nearby, lighting my way up the winding staircase with a couple wooden steps missing. Slowly, I moved my feet upwards, not sure what to expect. With every step that took me nearer to the top, I began to hear the words more clearly. "Ring around the rosies, pocket full of posies." I couldn't back out now. I wouldn't.

It was when I reached the top that I realized that same glow, that eerie, blue light was coming from the corner of the room, near the box I almost opened the day before.

Pulling out the flashlight I brought with me, I crept over, starting to shudder uncontrollably.

That was when I saw a carving in the wall.

Thomas

I never meant to kill her. I wouldn't have even thought of it. I guess it was just my luck that it happened while we were playing together near the cliff about 10 years ago. I have been trying to live with myself ever since, but I just can't stop thinking about it, reliving every moment of Caroline's death.

"Uver here, come get me," Laroline's voice called, as sweet as sugar. I laughed and chased after her, but she was too fast. The giggled loudly as I ran, singing her favorite song, the one about roses. Breathing heavily, I attempted to tag her so that she would be it for once.

As 7 rounded the corner of our old, run down orphanage and started up the steep hill toward the

lighthouse we always played at, I began to catch up to her little by little until she was inches away from my fingertips. Little did I realize she was also inches away from the sleep cliff that loomed over the crashing waves and sharp rocks in the foaming water below.

Reaching out to tag her, 7 caught sight of Caroline's feet, which stumbled, trying to find solid ground again. Quickly, the dirt underneath her gave way, dropping her into the ocean, her arms and legs flailing. Her body disappeared in the blanket of blue that lay beneath me.

I never told anyone. All I revealed of her death was that we were out hiking and she suddenly disappeared, never to be seen again. That was only partially true. I heard her singing her sweet song from the ocean for years after.

Opening my eyes more to make sure I could see straight, I inched slowly toward the carvings and the blue light, shuddering and longing to turn back. I convinced myself to continue, my eyes watering and the hair on the back of my neck standing up as I peered at the rough tally marks carved into the side of the lighthouse. It was then that I heard a sound, more horrifying than that of the ghostly song. I cringed. It was the desperate scraping of nails against wood.

Before I was given time to think or confront the others about this, another sound, that same disdainful screaming I heard just a day before filled the room. It seemed to be coming from the open window. I turned, placing my uncontrollably shaky hands on the rusted railing near the unlit light, and peered out into the night sky, letting the wind wash over me, and smelling the salty air. I glanced down, where waves thrashed, tossing and turning in the storm. No matter how hard I looked, I could make out nothing, and had no idea where that

sound was coming from. It was then that I felt something cold press hard against my back, seeming to attempt shoving me into the crashing waves below. Sucking in a breath, I whipped my head around, and heard the most unnerving sound of all, a dark cackle.

I could have sworn every strand of flaming hair on my head stood up straight, and the chills down my spine turned to a burning, tingling sensation when I realized exactly what was the source of that eerie blue light.

I froze in my steps, and dropped my jaw in an attempt at a blood curdling scream, but failed to make a sound. At that moment, when I saw the innocent face of a child with glowing white hair and deep holes the color of the night sky in place of eyes, I knew what it felt like to be literally speechless. This must be no other than the ghost of Caroline Blair. I stared at her loose white nightgown, tattered and fluttering in the sudden breeze dancing its way through the window. Dark scrapes lined her feet, making their way up to her knees and covering her arms. A lump formed in my throat, and I found myself unable to breath, unable to move, unable to think as I finally realized she was what was making the moaning sound of nails against wood and the sweet song of Ring Around the Rosies.

There was nothing I could do except stand there. No muscle in my body, no limb, allowed me to moved. Caroline tilted her head, revealing a gruesome scratch covering her neck. In a breathy voice that could have been mistaken for the wind, she nearly whispered, "Now you'll be trapped here too." My stomach lurched as I felt her hand, which must have been made of ice, push me

forward.

I suddenly lost my grip on the rail as well as my footing, feeling hail sting my face as I was thrown out the window. My throat wouldn't even let out a small whimper, and I began plummeting toward the tossing waves and sharp, pointed rocks that awaited me. This was the end. I knew it.

Then, out of nowhere, I felt a warm hand clasp my arm and two others wrap around my ankles. I glanced up through the window to see two faces, pale with terror. The moment I spied Marlee's dark curls and Natalie's eyes, the color of summer skies, a feeling of reassurance washed over me, although it wasn't over yet.

