KEEPER OF THE EAST BLUFF LIGHT
On the evening of June 11, 1951, a dense fog drifted toward Emerald Island and settled over the quaint town of East Bluff. Across the harbor, a lone foghorn moaned a throaty warning of deteriorating conditions at sea.

Most nights, faint lights emanating from small towns on Cape Cod were visible from this vantage point on the island. But not this night; tonight, they had been hidden by a thick, gray mist.

The rotating beacon atop the chocolate brown lighthouse was almost indistinguishable; it was as if it had somehow lost its luminance or been enshrouded by a thick woolen blanket.

Sam Biggs, an ornery, one-armed, sixty-five-year-old retired sea captain, emerged from the keeper’s quarters — an old, run-down shack of one tiny room with an outhouse forty feet to the rear — and slowly trudged across the yard carrying a kerosene lamp toward the tall, conical structure. This routine was second nature to him; he had done it for longer than he cared to remember.

Having made his way through the mist to the lighthouse, Sam placed the lamp on the ground and grabbed hold of the rusty door handle as best he could. His stiff, arthritic fingers were barely able to turn the key.
With as much strength as he could muster, Sam tugged on the heavy steel door until it opened. He then he picked up the lamp and walked inside. After closing the door behind him, he held the lamp over his head and peered at the fifty-four iron stairs that spiraled to the top of the lighthouse.

At that moment, Sam had an epiphany; for some reason, he suddenly became more cognizant of his physical limitations. What had once been an effortless climb up the stairs was now more akin to scaling the steep slopes of Mount Everest.

Sam, a dedicated lightkeeper who took his responsibilities seriously, knew he had to wind the wooden clock mechanism to keep the light turning, and he also had to ensure there was enough kerosene in the lamp for the wicks to burn through the night. This was especially important tonight because a nor’easter was expected to hit the island.

Sam inched his way up, one step at a time, until he reached the cramped, smoky tower room where the rotating light was housed. “I must be getting old,” he grumbled aloud, as he attempted to wipe the condensation off the circular windows. Lately, Sam had noticed how quickly he became tired.

He finished the window, then sat down on a hard, straight-back chair — his observation perch — and looked out over the dark Atlantic Ocean, though thick fog made it difficult even to see the seven-foot breakers swelling and crashing just below the cliff.

A stiff northeast wind howled past the lighthouse, sounding like a high-pitched whistle on a freight train as it swooped over the bluff, bending tree trunks as if they were made from rubber and snapping branches like Popsicle sticks.

As Sam, resting, gazed through the window, he noticed a vessel apparently in distress, about three miles from shore, due north. Gale force winds and driving rain obscured his view; he could barely make out the running lights on either side of the vessel, but was able to see a white mast light swaying back and forth as the vessel pitched and yawed atop twenty-foot ocean swells.

No doubt its destination was the harbor, several miles away. But the likelihood of making it there safely in such weather conditions was remote at best. All Sam could do was watch ... and hope. Ten minutes later, the vessel was no longer visible; it seemed to have mysteriously disappeared.

Though Sam had witnessed many nights like this, something about this particular one seemed eerily familiar, harkening back to his sea captain days when he had braved the elements and survived countless dangers aboard his fishing trawler, Lucky Lady. Harkening back to a night that had changed his life. He stoically put the memories out of his mind.

Sam’s gruff exterior made him appear as if he’d been to hell and back and lived to talk about it, though he was, in reality, a man of few words. At five foot ten inches tall, with a muscular physique, salt-and-pepper hair, and a long, scraggly beard reminiscent of Rip Van Winkle’s, Sam was quite the specimen, despite his age.

The skin on his face was weathered, and deep lines crisscrossed his forehead and cheekbones like a leather road map, revealing the many years of stress he’d endured as a deckhand on a trawler — a difficult job, demanding hard work and dedication, in one of the most dangerous occupations in the world. Actually, for Sam, deep-sea fishing was not only a job, but a family tradition, one he had been introduced to by his father at fifteen-years-old.

Morning brought with it unusually calm seas and a vivid, magenta sunrise. The storm that had pounded the island during the night had blown out to sea; it was almost as if it had never occurred.
“What did you see?” the inspector asked. “I thought it was a midsized vessel, perhaps a trawler, that appeared to be tacking hard to the starboard side, but all I could really see through the rain and fog was a mast light. A few minutes later, it had disappeared,” Sam answered. “You said that you were on duty at the time?” “Yes; I was in the light tower when I spotted the vessel,” Sam said. “I see,” the inspector replied, as he quickly scribbled on a note pad.

