

LANDY OF THE LIGHTHOUSE

The telephone rang in the foyer of Portland Bill lighthouse. A mild wind was blowing off the sea and Jim Landy had just sent his reading to the Met Office only a few minutes earlier in time for the evening shipping forecast. It hadn't been a particularly bleak day, but there was a chance of mist rolling in off the Channel later that evening. At the other end of the line was Sid Brigg, Head of the Met Office at Bracknell.

'We are going automatic Jim'

'I'm not giving up this lighthouse Sid. I've been doing the weather forecast for shipping from 'ere since I were a lad. I helped my father; and he did it before me with his father. That's three generations. Nineteen hundred and six, the first Landy stood 'ere when the great light shone out to sea.'

'You can still live in the cottage. Trinity said so.'

'That as maybe and that be a kind offer, what with losing the house at Easton and all that. But why does everything have to change?'

'You're not getting any younger Jim. Time you put your feet up; take up some golf or something?'

'When you say automatic, what precisely do you mean?'

'I mean it will be lit automatically from a monitoring station based at Harwich. If it doesn't light for any reason...'

'It's always lighted up...'

'If for any reason it doesn't light, the coastguard at Weymouth will notify us to send a bleeper to Shambles Reef.'

'Ever been to Shambles Reef, 'ave yer?'

'No'

'So, you are not aware that Shambles is the graveyard of many a ship; that, and Chesil Beach?'

'Of course, I'm aware. I keep the bloody records for the Maritime and Lloyds.'

'So, you will know that Shambles does not always light.'

'I know the Race is really the Devil's Door as far as Portland and Weymouth are concerned. The Shambles plays its part.'

'Alright. But can't I at least keep an eye on the lighthouse. Maintain the light? Paint the building?'

'I don't see why not, but Trinity won't pay you Jim.'

'I don't want paying. If they are letting me live in the cottage till my dying day, then that's alright. I want to be useful you see? All my experience; all my hard work; I want it to count for something. Not just be brushed aside cos it suits some desk job Johnny who thinks going automatic is best. A compu'er don't listen to the groans of the sea, the speed of the wind, the churning of the light on its platform.'

'Err, a computer might one day Jim.'

'Well I 'ope I ain't 'ere when that sad day arrives. The day a lighthouse man is put out to grass and play bowls for Melcombe Regis!'

'You don't play bowls.'

'Exactly. I'm a lighthouse man, 'ave been all my life and will be to my dying day. Now, you'll 'ave to excuse me, I got to light up. Take care, Sid.'