

# The Lighthouse

by Nerissa McCanmore

Copyright 2008 Nerissa McCanmore

This is a work of fiction. All the characters and events portrayed in this novel are either fictitious or are used fictitiously.

[www.lulu.com](http://www.lulu.com)

Lulu Enterprises, Inc.

All rights reserved by the author. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without the prior written permission of the author.

Other books by this author:

*Tojet*

Enter the world of the Lighthouse, a club for supernatural beings and social misfits. In this Gothic story collection you will find castles, ghosts, vampires, romance and terror:

*Bedlam Castle*--An American college girl loses herself in the hallways of a 900-year-old castle. Eccentric characters invite her to dinner. One is a genie, one is an undine, and most of the others are ghosts. One man intrigues her the most--but is he a mortal man or a supernatural creature like the rest?

*Jarkin*--Becky Stevens falls in love against her will with Archibald Jarkin, an eccentric, austere and charismatic preacher. Their passionate marriage is tested when Jarkin's TV ministry turns into a witch hunt. When Becky discovers the Lighthouse, their life together takes a startling new path.

*Alexander Boa: Or, I was a co-ed vampire slave*--When a young woman's college is taken over by a vampire, she becomes his secret mistress. Will she be torn apart when her friends decide to kill him?

*Candida*--A young man is stricken with a girl who falls under a vampire's spell. Soon married and pregnant with the vampire's baby, she has no idea what danger she'll be in if the baby is a boy.

4

*All Together Now*--This story combines characters and settings from the other four stories. Jenny, a social misfit, is introduced to the Lighthouse, supernatural creatures, and a deceptive man.

When he leaves her and then accuses her of stalking him, she can only vindicate herself by facing the horrors of a haunted cave. Will she survive? Will she fall in love again?

## Prologue

On a back road outside South Bend, Indiana, sits a lighthouse on a hill. No water lies near it: The lighthouse was the retirement home of an eccentric sea captain. When he died, the new owner, Ibrahim, converted it into a sanctuary for freaks, vampires, werewolves, witches and the like. It has bedrooms for those who are too drunk or tired to go home, or for those who need to hide. One room holds a library, full of stories written by or about the patrons. Here are some of those stories.

## Bedlam Castle

I was late. My roommate had left for dinner without me. No matter; I knew the way from our room to the dining hall.

Ross, a writing teacher and one of our two chaperones, told us to dress semiformal: That was a hotel rule.

Why was I late? Because I stood staring into my suitcase, huffing at the lack of semiformal clothes in it. The suitcase lay open on the four-poster, canopied bed—the bed that I, unfortunately, shared with my roommate Jenna.

Of course Jenna had the perfect dress at hand: a blue silk gown, creaseless because of her handy travel iron. It shone and shimmered as she twirled around in front of the room's full-length mirror. She stood there in black heels and perfectly coifed dark blonde hair, curls expertly arranged around a chignon. Ugh. I hated her. No, I didn't; that wasn't charitable. Okay, I disliked her. Nice enough girl, though—too nice. So nice, sunny, cheerful and outgoing that the entire campus was at her feet and she had dates every weekend (except here in England), some of them with the same guys I wanted. No, we weren't in the same circle of friends.

If I had a choice, I'd room with my best friend Amy, another dateless woman, also in the five-student group in England for the one-month winter semester of January 1993. We were on tour for thirteen days, after reading two of the plays we were to see. We'd see six plays, Bath, Stonehenge, Stratford-upon-Avon, London and parts of the British Museum. If only my German teacher would host a similar trip to the banks of the Rhine.

I finally decided on a suitcase-wrinkled, white dress shirt, a black knit vest and a long green skirt (no silk here, only soft cotton). I pulled on white knee-high nylons. Oh no, I forgot to pack dress shoes. I grabbed my black satin slippers, which looked much like ballet flats. I'd be inside, and only Jenna and Amy would know they were supposed to be worn with my nightgown.