The inspector looked up. “The Coast Guard received a radio transmission that claimed the East Bluff Light was not operating at the time of the accident.”

“That’s not true, Inspector. The light was on and rotating, as required, and I was there all night to be sure it was, as required when there are storms. Granted, weather conditions were bad and visibility almost nonexistent, but, I can assure you, the wick was lit last night,” Sam replied firmly.

“Is it possible you might have inadvertently dozed off and the light went out?”

“No, Inspector. I know for a fact I did not fall asleep on the job. I was awake the entire night.”

“Do you mind if I go up to the tower and take a look around?” the inspector asked.

“Not at all; let me show you the way.”

Sam slowly led the inspector up the stairs to the top of the lighthouse. The inspector checked the mechanisms, oil level, wicks, and logbook. He slipped on a white glove and lightly swiped his hand across the circular windows to see how much dirt was present, all the while taking copious notes of everything he observed.

Sam was as competent a lightkeeper as there was. In fact, he had become one of the best principal lightkeepers the East Bluff Lighthouse had ever had. Among the many items hanging on the tower wall was a Gold Lifesaving Medal he had received...
after he helped rescue a crew on a ship that had hit a cluster of submerged rocks, not far from the lighthouse.

“Congratulations on having received the Gold Lifesaving Medal, Captain. That was quite the display of heroics. I remember hearing about that incident. Well done!” the inspector said.

“Thank you, sir.”

“Well, Captain Biggs, I think I’ve seen enough. I appreciate your cooperation; you’ve been very helpful,” the inspector said.

“So, what’s next?”

“I’ll submit a report of the findings to the Coast Guard and you’ll be notified of any issues or recommendations, should there be any.”

After the inspector drove away, Sam was concerned. He couldn’t help thinking there was something else going on. After all, in the thirty years he had worked at the lighthouse, there had never been an investigation by the U.S. Coast Guard, in spite of the fact that several maritime accidents with loss of life had occurred in proximity to the East Bluff Light.

For the rest of the day and into the evening, Sam thought about the shipwreck, the inspector’s visit, and what might come of it. He also continued to mull over the fishing trip that had ended his career as the captain of a doomed fishing trawler.

On that fateful day, decades ago, he and his crew had prepared to set sail on what was supposed to have been a routine fishing trip. The memory was vivid because, at the start of each trip, he had always gotten a queasy feeling in his gut, never knowing for sure whether they’d return safely.

For Sam, there had been no sight more comforting than the guiding beacon of the East Bluff Lighthouse, particularly after having spent many days and nights at sea.

As captain of a fishing vessel, Sam had believed the safety of the crew and the seaworthiness of the vessel were of utmost importance. Having spent his entire life on Emerald Island, Sam was well trained as a fisherman; it was in his DNA.

Sam’s innate knowledge of the sea and maritime protocols had enabled him to become a competent and respected sea captain, a career from which he’d planned to retire one day when he grew much older. But fate has a way of sidetracking even the best-laid plans, and that proved true for Captain Samuel Biggs.

It is often said that time heals all wounds, and any unpleasant experience we might have endured somehow becomes less traumatic as it gradually fades from memory. However, in Sam’s case, a life-altering event that had occurred when he was hardly more than thirty-years-old — one he desperately wanted to forget — would not release him from its torturous grip. It often crept into his subconscious mind in the form of a recurring dream, a constant reminder of the inadequacies that caused him to feel as if he were less than a man.
At 5:00 a.m. on July 20, 1918, *Lucky Lady*, a 108-foot steam-powered vessel equipped with a Granton Otter Trawl, left East Bluff Harbor on what was expected to be an uneventful, three-day fishing trip to the outer shoals of Georges Bank. Haddock, cod, and flounder were the targets, and the crew looked forward to netting a catch that would replenish the coffers.

No one had a clue as to what would occur that voyage for it began just like any other. After a review of the first aid and emergency procedures with the crew of five — an exercise Sam conducted prior to each trip — and a check of the safety equipment aboard the vessel, *Luck Lady* left port and headed southeast. The skies were partly cloudy; light, variable winds were blowing about five knots from the east.

