SCENE 1. The lamp room of a lighthouse that no longer guides ships. Dusk.

(Shelves of lanterns, each with a paper tag. MARA, sixties, counts them aloud. TEO, her nephew, stands in the doorway with a clipboard he did not ask for.)

MARA
Forty-one, forty-two. The green one is forty-three, but it sulks, so I count it last.

TEO
Aunt Mara, the council wants a list, not a biography for every lamp.

MARA
A list is a biography with the good parts removed. Hand me the pencil.

TEO
They are sending an inspector on Thursday. He will want to know what is worth keeping and what can go to auction.

MARA
Everything here is worth keeping. That is the definition of an inventory.

TEO *
That is the definition of a museum, and nobody has bought a ticket since nineteen eighty-two. *

(MARA lifts a small brass lantern and turns it so the glass catches the last light.)

MARA
This one came off the ferry that sank in the January storm. The captain's daughter brought it up the stairs herself, still dripping.

TEO
Did the ferry sink, or did it run aground? Last year you said it ran aground.

MARA
It did both. It was a very determined ferry.

TEO
I will write "ferry, disputed."

MARA
Write "ferry, remembered." Disputed is for people who were not there.

SCENE 2. The same room, the next afternoon. Rain against the windows.

(ODILE, a retired harbour pilot, sits on an upturned crate polishing a lens. TEO reads from the clipboard.)

TEO
Item fifty. One storm lantern, red glass, cracked. Estimated value: sentimental.

ODILE
You cannot sell sentiment at auction. I have tried. They only take cash and furniture.

MARA
Odile kept that red lantern in her wheelhouse for thirty years. It saw more of the harbour than the harbour master did.

ODILE
The harbour master saw the harbour through the bottom of a glass. The lantern had better eyesight.

MARA *
The council never asked the lantern. They asked * the harbour master, and he told them the light * was a luxury, and they believed him because he * wore a hat with a badge on it. *

ODILE *
A badge is a very small lighthouse. It only * shows people where you are standing, never where * the rocks are. *

TEO
I still need a number. The council form does not have a box for "better eyesight."

MARA
Then draw a box. You are the one holding the pencil.

(TEO hesitates, then draws a small square on the form and writes inside it.)

ODILE
What did you write?

TEO
"Ask Odile."

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SCENE 3. Thursday morning. The lamp room is tidier than it has ever been.

(The INSPECTOR enters, out of breath, carrying a measuring tape and a folder. MARA, TEO and ODILE stand in a row as if for a photograph.)

INSPECTOR
Two hundred and four steps. Nobody told me there would be two hundred and four steps.

MARA
There used to be two hundred and five. One retired.

INSPECTOR
I am here to assess the collection for the regional heritage register. I was told there would be a list.

TEO
There is a list. It is ninety-one items long and some of them have opinions.

(TEO hands over the clipboard. The INSPECTOR reads, turning pages slowly.)

INSPECTOR
Item twelve, "brass lantern, ferry, remembered." Item fifty, "red storm lantern, ask Odile." Item sixty-three, "the green one, sulks."

ODILE
All accurate.

MARA
This is not a usual lighthouse. The light went out, but the keeping did not.

INSPECTOR
The register needs a single sentence describing the significance of the collection. One sentence. For the whole room.

(Silence. MARA looks at the shelves. TEO looks at MARA. ODILE puts down the lens.)

ODILE
Write that every lamp here came home with somebody.

INSPECTOR
That is a sentence I can file.

(The INSPECTOR writes. The iron key to the lamp room hangs on a nail by the door; MARA takes it down and gives it to TEO.)

MARA
You have the pencil and now you have the key. Do not let them auction the stairs.

TEO
I will count them every Thursday.

MARA
Count them when it rains. That is when they need it.

(Lights fade on the shelves, one lantern at a time, the green one last.)

(End of play.)