

MYSTERIES of MARTHA'S VINEYARD

A Light *in the* Darkness

**SNEAK
PEEK!**

FREE Sample Chapter
from your Friends
at Guideposts

RUTH LOGAN HERNE

MYSTERIES of MARTHA'S VINEYARD

A Light in the Darkness

by Ruth Logan Herne

“Well, Priscilla...” Priscilla Grant gazed out over the Atlantic Ocean and hauled in a breath of sweet, sea air. “You are definitely not in Kansas anymore.” The sound of waves, rolling steep and wide along the craggy shore that formed the eastern property line, rose up to her. She inhaled again and tried to calm her pounding heart. She was really here. She was really doing this.

She turned back to her late aunt’s—no, *her*—sea-blue cottage and studied its weathered clapboard siding and white trim, the windows flanked by bright white shutters and garnished with flowerboxes. The lighthouse, impossible to ignore, loomed over the cottage and cast a shadow of graceful authority.

She owned a lighthouse.

Disbelief swept in and she pushed it firmly right back out. The tower itself was a crisp white, capped by a black

lantern room ringed by a railing. A small window, halfway up the lighthouse, was also trimmed in black. The lighthouse no longer served in an official function, but it still stood as a noble sentinel on the shoreline of Martha’s Vineyard.

Gazing up, then out, her nerves calmed. She’d spent her whole life in the relatively small world of her Kansas farming community. She’d lived in the same farmhouse since she was a kid, helping first her father, and then her husband, Gary, work the fields of wheat, corn, and soybeans. She and Gary had raised their daughter, Rachel, on that farm, and eight months ago, Priscilla had held Gary’s hand and whispered her undying love and good-byes as he slipped from this world. One last breath that ignited so much change.

And now this.

 **Buy Now**

The sight made her smile, and when you've buried a beloved, smiles are few and far between, so the smile surprised her a little.

Just a month ago, she'd learned she had inherited this cottage from her aunt Marjorie Latham. Priscilla shocked everyone who knew her, especially Rachel, by deciding to leave the farm, and the only life she'd ever known, and move to the East Coast.

Gary would be proud if he could see me now, she thought, and knew the truth of her words. It was time to find out what else life had in store for her.

Rachel's ring-tone signaled another call from her daughter, but Priscilla left the phone tucked in her purse. She didn't have anything new to talk about yet. She'd get her suitcases moved into the cottage, take a good look around, maybe even unpack a little. Then she'd call Rachel back. Her daughter had texted and called throughout the day to check on her mother. But a little of that was more than enough. Priscilla needed some time to herself to discover her new home.

She rummaged through her bag until she found the envelope from Aunt Marjorie's lawyer that contained the house key. Then, straightening, she fit the key into the lock.

"What do you think you're doing?"

Her heart racing, Priscilla spun as if caught and dropped her purse. A man stood on the sidewalk a few yards away, his arms crossed and his face dark with disapproval. His short-sleeved shirt and pants were the same shade of blue, a uniform of some sort.

"Nothing!" She yelped the word like a guilty child.

His frown deepened. "This is private property."

"I know," she replied in a more dignified tone. "It's *my* property, actually."

Surprise lifted the man's eyebrows and loosened his arms, but he still seemed unconvinced. "Since when?"

"Since my Aunt Marjorie died and left it to me," she said, gaining confidence. "It was my grandmother's cottage before that, and *her* grandfather's before that, and I don't know how many

Lathams more. We've been here for ages. I'm Priscilla Grant, by the way."

The man relaxed and smiled at her. A nice smile. And Priscilla found herself smoothing her chin-length hair. "Well, that explains a lot. I'm very sorry for the misunderstanding." He extended his hand, stepping forward to greet her. "I'm Gerald O'Bannon, captain of the local Coast Guard station. One of our radio outposts is just down the shore from your lighthouse, and as I was driving past, I saw your car. There have been a lot of people poking around your property the last few days, and I thought you were just another treasure-seeker."

She bent to pick up her purse. "Please don't worry about it. I'm glad someone was looking after the place for me." She paused as his words registered. "Did you say another 'treasure-seeker'?"

Gerald's smile widened. "Ah, you *are* new in town. If you'd been here more than a day, someone would have told you all about it by now." He paused, letting the suspense build, and Priscilla played along.

"Told me what?"

"Last week the *Boston Globe* printed a story about Martha's Vineyard's most popular buried-treasure legend. During the Revolution, the son of a local blacksmith made off with the Redcoat payroll. He managed to hide it before he got caught, and the British were never able to recover it. As you can imagine, enthusiastic would-be millionaires have swarmed the island, looking in every likely spot—such as a deserted lighthouse."

They both looked toward the lighthouse before Priscilla turned back, skeptical. "There is no way that lighthouse existed during the Revolutionary War."

Gerald laughed. "You're right. It wasn't built until a hundred years later. But it's a nice thought, isn't it? Treasure hidden in a lighthouse?" He checked his watch. "I'm on duty in fifteen minutes, so I'll leave you be. Again, I'm sorry for startling you."

She reached out to shake his hand once more. "It was nice to meet you."

“You as well, Priscilla.” His hazel eyes sparkled. “I’m sure we’ll bump into each other now and then. Welcome to the island.”

Priscilla smiled her thanks and waited as he strode toward the white SUV parked at the end of her driveway. A bright red stripe and the words *Coast Guard* emblazoned the car door.

When he was gone, Priscilla turned back to the cottage. The door unlocked with a soft click, and she stepped into a dark, slightly musty hallway. She fumbled for the light switch.