Upon reaching the western edge of Georges Bank, the crew began the task of releasing the nets into the water. For two days, the trawler traveled in a wide circle of approximately fifty miles, as the crew caught a variety of fish, then placed them in an iced storage compartment below deck.

On the evening of the third day, the vessel, en route back to Emerald Island fully loaded, met with rough seas and began to list uncontrollably. Northeast headwinds were blowing at
thirty-five knots, with gusts reaching fifty-seven, and ten-foot waves began to crash onto the deck.

Sam, suspecting something was awry, handed over control of the vessel to one of the deckhands while he scurried below deck to investigate the cause of the vessel’s aberrant behavior. What Sam discovered confirmed his greatest fear: the integrity of the hull had been breached. *Lucky Lady* was taking on water.

Sam bolted back to the wheelhouse to inform the crew of the dire situation they were facing. He yelled, “Attention! Attention, everyone! We’ve got a critical situation; the hull has been breached. We’re taking on water. Man your emergency stations!”

Immediately, the crew responded to Sam’s orders. A deckhand named Rocco Silva ran to the stern of the vessel to reel in the net, which was his responsibility. While doing so, Rocco was swept overboard by a huge wave that crashed on top of him.

“Man overboard! Stop the engine!” yelled another hand.

Sam immediately stopped the engine and ordered the anchor to be dropped. The four remaining crew members ran to the stern to toss a lifeline into the water.

But the darkness and rough seas made it impossible to locate Rocco. All they could see was the rise and fall of waves and whitecaps; all they could hear was the howl of the wind and crash of water against the side of the trawler. The sting of salt spray pummeled their skin, as they desperately searched for their shipmate amid the churning ocean.

Finally, they were forced to assume he had drowned. Rocco Silva was deemed to have been lost at sea.

The vessel continued to be tossed around like a toy; a deluge of water now gushed through the crack in the hull, causing the vessel to begin to sink. The fishing net, still deployed, contributed to the instability of the vessel, so Sam made his way to the stern to attempt to retract the net.

The force of the wind and the water swirling on the deck pushed him onto the revolving winch. His left arm, caught in the winch’s gears, was crushed from the tip of his fingers to just below the shoulder. When the crew members heard Sam’s cry for help, they ran to him and stopped the winch, then rotated it in reverse to free his arm.

Sam—in agonizing pain, his arm nearly severed—somehow was able to bark out instructions to the crew, as one of the men applied a makeshift tourniquet to his arm to slow the bleeding.

“Deploy the life raft and prepare to abandon ship!” Sam yelled.

The vessel, now listing at a 45-degree angle and sinking ever lower, was all but lost. Within minutes, the remaining crew jumped into the raft, lowered it onto the ocean’s turbulent surface, and, thirty minutes later, watched the *Lucky Lady* disappear into the sea.

The next morning, a fishing trawler spotted the life raft and rescued the crew of the doomed vessel. Sam was immediately rushed to Emerald Island Hospital. Examination showed that, in order to save Sam’s life, what remained of his left arm would have to be amputated. Otherwise, there was a good chance gangrene would develop and spread toxins throughout his body.

During his months of recuperation, Sam wallowed in the depths of depression and self-pity. Not only was he devastated by the loss of a crew member’s life, but Sam had also lost his arm and his fishing vessel, *Lucky Lady*.

What will I do now? he repeatedly asked himself.

Sam was in dire straits. For one thing, he lacked health insurance. Second, his vessel was a total loss because he also hadn’t been able to afford what it would have cost to insure it. Third, Sam possessed no viable skills to earn a living other than as a fisherman.

There were times Sam contemplated suicide. But, deep down inside, he knew he wasn’t really a quitter. On the contrary, he was
you could trust with your life — and he couldn’t think of anyone else he’d rather have take his place.

On a crisp October Saturday morning, John traveled by horseback to an old house across town where Sam rented a room in the basement for $2.50 a week. The house was modest: a three-room, single-story building with a cellar, on a dirt road about ten miles from the lighthouse. John dismounted from his horse, tied it to a wooden post, and walked toward the entrance to the cellar in back of the house.

He knocked on the door, and, when it opened, Sam was standing there, one-handedly rubbing his eyes, as if he had been asleep.

“John! What a surprise — what brings you all the way out here today?”

“Hello, Sam. How are you?”

