

The Lure of the Bell

Everyone says the bell is dead. But they're liars.

The bell hangs from an old bell buoy that floats just off of George's Island. Rusted and half-sunken, it's barely visible through the blanket of fog that covers the harbour each night. They say it hasn't worked in decades, but at precisely 2:13 a.m., every morning, it rings. Three slow, echoing clangs that bounce off the water, just like a warning.

"You don't go out there if you hear it. You don't listen to it," my grandfather always said. He used to be a lighthouse keeper, so I grew up hearing some of the creepiest, most mysterious maritime ghost stories you can imagine. But none of them stuck with me like the story of the George's Island bell. He warned me to stay away from it, to never listen for it.

But what fourteen-year-old girl would actually listen to an old, wise man? Certainly not me. My name is Eva Storme, and tonight I'm setting out to uncover the real mystery behind the ringing bell. I've been planning this for weeks. Waiting for the right night, with thick fog, calm waters, and a new moon. My parents think I'm asleep, but I'm busy at work, packing a bag with all of the necessities: A flashlight, a blanket, a notebook, and my grandfather's old compass. Hopefully, it'll remember the way.

I throw on my shoes plus a jacket and head out the door. I waste no time heading towards the waterfront. The air has a crisp edge to it, and there's a gentle summer breeze. It's a quiet August night, and the streets are mostly empty. I gaze across the sidewalk and out onto the water, and watch as the fog is quickly rolling towards shore. I continue my walk down to the harbour. The ferry doesn't run at this hour, but there's a guy on the dock who rents out small wooden punts if you ask nice enough. It's strictly cash only. I told him I was doing a research project on tides. I don't think he believed me, but he handed the key over anyway.

As I step onto the boat, the wood creaks beneath my feet. The air is thick with salt and a chill that settles deep in my bones. The motor rumbles awake, and I'm off, slicing through dark water towards the place that everyone pretends doesn't exist.

George's Island.

The fog thickens around me as I cross the harbour. I'm making good time now. I can just see the outline of an island ahead. It's pitch black. No lights, no movement, no sign of life. As I close in, the island takes shape. Rocky edges, and thick trees stretch high above me like they're guarding something. I cut the motor and coast in, eyes scanning the shoreline for a place to land. A small clearing appears with a half rotten dock sticking out of the water. It'll have to do.

I tie the boat up loosely and hop onto solid ground. The air hits differently here. It smells fishy, damp, heavy, and just a little off. I'm sure this dock has seen hundreds of successful fishers and anglers before I was even born. It's even darker on shore, so I dig into my bag and grab my flashlight. Its beams cut across into the fog, landing on something to my left. The old bell buoy. Not more than 200 yards away.

I glance at my watch, **1:55 a.m.** That gives me a bit before the bell's supposed to ring. I start exploring, trying to get my bearings, when something shining between a group of rocks catches my eye. As I step closer, I notice that it's an old wine bottle with a green tint, wedged tight into shore. A cork seals it shut, and inside is a scroll of parchment, rolled up and tied with string.

I kneel down and tug it from the rocks. My fingers work the cork loose. Slowly and carefully, I unroll the paper.

It reads:

To Eva Storme

You've come too near,
For the bell still rings, and you should not hear.
It tolls for those who disobey,
And dares the brave to drift away.

Turn back now, don't annoy the dead,
For those who did, now roam instead.
Their whispers cling to sea and shore,
And once you're ours, escape no more.

- E. Storme, The Keeper

I blink down at the parchment, still clutching the edge of the bottle like it might vanish if I let go. The words echo in my head. Rhyming, eerie, like something straight out of a ghost story whispered around a campfire. "*You've come too near...*" Who writes like that, anyway? They're not going to scare me off. Sure, it's weird that it's addressed to me, but it's probably just some wild coincidence.

I glance over my shoulder, and suddenly I'm aware of how still the trees are. Not a single leaf moves, like the entire island is holding its breath. The harbour is the same. It's the calmest I've ever seen it. There's not even a ripple in sight. The stillness freaks me out, and I can't seem to get that letter out of my head. No one knew I was coming. No one could've, right? That gives me chills. But I'm not turning back. Not when something or someone doesn't want me to uncover the truth.

I wrap the letter up, slide it back into the bottle, twist the cork on tight, and safely secure the bottle in my bag. As I'm zippering the bag up, my flashlight flickers on and off a couple of times. That's odd, I just put new batteries in. I start to stand up when a loud splash breaks the silence. It sounded like something large entered the water. My heart skips a few beats. I shine my light all around, but nothing.

I take a slow step back, flashlight gripped tight in one hand, my other still hovering close to my bag. The splash could've been anything. A seal, a rock slipping off the bank, who knows. But something about it felt intentional. Like a reminder that I'm not alone.

I scan the shoreline one more time, before forcing myself to move. I need to get to higher ground for a better view, and to explore the old lighthouse. There should be lots of artifacts and helpful information inside. There's a path, hardly visible, overgrown, and winding up the hillside. My boots crunch against gravel and damp moss as I start to climb. With every step, my heart feels like thunder in my chest, breaths short and shallow. I try to remind myself why I'm even doing this. But if there's anywhere that might hold answers, it's going to be here.