I glanced at the carpeted floor and white walls of what I liked to call my chamber. The ceiling was just a bit higher than the bed's canopy. The tall windows, grouped together into four rectangles with diamond latticework patterns, looked out onto the Lower Court and opened outward. Frilly, tasteful, blue drapes covered them. The room was immaculate, from the corners to the soft, blue carpet with white fleurs-de-lis, to the pressed linen sheets, to the blue covers, to the antique dresser, to the Victorian chairs, to the full bathroom with Jacuzzi bath and shower stall. We even had a phone, television, radio and VCR, in case for some reason we were bored in such a beautiful, romantic castle. Other amenities were a coffee maker, robes, a radio, a pants press, a hair dryer, even cookies and chocolates.

I checked the fake-jeweled watch on a chain around my neck. I was ten minutes late. On cue, my stomach rumbled. I hoped I would get there before the others placed their orders.

Oh, no, my hair—what to do with it? It never stayed up properly, but I had to do something with it. My straight chestnut hair fell to the middle of my back. I pulled the sides into twists and coiled them on the back of my head. The rest of my hair flowed free, shining red in the light.

People said my slanted eyes and long nose were pretty, so I decided to skip the makeup and leave.

I checked my watch again: fifteen minutes late. With a gasp, I ran out into the hallway, ran back to get my key, ran into the hallway one more time and locked the door. Now which way again? Oh, yes.

My soft trotting footsteps spoke in faint ghostly voices on the carpeted floor in the hall. Plaster covered the walls, as it did all through the manor house and Great Hall, keeping out drafts. Often, the stone of a doorway was left unplastered for ambience. Modern paintings and portraits of former owners hung everywhere.

This nine-hundred-year-old castle, now a hotel with fifteen bedrooms, was just as romantic as I'd hoped, complete with a moat. A wide road led through the rolling hills of the South Downs to a gate with a rounded top and a portcullis. The hills were broken up occasionally by a line of trees. In the summertime the hills were green, the sky deep blue. Lines of trees also surrounded the wall. Two wide towers made up the gatehouse.

To my utter delight, the roofs of the towers and gatehouse were crenelated. Built in the fourteenth century, the rest of the sixty-foot-high castle wall spread out to the right and around the left corner, massive and stately, surrounding a courtyard. The wall looked big enough to enclose a city block back home.

Our bedrooms were in the manor house. The Great Hall (dining) was nearby, the cooking buildings beyond that. The ancient cooking buildings were no longer used, but were connected to the ruins of the old Great Hall by a narrow passageway. All the buildings we would use were connected by such passageways so no one had to walk outside to reach them. Many of the buildings were built right against the wall, with access to the towers and battlements. You could walk all over the castle, even inside the wall, and rarely go outside.

But if you did go outside in the summertime, in the courtyard you'd find a round dirt drive, gardens with small decorative trees, fountains, ivy-covered walls, a few ivy-covered stone arches that used to belong to the old Great Hall, stone steps, dark stone corners guarded by trees, sentry bushes cut in rectangles, flowers everywhere against the walls, and little green plants in stone pots. In the upper court was a stone terrace with iron tables and chairs where you could sit with your friends and eat lunch. There were even peacocks. The many tall windows displayed the gardens. You could gaze at them from the occasional nook with a window seat.

But it was after seven o'clock and now nighttime, so I only saw what the outside lights showed. Besides, it was winter, so

there was not much to see.

I imagined the lords and ladies who'd once roamed these wide halls in rich medieval dress, their duels and arguments and tournaments and celebrations and love affairs, their memories now long forgotten under the weight of centuries.

Wait a minute. This was not the right way. There should have been a staircase to the right, but there were only rooms. Had I taken a wrong turn? The sound of a hard wind made my breath catch in my throat. My heart pounded. I spun around. A cool draft wafted over me. My feet beat faster.

"This way," said a light and cheery tenor voice.

It had to belong to a hotel employee. I strode in its direction.