“Not bad,” Sam answered. “Come in and have a seat.”

They sat down at an old wooden table that looked as if someone had discarded it on the side of the road. One of its legs was damaged, causing it to tilt to one side as it stood wedged between the wall and a pile of straw Sam used as a makeshift bed.

“How’s your arm?” John asked.

“Oh, you mean the nub? Well, as you can see, it’s not much use, but it feels okay. A little numb at times, but I can deal with that. It’s strange, but I still find myself attempting to use my left arm even though it’s been amputated. I’d swear there are times when I feel as if it’s still there and I could use it to touch something or to pick something up. It’s funny how the mind works,” Sam said.

John paused for a moment before continuing. “Sam, as you know, I’ll be retiring soon.”

“Retiring? John, please. You and I both know you’ve been singing that same old tune for years. You’ll probably croak up
there in that lighthouse, and they’ll have to carry your old, dead carcass out of there on a stretcher one day.” Sam laughed.

“No, Sam, I’m serious. I think it’s time for me to hang it up. I’ve been a lightkeeper for much too long; forty years is more than enough,” John said, a stoic look on his face.

“You’re serious, aren’t you?” Sam asked.

“I’m dead serious.”

“So, what’s that got to do with me?”

“I’d like to know if you’d be interested in the job,” John said.

“Me? Why me?”

“Because you’d make a good lightkeeper. I believe you’ve got what it takes.”

“What it takes, John, is a physically fit young man who possesses both arms. In case you’ve forgotten, I’m one arm short,” Sam replied.

“That doesn’t matter, Sam. You could do it. In fact, I hope you’ll seriously consider it. I’d start you out as my assistant and teach you everything I know. And the keeper’s job comes with room and board, so, eventually, you’d be able to move out of this mildew-laden rat’s nest.”

“I don’t know, John. I’m not sure I’m up to the task.”

“Listen, Sam. I’ve known you since you were a young boy. Your father and I became best friends when we were just kids, and I’ve watched you grow up. I know your character. I have every confidence that you could do this if you want to.”

“But I’m not a lightkeeper; I’m a fisherman. Always have been; always will be,” Sam said.

“Well, look at it this way. Since you can no longer fulfill the duties of a sea captain, why not assist other sea captains? You could maintain the same lighthouse that has not only guided you on many a night, but also has helped countless other sea captains navigate through the treacherous waters of Emerald Sound for over one hundred years.”

“When you put it that way, it does seem like something worth considering,” Sam said.

“Would you mind doing me a favor and think about it?”

“Okay. I’ll think about it.”

“Good. If you think you might be interested, come over to the lighthouse and we’ll talk.”

“Okay, I will,” Sam said.

John stood up and made his way to the door. “See you later, Sam.” John walked outside, mounted his horse, and galloped away.

Sam sat on the edge of his straw bed and thought about what John had proposed. Though it sounded enticing, Sam found it difficult to envision himself as a lightkeeper.

Sam stopped by the East Bluff Lighthouse one evening a week later to discuss the job. When Sam walked through the gate, John was making his way across the lawn carrying a bucket of coal, heading for the keeper’s quarters.

“Hey there, Sam! How are you?”

“Hello, John. I’ve given some thought to the lightkeeper’s job, and I’ve decided to give it a try.”

“That’s great, Sam! When would you like to start?”

“How about next Saturday?”

“Okay, I’ll see you then,” John said.

Sam felt elated at the prospect of becoming an assistant lightkeeper, so much so, he decided to go into town for a steak dinner to celebrate his good fortune — something he hadn’t done since that tragic night at sea, three years before.

The Rusty Anchor was a local gathering spot where islanders spent their time and money — particularly during the off-season, when life slowed down to a snail’s pace — for the chance to listen to tall tales, get a bite to eat, or learn about the latest gossip being spread around town.

Sam glanced at his watch. Surprised to see it was almost 6:00 p.m., he began the short walk from the lighthouse to the
Rusty Anchor. On the way, he occasionally removed a small flask from his jacket pocket, opened it, and took a long gulp of corn liquor. When very young, Sam had learned how to distill corn mash into moonshine and always kept a small stash on hand. Prohibition had had very little effect on him.

Just as Sam reached the restaurant, he began to feel apprehensive about setting foot inside the place again after all this time. But this was a special occasion, and Sam didn’t want fear to put a damper on his celebratory mood.

