

Chapter One

CAP'N ANGUS

"Aaron, let's go back! It's sorta spooky out here. We shouldn't have come!"

"No! Not yet, Gracie! Don't be a silly sister now. Sheesh! Why are girls always scaredy-cats?"

The wind blew strongly through the nearby trees at the top of the cliffs. Distant waves could be heard crashing onto the jagged rocks below. The sun was now low in the sky, hovering like a huge alien space ship above the horizon, ready to plunge and disappear into the water in the distance. Long shadows danced around their feet. Their own shadows mimicked their human shapes, then stretched them into long, skinny giant forms, twisting and wriggling over the shimmering grass on the headland.

Aaron and Gracie were on summer vacation. Their parents had brought them to the Cape Lighthouse station at Cape Otway, near Apollo Bay, Victoria, on the south east coast of Australia. They were staying at the old lighthouse keeper's cottage that had been converted into a guesthouse for tourists. They would have preferred to go to the beach or even to stay home with friends, but Carol and Peter Brandon had insisted that their family vacation be spent at the desolated spot. There weren't any amusement rides, or video games or even a store, and Aaron and Gracie had been told to go explore while their parents unpacked and settled in for the week-long stay.

"Aaron, they'll get worried if we don't get back before dark!"

"What? Mum and Dad? Nah, don't be silly. They knew we were coming to the station cemetery."

"But Aaron, it's nearly six. Dad was going to barbecue some sausages for dinner around seven."

"That's an hour away. There's plenty of time. The cottage is only a five minutes walk. Come on."

He grabbed her by the hand, and with a cheeky grin, opened the rusty iron gate that led into the tiny cemetery. It was quiet inside. The wind couldn't reach this lonely and secluded spot nestled in the sand dune area north of the Cape.

Gracie gasped, "Ooh, look. There's a dozen graves here!" A shiver went down her spine, and goose bumps appeared on her pale arms. "Ugh! This place gives me the creeps! Hey, look at this one. Oh, Aaron, this little girl was only a baby! It says, 'Keeper Andrews child died today. 12 January, 1878.' That's sad."

"Yeah!" replied Aaron. His happy mood had vanished. He stood next to his sister, looking at the tiny grave. Their father had told them to look for it when he told them about how hard life was for the lighthouse keeper's families when they had lived at the station one hundred and fifty years earlier.

"Hello!" said a voice behind them.

Aaron and Gracie spun around and then froze in their tracks. Their feet seemed to be glued to the ground where they stood.

"Who are y-y-you? W-w-here did you come from?" croaked Aaron, as he stared at a tall stranger. *Darn it, why did his voice suddenly sound squeaky like a girl's*, he thought. Aaron cleared his throat, stuck out his slim chest, and held his sister's hand tightly, hoping that the stranger hadn't noticed his nervous stammer.

"I didna give you a fright, did I? I'm sorry. I didna mean to, laddie." The old man smiled. His grey beard reflected the golden glow of the sinking sun. Aaron saw that he was wearing a sailor's uniform complete with brass-buttoned coat. Atop his silver hair, perched at a jaunty angle, was a sea captain's cap. "Aye, Aaron, it's a captain's cap," the stranger's deep voice replied.

"Wha- whe- Hey! How do you know my name? I didn't ask you about the cap. I err, I um .." Aaron couldn't finish. He wondered, where had the man come from? The main gates to the station had been closed to the public at five o'clock. Aaron tried hard to remember the people they had met inside the station compound. There were Kathy and

Robin, the current Lighthouse station managers and Wal, the weatherman, who commuted between his property nearby and the station. Other than his parents, Carol and Peter Brandon, Gracie, his sister and of course, himself, there were no other people staying at the Lighthouse station that week. So, who was this stranger? Was it Wal, dressed in disguise, playing a joke?

As if reading Aaron's thoughts again, the stranger replied, "Nae, I'm not Wal! I came from the lighthouse back there. I'm staying for a wee while. I didna mean to frighten you or the young lass. By the way, I'm Captain Angus McLaughlan. My friends call me Cap'n Angus."

The children stared open mouthed at Cap'n Angus. He had experienced this reaction from people before, especially young children like Aaron and Gracie. Nae, not children, kids, he thought. Yes, that's what they called them in this modern time! Cap'n Angus put on the warmest smile he could, straightened his cap, dusted the cobwebs off his jacket, and thought, *"Och, why do I always forget to dust the cobwebs off afore I leave home! No wonder I scare folk. They probably think I've walked straight out of a grave. Oh, dear! One step at a time Cap'n! Don't frighten 'em off, man. Ye've only just met!"*

Gracie started to shiver all over. She felt the hair standing up on her arms. She couldn't help but notice the cobwebs and dust that the old man had just swept off himself. She remembered what her parents had said about talking to strangers. She didn't know what to make of this man at all.

Aaron couldn't move. This wasn't happening. He wasn't real! Was he?

The old sea captain nodded, then grinned a big beaming smile, which seemed to glow in the now disappearing golden sunlight.

