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# The Last Lighthouse Giant



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# The Last Lighthouse Giant

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# **PART ONE**

## **THE LANTERN**



## The Last Lighthouse Giant

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

## CHAPTER ONE

### BLANCO



**B**lanco was the last of the lighthouse giants. On this stormy night, he stood in his tall, round house atop Cape Humbug. He shone his fish-oil lantern out the high windows. Gale-force winds howled around the white brick tower. Monstrous waves pounded the dark cliffs below.

“Thunder and lightning!” the giant shouted.

Slowly Blanco turned his lantern. The light beam swept over the tossing sea. It landed upon a steamship, the S.S. Scuttlebutt, rounding the cape. Black smoke trailed from its twin smokestacks. Its side paddle-wheel churned through the raging water.

“The ship is running too close to the reef!” the giant said. “It’s headed for the rocks!”

With the lantern’s light beam fixed on the steamer,

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Blanco waved a hand in front of the glass chimney.

*Flash, flash... flash, flash, flash.*

“See my light, Cap’n,” he said. “Read my signal.”

But the side-paddler remained on its fatal course.

The giant leaned back. His mop of red hair brushed the lighthouse ceiling. Careful not to singe his bushy beard, he turned the lantern’s knob to raise the wick. The flame grew brighter.

Again, Blanco aimed the light at the doomed ship. Again, he moved 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 the lighthouse giant grab the cork life rings?

*Flash, flash... flash, flash.*

No, the ship started to turn. It veered westward.

Blanco sucked in a long breath and let it out. “Aye,” he said.

The steamboat captain saluted the giant with a blast of his horn.

*Only doing my duty*, Blanco signaled back.

Still, the lighthouse giant refused to rest. Tonight, more ships would pass along the southern Oregon coast. More ships needed guidance around the rocky reef. West, north, east, and south, Blanco turned the fish-oil lantern. West, north, east, and south. The ray of light swept across the ocean and cape all night long.

## CHAPTER TWO

### JENNY



Jenny Hughes, age ten, leaped from the wagon. She cupped her hands around her mouth. She shouted toward the top of the lighthouse. “Blanco! Is the coast clear?”

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

“Then come outside. Time for supper.”

Jenny’s father, Jacob Hughes, lowered the reins of the two chestnut horses, Star and Fish. He also stepped to the ground. Together father and daughter unloaded a large copper kettle from the back of the wagon. Fish chowder sloshed over the sides, as they placed the large pot by the edge of the cliff.



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“That was some storm last night, big fellow,” Jacob called. “Any problems?”

Blanco’s bearded face appeared in a 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. “Ever since you built your house on the cape, there hasn’t been a single shipwreck along this coastline.”

Jenny checked Blanco’s long canvas hammock strung between two cedar trees. This is where the lighthouse giant usually slept in the morning.

“Did you get any sleep, 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 extra thick today,” Jenny said. “People in town were generous. Dad and I even added extra potatoes.”

Her father laughed. Out of Blanco’s earshot, he said, “Generous? Port Beaver shopkeepers just had more spoiled food because of the storm. I doubt one of them gave our lighthouse giant a single thought last night. No one ever does. You’d think the town would be grateful for his service, but they treat him as a dangerous outcast.”

“I like helping Blanco,” Jenny said. “He wouldn’t hurt a sand flea.”

Jenny’s father gave his daughter a hug. “Your mother would have been proud of you.”

Jenny only knew her mother from photos. 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 pulled Jenny’s bicycle off the wagon. “Make sure you’re home by dark,” he said. “Lova’s plucked a

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chicken for dinner.”

After her father drove off, Jenny called to 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 lighthouse 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 sucked in a lungful of air. “How good it is to be outside,” he said. “I love the smell of sea air and the feel of salty wind against my face.”

“Me, too,” said Jenny. “I love the changing colors of the wrinkly water and the shushing sound of the crashing waves. I want to live by the ocean forever.”

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 next to Blanco. A cool breeze swept back her dusty-brown hair. She drew a sprig of lavender from a pocket of her overalls and held it under her nose. The lighthouse giant needed a bath. Seagull droppings, dried salt, and bits of seaweed decorated his beard. His face and hands were gray from the fumes of his fish-oil lantern. Food spills stained his shirt and mud coated his pants.

“Tomorrow is wash day, Blanco,” Jenny said. “But you’ve had a long night, so for now you must eat. Then you can get some sleep.”

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

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“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 the butter myself. I also used fresh milk I pumped from the cows this morning.”

