

KEEPERS AT THE EDGE OF THE SEA

By Ann Marie Oliva

Copyright © 2005 by Ann Marie Oliva, All rights reserved.

ISBN: 1-60003-114-5

CAUTION: Professionals and amateurs are hereby warned that this Work is subject to a royalty. This Work is fully protected under the copyright laws of the United States of America and all countries with which the United States has reciprocal copyright relations, whether through bilateral or multilateral treaties or otherwise, and including, but not limited to, all countries covered by the Pan-American Copyright Convention, the Universal Copyright Convention and the Berne Convention.

RIGHTS RESERVED: All rights to this Work are strictly reserved, including professional and amateur stage performance rights. Also reserved are: motion picture, recitation, lecturing, public reading, radio broadcasting, television, video or sound recording, all forms of mechanical or electronic reproduction, such as CD-ROM, CD-I, DVD, information and storage retrieval systems and photocopying, and the rights of translation into non-English languages.

PERFORMANCE RIGHTS AND ROYALTY PAYMENTS: All amateur and stock performance rights to this Work are controlled exclusively by Brooklyn Publishers, LLC. No amateur or stock production groups or individuals may perform this play without securing license and royalty arrangements in advance from Brooklyn Publishers, LLC. Questions concerning other rights should be addressed to Brooklyn Publishers, LLC. Royalty fees are subject to change without notice. Professional and stock fees will be set upon application in accordance with your producing circumstances. Any licensing requests and inquiries relating to amateur and stock (professional) performance rights should be addressed to Brooklyn Publishers, LLC.

Royalty of the required amount must be paid, whether the play is presented for charity or profit and whether or not admission is charged.

AUTHOR CREDIT: All groups or individuals receiving permission to produce this play must give the author(s) credit in any and all advertisement and publicity relating to the production of this play. The author's billing must appear directly below the title on a separate line where no other written matter appears. The name of the author(s) must be at least 50% as large as the title of the play. No person or entity may receive larger or more prominent credit than that which is given to the author(s).

PUBLISHER CREDIT: Whenever this play is produced, all programs, advertisements, flyers or other printed material must include the following notice:

Produced by special arrangement with Brooklyn Publishers, LLC

COPYING: Any unauthorized copying of this Work or excerpts from this Work is strictly forbidden by law. No part of this Work may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form, by any means now known or yet to be invented, including photocopying or scanning, without prior permission from Brooklyn Publishers, LLC.

CHARACTERS

ABBY	18, a young lighthouse keeper, she is soft-spoken, but determined to do her job
MR. TRENT	40s, a crude, desperate "Moon Cusser", equally determined to get his due
JACK	20s, an ambivalent "Moon Cusser"

TIME & PLACE

Early spring, 1845. A small (fictitious), isolated island off the coast of Massachusetts. A lighthouse kitchen, late day. A surprisingly ferocious, early spring storm has begun.

PROPS

A Table
Three chairs
A lantern
Two large knives
Plate
Fork
Mug
Time-appropriate costumes

KEEPERS AT THE EDGE OF THE SEA

by
Ann Marie Oliva

AT RISE: ABBY at a table polishing brass by a lantern. The sound of thunder stops her. The wind howls. SHE walks to the window to look out. As SHE sits down, two men enter, JACK and MR. TRENT.

ABBY: ***(surprised)*** What is this, sirs?

MR. TRENT: We did not mean to startle you, Miss.

ABBY: You do so when you enter the lighthouse unannounced.

MR. TRENT: We called up from below. The wind must have carried our words away.

JACK: We mean you no harm.

MR. TRENT: ***(scowls and quickly pushes past JACK)*** We was just wondering if your father is here by any chance? We have a certain question to ask.

ABBY: I can answer any question you may have. I assist my father. I am a keeper as well.

MR. TRENT: I must speak to him directly.

ABBY: Is it an emergency?

MR. TRENT: Well, there is a storm brewing up now, is there not?

ABBY: I am afraid so.

JACK: May we ask your name?

ABBY: Abigail Leighton. Abby to all who know me. And you are Mr...

MR. TRENT: Our names is of no consequence.

ABBY: How will I tell my father who was asking after him?

JACK: All we need to know is when he will be returning, or others in your family.

