
"A gorgeous, heartfelt, hopeful story"
EMMA CARROLL
FEATHERLIGHT
PETER BUNZL

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Barrington Stoke

For Paula

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AFTER MIDNIGHT



Mum shakes me awake in the middle of the night. She is sitting on the end of my bed and her face looks worried. Outside my window, the light from the lighthouse sweeps across the bay.

"Mum," I ask. "What's the matter?"

"The baby's coming early, Deryn," Mum replies. "I have to go to the mainland and get help."

Mum sounds scared. Panic makes my chest feel all spiky.

"I need you to fetch your father," Mum says to me.

I scramble to my feet and put on my slippers. My hand shakes as I light the oil lamp at my bedside. A book of fairy tales I was reading before I went to sleep slips from the table. It falls to the floor with a loud crash.

Mum picks the book up and shuts it. "Hurry!" she cries.

I leave her and race out. The rooms in our cottage are dark and silent. The only sounds I can hear are the creak of the wind on the roof tiles and the wash of waves in the distance.

I push open the door that leads to the lighthouse. The stone walls inside curve around in a circle. A thick pipe sprouts from the floor to the top of the tower, taking oil from the tanks in the cellar up to the light.

I climb the spiral stairs, holding the lamp in front of me, and open the door at the top.

This is the keeper's office. My favourite room in the lighthouse. The pipe runs right up into here. Beside the pipe is a writing desk and a curved bookcase full of books on the sea, ships, tides, flags, stars and nature. Books about the birds and animals that live on our island. They contain everything you need to know to be a lighthouse keeper.

My dad is sitting in his armchair, writing in his red logbook. His lantern, flask of tea and telescope are on the table beside him. A fire crackles in the grate of the stove by Dad's feet. He's been up here all night, keeping an eye on the ocean and checking on the lantern light upstairs. It's the most important part of his job. The light from the lighthouse keeps people at sea safe.

"What is it, Deryn?" Dad asks when he sees me.

“It’s Mum,” I say. “She needs you.”

And Dad knows exactly what I mean.

“Come on,” he says, standing up and taking his coat from the back of the door.