Blanco slurped another spoonful of chowder. He ran his flannel shirtsleeve across his mouth.

“Aye,” he said. “Delicious.”

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



## CHAPTER THREE

### OTHER LIGHTHOUSE GIANTS



Blanco's wooden spoon scraped the bottom of the copper kettle. He slurped the last spoonful of chowder.

"My father told me you are the last of the lighthouse giants," Jenny said. "You're the only one left on the coast, on any coast."

The giant returned the spoon to his shirt pocket. "Aye, Jenny-friend."

"My father told me about the Golden Age of Lighthouse Giants," said Jenny. "The years when you built the Highway of Lights along the coastlines of America to aide passing ships."

"Aye."

"Sea captains called lighthouse giants the Sky-High

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Sentinels, Behemoth Beacons, and the Giant Guiding Lights,” Jenny went on. “Without your lighthouses, shipping and trade around the world might not have been possible.”

“Once there were many of us, Jenny-friend,” Blanco said. “A dozen of our houses still stand along the Oregon coast alone. Hundreds more are found around the world, perched on the shores of the Pacific, Atlantic, and Indian Oceans. Even the cold Arctic Ocean had lighthouse giants guarding its frozen coastline. Hatteras, Montauk, Sambro, and Eddystone were some of the most famous lighthouse giants. Ocracoke, Kolberg, Amédée, and Slettnes were others I admired.”

“Gee,” said Jenny. “And each giant built a house and shone a lantern from the top windows?”

“Aye. Brick by brick. Stone by stone.”

“But what happened to the lighthouse giants, Blanco? Where did they go?”

Blanco scratched his red beard. “One by one, fancy lenses and modern machinery replaced the giants. After being forced from their homes, they wandered up to the closest mountains, the Alps, the Andes, the Appalachians, or the Cascades. There, they searched for a mountain peak not already occupied. That’s where they sit to this very day.”

“But don’t the giants get lonely sitting on a mountaintop all alone?” Jenny asked.

“Lighthouse giants are solitary souls, Jenny-friend,” Blanco said. “Loneliness is something we never feel. At times, the giants might signal each other mountaintop to mountaintop with their lanterns. But mostly, they sit and watch the clouds float by.”

“Did you meet any of the other giants?”

Blanco nodded. “Aye. When I first came to

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Oregon, I hiked down the coast searching for a dark cape or headland where I could build my lighthouse. Along the way, I met many of the lighthouse giants already here.”

“What were they like? Tell me about their lighthouses.”

“The first giant I met was Tillamook,” Blanco said. “He built his four-sided lighthouse on a large rock off the northern Oregon coast. Before Tillamook arrived, many ships struck the rock at night, and many lives were lost.”

“But what did Tillamook do all day long on his rock when not shining his lantern?”

“He liked to yodel.”

“He yodeled?”

“He stood in his square lighthouse and yodeled loud and clear,” said Blanco. “On foggy days, sea captains were grateful for his yodeling. When they heard it, they knew Tillamook’s rock was near.”

“What other lighthouse giants did you meet?”

“Farther down the coast I came upon Arago. His lighthouse stood on a sand spit at the mouth of the Sandy River. This giant was quite fat and had a pointy head. That meant his house was extra wide at the bottom and narrow at the top. Arago also had a beard that flowed down to his toes. It became a nest for a hundred shorebirds.”

Jenny laughed, imagining such a thing.

“During low tides, Arago built giant sand castles on the spit,” Blanco said. “Complete with towers, parapets, wide moats, and drawbridges. The sand castles were big enough for children to climb inside and play Knights of the Round Table. When the tide came in, the castles washed away, and Arago built a new one the next day.”

“Gee!” said Jenny.

A brown pelican flew up and landed on Blanco’s shoulder. After swallowing a fish stored in its pouchy bill,

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it perched by the giant's head as if listening to his story.

"After Argo, I met Coquille, the Gymnast Giant," Blanco said. "Her lighthouse was covered with sparkles, and she wore a sparkly costume. All day long Coquille did backflips and cartwheels on the sand dunes behind her house."

Jenny tried to picture a sixty-foot giant in a sparkly costume tumbling on the dunes.

"Perhaps Coquille looked like the Ferris wheel, I saw at the Coot County Fair," she said.

"As I wandered south, I met Umpqua outside Coot Bay," Blanco went on. "Umpqua was from the Highlands of Scotland and wore a kilt. He painted his lighthouse with the crisscross plaid pattern of his family's tartan."

Jenny thought a moment. "Say, did you paint your lighthouse white, because Blanco means white in Spanish?"

