

# Only Woman Light House Keeper in the World



MRS. KATY WALKER AND HER FAVORITE GRANDCHILD.



EMMA, ONE OF THE CHILDREN BORN AT THE LIGHTHOUSE.



JAKE WALKER, ASSISTANT KEEPER ROBBINS' REEF LIGHTHOUSE.

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**T**HE ONLY woman in the world in charge of a lighthouse entirely surrounded by the waves lives in New York bay. She is in the very center of a population of 6,000,000 people, yet she is not a part of it and has not its ways, for when she leaves her sea-swept home once or twice a year to shop in New York the rush and confusion of the great crowds all about so fill her with loneliness that before she has scarcely begun her purchases she turns her back on the things dear to the feminine heart and flees precipitously to Robbins' Reef lighthouse. There, she says, she has not known a lonely minute in the seventeen years that she has watched the endless procession of countless craft up and down the bay on their way to and from the docks of the new world metropolis.

This woman is Mrs. Katy Walker, and the sailors' beacon which she has in charge rises sheer out of the water five miles south of the Battery. It stands on the eastern end of the reef, where, in the days of the Dutch governors, the boys of New Amsterdam went out in rowboats to shoot with their blunderbusses the seals that sunned themselves on the rock-strewn sandy stretch that reaches back to the Jersey flats to the westward and is exposed in a long, thin line when the tide is out. And just a half mile to the east runs the channel that the majestic liners and other seagoing craft follow on their way to the Atlantic.

From the lighthouse Mrs. Walker has a marvelous panorama of nature's works and man's most ambitious efforts. The only thing that she has to do in order to drink in a view that tens of thousands of people have traveled across continents and oceans to behold is to walk around the little stone balcony surrounding the light. She can see the Narrows and the frowning fort on either side; Brooklyn, with its two or three tall buildings and its wooded suburbs to the southeast; and Governor's island and qucer, old, rounded Fort Castle William. She can see the East river with the Brooklyn bridge hanging above it; New York's skyscrapers, hiding the rest of Manhattan island and looking like mammoth sticks, pierced with many holes, rising sheer out of the water; and the North river with its myriad of ferry boats and ragged line of docks and railroad terminals on either shore. She can see Bedloe's and Ellis islands, supporting the Statue of Liberty and the mosque-like buildings of the new Castle Garden. She can see the score or more of smoky, bustling, manufacturing towns along the Jersey promontories. She can see the hills and beach towns of Staten island, with picturesque St. George two miles away, and the low, long, rakish buildings of Sailors' Snug harbor just visible up the Kill Van Kull. And in a sweep of the harbor itself she can see chugging tugs, churning ferry boats, every manner of sailing craft, tankers and tramp steamers, excursion boats, long strings of barges, puffing launches, gilded yachts of millionaires, warships, ocean liners and rowboats of the Bay fishermen, dotting the water on all sides and displaying the flags of many nations.

Mrs. Walker is content to see all this and to live isolated from it all. The very noises of the great marts about her that sometimes come faintly out to the reef make her tremble, for these almost silent echoes of trade recall the lonely moments of her city trips. And just as she thinks the metropolis is the most God-forsaken spot on earth, so she believes that Robbins' Reef lighthouse is the most blessed. It is her home, and there her son Jake, who is the assistant keeper, his wife and three

little daughters, and her own daughter, live with her.

Mrs. Walker cares for the companionship of no other human beings. To her the millions of people within rowboat reach are as nothing except when they can be kept from shipwreck by her light, or saved from drowning or crushing ice floes by Jake in his small boat, or when she can warm with coffee the half-frozen "clammers" who in winter work within calling distance of the reef.

It is her ever-constant vigil to warn and to succor the men who go down to the deep that has led them to speak of Robbins' Reef lighthouse for years as "Katy's Light."

So conscientious is Mrs. Walker in taking care of the lighthouse that every night since her husband died, fourteen years ago, she has not failed once to look after the lamps. Sometimes, when he can persuade

that the ships are lost to view, she looks after the fog whistle, or, if that is out of order, sets in motion the clock-like mechanism that rings the fog bell. After that she stays up until the fog lifts entirely or the worst of it is over.

With the exception of one year, Mrs. Walker has spent all her time in America in a lighthouse. It has been twenty-two years since she landed on Sandy Hook with her son, whose father had died in Germany shortly before she set sail for this country. She had been working on the Hook only a few months when Jacob Walker, the assistant keeper of the Sandy Hook lighthouse, met her and fell in love with her, and in less than a year after her arrival she was taken to the lighthouse as Jacob Walker's bride, her boy going along as Walker's adopted son and taking his name. There she helped her husband for four

years. In her quaint, broken English she says to those who compliment her: "You think it fine? I am glad. But I like to work. It keeps me contented and happy. And why don't I take a vacation once in a while and let Jake take care of the light? Ah! I wouldn't know what to do with a whole day on shore—and then, I love the light."