"W-w-where did you r-r-really come from?" stuttered Aaron, and then ran out of words. He could only stare at the stranger. He had an eerie feeling as a shiver went through him, as if a cold breeze circled around them.

"As I said before, I came from the lighthouse tower back there on the Cape. I visit lighthouses all round the world. It's my job... um, no... it's my passion to see these beautiful towers."

"You live in the lighthouse?" Aaron asked doubtfully. "No one lives in a lighthouse."

"Aye, but they do..."

Gracie interrupted, "But where did you come from before you went to the lighthouse? You speak English, but you talk sorta funny."

"Sorta? Now ye are using a strange language, lass! He, He, He! I was born in Scotland, way over the other side of the world. Do ye know where Scotland is?" His pale blue eyes seemed to sparkle in the fading light.

"Of course," replied Gracie. Despite her reservation, she began to like the old man with his friendly smile. "That's where men wear those checked skirt things," she giggled.

"Kilts, lass. Tartan Kilts! Nae skirts!" The voice sounded cross. The white bushy eyebrows crumbled together as he frowned. "Do ye two nae learn history at school?"

"Yeah, but it's boring!" pouted Aaron.

"Ah, that's why ye didna want to come to the Cape for the week with your parents. So, ye think history is boring? That's a shame. I love history. Ye canna feel the history in this cemetery? I can!"

"What do you mean feel history? You can't feel it, you just have to learn it!" protested Gracie.

"Och, lass, ye felt history a few minutes ago! Ye felt sad at seeing the wee bairn's grave there. That's what I mean by feeling history."

"Bairn?" she puzzled.

""Bairn' is Scottish for a baby."

Gracie looked at Cap'n Angus with a questioning frown.

"Cap'n, we tried to go in the lighthouse tower's door before coming here, but it was locked," she commented.

"Aye. I know, Gracie. I dinna need a key. He, He, He!"

His rounded tummy bounced as he chuckled.

"Oh dear, I'm sorry, lass. If only ye could see the look on your face when I said that I dinna need a key! He, He, He."

Truth was, Cap'n Angus just loved to play jokes on people. And he also liked to tease. Deep down he was a kindly man who liked children. He felt they always accepted strange or new things more easily than adults. Their minds had not yet closed down to possibilities.

"Come, youngsters! Let's go back. It's getting dark now. Ye should return to the lighthouse tower and the cottage area. These paths can be dangerous in the dark. I dinna want to see ye disappearing over the edge! Follow me." With that command, he strode off down the path in front of them.

Cap'n Angus walked about ten feet ahead of them. Gracie thought it odd that she couldn't hear his footsteps, but decided maybe it was because the wind was so strong, blowing past her ears. Five minutes later, they could see the tall, stark white tower of the lighthouse perched at the top of the cliffs ahead. They descended into the bushy track, which wound and twisted through the dense bush that surrounded the compound area. They were now in a safe area, away from the cliff edge. They gasped as they rounded the last bend in the narrow track. Cap'n Angus was no longer walking ahead of them. He had disappeared!

"Hey! Cap'n, wait up... Cap'n? Heck, Gracie, he can't walk that fast, can he?"

"*He, He, He. Now's the time to play tricks! He, He, He!*" thought Cap'n Angus, then called out, "Come on! Hurry up in front! Stop dawdling!" The deep voice now boomed from behind them.

"Wha.. Hey.. how did you get behind us? Ha! You musta hid in the bushes, then stepped in behind us. Very funny! *humph!*" grunted Aaron.

Cap'n Angus just smiled back at him, then said, "Hmmm maybe, maybe not. Come on, lad. Hurry! It's getting dark!"

"*This boy isn't easily spooked!*" thought Cap'n Angus, a little disappointed that his disappearing act didn't frighten Aaron.

They reached the open area where the cottage of the former lighthouse keepers and the lighthouse tower was nestled near the edge of the Cape. The tower was so big that it dwarfed them. Its white painted stone exterior seemed to disappear into the low flying clouds above them. Looking up to the top made them feel giddy. The children were aware of Cap'n Angus's presence standing in front of them, smiling as his deep voice drifted like the wind into their ears.

"Beautiful, isn't it? Ye know that this tower looked just the same over one hundred years ago. With imagination, ye can feel what it was like back then, when the lighthouse keepers and their families lived here. They felt the same breezes, breathed the same sea air that ye are breathing... the same strong wind that ye can feel now."

His voice became soft as he seemed to be lost in memories. Gracie and Aaron began feeling the wind and imagining what it was like. Gracie turned to ask the captain a question. He'd disappeared again! The cold wind made her shiver as she called out, "Cap'n? Oh, please stop playing tricks! Cap'n?"

"Aye? Can ye hear me?"

His voice seemed to blend into the roar of the wind.

"Wow! It's a trick, I bet he's behind the tower, Aaron. You go this way, and I'll go the other way. I bet we find him," she shouted as she scampered around the tower.

Moments later, they met each other at the back of the tower with bewildered looks on their faces.

"He's gone, Gracie. He's vanished into thin air!"