At the front entrance, Sam almost turned around, but his slight tipsiness helped him overcome his discomfort enough to open the door and walk inside. What Sam discovered when he entered was that some things never seem to change.

To Sam’s surprise, an attractive waitress, Sandra Johns, still worked at the Rusty Anchor. Sam had flirted with her on occasion, but nothing had ever come of it because he was a dedicated sea captain with neither the time nor desire to become seriously involved with any woman. Back then, Sam’s mistress had been the sea, and there had been nothing more important to him than his life as a sea captain and his fishing vessel, Lucky Lady.

Sandra was a petite, eighteen-year-old brunette with an attractive face and distinct dimples on each cheek. Her hair flowed loosely about her shoulders, and her slender body was supported by a set of strong, shapely legs an athlete might envy.

Sam sat at the counter by the front entrance, next to the cash register, just as he used to do after returning home from a fishing trip. But now he lacked the swagger of the confident sea captain he had been.

The rustic surroundings inside the restaurant seemed both familiar and foreign because Sam no longer felt welcomed by some of the regulars; his legacy had been tarnished. He had been reduced to an old, tired sea captain who had not only lost the life of a crew member, but also his vessel — something for which no individual worth his salt would want to be known on Emerald Island.

Fortunately for Sam, Sandra Johns acted differently. Her warm smile and hospitality were genuine; they were offered as graciously as though Sam had been there just yesterday.

“Well, hello, Sam. Long time no see.”

“Hi, Sandy. It’s been about three years, hasn’t it? How’ve you been?” Sam asked.

“I’ve been fine. I’m just trying to earn a living like everyone else.”

Sam said, “I’m pleasantly surprised to see that you still work here. I thought you’d be settled down by now, or that you might have moved off-island.”

“I’ve often thought about getting the hell off this island, but, as you can see, I haven’t gotten very far. Sometimes I feel as if I’ll never leave. The job’s steady, and I enjoy the people I work with, so I guess you could say that this is my lot for now.”

“It’s not so bad, Sandy. Heck, there are many other things you could be doing that are not so admirable, if you know what I mean.” Sam chuckled.

“And what exactly are you insinuating, Sam Biggs? That I could be a hussy or a hooker, or perhaps a brazen and immoral woman? You know I’m not that kind of girl.”

“I know. You’ve always been a respectable young lady — and a pretty one, too!”

“And you’ve always been a flirt. You haven’t changed a bit, Sam,” Sandra said.

“Oh, but I have; I’ve changed quite a bit. For one thing, as you know, I’m missing an arm. And I’m no longer the captain of my own vessel. I can’t tell you how much I miss the life of a seaman.”

“I can only imagine. So, Sam, what brings you here after such a long time?”

“I stopped by for a steak to celebrate my new job.”

“And what might that be?”

“I’m training to become a lightkeeper.”

“A lightkeeper? What do you know about lighthouses, Sam?”
“Nothing. But John Landry asked me if I’d be interested in becoming his assistant. He’s due to retire soon, and he wants me to replace him. He’s offered to teach me everything he knows about operating a lighthouse.”

“It sounds interesting. Do you think you’d enjoy that kind of work, considering the fact that you’ve spent most of your life on a boat? I’ve heard that the keeper’s job can be lonely; it seems better suited for a hermit.”

“To be honest, Sandy, I’ve lived the last three years of my life as if I were a hermit. Ever since the accident, nothing has gone well for me. I’ve no job and no friends, with the exception of John, and, there’s nothing for me to look forward to except trying to figure out where my next meal is going to come from, or whether I’ll be sleeping in a tent, on the beach, or on a park bench.”

“Sam, I’m so sorry to hear of all your hardships,” Sandra said.

“That’s okay, Sandy; I’m used to it.”

“Hey, Sandy, could I get some service?” a customer yelled from a nearby table.

“Sure, Charlie; I’ll be right over. First, what’s your favorite dessert, Sam?”

“Apple pie.”

Sandra turned and, with a knife, cut a generous slice of apple pie and placed it on a plate. Then she set it down on the counter in front of him. “This is my treat, Sam. Congratulations on the new job. I know you’ll be a great lightkeeper,” she said, with a big, bright smile.

“Thanks!”