"Come this way," it kept saying.

I looked around for its owner, but saw no one. It led me through corridors, some carpeted and some stone, to a large oak door. Behind it, people laughed and chatted. The restaurant at last! Breathing a prayer of thanks, I opened the door. I hoped no one would notice I was twenty-five minutes late.

The door creaked and echoed all through the hall, making me jump.

Wait a minute. I knew none of those people. I flushed.

They all sat around a long oak table in a low-ceilinged room large enough for fifty people and dancing besides. Dark blue paisley curtains were drawn shut over the tall windows. Suits of armor stood along the walls on the polished oak floor. A purple rug covered the floor. A fire was lit in the fireplace, countering the chill that central heating could not. (After all, imagine the heating

bill if the owners kept every room toasty.) The heat made me sleepy. A display of ancient swords hung over the stone mantle. Candles on golden candlesticks lit the feast spread out on the table. Candles instead of electric bulbs filled the ancient chandeliers and sconces. Tapestries of midnight blue, black and other dark colors hung over the white-plastered walls and black wainscoting.

The people looked as if they'd stepped out of a novel by Sir Walter Scott. Their fashions ranged from twelfth-century bliauts to outlandish Elizabethan costumes to eighteenth-century mob caps and panniers, covering all the periods the castle had been inhabited before it was left vacant in the nineteenth century. Most of the people were dressed Medieval or Renaissance rather than Enlightenment. These people had gone to a lot of trouble to look authentic, right down to their shoes.

And they were all looking at me.

"Excuse me," I squeaked. "I'm lost."

"What room are you looking for?" one man asked. His brown-striped suit, black tie and black Inverness overcoat fit more in the nineteenth century than in the Middle Ages. His skin was also ruddy, in contrast with that of the others, who were strangely pale. His short, brown hair was cut in modern bangs. His combination of features was not generally considered handsome: small, ebony-button eyes; a triangular and big nose that came to a blunt point; a mouth of average size and shape, no graceful lines; pointy chin. He also looked a bit old, maybe thirty.

"I'm looking for the restaurant," I said.

“Close enough. We’re eating in this room, too, so you may as well join us.”

I smelled baked chicken. My stomach rumbled again. “No, really, I couldn’t. My group is expecting me.” My stomach growled at me for that answer.

“Use that phone to tell them you’ll be a little late.”

“I already am a little late.”

“Then be a little *later*. Come on, we’d love to have you join us.”

Were they members of a medieval reenactment group? They seemed friendly, with their smiling faces and cheerful laughter. If they belonged to the Society for Creative Anachronism (SCA), as Amy did, they were definitely friendly. Of course, the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries were not medieval, so they were probably doing a theme night. In any case, I’d been daydreaming for months of adventures in England, of getting to know the locals. Time for spontaneity!

“Well—all right. I’ll see if I can.”

They cheered. I simpered.

I stepped into the room. The touch-tone telephone hung on the wall as an oasis of modernity. I looked up the extension to the restaurant in the directory, which hung from a chain beside the phone. When the headwaiter got Ross on the phone, I put one finger in my free ear to keep out the noise and said,

“Ross? It’s me, your late bloomer. I’ve been invited to join a—” cheers interrupted me— “party in one of the other rooms.”

“Locals?” Ross asked.

“I don’t know. They look like SCA people to me.” Of course, I knew Amy would say they looked too authentic to be SCA people, since there were no tennis shoes, modern eyeglasses, or socks. “One of them has a British accent; I haven’t been able to make out the others’.”

“What kind? Cockney? Quality? Yorkshire?”

“I don’t know what you call it. It doesn’t sound like any of those. I guess it’s local.”

“All right. Which room are you in?”

“I don’t know. I–got lost. That’s how I found these people.”

“Got lost?” He chuckled and my face flushed. “Is there a number on the phone? I’ll trace you with that.”

