

*Ashes  
on the  
Waves*

MARY LINDSEY

*Also by the same author:*

Shattered Souls

ANNABEL LEE

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It was many and many a year ago,  
    In a kingdom by the sea,  
That a maiden there lived whom you may know  
    By the name of Annabel Lee;  
And this maiden she lived with no other thought  
    Than to love and be loved by me.

*I* was a child and *she* was a child,  
    In this kingdom by the sea;  
But we loved with a love that was more  
    than love—  
    I and my Annabel Lee—  
With a love that the wingéd seraphs of Heaven  
    Coveted her and me.

And this was the reason that, long ago,  
    In this kingdom by the sea,  
A wind blew out of a cloud, chilling  
    My beautiful Annabel Lee;  
So that her high-born kinsmen came  
    And bore her away from me,  
To shut her up in a sepulchre  
    In this kingdom by the sea.

The angels, not half so happy in Heaven,  
    Went envying her and me—  
Yes!—that was the reason (as all men know,  
    In this kingdom by the sea)  
That the wind came out of the cloud by night,  
    Chilling and killing my Annabel Lee.

But our love it was stronger by far than the love  
    Of those who were older than we—  
    Of many far wiser than we—  
And neither the angels in Heaven above,  
    Nor the demons down under the sea,  
Can ever dissever my soul from the soul  
    Of the beautiful Annabel Lee:—

For the moon never beams, without bringing  
    me dreams  
    Of the beautiful Annabel Lee;  
And the stars never rise, but I feel the bright eyes  
    Of the beautiful Annabel Lee:—  
And so, all the night-tide, I lie down by the side  
Of my darling—my darling—my life and  
    my bride,  
    In her sepulchre there by the sea,  
    In her tomb by the sounding sea.

—Edgar Allan Poe, 1849

The death, then, of a beautiful woman is, unquestionably, the most poetical topic in the world—and equally is it beyond doubt that the lips best suited for such topic are those of a bereaved lover.

—Edgar Allan Poe,  
from “The Philosophy of Composition,” 1846



# 1



*There is no passion in nature so demoniacally impatient, as that of him, who shuddering upon the edge of a precipice, thus meditates a Plunge. To indulge, for a moment, in any attempt at thought, is to be inevitably lost; for reflection but urges us to forbear, and therefore it is, I say, that we cannot. If there be no friendly arm to check us, or if we fail in a sudden effort to prostrate ourselves backward from the abyss, we plunge, and are destroyed.*

—Edgar Allan Poe,  
from “The Imp of the Perverse,” 1845

She looked like something out of a dream . . . or a nightmare. Simultaneously, so terrible and beautiful, it made me ache.

Waves pounded against the jetty, shooting geysers of frigid salt water into the air as she leaned into the wind, her long hair whipping in all directions.

“No. Stop!” I shouted, but the howling gale and crashing waves consumed my words.

She took a step closer to the rocky edge and held her arms out to the side as if she were going to fly. But she wasn’t going to take flight. She was going to die.

“No!” I leapt onto the boulder at the base of the jetty and fought the wind, picking my way over the slick, moss-covered surface. “Don’t do it!”

Arms still spread, she tipped her head back, letting the spray from the waves shower her face, like a lover embracing the rage of the sea itself.

A huge wave slammed the rocks to my right. I crouched and gained a fingerhold on the rough surface to keep from being washed away.

Just a little farther and I’d be past the wave break point.

She turned toward me, her glassy eyes unfocused. I’d been there. I knew what she was experiencing in that trancelike stupor. *Don’t do it*, I bid her silently. She teetered for a moment and I felt certain she would fall backward. I was so close—within steps of reaching her. I couldn’t lose her now. “No! Hang on!” I shouted.

As beautiful as I thought she was before, it was nothing compared to seeing her face. Fine and delicate, bathed in the rich, caramel glow of the setting sun, her brow was drawn in concentration as she seemed to grasp the reality of her situation. She’d reached the point of no return. If she didn’t jump now, it was clear I wouldn’t let her. How badly did she want this release? How deep was the pain?

Not deep enough, I realized with relief as I wrapped my good arm around her waist and pulled her to me.

“What the hell are you doing?” she screamed, shoving against my chest. “Are you freaking nuts? Let me go!”

If I had been whole, I could have reasoned with her while standing. Instead, I was forced to sit, pulling her down with me in order to gain enough control to keep her from hurting herself—or me for that matter. As hard as she was struggling, we were both likely to end up in the sea.