Gracie started to giggle and called out, "Oh, Cap'n, this is going a bit far now. First you want us to believe that you're a real sea captain. Then you keep playing disappearing tricks on us! Ha, ha, ha, ha. You're so funny, and good, too. Are you an actor, paid to appear at night to scare kids like us?"

"Yeah, Cap'n, or whoever you are, that's a neat trick. Come on, where are you? Can you show us how you do it?"

asked Aaron.

A cold breeze whisked around them, blowing Gracie's blond hair around her face. Aaron blinked his eyes wide in amazement, then in surprise as Cap'n Angus seemed to appear through the locked door of the tower, and then stood in front of them. They thought their eyes were playing tricks on them.

"Yeow! Hey, how did you do that?" gasped Aaron.

"Och, I'm sorry, I didna mean to scare ye, but I'm having one of those days. He, He, He, I canna help myself. I like to play jokes, you see,? but not frighten ye!"

"B-b-ut you walked through the locked door! At least, I-I think you did!" muttered Aaron.

"No, Aaron, it was a trick. Cap'n Angus was playing a trick!" spluttered Gracie.

Cap'n sighed. It was time he told them the truth.

"I was a Captain on a sailing ship. My ship was wrecked on rocks off the Scottish coast in 1825. We hit the rocks because there was no lighthouse on the cliffs above. There's a lighthouse there now, just like this one here. The ship's crew were all laid to rest in a little cemetery, at the top of the cliff near to the wreck. The lighthouse that now stands on top of that cliff warns ships about the reef that we struck. You can read it in the history."

"This tower has the date 1848, above the door!" said Aaron. "What you're saying is that you died 23 years before this tower was built? You're kidding, aren't you, huh? Come on, Cap'n Angus, where's the key? You have a key for that door! Stop fooling around, or I'll call Dad."

"Och, lad, no need to call your Dad."

"1825? That's one hundred and seventy years ago!" Gracie shuffled forward, put out her hand, and continued, "That's not possible!"

"Gracie's calculations are right. I died off the Scottish Coast, 23 years before this lighthouse tower was built here in Australia in 1848!"

Cap'n Angus watched the stunned looks on the children's now pale faces. The stunned look changed to a puzzled look, then one of disbelief.

"Och, these two are still disbelievers! I hope I haven't made a mistake," he thought.

Cap'n cleared his throat, then put on his most engaging smile, and said quietly.

"Do ye believe in ghosts?"

"Ghosts!" exclaimed Gracie.

"Wow!" whistled Aaron.

"How did you get here? I mean why are you here.. err... I mean you look r-r-r-r-real!" Gracie's teeth had started an uncontrollable chattering.

"I spirited myself here, lass. Go ahead, try to touch me," he smiled back, holding out his hand. "I promise I won't bite!"

Gracie nervously moved forward to touch Cap'n Angus's hand. She caught her breath.

"I-I-I c-c-an't feel you! Oooaha."

She was suddenly fascinated at what she could see, but not feel.

"Ha! I must be dreaming this," she decided. She wasn't scared anymore, just curious. For the first time, she noticed that Cap'n didn't cast a shadow. She looked at Aaron's shadow, her own shadow, then looked for Cap'n Angus's. There was no shadow at all! A shiver ran down her spine. She hoped that it was only the cool evening wind. Cap'n folded his arms and leaned on the safety railing that ran around the base of the tower. She noticed that his dark blue trousers were stained with what looked like salt spray.

Cap'n cleared his throat, and said, "Ye see, one advantage of being what ye like to call a ghost is that we are able to appear or disappear at will. We can form and reform and go through solid walls. We can even travel to other places in a few seconds, or travel through time if we want."

"You can't be a ghost!" croaked Gracie, still bewildered but re-gaining her defiance. "Coz we can see you!"

"But lass, have ye already forgotten that ye canna touch me?" sighed Cap'n.

"Shh, Gracie! Sheesh, you're so dumb! Cap'n, why are girls so dumb? You are a ghost, aren't you? How else would you have appeared out of nowhere?" Aaron was fascinated.

A cool breeze started to whirl around them, flicking Gracie's blond hair again.

"Aye, laddie. I'm a ghost all right. Now, let me see, how can I prove it? He, He, He! Ah, I know. Watch carefully. I'm going to dematerialise, then reappear. All right?"

Aaron took a deep breath and replied, "Sure!"

"Yeah, right!" smirked Gracie, not believing the old man's next trick.

The wind suddenly became strong, and swirled around them. Cap'n smiled and said, "Back shortly." A puff of cold air, and Cap'n Angus simply disappeared, right before their eyes!

"Are ye ready? I'm coming back. I'm re-materialising." The deep voice seemed to come from inside the white wall of the tower. A second later a hand, then an arm came out through the white wall. It was as if the bricks had magically parted like a curtain on a stage. In a few moments, the entire familiar figure of the old sailor had fully reappeared in front of them. Gracie felt her hair standing up on the back of her neck.

"Argh! You *are* a *ghost*!" she croaked and then fainted.