PROLOGUE

**MATILDA**

***Cobh, Ireland. May 1938***

T**HEY CALL IT** Heartbreak Pier, the place from where I will

leave Ireland. It is a place that has seen too many goodbyes.

From the upper balcony of the ticket office I watch the

third-class

passengers below, sobbing as they cling to their

loved ones, exchanging tokens of remembrance and promises

to write. The outpouring of emotion is a sharp contrast to the

silence as I stand between my mother and Mrs. O’Driscoll,

my chaperone for the journey. I’ve done all my crying, all my

pleading and protesting. All I feel now is a sullen resignation

to whatever fate has in store for me on the other side of the

Atlantic. I hardly care anymore.

Tired of waiting to board the tenders, I take my ticket from

my purse and read the neatly typed details for the umpteenth

time. *Matilda Sarah Emmerson. Age 19. Cabin Class. Cobh to*

*New York. T.S.S. California.* Funny, how it says so much about

me, and yet says nothing at all. I fidget with the paper ticket,

tug at the buttons on my gloves, check my watch, spin the

cameo locket at my neck.

“Do stop fiddling, Matilda,” Mother snips, her pinched lips

a pale violet in the cool spring air. “You’re making me anxious.”

I spin the locket again. “And *you’re* making *me* go to America.”

She glares at me, color rushing to her neck in a deep flush

of anger, her jaw clenching and straining as she bites back a

withering response. “I can fiddle as much as I like when I get

there,” I add, pushing and provoking. “You won’t know what I’m

doing. Or who with.”

“*Whom* with,” she corrects, turning her face away with an

exaggerated sniff, swallowing her exasperation and fixing her

gaze on the unfortunates below. The cloying scent of violet

water seeps from the exposed paper-thin

skin at her wrists. It

gives me a headache.

My fingers return defiantly to the locket, a family heirloom

that once belonged to my great-great-

granny

Sarah. As a child

I’d spent many hours opening and closing the delicate filigree

clasp, making up stories about the miniature people captured

in the portraits inside: an alluring young woman standing beside

a lighthouse, and a handsome young man, believed to be a

Victorian artist, George Emmerson, a very distant relative. To

a bored little girl left to play alone in the drafty rooms of our

grand country home, these tiny people offered a tantalizing

glimpse of a time when I imagined everyone had a happy ever

after. With the more cynical gaze of adulthood, I now presume

the locket people’s lives were as dull and restricted as mine. Or

as dull and restricted as mine was until half a bottle of whiskey

and a misjudged evening of reckless flirtation with a British

soldier from the local garrison changed everything. If I’d intended

to get my mother’s attention, I had certainly succeeded.

The doctor tells me I am four months gone. The remaining

five, I am to spend with a reclusive relative, Harriet Flaherty,

who keeps a lighthouse in Newport, Rhode Island. The perfect

hiding place for a girl in my condition; a convenient solution to

the problem of the local politician’s daughter who finds herself

unmarried and pregnant.

At one o’clock precisely, the stewards direct us to board

the tenders that will take us out to the *California,* moored on

the other side of Spike Island to avoid the mud banks in Cork

Harbor. As I step forward, Mother grasps my hand dramatically,

pressing a lace handkerchief to her paper-dry

cheeks.

“Write as soon as you arrive, darling. Promise you’ll write.”

It is a carefully stage-managed

display of emotion, performed

for the benefit of those nearby who must remain convinced of

the charade of my American holiday. “And do take care.”

I pull my hand away sharply and say goodbye, never having

meant the words more. She has made her feelings perfectly

clear. Whatever is waiting for me on the other side of the Atlantic,

I will face it alone. I wrap my fingers around the locket

and focus on the words engraved on the back: *Even the brave*

*were once afraid.*

However well I might hide it, the truth is, I am terrified.

VOLUME ONE

**founder:** *(verb)*

to become submerged; to come to grief

*I had little thought of anything but to exert myself to the utmost,*

*my spirit was worked up by the sight of such a dreadful affair*

*that I can imagine I still see the sea flying over the vessel.*

—Grace

Darling

CHAPTER ONE

**SARAH**

***S.S.* Forfarshire*. 6th September, 1838***

S**ARAH DAWSON DRAWS** her children close into the folds

of her skirt as the paddle steamer passes a distant lighthouse.

Her thoughts linger in the dark gaps between flashes.

James remarks on how pretty it is. Matilda wants to know how

it works.