Now, back inside the lighthouse, I felt that same paralyzing fear pierce my heart as I tried to run from Caroline, the chills from her cold, hard stare lingering on my spine. Try as I might, I couldn't move, couldn't escape from this horrific nightmare that kept me locked in its grasp just like Caroline seemed to be locked inside the lighthouse.

I had finally mustered enough strength to place one foot forward when her cold hand, more of a cloud than solid skin and bone, reached toward me longingly. "Stay here with me." Her head cocked to the side, and her sweet childish face almost fooled me. Slowly, I gulped and shook my head.

The look in her ghost's eyes turned cold, and I made out the figure of her cool, icy fingers reaching toward me, as if to pull me, to try to drown me in the ocean again. My heart raced, and I looked around frantically for Marlee and Natalie, who were right next to me, but they too, could not move.

Just as Caroline was about to touch us, I heard the creaking of wood, which split underneath me. Suddenly, I was falling helplessly through a hole in the wooden floor, my two sisters with me. I could make out the faint sound of the ghost's cries, and then, she disappeared.

A searing pain pierced my ankle as I hit the white wood with a thud. Looking quickly around, I grabbed the wrists of the two girls, and without a backward glance, took off into a sprint across the vast expanse of the bottom floor. I don't think I have ever run that fast in my life.

We're safe! I thought, my heart pounding in my chest and ears, my breathing becoming heavy. The doorway stood just two feet ahead, and I let out a sigh of relief, knowing that we would be okay. I was wrong.

Suddenly, as I was scampering across the wood, I hit something hard and black. I sucked in a breath, looking up to see the dismayed face of a man, his clothing grimy, and his hair a tangled mess. His long, honey colored beard hung down from his chin, and by the rotten stench he put off, I could tell he hadn't washed in days, maybe even weeks.

Cautiously, I backed away, glancing at him in fear, wondering if he was yet another ghost. He couldn't be. He had deep, dark gray eyes and his voice sounded low.

"What do you think you're doing here?" he asked, grabbing me by the front of my shirt.

"I-I-I'm s-sorry sir, we um...."

"We are just looking through the lighthouse. Do you have a problem with that?" Natalie's voice, strong and confident, as always made its way through the room, echoing off each wall.

The man grabbed her by the wrist, twisting her arm until she cringed. My mind raced, thinking of all the possibilities. He could kidnap us. He could kill us. He could trap us or toss us into the ocean, like Caroline, but he didn't.

"You get out! Get out NOW!" his deep voice boomed. Terrified, I scampered past him and into the gray predawn light, Natalie and Marlee following close behind.

The fresh smell of rain still lingered in the air, as we kicked up dust, hearing the last of the old man's words. "And don't you EVER come back here again."

I shivered, thinking I wouldn't sir, not if you payed me a million dollars. Although I could no longer here or feel Caroline's soft, creepy song, her voice, gently whispering Ring Around the Rosies would remain vividly forever in my mind, along with the eerie blue light that seemed to follow me everywhere from then on after.

"Ashes, ashes," I jerked awake, cold sweat running down my forehead, the haunting image of Caroline still dancing its way through my mind. I just couldn't get that experience out of my head.

Pulling off the covers, I recognized a slight pressure in my left pajama pocket. Fingertips beginning to tremble, I reached in, pulling out a piece of torn, crumpled paper.

Dear Diary, July 10, 1952

My sweet Caroline, my best friend, died ten years ago. It was all my fault. We were playing tag, and I pushed her off a cliff. I could never have told anyone, so instead I said she was missing. I can't even live with myself. There hasn't been a day that has gone by that I haven't missed her terribly.

Walking along the beach about five years ago, I found what little bones remained. I am not sure if they were even hers, but I placed them in my hand carved box, and tucked it away in the top of my late parents' lighthouse.

Since then, I have felt disturbed, hearing her sing her song about roses every night from the ocean. One night, as I was visiting the lighthouse, I realized a faint light glowing in the corner. When I turned to see what it was, it was her.

She is trapped there, my Caroline, her sweet spirit singing gently out of the waves each night. How I miss my Caroline.

I shuddered. He must have placed this in my pocket. There was no doubt the old man knew about Caroline. At least this offered the least bit of explanation. Swallowing hard, I ripped up that paper. I couldn't wait to get out of Oregon.

Every night since, Caroline's voice sings its song softly from the sea, and the nightmares replay through my head. I have never been the same since. Some say I seem more timid and reserved. Little do they know it was all because of Caroline. Although it helped me gain a relationship with my sisters, to learn to trust them and look out for them, there are so many horrific details that linger in my mind, and will remain there forever.