I gave the extension number to him. He hung up to call one of the owners, then called me back and said, “The owner says they’re okay, if you can handle them. He said they live here and love to party in that room. He kept snickering, though. I don’t know why.”

“Is it all right for me to stay here for dinner?”

“Of course. This is better than I could’ve hoped for. You’ll get totally immersed in the culture.”

Someone began playing an instrument. I looked to see a man kneeling on a tabletop and playing a lute. He looked like a jester in his red hose and long, red robe with wide, green zigzags across it. He sang,

Dear princess, give me a look.  
Dear princess, don't forget me.  
When you find your home,  
Dragon though I am,  
I shall always love thee.

I'd be immersed in something, all right.

"But we are going to explore the castle later on," Ross went on. "If you want to join us, come over here, *ninish* as they say here. You won't miss anything. We'll just be talking about local customs and you'll be seeing them firsthand."

After we hung up I glanced around, one eyebrow raised. Where did I dare sit? To my relief, the man who'd invited me beckoned me to sit by him. I sat down in a straight-backed chair cushioned with red vinyl, feeling at ease beside him even though strangers usually make me nervous. Yet his right index finger kept twitching. Was he the nervous one?

"You're an American, aren't you?" he asked with wine-scented breath. "From where?"

"The Midwest," I said, "a small college in Wisconsin. We're getting class credit just for reading plays and visiting England for two weeks."

He grinned. His finger tipped over a salt shaker. He put it back in place without batting an eye. "Wonderful arrangement. I never did like being stuck in a stuffy classroom all day. To borrow from Shakespeare: To be or not to be in class—that is the question, whether 'tis nobler in the mind to suffer the slings and arrows of

outrageous marks, or to take arms against a sea of studies, and by traveling end them?—How do you like England so far?”

“I’ve only been here a week, but *ach*, it’s so cool.” I loved the sound and feel of German and used it whenever possible. I sighed and looked around the room. “This castle is the best of all, so romantic. I can’t wait to see the moors and imagine Heathcliff and Catherine from *Wuthering Heights* playing on them as children. And then there’s Bath, the city Jane Austen wrote about so much.”

He chuckled. “So you’re a student of English literature. What’s your name, then?”

“Writing major, actually. It’s Beth. Do you live around here?”

“Oh, yes. I live quite close.” He grinned and snorted. His finger flipped a spoon, which fell with a clatter. “Right now I’m—in between tours, so I’m—back home for a holiday, yes. I’m in a Shakespearean troupe, you see—sometimes—when I choose to be. They call me the Ghost, even though I’m not—really. What year of college are you in?”

“Second, what we call sophomore.”

“And how old are sophomores in America?”

“I’m nineteen.”

“So, Beth, you’re almost the same age as Elizabeth Bennet in *Pride and Prejudice*.”

Now I grinned. “You know Jane Austen?”

He frowned and looked up. “Well, no. She’s dead now and never visits.”

My eyebrow rose. “Uh—no, I mean, you know her work.”

He waved the hand with the twitchy finger. “Oh, that. Yes, of course. I suppose you’re thirsty. Have some wine.” He grabbed a pitcher and banged it down on the table in front of my plate of Wedgwood china, rattling the lily painted on the plate.

“No, thanks. I don’t drink.”

He raised his eyebrows. “Not even wine?”

“Nope. I’m underage back home and wouldn’t touch it even if I wasn’t. My parents are old-fashioned Presbyterian temperance people, so I’m not comfortable drinking alcohol.”

“Ah, a teetotaler. I like that: It’s different. I suppose I ought to get round to telling you my name: Colin Radcliffe, as in Ann Radcliffe, eighteenth-century Gothic novelist. I love good old Gothics.”

It seemed to fit him. “So do I.”

The hotel wait staff came in and served dinner. They were all dressed up—smart, white jackets, black pants, ties—just as you would expect in a fancy restaurant. A couple of them floated around the room with smiles and jokes as if they knew these people, but the other two acted nervous, glancing askance at the partygoers and serving the food as quickly as possible. Despite the number of guests and table settings, however, the staff gave food and drink (mine was lemonade) only to Colin and me. We received all the food at once, mostly French dishes I could not pronounce and English dishes I could not name. The chicken, fruit and vegetables were all fresh and prepared to perfection. The staff tended candles, then swept out the door again.