“I’m not sure, Matilda love,” Sarah offers, studying her

daughter’s eager little face and wondering how she ever produced

something so perfect. “Lots of candles and oil, I expect.”

Sarah has never had to think about the mechanics of

lighthouses. John was always the one to answer Matilda’s

questions about such things. “And glass, I suppose. To reflect

the light.”

Matilda isn’t satisfied with the answer, tugging impatiently

at her mother’s skirt. “But how does it keep going around,

Mummy? Does the keeper turn a handle? How do they get the

oil all the way to the top? What if it goes out in the middle of

the night?”

Suppressing a weary sigh, Sarah bobs down so that her face

is level with her daughter’s. “How about we ask Uncle George

when we get to Scotland. He’s sure to know all about lighthouses.

You can ask him about Mr. Stephenson’s *Rocket,* too.”

Matilda’s face brightens at the prospect of talking about the

famous steam locomotive.

“And the paintbrushes,” James adds, his reedy little voice

filling Sarah’s heart with so much love she could burst. “You

promised I could use Uncle George’s easel and brushes.”

Sarah wipes a fine mist of sea spray from James’s freckled

cheeks, letting her hands settle there a moment to warm him.

“That’s right, pet. There’ll be plenty of time for painting when

we get to Scotland.”

She turns her gaze to the horizon, imagining the many

miles and ports still ahead, willing the hours to pass quickly

as they continue on their journey from Hull to Dundee. As

a merchant seaman’s wife, Sarah has never trusted the sea,

wary of its moody unpredictability even when John said it was

where he felt most alive. The thought of him stirs a deep longing

for the reassuring touch of his hand in hers. She pictures

him standing at the back door, shrugging on his coat, ready for

another trip. “Courage, Sarah,” he says as he bends to kiss her

cheek. “I’ll be back at sunrise.” He never said which sunrise.

She never asked.

As the lighthouse slips from view, a gust of wind snatches

Matilda’s rag doll from her hand, sending it skittering across the

deck and Sarah dashing after it over the rain-slicked

boards. A month in Scotland, away from home, will be unsettling enough

for the children. A month in Scotland without a favorite toy

will be unbearable. The rag doll safely retrieved and returned

to Matilda’s grateful arms, and all interrogations about lighthouses

and painting temporarily stalled, Sarah guides the

children back inside, heeding her mother’s concerns about the

damp sea air getting into their lungs.

Below deck, Sarah sings nursery rhymes until the children

nap, lulled by the drone of the engines and the motion of the

ship and the exhausting excitement of a month in Bonny Scotland

with their favorite uncle. She tries to relax, habitually

spinning the cameo locket at her neck as her thoughts tiptoe

hesitantly toward the locks of downy baby hair inside—one

as pale as summer barley, the other as dark as coal dust. She thinks

about the third lock of hair that should keep the others company;

feels the nagging absence of the child she should also hold in

her arms with James and Matilda. The image of the silent blue

infant she’d delivered that summer consumes her so that sometimes

she is sure she will drown in her despair.

Matilda stirs briefly. James, too. But sleep takes them

quickly away again. Sarah is glad of their innocence, glad they

cannot see the fog-like

melancholy that has lingered over her

since losing the baby and losing her husband only weeks later.

The doctor tells her she suffers from a nervous disposition, but

she is certain she suffers only from grief. Since potions and

pills haven’t helped, a month in Scotland is her brother’s prescription,

and something of a last resort.

As the children doze, Sarah takes a letter from her coat

pocket, reading over George’s words, smiling as she pictures

his chestnut curls, eyes as dark as ripe ale, a smile as broad as

the Firth of Forth. Dear George. Even the prospect of seeing

him is a tonic.

