

TO THE LIGHTHOUSE

by

Jim Sherry

Based on the Novel

by Virginia Woolf

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FADE IN:

EXT. CLOUDY SKY - NIGHT

We hear sounds of thunder, rain, wind, a turbulent sea, and waves crashing on a shore.

Then we see a night sky, black with clouds and fog. A flash of lightning. Then more thunder.

Through the darkness and fog, a lighthouse on a small island of rock sheds its warning light around the surrounding bay.

A boat's horn sounds in the distance.

In the background, we begin to hear the sounds of a ticking clock faintly but steadily.

It is September 1910, near St. Ives, Cornwall.

INT. CHILDREN'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

The ticking of the clock is now quite prominent.

In spite of the closed curtains on the window, a flash of lightning outside partially illuminates a children's bedroom in the Ramsay House, a ramshackle Victorian structure used by the family during the summer months.

We can make out the outlines of two old-fashioned dressers and two beds where children are sleeping.

On one of the dressers, a doll sits leaning against the wall next to the various pieces of a toy tea set. On the other dresser is a model ship, a scissors, and some books. There is also a clock, the source of the ticking we have been hearing. It is 2 AM.

In one of the beds, a pretty girl of seven years old is sleeping soundly. This is CAM RAMSAY.

In the other bed, a boy of six years old, JAMES RAMSAY, is tossing about restlessly.

His eyes flash open. They are very blue and very intense. As we watch him, we hear again the sounds of the storm, the waves crashing on the shore, and the distant sound of the ship's horn. Hearing this last sound, James smiles to himself.

INT. STUDY - NIGHT

In the adjacent room of the Ramsay house, MRS. RAMSAY is sitting at a writing desk in front of a curtained window, clad in her dressing gown. A single, small, kerosene lamp on the desk provides the only light. She is reading letters. Though still extraordinarily beautiful for her age, she is beginning to show the strains of being the Victorian "angel of the house" for nine children, a demanding husband, and indeed, for everyone else she meets. She is 45 years old.

As Mrs. Ramsay opens the first of a considerable stack of letters, we hear the voice of a cultured OFFICIAL.

OFFICIAL (V.O.)

Dear Mrs. Ramsay. As you know, your active support of reform in the shire has been a key factor in enabling the hospital association to raise the necessary funds for the new maternity wing. That's why we are counting on you to lead an effort among women of St. Ives to fund a new children's ward.

Mrs. Ramsay nods to herself, and puts aside the letter as if to say, yes, I will attend to this.

Now she picks up another letter with some puzzlement as if to say "What's this?" and looks at the return address.

MRS. RAMSAY (V.O)

Oh yes, the Parrot. I wonder what she wants.

As she reads, we hear the voice of MRS. DOYLE, a pompous society woman. We also hear Mrs. Doyle's parrot cackling in the background. Mrs. Ramsay mouths the words and mimics the heavy-lidded pretension of Mrs. Doyle.

MRS. DOYLE (V.O)

My Dear Mrs. Ramsay: When I agreed to let my daughter spend a few days with you at your summer home, I little thought that a few days would become weeks. But now all I hear from Minta (when she writes at all) is "how wonderfully Mrs. Ramsay does this," and "how beautifully Mrs. Ramsay does that." You and your vaunted "charm" seem to have bewitched the child.

MRS. RAMSAY (V.O)

Silly, silly woman! I've done no such thing.

Mrs. Ramsay puts down the letter with irritation, and starts to open another. But after a moment, she resumes reading.

MRS. DOYLE (V.O.)

You and your vaunted "charm" seem to have bewitched the child. I cannot understand it. She has everything here at home, everything.

MRS. RAMSAY

(Aloud) Minta is hardly a child anymore! At eighteen, she can make her own decisions. (V.O.) And who wouldn't want to get away from all that marble and gilding and over-stuffed chairs, where the only topics of conversation are the exploits of that obnoxious parrot!

She opens another letter. Now we hear the voice of JENNIE, a former maid in the Ramsay household. As Mrs. Ramsay reads, her eyes widen with pain and compassion.

JENNIE (V.O.)

Dear Mrs. Ramsay. I'm so unhappy, and so alone. I don't know what to do. I know I don't deserve no notice from you after what I done. But I don't know where else to turn. I know now I should ha' listened to you. You was right all along about Arthur. I'm in the family way and now he has left me. What am I to do?

Mrs. Ramsay gets up suddenly, breathing heavily, upset by what she has been reading. She pulls aside the curtain, and looks out into the night.

The sky is still stormy, but beginning to clear. Mrs. Ramsay gazes out towards the lighthouse as it stands in the midst of the bay. As she watches the revolution of the light, however, her breathing becomes more regular and we see her face grow calm, gaining in resolve.

She goes back to the desk, pulls out a piece of paper, and begins to write.

INT. CHILDREN'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Meanwhile, James Ramsay has propped himself up on one elbow, listening to the sounds of the waves and the wind. These sounds are no longer as intense as they were.

So he now gets up from his bed, careful not to disturb his still-sleeping sister. He tip-toes over to the window, draws the curtains aside, and looks out at the lighthouse.

Since the window is dirty and smudged, he tries to open it to get a better view. But the window is swollen with moisture and does not move.

He tries again, this time with more force. He succeeds, but the window opens with a loud bang.

INT. STUDY - NIGHT

Mrs. Ramsay has just finished one of her letters, enclosing money inside.

As she hears the sound of the window banging in the adjoining room, she frowns slightly and seals her letter. She already knows what she will find in the next room. She reaches for the kerosene lamp and gets up.

INT. CHILDREN'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

From inside the children's room, we watch as Mrs. Ramsay slowly and quietly opens the nursery door, holding the lamp. In its glow, her face is warm and tender.

James is standing by the window. He does not even turn around. He knows that it is his mother at the door, and simply waits for her to come to his side. She walks over to him quietly, and puts a hand on his shoulder.

The lighthouse gleams in the bay.

JAMES

I had to get up to see it.

MRS. RAMSAY

I know.

JAMES

It's wonderful isn't it?

MRS. RAMSAY

Yes.

JAMES

Tell me about it again.

MRS. RAMSAY

James, you've already heard it so many times.

JAMES

Please!

As she replies to James, we hear the fascination in her own voice.

MRS. RAMSAY (SOFTLY)

The lighthouse, James, is a kindly eye amid darkness and storms, spreading its gaze round and round the bay, protecting all of us here in St. Ives, and all the travelers who pass by our shores.

As Mrs. Ramsay continues, the sound of the waves grows louder until we cannot hear what she is saying.

EXT. SHORELINE - NIGHT

The lighthouse beam continues to stroke the bay, revealing the lines of waves as they rush towards the shoreline.

Behind it, as the storm clouds continue to move away, we see the first signs of brilliant stars and a beaming moon.

Closer to shore, the spray leaps high in the air as the waves crash against some of the rocks that dot the shore.

Sheets of foam run swiftly up the beach and spread themselves along the shore. In the combined light of moon and lighthouse, the shoreline seems to dance with silver.

INT. CHILDREN'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Mrs. Ramsay and James are still standing at the window, Mrs. Ramsay's hand is on James shoulder.

MRS. RAMSAY

And everywhere it glances, it
leaves a little bit of loveliness,
a little bit of magic.

JAMES

Will I ever go there, Mother? Will
I ever go to the lighthouse?

MRS. RAMSAY

Of course you will. Not tomorrow,
of course. Tomorrow's our dinner
party. But after that--the first
fine day. I promise.

James looks at his mother with extreme gratitude and hugs her intensely. As we move away, they continue to stand and gaze towards the lighthouse.