

[Untitled Project C]

Part One:

Chapter [Unknown]

I wake to the clock-like sound of the iron crank upstairs. The bed feels enormous without my husband in it, and I stretch my arms and legs to fill the frame. I love this moment – before the day begins, my son wakes, and – the bell rings. The crank, now wound, lifts the hammer that hits the bell, which rings again moments later, a loud and affronting noise. I slip on my robe and slippers in the still-dark room and move up the stairs. The bell rings again. I wonder if I'll ever be used to it.

“Mama!”

My son runs to hug me, and his head presses into my stomach. “Henry! How is the ocean this morning?”

He pulls back, pointing out the lighthouse windows: “Look!”

I look.

“Do you see the fog?”

It is thicker than usual. “I see, darling... How mysterious.”

“*Mysterious*,” Henry repeats.

“Like mermaids.”

“Or sea monsters... or selkies... or pirates!”

“Oh, I hope not pirates.”

I feel my husband behind me. “No pirate can get to you, dear.”

Henry huffs, “I’ll protect you, Mama. I’ll skin them and – and throw their bodies to the sharks!”

George and I laugh. I turn in his arms, kiss him, and push away.

“Breakfast.”

He nods: “Breakfast.”

Henry says, “Breakfast!”

Once we’ve eaten, George leaves to re crank the bell striker and check the beacon. Henry races to the balcony to play, and I stay to clean. My back whines over the cast-iron stove’s low height. The cabinets are full of government meals, but we’re low on our pleasures. I dress for the market.

Henry stands at the front of the lighthouse, swinging like a swordsman, shouting at the horizon. Somewhere behind the fog, the sun has risen, and the day has settled into a slate haze. I walk onto the balcony. The wind staggers me back.

“Henry, where’s your father?”

“Papa’s downstairs.”

“I’m leaving for town.”

“Goodbye, Mama.”

“Goodbye, darling.”

I’m halfway through the door when I turn back and am startled. In this short distance, I already must squint to make out Henry in the fog. He is an outline. “And don’t play too close to the railing.”

“Yes, dear?” George is bent over his logbook.

I walk across the deck and stand beside him. The fog, however ghostly, looks magnificent; I say so.

George looks out at the distance, then up at me. He takes my hand and kisses it. “What an odd thing to say.”

I smile and let my hand fall on his head. “I say many odd things.”

He smiles, his mouth slightly open and splitting from the wind.

“We’re out of eggs and coffee, my love.”

“Ah, that’s why you’re wearing your bonnet.”

I absentmindedly touch it. “Yes, I plan to go to the market.”

He stands, closing his logbook. “Should we call the boaters?”

“No, no, George, if you’ll just lower the rowboat, I’ll take myself to shore.”

He glances back at the fog. “If you’re certain.”

“I am.”

Skirts smoothed and settled in our green boat, I palm the oars and look to wave at George and Henry. George, half-visible, is back at the bell crank, and Henry drapes over him, steadily talking. If it weren’t for the brightness of the lighthouse light, I would not be able to see them at all. Fog creeps in around them.

I begin rowing to shore.

Although not proper for women, I enjoy the physicality of boating – its demands and rewards. Alone in a boat with nothing in view, I can feel at the same time small and like a great beast conquering the sea.

Once at shore, I leave our boat with the weekday boater and begin to walk. The fog has softened the sun so that the walk feels unseasonably pleasant. I'm not surprised when I find the market teeming with locals and sailors.

The sailors made off with all the vendors had, so I leave with the last carton of eggs – half broken – and no coffee. I wrap the eggs in my over-skirts and wait for the boatsman to push me into the water.

The fog has not let up, and I'm rowing against the wind. Straining to push through the water, I look ahead for the beacon but see only gray. The haze must be muddling the light this far out. But the closer I row, the clearer I see: the beacon isn't on. Nor, I notice, is the bell sounding. Although abnormal, this isn't unprecedented – George has other work, especially when watching Henry alone. I drive forward, squinting.