*Dundee. July 1838.*

*Dear Sarah,*

*A few lines to let you know how eager I am to see you,*

*and dear little James and Matilda—although*

*I expect they*

*are not as little as I remember and will regret promising*

*to carry them piggy back around the pleasure gardens! I*

*know you are anxious about the journey and being away*

*from home, but a Scottish holiday will do you all the*

*world of good. I am sure of it. Try not to worry. Relax and*

*enjoy a taste of life on the ocean waves (if your stomach*

*will allow). I hear the Forfarshire is a fine vessel. I shall be*

*keen to see her for myself when she docks.*

*No news, other than to tell you that I bumped into*

*Henry Herbert and his sisters recently at Dunstanburgh.*

*They are all well and asked after you and the children.*

*Henry was as tedious as ever, poor fellow. Thankfully, I*

*found diversion in a Miss Darling who was walking with*

*them—the*

*light keeper’s daughter from Longstone Island*

*The Lighthouse Keeper’s Daughter* \_ 11

*on the Farnes. As you can see in the margins, I have developed*

*something of a fondness for drawing lighthouses.*

*Anyway, I will tell you more when you arrive. I must*

*rush to catch the post.*

*Wishing you a smooth sailing and not too much of*

*the heave ho, me hearties!*

*Your devoted brother,*

*George*

*x*

*p.s. Eliza is looking forward to seeing you. She and*

*her mother will visit while you are here. They are keen*

*to discuss the wedding.*

Sarah admires the miniature lighthouses George has drawn

in the margins before she folds the letter back into neat quarters

and returns it to her pocket. She hopes Eliza Cavendish

doesn’t plan to spend the entire month with them. She isn’t

fond of their eager little cousin, nor her overbearing mother,

but has resigned herself to tolerating them now that the engagement

is confirmed. Eliza will make a perfectly reasonable

wife for George and yet Sarah cannot help feeling that he deserves

so much more than reasonable. If only he would look up

from his canvas once in a while, she is sure he would find his

gaze settling on someone far more suitable. But George will be

George and even with a month at her disposal, Sarah doubts it

will be long enough to change his mind. Still, she can try.

Night falls beyond the porthole as the ship presses on toward

Dundee. One more night’s sailing, Sarah tells herself, refusing

to converse with the concerns swimming about in her

mind. One more night, and they’ll be safely back on dry land.

She holds the locket against her chest, reminding herself of

the words John had engraved on the back. *Even the brave were*

*once afraid*.

*Courage, Sarah*, she tells herself. *Courage*.

CHAPTER TWO

**GRACE**

***Longstone Lighthouse. 6th September, 1838***

D**AWN BLOOMS OVER** the Farne Islands with soft layers of

rose-tinted clouds. From my narrow bedroom window

I admire the spectacle, while not trusting it entirely. We islanders

know, better than most, how quickly the weather can

turn, and there is a particular shape to the clouds that I don’t

especially care for.

After spending the small hours on watch, I’m glad to stretch

my arms above my head, savoring the release of tension in my

neck and shoulders before climbing the steps to the lantern

room. Another night navigated without incident is always a

cause for quiet gratitude and I say my usual prayer of thanks

as I extinguish the Argand lamps, their job done until sunset.

The routine is so familiar that I almost do it without thought:

trim the wicks, polish the lenses of the parabolic reflectors to

remove any soot, cover the lenses with linen cloths to protect

them from the glare of the sun. Necessary routine tasks which

I take pride in doing well, eager to prove myself as capable as

my brothers and eager to please my father.

A sea shanty settles on my lips as I work, but despite my

efforts to focus on my chores, my thoughts—as

they have for

the past week—stubbornly

return to Mr. George Emmerson.

Why I persist in thinking of him, I cannot understand. We’d

only spoken briefly—twenty

minutes at most—but

something

about the cadence of his Scots burr, the particular way he

rolled his *r*’s, the way he tilted his head when surveying the

landscape, and most especially his interest in Mary Anning’s

fossils, has stuck to me like barnacles on a rock. *“Tell me,*

*Miss Darling, what do you make of Miss Anning’s so-called*

*sea*

*drrragons?”* My mimicry brings a playful smile to my lips as

I cover the last of the reflectors, idle thoughts of handsome

Scotsmen temporarily concealed with them.

The lamps tended to, I walk once around the lantern to

catch the beauty of the sunrise from all angles. From the first

time I’d climbed the spiraling lighthouse steps at the age of

seven, it was here, at the very top of the tower, where I loved to

be most of all, the clouds almost within touching distance, the

strong eighty-foot

tower below keeping us safe. The uninterrupted

view of the Farne Islands and the Northumbrian coast

hangs like a vast painting in a private gallery, displayed just for

me, and despite the growl in my stomach I’m in no hurry to

head downstairs for breakfast. I lift Father’s telescope from the

shelf and follow a flock of sandwich terns passing to the south

before lowering the lens to watch the gulls bobbing about on

the sea, waiting for the herring fleet to return. The patterns of

light on the surface of the water remind me of Mary Herbert’s

silk dress shimmering as she danced a reel at last year’s harvest

home ball.