ABBY: Excuse me, but I told you I will give him your message. It is beginning to darken and I must get to the catwalk to light the lantern.

(Another clap of thunder, then lightning. The wind howls.)

MR. TRENT: Yes, this storm promises to be a beauty, it does, a real beauty.

JACK: The lighthouse itself shakes under our feet from the wind.

ABBY: It does do battle with the weather and the sea. Please forgive me now, but I must...

MR. TRENT: ***(blocks her path)*** No, girl.

ABBY: I do not understand.

JACK: Your family will not be able to return tonight from the mainland, will they, Abby? You are stranded here alone?

ABBY: ***(to MR. TRENT)*** Sir, you block my path.

MR. TRENT: I do not want to trouble you, girl, but there will be no light shining from the top of the lighthouse tonight.

ABBY: But, there must, there is a tremendous storm approaching and the ships need to see... no, no, you are Moon Cussers?

MR. TRENT: Be calm, girl.

ABBY: You are, are you not?

JACK: There will be no moon to curse tonight.

ABBY: But I must get to the top and light the...

Keepers at the Edge of the Sea – Page 4

MR. TRENT: Listen to me well. There will be no light shining tonight from the top, ya hear?

ABBY: I am the keeper here. I will say what is to be lit and what is not.

MR. TRENT: You think again, girl. Jack here and me, is gonna say what is and is not to happen.

ABBY: Then you will surely cause the ships coming in to wreck as though you were mocking God himself.

MR. TRENT: God has nothin' to do with it.

ABBY: This can not be...

MR. TRENT: **(takes a large knife from his belt)** Oh, but it is, and after the wreck, we have business on the beach. We will be there as the cargo comes ashore. On a night such as this, with an unexpected storm, maybe two ships or more could wreck. The bales is ours then. It is fair game.

ABBY: I appeal to you, sir. It is one thing if a ships wrecks by natural happenstance, but quite another when it is caused to do so.

JACK: We do not cause it to happen, we only keep the light off the water.

ABBY: **(angry)** And that will cause it to happen.

MR. TRENT: Sorry, girl, but business is business is business.

ABBY: **(tries to run past MR. TRENT)** No.

MR. TRENT: **(stops her and holds her arm roughly)** You little...

JACK: No need for that, Mr. Trent.

MR. TRENT: We said no names. I told ya no names!

JACK: You handle the girl roughly. She only tries to do as keepers do.

MR. TRENT: **(lets go of ABBY)** Maybe so, but this night, this keeper will not.

ABBY: The ships will be helpless with no light. But that is exactly your plan, is it not?

MR. TRENT: Look here, we mean no harm to anyone, in particular.

ABBY: No harm? This island coast is most dangerous. The rocks are large and treacherous. They can rip a boat underneath without warning.

JACK: Sailors know their chances when they go to sea.

ABBY: That is why we are here, to help them back again, safely.

MR. TRENT: There is no safe way back to Howling Head Island, especially on a night such as this. In the old days many a ship was lost even with no storms and bright light from a full moon.

ABBY: From inexperienced captains to be sure, but many have made it without harm since the lighthouse.

MR. TRENT: Yes, and damn near left us without our goods.

ABBY: They are not "your" goods.

JACK: Of course, they are. It has always been the way. Whatever comes ashore from a wreck belongs to the first man to lay his hands on it.

ABBY: That is...

MR. TRENT: It makes no difference what a keeper says. The goods belongs to us. We never wanted ya here in the first place. We fought to keep ya away, but they would not listen. You are lucky there has been no fire under ya.

(More thunder and lightning.)

ABBY: We are needed.

MR. TRENT: You take our living from us.

Keepers at the Edge of the Sea – Page 5

ABBY: And you, sir, are about to take lives away from innocent men.

MR. TRENT: It is them or me. **(HE bangs on the table. ABBY is afraid and tries to run again. This time JACK stops her.)** You are not goin' anywhere girl. Do I make myself clear enough to ya?

ABBY: **(twists away from JACK)** Have you ever heard the sound of a ship as the bottom scrapes across the rocks? Have you ever heard the sound of a ship as it is thrown against the breakers and smashes and rips open, the screams of the men as they are tossed into the swirling sea, their shouts for help?

MR. TRENT: And who has heard my shouts for help? Can you tell me that? I face an endless sea of my own. But I do not intend to drown, no girl. I will not go down.