When light flooded the entry and spilled into the adjacent living room, Priscilla gazed with appreciation. She hadn’t visited this fairy-tale cottage since she was a child, yet it mirrored her vague memories. The mismatched furniture hailed from different eras but partnered with the sunny yellow walls, the white trim, and bright Cape Cod curtains for a charming effect.

She dragged her two suitcases inside, one at a time, until she had them both standing next to the four-poster bed in the larger of the two bedrooms. She considered unpacking, filling the small closet and antique tallboy dresser with her belongings, but first she wanted to explore the rest of the cottage.

She started in the living room. Some objects she remembered from long ago—the lighthouse painting above the fireplace, viewed from the ocean during a storm, and a porcelain swan she had coveted as a child—but many items were new. The bathroom boasted a claw-foot tub and a black-and-white tile floor. The spare bedroom, though small, looked inviting with its quilted bedspread, antique dressing table, and gingham curtains. In the kitchen, she found some lovely old tea tins, and the fridge and oven were, thankfully, fairly new.

On the kitchen counter, Priscilla spotted a bright yellow envelope with her name on it. Inside, was a greeting card with a picture of the island along with a handwritten note, which read:

*Priscilla,
Welcome to Martha’s Vineyard! We did our best to spruce up*

the cottage for you. We’re so excited to have another Latham cousin living so close. We look forward to getting to know you better. Once you’re settled, give one of us a call. We’ll show you around the island and treat you to brunch at our favorite seaside cafe.

*Happy homecoming!
Your long-lost cousins,
Joan, Gail, and Trudy*

Under each name was a phone number, solidifying the fact that she had family here.

The idea of that brought comfort and raised her expectations. She hadn’t realized any relatives still lived on the island. Her last visit occurred when she was eight, and she hadn’t kept up with the Latham side of the family at all. Though their names sounded vaguely familiar, she had no clear memories of Joan, Gail, or Trudy. Still, she looked forward to meeting them. It was a relief to know she had some ready-made connections on the island. Meeting new people had never been her forte, making her move east more of a challenge, but what was life if it offered no challenge? Gary had taught her that and so much more.

She set down the card and continued her exploration. At the back of the kitchen, a door revealed a set of stairs leading downward. Priscilla was surprised to find a cellar. She hadn’t expected one this close to the shore, but she supposed the low bluff on which the lighthouse stood made it possible.

Suddenly apprehensive, she flipped the switch just inside the door. A single bare light bulb illuminated the musty space. Smaller than the footprint of the house, it had probably been built to serve as a root cellar or pantry. Spider webs decorated the lower reaches, a clear sign that the cousins had given the ancient basement a wide berth. She decided her cousins were smart women and closed the door. She could attack the basement... and the cobwebs... another day.

Another door, painted white like the walls, stood at the far

side of the living area. She wrinkled her brow as she crossed the room and tried the handle. Locked.

Locked meant there must be a key someplace, but where? She walked back into the kitchen. A small key rack with two tiny drawers hung just inside the back entry. An old-fashioned skeleton key lay atop the narrow shelf. An old key for an old door? It made perfect sense to her, so she lifted the key down and retraced her steps. She inserted the key, and when she heard metal on metal, her success inspired another smile, less rusty this time. She tugged the door firmly, and when it resisted, she tugged harder. It sprang forth with the added force, revealing a narrow stairway heading up. To what? she wondered as she flipped the single light switch to the “on” position. She’d never thought about the cottage having an attic, but as she mounted the steps, that’s exactly what she found. Steep eaves narrowed the headroom, and dull, stale air filled the spaces around storage boxes in every shape she could imagine.

Peering past the boxes, Priscilla’s focus was captured by a large sea chest against the far wall. The time-weathered, dark wood chest was so big, she could have curled up inside it.

She went straight to the chest and knelt down. She expected to find a lock, but all she had to do was lift the brass latch and push. The hinges creaked in protest against the heavy lid, but the chest opened.

Priscilla held her breath as she took in the chest’s contents. She noted three stacks of books, in various sizes and colors. She lifted the one nearest her, a slim clothbound volume, and opened it to find a journal of some sort, cursive writing filling the lined pages. She squinted and tilted the pages until the light hit them full on and she could make out a few lines.

It was a lighthouse log book dated 1933. The keeper had kept notes about passing ships, messages received, and repairs made. She set the clothbound journal on the floor next to her and lifted a leather-bound journal from the chest. This log was from 1928. The entry she turned to documented a storm that had kept the lighthouse

keeper up all night.

She was about to close the chest lid when she noticed a unique journal halfway down the centered pile. It was larger than the others and bound in dark, rich leather, embossed with a vine pattern. It looked old. *Really* old.

The leather felt dry enough that she worried it might crack. She settled back on her heels and laid the logbook on her lap, running her fingers over the tooled leather. Something fell out of the back of the logbook, bouncing off her leg and landing on the floor with the bright *ting* of metal. Priscilla nearly dropped the journal but managed to carefully close it and set it back in her lap.

She picked up the object. A coin. She raised it to the light and was shocked to find it was gold instead of the silver she’d expected. The coin’s face showed the profile of a portly man with a garland of leaves in his hair like Caesar. She brought the coin closer to her face and squinted to make out the letters circling his head.

GEORGIVS III DEI GRATIA

Georgius III. George the third, King? King George the third?

Her hand shaking, Priscilla turned the coin over to find the image of a coat of arms. It was surrounded by a string of letters that made no sense to her, but her gaze was arrested by the date at the top.

1775.

What, exactly, was it that Gerald O’Bannon had told her about Nathaniel Claybrook and the Redcoats’ stolen gold?