Dear Mary. Despite our friendship, she and her sister,

Ellen, have always thought me a curious creature, unable to

understand how anyone could possibly prefer the wind-lashed

isolation of an island lighthouse to the merry hubbub of a

dance. *“Will we see you at the ball this year, Grace? Henry is*

*anxious to know.”* Their dedication to the cause of finding me

a suitable husband—preferably their brother—is

nothing short of impressive, but the business of marriage doesn’t occupy my

thoughts as it does other women of my age, who seem to think

about little else. Even my sisters, who now live over on the

Main, perpetually tease me about being married to the lighthouse.

“You’ll never find a husband if you hide away in your

tower, Grace. You can’t very well expect the tide to deliver

one to you.” Time and again, I have patiently explained that

even if I did marry I would merely be swapping the life of a

dutiful daughter for that of a dutiful wife, and from what I’ve

observed I’m not at all convinced the institution of marriage is

worth the exchange. It is a point well-made,

and one they find difficult to argue with.

As I make my way down to the service room which sits just

below the lantern room, I pause at the sound of my father’s

voice floating up the steps.

“You coming down, Gracie?” Mam has a fresh loaf. She insists

it needs eating before the mice get to it.”

His Trinity House cap appears above the top step, followed

by thick eyebrows, white as the lime-washed

tower walls. I take

his arm to help him up the last few steps.

“You’re supposed to be resting,” I scold.

His breathing is labored. His cheeks—already

rusted from decades of wind and sun—scarlet

with the effort of climbing

the ninety-three

steps from the ground floor. “I know, pet. But

Mam mithers when I rest. Thought I’d be better off resting

where she can’t see me.” He winks as he sinks gladly into his

favorite chair, taking the telescope from me and lifting it to his

eye. “Anything doing?”

“Mercifully quiet,” I remark, adding a few lines to the Keeper’s

Log about the weather and the sea conditions before recording

the tides. “A few paddle steamers and fishing vessels

passed. The seals are back on Harker’s Rock.”

Father scans the horizon, looking for anything unusual

among the waves, interpreting the particular shape of the

swells, crests, and troughs. It bothers him that his eyesight

isn’t what it used to be, glad to have me as a second pair of

eyes. We make a good team; him the patient teacher, me the

eager pupil.

“Seals on Harker’s Rock, eh. Local fishermen will tell you

that’s a sign of a storm coming. Mam’s already fretting about

your brother getting back.” He focuses the telescope on the

clouds then, looking for any indication of approaching squalls

or incoming fogs or anything to suggest an imminent change

in the conditions. My father reads the clouds and the behavior

of the seabirds as anyone else might read directions on a

compass, understanding the information they offer about bad

weather approaching, snow on the way, a north wind blowing.

Partly by his instruction and partly by an inherent islander’s

instinct nurtured over my twenty-two

years, I have absorbed

some of this knowledge, too. But even the most experienced

mariner can occasionally be fooled.

Father rubs his chin as he always does when he’s thinking.

“I don’t trust that sky, Gracie. You know what they say about

red skies in the morning.”

“Sailors’ warning,” I say. “But the sky is pink, Father, not

red. And anyway, it’s far too pretty to be sinister.”

Chuckling at my optimism, he places the telescope in his

lap and shuts his eyes, enjoying the warmth of the sunlight

against his face.

It troubles me to see how he’s aged in recent months; that

he isn’t quite as vigorous as he once was. But despite doctor’s

orders that he take it easy, he insists on continuing as Principal

Keeper. As stubborn as he is humble, there’s little point

in arguing with him. Being the light keeper here isn’t just my

father’s job—it

is his life, his passion. I might as well tell him

to stop breathing as to stop doing the familiar routines he has

faithfully carried out here for decades.

“You look tired, Father. Didn’t you sleep well?”

He waves my concern away, amused by the notion of his little

girl taking the role of parent as I often do these days. “Mam was

at her snoring again. Thought it was the cannons firing from

Bamburgh to signal a shipwreck.” He opens one eye. “Don’t tell

her I said that.”

I laugh and promise not to.

Taking the telescope from him, I lift the cool rim to my

eye, tracking a fisherman’s boat as it follows a course from

North Sunderland toward the Outer Farnes. Hopefully it is

a postal delivery with word from Trinity House regarding our

annual inspection. Waiting for the report always makes Father

restless, even though previous reports have consistently

noted the exceptional standards maintained at the Longstone

light, declaring it to be among the best-kept

stations in England.