Two things, however, Mrs. Walker does leave to her assistant—going ashore for supplies and rescuing rowboat fishermen. Not infrequently young Walker has to lower his boat from the davits on the lighthouse's sea wall and pull out to a boat caught and being crushed in the ice, or capized by a sudden squall or the wash of a liner. In effecting several of these rescues he himself has narrowly escaped being crushed by the ice that often piles up eight and ten feet high about the lighthouse.

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He has also had not a few perilous trips to St. George for supplies. In good weather the distance is covered in less than half an hour, but when the autumnal storms and winter set in Jake does well if he can make shore after two hours of rowing. Frequently he gets ashore, but when he starts to return he is forced to put back to Staten Island and wait for the storm to die down. He spent three hours the day before last New Year's day trying to reach the lighthouse with a turkey and fixings, but at last, and only when he was half-frozen, he gave up the struggle, with the result that the people on the Robbins' Reef had no New Year's dinner.

The rowboat communication with the main land, and the only kind that there is, is much interrupted at this season of year. Last winter Jake did not get ashore more than half a dozen times. But there is always one day that he makes every effort to get over to St. George. That is the day before Christmas, when his wife and their three children—Emma, the eldest, 4 years old; Katherine and Alberta, the baby—go to New York to see the Christmas toys and buy gifts for one another and the faithful woman left alone in the lighthouse.

This is one of the two or three times a year that these three water babies get on land, and the sights that they see make their little eyes bulge with wonder and furnish food for childish talk for days to come with their grandmother, who, until her son married about five years ago, had her two children for her only companions for nearly ten years.

Because they get to see people outside the lighthouse so seldom, the little girls are extremely shy when a stranger once in a great while clambers up the iron ladder reaching down to the water along their home's side. No amount of coaxing can induce the two younger to come from their hiding place behind their grandmother's skirts, and only after prolonged persuasion will Emma forget her bashfulness enough to smile timidly and lip sweetly.

Mary, the daughter, is away a good part of the time now, for she goes to a boarding school on Staten island. But when vacation comes she loses no time in getting back to the lighthouse, where her little niece spends hours on sunny days in the rope swing in which she passed a large part of her childhood, and which is suspended from stout iron hooks driven into the stone floor of the second balcony. She has never known any other home than the lighthouse, and her affection for it is deep. She is, indeed, a child of the sea, and, like her simple-minded, open-hearted and quaintly old-fashioned mother, she can interpret its every sign and mood. She loves it in summer calm, and in winter storm that hurls great waves against the light's base until it trembles and dashes frozen salt spray half way up its height.

## Spirit of the Christmas Greens

Down in the Southland far away,  
Where summer days forever stay;  
By sluggish pools where lizards sun  
And ghostly moss swings tendrils dun;  
High up where gnarled branches grow,  
Gleam waxen berries, mistletoe.

On sullen reach of sandy shore,  
And, stretching backward evermore,  
In waste of stunted shrub and tree,  
Swept by the chill breath of the sea,  
One touch of color burns and glows—  
'Tis where the scarlet holly grows.

Upon New England's rock-ribbed crest,  
With Nature's frosted fretwork dressed,  
Its roots by massive bowlders stayed,  
Its top by bleak winds rudely swayed,  
The Tree of Trees, with arms outspread  
To greet the Storm King, rears its head.

And so from solitudes apart,  
Unto the city's throbbing heart,  
To children's outstretched hands they come  
To deck the feast in every home,  
And show that Christmas and its cheer  
Unites all places far and near.



her to let him, her son relieves her a part of the night, but for the most part she has kept the light bright with no outside help. "It is my work," she says, "and so I love to do it."

For weeks in winter Mrs. Walker never closes her eyes in sleep when night comes. Then it is that the windows enclosing the light can be kept free from frost only by constant cleansing. At this time Mrs. Walker will not let Jake come up into the little room where the light glows until dawn. Then he brings her a cup of coffee, and, after she has drunk it, she descends the ladder and goes to bed. That is, she generally does, but if the day is foggy and a blanket of white hangs over the bay so

years. At the end of that period he was transferred to Robbins' Reef light, where he remained until he died.

Mrs. Walker believes that her husband would be living still if it had been possible to get a doctor to him while he was ill. But because the bay was choked with floating, grinding ice no one could reach the lighthouse, and so a heavy cold developed into a fever and pneumonia; and one night, when a storm raged and while the wife was up with the light cleaning the windows, so that death might not overtake the ships, that dark form stole into one of the little circular bedrooms below while no one watched.

After the funeral Rear Admiral Rogers,

for about ten years, and although she has been entitled to ten days' vacation a month since that time, she has not taken advantage of the regulation for a single day. She has never been absent from the lighthouse for more than six or eight hours at a stretch.

In all the years that she has been in charge of the lighthouse Mrs. Walker has not received a reprimand or had a complaint entered against her, despite the fact that she has charge of a light which stands in one of the world's busiest harbors. Her lighthouse has the reputation of being the cleanest and best kept in the Third district.

Mrs. Walker is very modest about her