

LIGHTHOUSE EDDY

by C.G. Harris

It is a truth well acknowledged in my country that fact is stranger than fiction; I care to believe that this wisdom stands true the world over.

I've travelled much, both believing and disbelieving the things I have seen. I have been often elated and sometimes disturbed. Run the gauntlet between truth and lies as you read and make of my story what you will – only know that I insist it happened just as I relate, and that I wish it had not.

To call your country and the things in it *quaint* does it a great disservice. The lighthouse at Spirren Head was not quaint; the narrow sand spit on which it lay, reaching out into an austere North Sea and curling back like a beckoning finger into the Humber estuary, even less so. I wondered what my countrymen in cosmopolitan Boston, Massachusetts, USA, would call this bleak place, and I guessed quaint would not be the word that they would use – no sir.

That being said, I reckon that all lighthouses, by their nature, brooding constantly as they do over scenes of potential and actual tragedy, will always have a melancholic air. I did not hold its bleakness against it; I merely looked across the bay and felt a compulsion to look out from those rocks to where a surly sea and sky merged with a darkening acceptance of the early dusk.

To this end, I made my way on foot through the village of Essingham, which was a single, unlit street with cramped, glowering houses on either side and the sole feature of redemption being a public house just lighting up; you can bet that I had it in mind to call in when I came back that way.

I found the spit was a combination of sand and shingle, at times narrowing to 50 yards across with mudflats on the landward side; the occasional gull rose and twisted in the wind, and I, in turn, stepped out and braced myself against it, suddenly chilled and wondering why the lighthouse remained unlit.

It was three miles to the southernmost tip, far enough to call it lonely, if not outright isolated. When I reached the base of the lighthouse, the windows boarded. Quite evidently, it was a moon, half-hearted, and its shadow was cast against grainy.

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A small wooden structure stood to the side, which, by its design, looked as though it might once just have housed an occupant or two; the whole prospect became suddenly grim to my writer's mind. The dark, defunct tower stretched into the night sky in such a forlorn manner, its railed apex shrouded on one side by shadow and the other by moonlight, that I suddenly felt the need for company, and I would take my chances on whether that was yet another cheerless Yorkshireman; despite the darkening, intermittent cloud, I made my way back along the spit more hurriedly than I had come.

The Wayfarer was the kind of public house that delights us Americans, a kind of a throwback to pre-*bistro* days, not quite with sawdust on the floor but quiet, apart from a fizzing fire, and with an assortment of ales with unlikely names like *Red Gander* and *Winter Mist*. I strode to the bar with relief, removing my rucksack whilst ordering the latter ale – it seemed to suit both the mood of the district and the inclement weather, and I was pleasantly surprised to find the barman smiling as he served me. In an arch manner, he asked me if I had been to see the lighthouse.

“Why, yes I have. How do you know? Is it a Yorkshire knack to read minds?”

“Now't else to see round here. You will have heard all about it of course...?”

“I can see that it is out of use, is there a story behind that? Stories are my stock-in-trade.”

“Aye, there's a story.” He glanced towards the fireplace. “I have some barrels to change; then, if you've still a mind, I'll settle your curiosity. It'll not be throng tonight.”

I nodded and raised my glass, and he wandered towards the cellar door while I looked around for a comfortable seat. Being the only patron, I had the fairest of choices, and I well liked the look of a high-back chair in a dark corner near the fire where the shadows flickered in and out in a lively fashion. It was only when I got closer and my eyes adjusted to the gloom that I noticed the man. He leaned forward as if he had detached himself from the fabric of the chair opposite mine.

“You American?”