“Pride goes before destruction,” Father says whenever I

remind him of this. “And a haughty spirit before stumbling.

Proverbs 16:18.” He is not a man to dwell on success, only

striving to work harder because of it. Among the many traits

that I admire in him, his humility is the one I admire the

most.

Hauling himself up from the chair, he joins me at the window.

“The hairs are prickling at the back of my neck, Grace.

There’s bad weather coming, I can feel it in the air. And then

there’s birds flying in through the window downstairs.”

“Not again?”

“Nearly gave your mam a heart attack. You know what she

says about birds coming inside and people dropping down

dead.”

“I’d rather the birds flew inside than knocked themselves

out against the glass.” Too many birds crash against the lantern

room windows, dazzled by the reflected sun. I’ve often

found a stiffened guillemot or puffin when I step out onto the

perimeter to clean the glass.

“Which one of us do you think it is then, Gracie, because

I’m not in the mood for perishing today, and I certainly hope it

isn’t you? So that only leaves your poor old mam, God rest her.”

“Father! You’re wicked.” I bat his arm affectionately, pleased

to see the sparkle return to his eyes, even if it is at Mam’s

expense.

My parents’ quarrelling is as familiar to me as the turn of

the tides, but despite all the nagging and pointed sighs, I know

they care for each other very much. Mam could never manage

without my father’s practicality and good sense, and he would

be lost without her steadfast resourcefulness. Like salt and the

sea they go well together and I admire them for making it work,

despite Mam being twelve years my father’s senior, and despite

the often testing conditions of island life.

Father flicks through the Log book, adding a few remarks in

his careful script. *September 6th: Sea conditions: calm. Wind:*

*Light south-westerly.*

*Paddle steamer passing on horizon at two*

*o’clock. Clouds massing in the south.* He takes my hand in his

then, squeezing it tight, just like he used to when I was a little

girl walking beside him on the beaches at Brownsman, our first

island home. The rough calluses on his palms rub against my

skin, his fingers warm and paper dry as they wrap themselves

around mine, like rope coiling neatly back into place.

“Thank you, Grace.”

“For what?”

“For being here with me and Mam. It can’t be easy for you,

seeing your sisters and brothers marry and set themselves up

on the Main.”

I squeeze his hand in reply. “And why would I want to marry

and live on the Main? Where else would I want to be other than

here, with you and Mam and the lamps and the seals?” It’s an

honest question. Only very rarely do my thoughts stray across

the sea toward an imaginary life as a dressmaker or a draper’s

wife in Alnwick, but such thoughts never last long. I’ve seen

how often women marry and become less of themselves, like

scraps of pastry cut away and reused in some other, less important

way. Besides, I don’t belong to bustling towns with their

crowded streets and noisy industry. I belong here, with the birds

and the sea, with the wild winter winds and unpredictable summers.

While a harvest home dance might enchant Mary and

Ellen Herbert for an evening, dear Longstone will enchant me

far longer than that. “The island gives me the greatest freedom,

Father. I would feel trapped if I lived anywhere else.”

He nods his understanding. “Still, you know you have my

blessing, should you ever find a reason to feel differently.”

I take my hand from his and smooth my skirts. “Of course,

and you will be the first to know!”

I leave him then, descending the spiraling staircase, the footsteps

of my absent sisters and brothers carried in the echo that

follows behind. There’s an emptiness to the lighthouse without

the hustle and bustle of my seven siblings to trip over and

squabble with, and although I enjoy the extra space afforded by

their absence, I occasionally long for their rowdy return.

As always, there is a chill in the drafty stairwell and I pull

my plaid shawl around my shoulders, hurrying to my small

bedroom beneath the service room, where a cheery puddle of

sunlight illuminates the floor and instantly warms me. The

room is no more than half a dozen paces from one side to the

other. I often think it is as well none of us Darling children

grew to be very tall or large in frame or we should have had a

very sorry time always bending and stooping. Against one wall

is my wooden bedchamber, once shared with my sister, Betsy.

A writing desk stands in the center of the room, a ewer, basin

and candlestick placed upon it.

Crouching down beside a small tea chest beneath the

window, I push up the lid and rummage inside, my fingers

searching for my old work box, now a little cabinet of curiosities:

fragile birds’ eggs protected by soft goose down; all

shape and size of seashells; smooth pebbles of green and blue

sea glass. I hope the collection might, one day, be impressive

enough to show to Father’s friends at the Natural History Society,

but for now I’m content to collect and admire my treasures

from the sea, just as a lady might admire the precious

gems in her jewelry box. Much as I don’t want for a husband

or a position as a dressmaker, nor do I want for fancy jewels.