Sandra went about her business of waiting on other customers, and, for the next couple of hours, Sam sat at the counter and nibbled on remnants of his dinner and dessert, all while watching Sandra’s every move. Several times, he did step outside to have another sip of corn liquor. As time passed, Sam became increasingly enamored of the young waitress, taking note of how her tight skirt outlined the contours of her body and exposed a sensuality Sam had never noticed before. It wasn’t long before the corn liquor had him on his way to losing all inhibitions.

Each time Sandra bent down to serve a customer or to pick something up off the floor, Sam felt his libido rise, along with the bulge in his pants. He was horny, and had a strong desire to get between Sandra’s smooth, muscular legs — something he had always wanted to do, but never had the nerve to attempt. Perhaps this might be his lucky night.

It was close to ten o’clock, and the Rusty Anchor was about to close. As other customers walked out, Sam raised his glass to his lips and tilted it back to drain the last drops of a fountain drink into his mouth. He watched staff members cleaning up as fast as they could; they were anxious to get off work. Sandra was at a table across the room, counting her tips, when she looked up to catch Sam staring at her, the lust in his eyes.

“Hey, Sam, what are you still doing here? Do you plan to help us close up, or are you spending the night?”

“I didn’t realize it was so late; time seems to have flown by!”

“That’s how it is sometimes, you know? I’m glad you stopped in, Sam.”

“It’s good to see you again, too.”

“Thanks!” she said.

“Hey, Sandy, what are you doing after work? Do you have any plans?” Sam asked.

“No, I’m not doing anything special. I’ll probably go home and read a book.”

“Have you ever seen the inside of the East Bluff Light?”

Sandra pondered for a moment, then said, “No, I can’t say that I have.”

“Well, how would you like to see it tonight? I could give you a quick tour; I’m sure John wouldn’t mind if I show it to you.”

“That sounds intriguing. Let me finish up; then we can get going,” Sam’s heart began to race. He couldn’t believe Sandra
had agreed to go to the lighthouse with him. Suddenly, a flurry of conflicting emotions came over him. He had always known Sandra to be a respectable young woman with no ulterior motives, a true friend. But Sam’s better judgment had become impaired by his intoxication. He found himself embroiled in a battle between morality and lust, and, unfortunately, lust seemed to prove the stronger of the two.

Sam and Sandra walked out of the restaurant and up East Bluff Drive toward the lighthouse. It was a clear, cool night, twinkling stars dancing above. A full harvest moon illuminated the surface of the ocean under the bluff as well as the road upon which they walked, making what would normally have been just another jaunt something more akin to a romantic interlude.

However, their expectations couldn’t have been more different; in fact, they were worlds apart. Sandra was curious to see the flame emanating from the wick at the top of the light. Meanwhile, Sam desperately wanted to dip his wick inside Sandra to satiate his sexual desire and, hopefully, to ignite her internal flame — a far cry from what Sam had been used to, during years of using his imagination and masturbating in solitude.

When they arrived at the lighthouse, Sandra stood quietly by the door while Sam walked to the keeper’s quarters and softly tapped on the window. John was inside, sitting at a table, reviewing the weather and tides report under the dim glow of a candle.

John looked up, then walked over to open the door. “Hey, Sam. What’s up?”

“You sly dog, you,” John said, with a wink. Then he added, seriously, “Please see to it that you don’t bump into anything up there. The mechanisms are very delicate, and the slightest disturbance could throw the light out of alignment. And I don’t want to have to deal with that.”

“Okay, John. We’ll be careful.”

John tossed the key to Sam, and he caught it with his only hand. “Nice catch, Sam.”

“Thanks!”

Sam also accepted an oil lamp from the keeper and carried it back to the lighthouse. He unlocked the door, pulled it open, and he and Sandy went inside.

“Wow, it sure is dark in here,” Sandra said.

“That’s what the lamp is for. Let’s go up the stairs, but be careful.”

When they reached the end of the fifty-four stairs to the top, Sandra was impressed by what she saw. “It’s beautiful up here, Sam.”

“It is nice, but it can’t compare to your beauty,” Sam said, a gleam in his eye.

“If I didn’t know better, Sam, I’d think you were flirting with me again.”

“And you’d be correct. To tell the truth, I couldn’t keep my eyes off you the whole evening back at the tavern,” he confessed.

Perhaps you’ve had too much to drink; it sounds to me like alcohol talking.”

