

THE LIGHTHOUSE LEDGER

The ledger came back to the island in a supermarket bag, forty-one years after the last keeper left. Ruth found it on the bench outside the post office, with a note pinned to the cover: *This belongs to the light.*

She knew the handwriting inside at once. Her grandfather had kept the Saltwick light for twenty-two winters, and he wrote the way he walked, leaning a little into the wind. Every night had its line: the time the lamp was lit, the weather, the ships he saw pass. 6 Nov. Lit 16.40. Wind NW, rising. Collier northbound, low in the water. All well.

All well, all well, all well. Page after page of it, until she wondered how a man could live so long on the edge of the sea and find so little to say about it.

Then, near the end, the entries changed.

12 Jan. Lit 16.55. Fog. A light answered mine from the north rock, where there is no light.

13 Jan. Lit 16.56. It answered again. Three long, one short.

Ruth turned the page. The next line was not in her grandfather's hand. The letters were small and upright, pressed hard into the paper, as if whoever wrote them had never held a pen before.

14 Jan. Lit. We are coming in.

She closed the book and looked out across the harbour, where the tower stood dark against a white afternoon. It had not been lit since 1985.

That night, at eleven minutes to five, it was.