Finally, arms shaking, I reach the lighthouse. George hasn't let down the cords to lift the boat, so I quickly tie the boat's rope to our swinging ladder. Seawater chops into it, puddling at my heels. As I gather the eggs and balance myself in the boat, I yell, "George!" At no reply, I say again, as loud as I can, "George!" A wave bucks the boat, knocking me back, flying the eggs out of my hands and into the water. My sudden weight tips our rowboat half-under, then shifts back as I stand so it's half-submerged. Soaked, I scramble onto the hanging ladder. The rowboat slowly tips again into the ocean, now hanging half-out from the rope.

I'm incensed.

Crawling up the ladder, I croak, "George! George, get down here!"

I stop on the lower deck to peel off my over-skirts, -shirts, and shoes. Shivering in my underclothes, I take a breath before I stomp up the winding stairs to our home, screaming George's name ever more angrily.

[Unfinished]

Part Two:

Chapter 93

I wake to quiet. There is no time to stretch or breathe the morning air. I've barely slept, as every night since George and Henry disappeared, both because the lighthouse demands constant maintenance and because I cannot stop my mind from running. I stand in my sleep-clothes and start my day. I don't put on my robe or slippers. I am the lighthouse, the lighthouse is me, why feel the need to dress?

Today, I am resigned. The water mimics me, still and quiet, its horizon a clean and unblurred line. I do not look for them today, I do not wonder. I work. I crank and climb and fix and wash. They do not come for me.

## Chapter 96

I wake to screaming. I cannot tell if it is mine or George's or Henry's. It is an amalgamation of our voices. It is an abomination of nature. It makes me scream, if I wasn't already, aggravating the cacophony.

Eventually, I hear only my own noise. They are gone. I breathe.

I cry.

A creak.

I run to the lower deck. I shout their names.

Another creak, to my left. It's the wooden railing, bending with the breeze. I note to fix it today.

They do not come for me.

## Chapter 102

I wake to George lying beside me. I stand and walk upstairs to the crank. George is already there. I call his name, but he doesn't hear me. I walk towards him but am then on the balcony.

Henry is running back and forth on the railing. I yell at him to get down, but he doesn't hear me. I run towards him but am then on the lower deck.

George is fixing the wobbly railing. He asks me to get a tool for him. I get it and walk towards him. He turns, and it isn't his face. I realize it was never him. I back away. He stands and calls my name, leaning back against the railing. The railing snaps, and he falls.

As I run towards the now-empty space, I hear Henry call "Daddy" and then see him falling from above. He falls slowly, like through mud. But it isn't him, either. It is another boy. He waves at me and is gone.

I don't hear a splash. I don't see them in the water.

I jump in after them and something pulls me under.

It is pitch-dark in the sea, and my eyes burn. I see only black. I hear a loud gurgling.

I wake, and they have not come for me.



## Chapter 115

I wake to rough waters. The waves crash outside the lighthouse windows. I wander upstairs to see salt-mist spattering onto the balcony. A thin sheen of sea water covers the balcony.

I walk into the water barefoot, steadying myself with one hand on the railing. I stumble. The wind whips my nightgown around me, and I hold it close with my other hand. Slowly, I make my way around the back to the bathroom, which sits along the balcony. I open the door. Inside, there is an even thinner sheen of water – more like a glimmer. The toilet, a hole in the bottom of the bathroom that leads into the ocean, has tall walls around it like a toilet bowl or bucket. This, I presume, has kept the mist from getting in.

I leave the bathroom and shuffle back to the inside door. Once I've finished all my immediate chores, I go to the kitchen for breakfast. There, I find we have run out of eggs.

My serenity is gone.

They are not coming.

## Chapter 160

I AM AWAKE.

I scream this as I run upstairs to replenish the fuel. I scream each word with each step: I.  
step. AM. step. AWAKE. step.

I. step. AM. step.

I. step. I. step.

I step I step I step.

I step and step and step.

I step and reach the fuel, and I fill it, and I am nowhere, and I am naked, and I run back  
down the stairs to trim the wicks:

AWAKE. step. AM. step. I. step.

AWAKE. step. AM. step.

AWAKEAM. step.

AWAKEN.