ABBY: Then this is murder!

(MR. TRENT attempts to go after ABBY. JACK intervenes and holds off MR. TRENT.)

JACK: Mr. Trent, please.

MR. TRENT: You would defend her words?

JACK: I defend nothing she says, but that was not the bargain we made. No harm was to come to the keepers. Do you remember?

MR. TRENT: **(breaks away from JACK; to ABBY)** Mind yourself, girl. I am not a patient man. **(scowls and reconsiders)** Bring me somethin' to eat. Now.

ABBY: There is very little food.

MR. TRENT: What is the very little?

ABBY: A small piece of bread and a hen's egg left for my supper.

MR. TRENT: Then I suppose you will go without supper as my own children have done on many a night. Bring it to me. Do not try to run anywheres, either. Jack here is more than a match for ya. **(ABBY, looking between both men, exits. MR. TRENT motions to JACK to follow her. HE sits at the table and calls after her.)** And bring me some drink, too! **(to himself)** Silly girl.

JACK: **(stays, but watches her from downstage; hears MR. TRENT'S remark)** She is a keeper.

MR. TRENT: Will ya stop sayin' that? I know damn well what she is. It was the worst day in the midst of many a bad day when they decided to put up this lighthouse and brought them keepers to Howling Head Island. How is a man to get on?

JACK: Still, we will cause many a widow heartache.

MR. TRENT: That did not seem to bother ya before.

JACK: I never thought of it before.

MR. TRENT: Then get rid of the thought. Think what is about to be ours. **(ABBY comes back into the room with a plate and a mug. SHE puts it down hard in front of MR. TRENT.)** So, you gonna pout now, are ya? It will do no good. **(MR. TRENT eats ravenously. ABBY and JACK look on.)** A bad, bad winter it has been.

ABBY: For everyone as well.

MR. TRENT: Did everyone bury a child who caught the fever?

ABBY: Many have lost sons and daughters to the fever.

Keepers at the Edge of the Sea – Page 6

MR. TRENT: You would be struck dumb if you knew the whole of it. That is the fourth child I have buried in six years. My wife is ill and can not tend the house. My eleven year old daughter must care for her and two younger brothers, and do the work her mother can not.

ABBY: I am sorry for your losses, sir.

MR. TRENT: **(angrily)** What do you know of losses?

ABBY: I have seen many in my time here.

MR. TRENT: Have ya now?

ABBY: Yes, before the ships were used to us, we lost many men. Still we went out in the storms in small boats to try to rescue them. Often we would hear their screams, but not see them. The next day, and for weeks after sometimes, their bloated bodies would wash ashore, half eaten by sea creatures.

MR. TRENT: **(Furious; throws his plate towards ABBY)** Witch! Are ya trying to poison me with your talk?

JACK: **(trying to distract him)** Mr. Trent, sir. It is thoroughly dark now.

MR. TRENT: **(gets himself under control, looks around and out the window)** So it is. I believe I will look around outside. **(HE takes a final few gulps, slams down the mug, stares down ABBY)** You are a dangerous one, you are, with your ideas. **(to JACK)** Keep your eye on her that she stays here.

(MR. TRENT exits. ABBY and JACK stare awkwardly at each other. ABBY picks up the plate and starts to clean up. SHE tries to hide her tears. JACK looks out the window.)

JACK: I got no quarrel with you, Abby, or your family.

ABBY: It would seem that is not true.

JACK: But it is. We only want what is due to us.

ABBY: Due to you?

JACK: Aye.

ABBY: Do you believe it is wrong to kill?

JACK: Mostly.

ABBY: Then why would you kill these men?

JACK: I do not kill them. The sea does.

ABBY: If you keep me from warning them...

JACK: You think backwards.

ABBY: God help you, if you were a sailor.

JACK: I was.

ABBY: What?

Thank you for reading this free excerpt from KEEPERS AT THE EDGE OF THE SEA by Ann Marie Oliva. For performance rights and/or a complete copy of the script, please contact us at:

Brooklyn Publishers, LLC

P.O. Box 248 • Cedar Rapids, Iowa 52406

Toll Free: 1-888-473-8521 • Fax (319) 368-8011

www.brookpub.com

Do Not Copy