I looked at Colin, but he had turned to his dinner and hadn't seemed to notice. I shrugged and turned to my own.

The silverware, which actually was made of silver, had gargoyles carved into the handles. The jewels on the golden goblets looked real.

I began to cut up my piece of baked chicken.

Colin cried, "I say, did this chicken bawk at me?"

"Bawk?" I said.

"See? There it goes again."

Was his mind all there? "It was me that time." I cut again. Something bawked. I jumped.

"There it was again!"

"I think someone's playing a trick on us. I'm not cutting anymore until they stop it."

"Oh, don't be such a spoilsport," said a voice behind me. "If you're going to become one of us, then I'd really rather you be much more fun."

I glanced around, but saw no one behind me. "Did you say that?" I asked Colin.

"I didn't say a thing. It was him."

"Him? *Ach, Mensch!* Don't try to tell me the chicken said it." As if in response to this surreal party, everything around me seemed to drift into a dream. I believe the locals would call me "giddy."

"I'm not. It was—"

"Oh, don't tell her!" cried the voice. It was the same one that had led me through the halls.

“You old rascal.” Colin chuckled.

Thinking he meant me, I looked at him in surprise, but he was looking behind me.

He said, “Oh, by the way, I’m much obliged for your help with my request. She seems quite suitable so far.”

“Suitable? Who’s suitable for what?” I looked behind me again, but no one was there. “Who were you talking to?”

“Someone who left already.”

“He must move quicker than a cat.” I shivered. I shook my head and went back to my chicken.

Colin said, “Your clothes are so simple and your hair is so free. In my day, the women looked pretty in their fashions, but so restrained.”

“In your day? Wouldn’t that be the eighties? We dressed like this then, too.”

“Maybe in *your* eighties, but not in mine—um—my town.” His finger twitched again. He stared at the wine pitcher. He then watched my hands cutting the chicken. “You have such a pretty way of holding your fork.”

I flushed and glanced up at him. He had a gleam in his eye. My eyes darted away and I stared at my plate. “Thanks,” I said in a tiny voice. I hoped he wouldn’t say “What?” as everybody else did. He didn’t. My skin tingled.

The young Renaissance man across from me now caused a welcome distraction. The salt and pepper shakers were shaped like cones with the tops cut off; he stacked them in a pyramid. I ate my chicken as I watched. Colin jumped up and ran around the table,

collecting more until no stray salt shaker was left. The young man stacked them onto the pyramid. He sprang up. He and Colin yelled and crashed their hands through the pyramid. It toppled. With sober expressions they returned the salt and pepper shakers to their places and sat down. Colin continued eating as if nothing had happened—until my laughter cracked his face into a grin.

“We have to do that every once in a while to keep from going sane,” he said.

At that moment, I knew I wanted him. I had long searched for a man as weird as Doctor Who. Yes, I admit it: I’m a *Doctor Who* fanatic. I’ve had fantasies about going into the TARDIS with Tom Baker’s Doctor and becoming his love muffin. He’s not handsome: It’s that yo-yo and that outrageously long scarf.

As I ate my vegetables Colin said, “My friends and I see the people who come to this castle every day. We see how they dress, how they act; we hear how they talk. We often adopt their changes in the language, so any newcomers can understand us. It’s curious how much people change down through the ages. Here we have some change, but only what we like. This is our room; no one else dines in here except by invitation. We speak and dress however we please, whether modern or medieval. We’re happy here.”

I looked into his ebony eyes and grinned. “And I was deemed worthy enough to invite in?”

He grinned back. “My dear lady, you were led here on purpose.”

“Why me?”