“Stop,” I said in her ear as I forced her to her back and pinned her body with my own. She needed to be calm in order to listen to reason. The frigid water crashed against the rocks on all sides as her warmth seeped through our clothes into my skin.

“Oh, God,” she cried. “What are you doing?”

Lying on top of her, I trapped her legs between mine and held her arm over her head by her narrow wrist, the full length of my body immobilizing her except for her free arm, which she was using to beat the side of my head. I lowered my mouth to her ear. “Stop, please,” I said. “I just want to help you.”

She went still.

It felt like her flesh melted into mine as the tension ebbed from her like an evening tide. We remained like this for a while, breathing in unison and saying nothing, her body pliant beneath mine.

Sensing she had calmed, I lifted my weight from her slightly. In one swift movement, she shifted higher and slammed her knee into me.

Part of me marveled at her cleverness. The other part struggled to remain conscious through a wave of pain so intense I couldn't breathe.

She muttered something indecipherable as I rolled onto my side and she pushed to her feet. Perhaps she had spoken clearly and it was just the sound of my pulse in my head that muffled her words.

Unable to move, I could only watch as she picked her way over the rocks toward the shore, never once looking back, now released from the call of the sea.

By the time the pain had subsided enough for me to get to my feet, she had cleared the jetty and was climbing the rocky path toward the mansion.

The structure loomed ominous and foreboding at the apex of the hill. The bottom half was shrouded in the dense fog that crept across the land from the water. Illuminated by lightning flashes, the mansion appeared alive—like a breathing stone monster waiting for the opportune moment to lay siege to our tiny village below.

I watched from behind a boulder marking the corner of the property as she raked the rain-soaked hair from her face and studied the stone beast as if she, too, sensed its mal-intent.

With her delicate, slender hands, she yanked the iron gate, but it only gave a few inches. The hinges screamed in protest as she gave it another tug and then another, until it finally yielded enough for her to squeeze through.

Inside the gaping mouth of the overhang at the front of the house, huge oak double doors with hand-hewn black metal hardware stood more like soldiers' protective shields than a welcoming entrance. Everything about the place screamed "go away," and I would have, but that wasn't an option . . . not yet, anyway. Not until I was certain she was safe.

She banged ineffectively on the doors several times, then slapped her palms against them—her softness in complete opposition to the unyielding harshness of the structure.

She turned and I ducked behind the huge stone. I thought for a moment she had sensed my presence, but to my relief, she was simply looking for something on the path just off the porch. With almost unnatural grace, she descended the few steps of the porch and picked up a fist-size stone. Rolling it in her fingers, she climbed the steps and slammed it against one of the iron straps across the door.

The sharp raps reverberated against the stone of the mansion and echoed into the fog that had all but enveloped the

island. As if in reply, lightning split the sky, making the house appear to lurch as it reflected off the leaded-glass windowpanes that shone like the eyes of a hundred night animals.

The doors groaned as they were drawn open from within. I didn't see Miss Ronan, but I recognized her deep, liquid voice. "You should not be outside after dark, Anna," she warned. "Bad things happen after dark."

Anna shot a look over her shoulder toward the sea before running into gaping jaws of the mansion.

She was safe inside the belly of the monster: safe from the storm, safe from the call of the sea, and most of all, safe from me—a monster of another kind entirely.

A scream shattered Muireann's sleep. She nudged her sister. "Wake up! Something's going on." Her sister responded by snorting twice, then rolling over.

There it was again, louder this time. They were torturing someone. She crawled to the edge of the rock ledge and put her head underwater.

"Please, please," a youthful male voice pleaded. "Give me another chance."

"You had your chance," an older man answered. She recognized that voice. It was their leader.

"It wasn't my fault," the young male cried. "I had her. He severed the connection. No, please . . ."

Then the screaming began again.

Muireann lifted her head from the water and took a deep shuddering breath. She glanced over her shoulder to find her family still huddled comfortably together, deep in slumber.

Again, she put her head underwater, praying the young male would be released.

“Who severed the connection?” the leader’s voice boomed.

“The broken one did it. He’s the reason she got away. Please don’t kill me.”

There was a long silence. Muireann’s lungs ached. She should have taken a deeper breath.

“If we become too weak to remain in this realm, you will *wish* I had killed you,” the leader said. “There are things worse than death, son, as the broken one will soon discover.”

Muireann pulled her head from the water, filling her lungs with a gasp. He had tortured his own son, she realized with horror. Muireann had no idea who the broken one was, but she knew he didn’t stand a chance.