The wind picks up slightly, rustling the trees at last, and bringing some peace to my mind. I finally reach the top of the hill, and catch sight of a tall, angular shape. It's the lighthouse. Even in the dark it's unmistakable. I let out a sigh of relief. As I reach the base, I shine my flashlight up the side. Its paint is peeling, the windows are broken, and the door is slightly ajar. I pause for a moment and take a couple of deep breaths. My nose fills with damp, musty, salty air. It's not hard to tell that this lighthouse has been around for some time.

The door creaks louder than I expected as I push it open, scraping against the warped floorboards like it's reluctant to let me in. I step into the dark and my boot catches on something hard, sending me stumbling forward. As I throw out a hand to steady myself, my flashlight swings widely across the room. Its beams flicker over heaps of tangled rope, rusted metal, and scattered debris, almost completely concealing the floor beneath it all. For a moment, doubt creeps in, and I start second-guessing every choice that's led me here. But deep down, I know that my heart guided me to this lighthouse for a reason. So I shake it off and start searching. I yank open drawers from old, rotted desks, unfold stained maps and sea charts, and sift through brittle scraps of paper that crumble upon my touch. A cracked compass tumbles free, its needle twitching weakly as if it has some life left in it. Cobwebs hang from the ceiling and dust floats freely through the air catching in my throat. But I press on. Certain that somewhere in this wreck lies the answers I came for.

That's when I see it: a thick, maple coloured, leather journal sitting half-buried under a pile of knotted rope. I carefully pull it free, brushing off flakes of mildew. The name burned into the cover sends chills up my spine.

Elias Storme.

I gently flip it open. The ink has faded, but the words are still legible. The first date I see is from October 1, 1874.

The sea is uneasy tonight. Strange tides tug us off course. Fog rolling in thicker than normal. We board The Maritime Majesty and wave goodbye to our hometown Halifax. Spirits are high, but something feels a little off.

I scan further down the page, and my heart starts pounding.

October 2, 1874

A storm rolls in, rapidly growing. Lanterns flicker, oil running low. Waves crash against the ship like thunder rolling across the sea. I fear for us all.

I turn the page to the final entry. It's short, but feels unfinished.

October 3, 1874

The harbour bell is silent. No sound to guide...

I slam the journal shut, heart hammering. Whatever happened here isn't over. I step outside, clutching the book close to my body.

BONG.

A bell rang across the harbour, deep and heavy. My head snapped toward the buoy, but it was still and dark. I glanced down at my watch. **2:07 a.m.** Too early.

Something cold brushes up against my ankle. I gasp and whip my flashlight down. Nothing.

"What is happening!" I start to holler, as a voice behind me whispers:

"You're not supposed to be here."

Every instinct inside me is screaming run. I bolt for the dock. I'm not even sure why, but just knowing that I have to move. When I reach the edge, I freeze, staring out through the fog. This time, something's waiting.

An enormous ghostly outline shimmers into view, half-sinking in the harbour mist. The Maritime Majesty. My breath is trapped in my chest. Lanterns swing wildly in the haze, their glow jerking with the chaos. Screams pierce the night, sharp and panicked. All at once, silence.

And then, just like that, it's gone. Only dark water, only silence.

For a split second, I think maybe it's all over. Maybe I imagined it all.

But then at 2:13 a.m. sharp, the bell rings. This time it's loud and clear. Three deep, long, purposeful strikes. No way to be mistaken. I swing my light toward the buoy where a faint figure is waiting. He's dressed in an old navy blue coat, with eight golden buttons catching the moonlight. A wide-brimmed hat shadows his face, and in his hand, an oil lamp burns low, flickering against the soft breeze.

He lifts a hand to the sky as if he's warning me of something.

A faint rumble of thunder stirs in the clouds, and a big bolt of lightning splits the sky. He's gone.

Now I understand. Elias hasn't been warning me to stay away. He's been trying to show me what really happened.

I'm contemplating what my next move should be when another flash of lightning tears open the sky. That one was so close it didn't just light up the clouds, but also the ground around me. During the bright white blast, something half-hidden in the grass sparkled back.

Goosebumps ride up my arms, and I waste no time. I drop to my knees and brush away wet leaves and dirt from the top of a granite stone, its edges smooth, carved in the shape of a heart. Slowly, I trace each letter with my fingertip.

"In memory of the souls lost aboard The Maritime Majesty – October 3rd, 1874 at 2:13 a.m. May the bell guide the living and the lost."

The words linger in the night air.

"Wow," I whisper.

I sit back on my heels, letting the weight of it all sink in. Slowly, the truth settles over me. The bell was never a curse. It was a warning system that failed, and is now guarded by the ghost of a man who only wants peace, and wants to keep future sailors safe.

For the first time, I don't feel afraid of Elias Storme. Not one bit. Instead, I feel grateful for all that he has done.

Now that I have solved the mystery of the Geroge's Island Bell, it's time to head home. I walk back to the dock, buckle up my lifejacket, untie the boat, and step in. The bottle and journal are tucked safely in my bag as I push off into the water.

I glance back through the fog one last time.

"Goodbye Elias. Thank you for everything. Keep saving lives."

The fog shifts and a voice drifts through: "Tell them not to forget."

The words echo in the mist, then fade. The bell doesn't stir, it doesn't have to. Its keeper has been heard. For the first time in centuries, Elias can finally rest. From now on, it will only toll when another life needs saving.

As for me, I will tell the story every chance I get, because I made a promise to Elias, plus... I'm living proof that not all ghosts are bad ones!

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