He held my gaze, making my insides quiver. “You’re different. I saw you as you came into the reception hall. I saw how you looked at everything as you went to your room, and heard you tell your friend Amy about all the things you imagined had happened here. I’ve seen many young women come through here and enjoy the sights and romance, but never have I seen one who wanted so much to become a part of the castle.”

I blinked and averted my eyes. I had not seen him anywhere before now. Where was he when he saw me? “If I could dress like the people here, I would,” I said. “Amy wants me to join the SCA, but then I hear her complain about what she calls shire, or group, politics. I have enough trouble dealing with life at college without stepping into other people’s power struggles.”

Colin’s finger twitched again. “Really? You’d rather wear, say, Elizabethan than what you’re wearing now?”

I snorted. “Certainly not. I’d rather wear one of those dresses.” I waved at a gorgeous gown one woman wore, with its wide, trailing sleeves, tight bodice, sash, full skirt and graceful drapes: a bliaut.

“You say that now, but it’s not practical for daily life. Your own outfit is romantic. I hope you’d still wear it.” His eyes flashed across it. I could see him flinch, trying not to stare at my bosom. I found this amusing rather than offensive.

“Now and then, when I get tired of always having to push back my sleeves when I go to the bathroom.” I turned to my dessert, a strawberry ice. “Of course this is delicious, but I have a chocolate craving.”

“Never fear, my dear. One word from me and the proprietors will make certain that you get your chocolate tomorrow evening.”

I sighed and picked at the ice with my spoon. “I’m only here for one night. It’s over a hundred dollars just for my share of the room cost, whatever that is in pounds, not including meals, plus we have more of England to see. I usually just do work-study during the school year, but I had to get a temporary job to pay for this trip. We’ll be staying longest in London, for several days. We’ll be in a four-star hotel, but that’ll be nothing compared with this.”

“A shame, a terrible shame.”

“*Ach, ja.*”

His hand began sliding toward mine.

A man stood up. He was dressed in a long, white robe and a cone-shaped hat, both covered in stars, moons and zigzags. He said,

“Now for our rendition of *Cinderallen*. Our good friend Colin will play *Cinderallen* and I shall be the fairy godfather.”

Colin’s hand flew back to his side. I turned to him and smiled with my eyebrows drawn together. “*Cinderallen?*” I asked as he got up.

Colin slipped on a brown tunic and took his position halfway between the table and the door, kneeling on the floor and pretending to scrub it. A middle-aged woman in a fur-lined, high-waisted, tight-sleeved gown and a cone-shaped princess hat strode up to him from stage left, carrying the ends of her overskirt.

“You’re too slow,” she said. “You’ll never be done in time for the ball now.” She stalked off the “stage.”

Cinderallen gazed at the ceiling and put his brush hand to his forehead, melodrama at its best. “Oh, whatever shall I do?” he cried. “What a cruel stepmother. I’m never able to go to balls. And if I can’t go to balls, how shall I ever meet a nice young lady to marry?”

The fairy godfather twirled up to him from stage right.

Cinderallen cried, “Fairy godfather! Can you help me get to the ball?”

“But of course, my godchild. One thing, first: Please don’t call me your *fairy* godfather.” He tapped Cinderallen with a star-tipped wand. I blinked; his tunic switched from dirty brown to bright blue.

The fairy godfather left the stage. Several couples spun onto the stage and danced around. Cinderallen caught the eye of a woman in her twenties. She wore rich satins and wide, ermine-lined outer sleeves, her ample bosom propped up with a revealing, tight bodice. A five-pointed hat framed her pretty face. She and Cinderallen danced the tango. I hoped it was just for the play.

The fairy godfather hummed the tune from Big Ben and stomped out the time: midnight. Cinderallen ran from his beautiful princess to the other side of the stage, just in time for the twelfth stomp. His tunic switched back from blue to brown.

As the princess asked her footman how she’d ever be able to find “that handsome prince” again, a young woman walked across the table toward me, cleared a space and sat cross-legged near the