

## Lady in the Mist

That night, I was in my room preparing for bed when a loud crack of thunder vibrated through the room. I rushed to the window, dread pounding through me at the sight of the darkening sky. Drops of rain shimmered on the glass, and a startling bolt of lightning illuminated the lighthouse. Something flashed in the top window of the tower, and I squinted through the darkness. Had that been a face? That was impossible. The weather was making me imagine things. Another enormous clap of thunder boomed, and I jumped back, dropping the curtain.

I shivered. *Stop this. It's only a storm. You're inside. You're safe.* I made a concentrated effort to stop the trembles running through my body. Choosing a book from the nightstand, I settled in bed to read. No way would I be able to sleep until the storm subsided. I tried to focus on the novel, but the words might as well have been written in Swahili for all I understood.

My mind kept wandering to the weather raging outside. With a determined effort, I focused on the page I'd already read no less than five times.

A particularly horrendous blast of thunder made me let out a scream. The lights went out, and I was plunged into darkness.

I froze, my legs quaking so badly, I couldn't climb from the bed. But then again, did I want to? Wasn't this the safest place to be?

I tried to remember if I'd seen any candles in the bedroom, but couldn't recall. The storm was frightening enough, but a power outage was terror-inducing. The only illumination was the occasional flashes of lightening across the draperies, which only intensified my fear.

Forcing my legs to work, I threw off the covers and stood. There had to be a candle in here somewhere. I was halfway across the bedroom floor, making my way through the dark toward the dresser, when a violent rattle shook the doorknob.

A scream left my throat. I couldn't think straight. Terror sent blood rushing through my eardrums, and it was several moments before I recognized Clinton's voice. "Lillian? Are you all right?"

On shaking legs, I rushed to the door, mindless of the dark. I jerked it open and summoned all my willpower not to launch into Clinton's arms. In the faint glow of the flashlight he held, I could barely make out his silhouette, but just having another human in the vicinity eased my terror.

"The power's out," I said stupidly.

"I know. I'm sorry. There are candles in the bathroom."

"I wasn't sure where to look. And it was dark..." I shuddered. "Why are you here?"

"Drew mentioned your fear of storms. I wanted to make sure you were okay."

“Thank you.”

“Let’s get those candles.” His touch landed on my arm, warm and comforting. He guided me to the bathroom where he released me and opened a cabinet. Several candles, some new, some already used were stacked neatly in place. He grabbed the nearest one. Resting the flashlight on the countertop, he reached into his pocket. Flame from a lighter touched the candle’s wick. He turned off the flashlight and slipped it in his back pocket. The flare wavered over his features, which were drawn into a look of concern I’d glimpsed only a few times.

“You’re shivering,” he murmured. He rubbed his hands up and down my arms. The friction of his touch sliding the silk gown along my flesh sent a skitter of desire over my spine.

I met his gaze in the candlelight. His eyes shimmered a golden green. We stared at one another for a few excruciatingly silent moments. He tugged lightly, and I was pulled against his chest. My bones turned to liquid, his touch leaving languorous heat in its wake. His hands slid upward, settling on my face.

“What am I doing?” he asked, his voice a tortured groan.

Before I had time to respond, he lowered his head and claimed my mouth. The kiss was gentle, his lips warm and coaxing. I opened to him with a small moan, linking my hands behind his neck. I pressed into him while a wave of undeniable yearning ached in my lower belly. *Madness. This is madness*, a voice whispered in my head. In spite of the truth in the words, I didn’t stop.