Taking a piece of emerald sea glass from my pocket, I add

it to the box, my thoughts straying to the piece of indigo sea

glass I’d given to Mr. Emmerson, and the generous smile he’d

given me in return. *“There is an individuality in everything,*

*Mr. Emmerson. If you look closely at the patterns on seashells,*

*you’ll see that they’re not the same after all, but that each is, in*

*fact, unique.”* He wasn’t like Henry Herbert or other men in

my acquaintance, eager to brag about their own interests and

quick to dismiss a woman’s point of view, should she dare to

possess one. Mr. Emmerson was interested in my knowledge

of the seabirds and the native wild flowers that grow along

Dunstanburgh’s shoreline. When we parted, he said he’d

found our conversation absorbing, a far greater compliment

than to be considered pretty, or witty.

“Grace Horsley Darling. What nonsense.”

I scold myself for my silliness. I am no better than a giggling

debutante with an empty dance card to dwell on a conversation

of so little significance. I close the lid of the work box with a

snap before returning it to the tea chest.

Continuing down the steps, I pass the second-floor

room

where my sisters Mary-Ann

and Thomasin had once slept in

their bunk beds, whispering and giggling late into the night,

sharing that particular intimacy only twins can know, and on,

past my brother Brooks’ bedroom on the first floor, his boots

left where he kicked them off beneath his writing table, his

nightshirt hanging over the back of a chair, waiting expectantly

for his return.

At the bottom of the stairwell, I step into our large circular

living quarters where Mam is busy kneading a bad mood into

great mounds of bread dough at the table in front of the wood-burning

stove, muttering about people sitting around the place

like a great sack of coal and, Lor!, how her blessed old bones

ache.

“At last! I thought you were never coming down,” she puffs,

wiping the back of her hand against her forehead, her face scar-

let from her efforts. “I’m done in. There’ll be enough stotties to

build another lighthouse when I’m finished with all this dough.

I canna leave it now though or it’ll be as flat as a plaice. Have

you seen Father?”

“He’s in the service room. I said I would take him up a hot

drink.”

“Check on the hens first, would you? I’m all dough.”

Taking my cloak and bonnet from the hook beside the

door, I step outside and make my way to the henhouse where

I collect four brown eggs and one white before taking a quick

stroll along the exposed rocks, determined to catch some air

before the weather turns and the tide comes in. I peer into

the miniature aquariums in the rock pools, temporary homes

for anemone, seaweed, pea crabs, mussels, and limpets. As

the wind picks up and the first spots of rain speckle my skirt,

I tighten the ribbons on my bonnet, pull my cloak about my

shoulders, and hurry back to the lighthouse where Mam is

standing at the door, frowning up at the darkening skies.

“Get inside, Grace. You’ll catch your death in that wind.”

“Don’t fuss, Mam. I was only out five minutes.”

Ignoring me, she wraps a second plaid around my shoulders

as I remove my cloak. “Best to be safe than sorry. I hope your

brother doesn’t try to make it back,” she sighs. “There’s trouble

coming on that wind, but you know how stubborn he is when

he sets his mind to something. Just like his father.”

And not unlike his mam, I think. I urge her not to worry.

“Brooks will be in the Olde Ship, telling tall tales with the rest

of them. He won’t set out if it isn’t safe to do so. He’s stubborn,

but he isn’t foolish.” I hope he is, indeed, back with the herring

fleet at North Sunderland. It will be a restless night without

him safe in his bed.

“Well, let’s hope you’re right, Grace, because there was that

bird making a nuisance of itself inside earlier. It sets a mind to

thinking the worst.”

“Only if you let it,” I say, my stomach growling to remind me

that I haven’t yet eaten.

Leaving Mam to beat the hearth rug, and her worries,

against the thick tower walls with heavy slaps, I place the

basket of eggs on the table, spread butter on a slice of still-warm

bread, and sit beside the fire to eat, ignoring the wind

that rattles the windows like an impatient child. The lighthouse,

bracing itself for bad weather, wraps its arms around

us. Within its proud walls, I feel as safe as the fragile birds’

eggs nestling in their feather beds in my work box, but my

thoughts linger on those at sea, and who may yet be in danger

if the storm worsens.