"Aye," said Blanco. "My parents named me after the white cliffs of Tierra Del Fuego where my family's lighthouse stood."

"What did Umpqua do all day?" Jenny asked. "How did he spend his free time?"

"He played checkers on the beach with the children of Coots Bay. They used wagon wheels for checkers. It took three large boys to make a move."

Blanco paused to gaze at the big round sun lowering in the western sky. Jenny noted the look of longing in the giant's gray eyes.

"Next, I met Heceta, the fairest lighthouse giants of all," the giant said. "Her tall, slender lighthouse stood on the headlands north of Florence. At times, she would dangle her long black hair from a top window for the children to climb."

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“Like Rapunzel in the fairy tale,” said Jenny.

Blanco sighed again. “Heceta was also an expert knitter,” he said. “She knitted the finest fishing nets for the fishermen of Florence.”

Jenny smiled. “Sounds like you had a crush on Heceta,” she said. “Didn’t you?”

The giant shrugged his shoulders. The pelican flew off. “Finally, I met Yaquina, the tallest and strongest lighthouse giant on the Oregon coast. His ninety-foot tall lighthouse stood on Cape Foulweather near Newport. Many tall tales have been told about the Mighty Yaquina.”

“Tell me one,” said Jenny.

“One story tells of a blue whale that washed up on Newport Beach,” said Blanco. “With ropes and draft horses, the town humans failed to pull the great beast back into the water.”

“And the people were too proud to ask Yaquina for help,” said Jenny.

“Aye,” said Blanco. “Fortunately, Yaquina spotted the stranded whale from Cape Foulweather. He waited until nightfall before racing down to the beach. He scooped up the whale in his arms and waded into the water. He stood in the high surf all night until the whale was strong enough to swim away.”

“Tell me more about the Mighty Yaquina.”

“One day there was an earthquake out in the Pacific Ocean,” said Blanco. “It created a colossal tidal wave that headed straight for the Oregon coast. From his lighthouse, Yaquina saw the great wave coming. He shouted to the humans in town to race to higher ground, but they ignored him.”

“What did he do?” Jenny asked. “The whole town would be washed away.”

“Like many coastal towns, Newport had a lumber



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mill at the water's edge," the giant said. "Piles of logs sat in the lumber yard waiting to be cut into timber. Figuring he had about ten minutes before the tsunami hit, Yaquina raced to the yard and gathered a stack of logs in his strong arms. At the mouth of Newport Bay, he built a wooden dam. Back and forth he raced between the mill and dam until the barrier stood over fifty feet high."

"Gee!" said Jenny. "He did that in ten minutes?"

"Nine minutes to be exact," said Blanco. "He had a whole minute to return to Cape Foulweather and watched the wall of water smash into his dam. Not a drop of water flowed into the streets of Newport."

"And I bet the people didn't even thank him," said Jenny.

"Not a word," said Blanco.

"After meeting Yaquina, did you discover Cape Humbug?" Jenny asked.

"Aye. This stretch of coastline was pitch black at night," said the giant. "I saw the rocks and reef and knew Cape Humbug needed a guiding beacon. That's when I decided to build my lighthouse on this cliff, brick by brick."

By now the sun had slipped below the horizon. The air grew cold, and the ocean turned turquoise. Jenny shivered. She scooted closer to the giant.

"The Giant Guiding Lights," she said. "What a shame. Now all those other lighthouse giants are gone and forgotten."

The giant grew silent a moment before saying, "I'll tell you a secret about lighthouse giants, Jenny-friend. Sometimes, they sneak down from their mountaintops to visit the ocean they love so much. They come only at night, so humans don't spot them. They're careful to walk on hard ground to avoid leaving footprints."

"Golly gee," said Jenny.

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Blanco swung his long legs onto the cliff. He rose to his knees. He took a large piece of flint and a steel knife from his pocket. "Now it's time for me to light my lantern," he said. "Lucky I still have my job."

On hands and knees, Blanco crawled through the door of his tall round house. Soon his blackened face appeared in a high window.

Jenny got on her bike. "See you tomorrow, Blanco," she called out. "Remember, it's wash day. My father will be here in the morning to pick up the kettle. Thank you! Thank you for your service!"

As Jenny pedaled toward the Hughes Dairy Ranch, a beam of light crossed the sky above her. She looked back to see Blanco's lantern shining from the top of his lighthouse.

"Another night of tending the lamp," she said. "Another night of watch duty for our lighthouse giant has begun."

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