My feet reach the floor.

I hear a drop of freezing rain, and I move to crank the light. I side-step to signal  
inclement weather. I trim the wicks and bound down further steps to log the incoming rain.

AM I AWAKE?

slam.

Part Three:  
Chapter [Unknown]

The ice is nearly melted on the ocean surface. I log this, along with today's temperature and all my operations. Rather, George's operations –

George logs the melting ice, along with today's temperature and all his operations. He fills in the last page and closes the book. Tomorrow, he will need a fresh one from the lighthouse's uppermost closet. He hands the notebook to me, and I tuck it under my arm and promenade around the deck.

I don't bother turning back to him. George always leaves after logging, no matter how I beg him to stay. He has become so cold to me.

The water is calm, as it often is this time of year. Splotches of ice dot the ocean in seemingly random spots, and the water barely ripples. I imagine mermaids under the surface shedding seal-skin jackets as everything warms.

I take out the notebook from beneath my arm and open it to the first page. Although these logs are meant to last exactly one year, they rarely span so perfectly. The first page starts almost 11 months ago today.

*April 18, 1892*

*The weather is greatly improving with the change of seasons. The air reached a peak temperature of 55 degrees Fahrenheit and the sea reached a peak temperature of 31.5 degrees Fahrenheit.*

I flip forward through the pages and stop where his handwriting changes. It is a mid-summer log, and his handwriting is remarkably neat. Uncharacteristically so. I brush my

fingers across the page. The next couple months have the same anomaly, then gradually shifting back to George's natural writing. By the end of the notebook, his handwriting is nearly back to normal, but not quite. This aligns with when he and Henry started avoiding me and stopped speaking to me. I still don't know what happened to cause their change. It certainly seems serious.

I make a note to try to talk to them again.

And then, looking up from the notebook, I see a dark spot along the horizon. It doesn't appear to be moving, but I know it must be a ship. I doubt it is coming for me. Even if it is, it likely won't arrive until morning. I ascend the stairs to my bedroom, placing the notebook on my bedside table. George, as usual, is not in bed, and Henry is nowhere to be found.

I lie in bed, the light outside quickly fading, and shout out to them: "Goodnight, George! Goodnight, Henry!"

And I drift away.

I startle awake to a loud HONK.

I blink rapidly, adjusting to the darkness, and then reach for a candle and match.

HONK.

The candle lit, I wrap my robe around me and turn the corner. Instantly, everything lights up. Not only does the lighthouse beacon alight the ocean as it moves back and forth, but a ship approaching my home shines directly at me. I blow out my candle.

Ships often dock locally, at the seaport. The harbor markets, boarding houses, and bars entice them here – or perhaps it is the other way around. I cannot be sure, as I don't often go into town. But I have yet to visit shore and not see a man in uniform.

Still, the ships headed for the seaport go directly there and do not stop here. George and I only ever host the most desperate sailors – those who cannot make it to shore, those in the middle of a terrible storm, those who need a place to house their family... But this does not look like a family ship, and there is no storm or unsteady weather.

HONK.

I rush downstairs to change into more presentable clothes. I expect George and Henry are hiding somewhere. I don't try to rouse them.

HONK.

I resist the urge to shout back, "I'M COMING."

But really, there's no way for them to know where I am. They are merely asserting their presence to ensure I am awake.

Rather, to ensure *George* is awake.

I am sure they will be disappointed, but there is nothing I can do about that.

HONK.

Dressed, I climb back up the stairs and walk onto the upper deck. The hair at the back of my neck prickles with suspicion.

It is still cold, especially since the sun hasn't yet risen. My hair is back, pinned beneath my bonnet, and the breeze stiffens my neck.

The ship has finally stopped. I am eye-level with the cockpit.

There is only one man there. He is flipping dials and pressing buttons, no doubt finalizing the ship's stop. He is older than me, but not old, with small freckles of gray in his black hair and beard.

I look onto the ship's deck. There is nobody there.

Suddenly, the same man is on the lower deck, pulling ropes and releasing the ship's anchor. And then, he looks up at me.

I freeze. His eyes look black.