“I’m not drunk! I’ve had my eye on you for quite some time, even when I used to come in to the Anchor back in my sea captain days.”

“Sam, I had no idea you felt that way. I thought we were just friends.”

“We are friends, Sandy. It’s just that I never had the nerve to tell you how I really felt. I thought you’d laugh at me,” Sam admitted.
“Laugh at you? Come on, now, Sam. You were the heartthrob of so many ladies in town. But you had a reputation for being untouchable, a dedicated man of the sea.”

Although not the most romantic of settings, the tower room was unique, possessing an ambience unlike anywhere else. There, in that special place, Sam patiently waited for the right moment to make his move, a lion stalking its prey, waiting to pounce.

As they sat there, enjoying the dark, panoramic view of the ocean, Sam gently placed his arm around Sandra and pulled her toward him. He then looked into her eyes and kissed her like she had never been kissed before.

Sandra responded in kind, and, before long, they both lay naked on the narrow walkway beneath the rotating light. Sam quickly straddled her, then penetrated her with a thrust that caused her to yell as her body stiffened.

Sam began to pant and sweat profusely as he arched his back and stroked Sandra as hard as he could. She cried out in discomfort at first, but then moaned in ecstasy as the sharp pain gave way to pleasure, culminating as they both simultaneously reached orgasm. Their impromptu dalliance was hot enough to set ten lighthouses ablaze.

Dressed again, Sam and Sandra made their ways down the steps and walked across the lawn toward the street. Sam left the key to the lighthouse door under a flat rock by the front entrance of the keeper’s quarters.

As is the case with many men after having made love, now Sam exhibited a cold indifference toward Sandra; it was almost as if his masculinity had overpowered his emotions, causing him to appear to be insensitive.

Sandra had always thought highly of Sam, but she harbored no illusions about the prospect of having anything that resembled a serious relationship. She knew the type of man Sam was, as well as the consequences of being caught up in the heat of the moment, particularly when it involved an individual to whom life had recently dealt a shitty hand. Sandra honestly believed Sam wasn’t capable of expressing love; it wasn’t in him, and she knew it.

“Let me walk you home,” he said.

“That’s okay. You don’t have to; I’ll be fine. Besides, you’ve got a long way to go to get home yourself.”

“Are you sure? I don’t mind.”

“I’m positive, but thanks anyway,” she said.

“I begin training for the lightkeeper’s job on Saturday. I’ll stop by the Anchor to see you then.”

“That would be good.”

“Thanks for spending time with me tonight, Sandy. You’re really a special lady,” Sam said.

“And I thank you for showing me the lighthouse, Sam.”

Sam and Sandra walked down the road in opposite directions, like two ships that had briefly stopped beside one another before continuing on in the dark of night. Sandra went back to her apartment downtown, and Sam caught a ride to his one-room basement rental, ten miles away.

Saturday had come and gone, and Sam, now deeply immersed in the rigors of learning all about the operation of the East Bluff Lighthouse, had failed to stop by the Rusty Anchor to see Sandra as he had promised. But that didn’t bother her because she had never expected to see him anyway. She continued to wait on tables and collect tips, just as she had done during the three years before Sam had reappeared from his self-imposed exile.

About a month later, Sandra noticed a distinct change in her body. She had put on a little weight and begun to feel winded after performing even the simplest task — something that
had never happened to her before. She knew what was going on, and the eventual bouts of morning nausea confirmed it. She was pregnant. And there was no doubt the baby was Sam’s — conceived during their tryst at the top of the East Bluff Light — for Sandra had not been with anyone else before or after having sex with Sam.

Sandra was now faced with a life-changing decision. Ultimately, she decided not to tell Sam about the baby. Instead, she made plans to leave Emerald Island and travel to California to live with relatives and have the baby.

In less than a month, Sandra had tendered her resignation to the Rusty Anchor, packed up her belongings, and moved away without saying good-bye to Sam. When Sam finally stopped at the restaurant some weeks later, he was surprised not to see Sandra there.

“Where’s Sandy? Is she off today?” Sam asked the man behind the counter.

“Didn’t you know? Sandy quit about a month ago.”

“Quit? I had no idea she had quit.” Sam was clearly puzzled.

“Why did she quit? She’s worked here for years.”

“Yeah, I know. Before she left, she told us she was moving to California, something about staying with relatives and getting a job out there,” the man said. “Can I get you something, Sam?”

“I guess I’ll have a piece of apple pie.”

Sam was shocked. He couldn’t believe Sandra would leave the island without saying good-bye. But, then again, why shouldn’t she? She wasn’t beholden to him for anything. In fact, she had every right not to tell Sam her plans after he had selfishly taken advantage of her that night at the lighthouse.

And, to make matters worse, after Sam had gotten what he wanted, he’d simply disappeared, the epitome of disrespect. In Sandy’s eyes, Sam must have seemed everything a friend wasn’t — a cold and calculating individual, lacking any compassion whatsoever.

Seven months later, Sandra gave birth to a son she named Jason. And, during Sandra’s pregnancy-in-absentia, Sam learned everything there was to know about operating a lighthouse. Whether it was replenishing the supply of oil, trimming wicks, winding the clock mechanisms, or cleaning the lenses, Sam seemed unencumbered by the fact that he had only one arm to work with.

As with anyone afflicted with a disability, Sam compensated for what he was missing by what he had — in his case, his left shoulder and, where feasible, his legs and feet.

As time went on, John became even more confident in Sam’s ability to perform the duties of a lightkeeper. Now battling a number of health issues — including high blood pressure, emphysema, and diabetes — John had begun to spend most nights in the keeper’s quarters, leaving Sam to handle things alone at the lighthouse.

One morning after having worked the night shift, Sam emerged from the lighthouse and stopped at the keeper’s quarters to report to John before heading home.

When Sam tapped on the door and walked in, he didn’t see John sitting at the table drinking coffee and reading the newspaper, something he usually did every day.

“John?”

No answer.

“Hey, John!”

Nothing.

Perhaps he’s using the outhouse, Sam thought.

But when Sam walked through the room toward the back door, he found John lying in bed, dead as a doornail and stiff as a board. Sam reached over and touched John’s forehead; it felt as if it were a block of ice. Sam immediately summoned the police, who, in turn, contacted the coroner. John had died from complications of heart disease and diabetes.

John — the last true friend Sam had had — was really more
than a friend; he was almost like family. And his death hit Sam hard. The funeral service was brief, but still a somber event. John had died at the ripe old age of seventy-nine, and barely a handful of people were there to witness his coffin as it was lowered into the ground under the shade of an oak tree on a grassy knoll in the town cemetery. Most of his family and friends had predeceased him.

Immediately following John’s death, Sam was named principal lightkeeper of the East Bluff Lighthouse. And, for thirty years hence, Sam had operated the lighthouse with competence and dedication.

There were times when Sam wondered if he had made the right decision, agreeing to become John’s successor, for it was a thankless job. Loneliness was common, as were cold, sleepless nights. Paranoia often struck at the slightest sign of bad weather, a prelude to potential shipwrecks.

But, month after month and year after year, Sam became hardened to a point where he could tolerate just about any hardship. Inclement weather, fraught with rain and wind, snow and cold — it mattered not, for Sam was keeper of the East Bluff light, a responsibility he had grown to love like the salty brine.

The nights of a lighthouse keeper always seemed long because the rules required several visits to make sure the lamp remained lit and, during storms, constant attendance. Sam — always zealous in his dedication — often just stayed awake for the entire twelve-hour shift, sitting on a straight-back chair, checking both wick and the sea regularly.

To help him get through those long nights, Sam read, mostly novels. In fact, he had become an avid reader. He’d usually visit the East Bluff Library once a month to borrow a book or two to read under a dim light in the tower.

One morning, after he had finished work, Sam walked to the library to return the books he had borrowed and select a few more for the upcoming month. Upon entering the building, he was greeted by a woman he’d never seen before.

“Good morning, sir. How may I help you?”

“Ah, yes. I’m returning some books,” Sam said as he placed them on the counter. As she took them, he asked, “Are you new around here?”

“I beg your pardon?”

“I was wondering if you were new to the island because I’ve never seen you here before,” he said.

“Oh, I’m sorry; please forgive me. I’m not new to the island;
About The Author

Kevin Parham is the author of the award-winning memoir, The Vineyard We Knew — A Recollection of Summers on Martha's Vineyard. After an extensive career in the entertainment industry as a professional musician, Kevin decided to pursue his new-found passion for writing. Keeper of the East Bluff Light is Kevin’s first novel.

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