

THE LANTERN

From my warm cosy bed inside lodgings in Terminus Road just off seafront, I could hear the droning howl of the wind. The shipping forecast, broadcast on the wireless just hours before, gave warning of what was likely to hit the shores of southern England. My galleon moored in the cove, my crew tethered to the voyage that awaits, remained safe.

Although the damp muslin curtains were thick brown, they were no match in keeping out the sweeping, pulsating glow from the lantern of the lighthouse perched

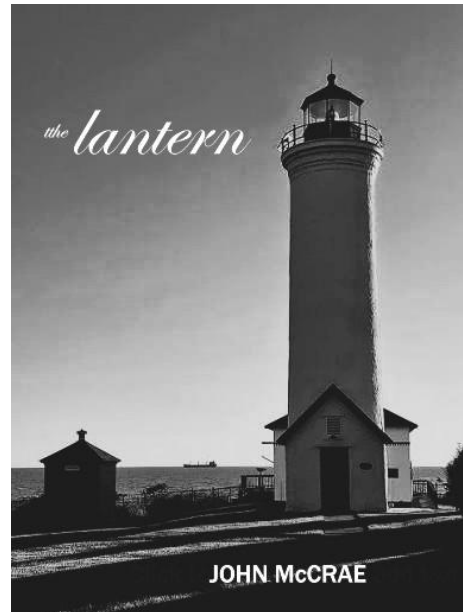
high up on The Esplanade. The menacing beacon pierced the dark shadows from where stories of piracy and skullduggery lurked and soon commanded respect.

‘That’s a good opening John. But whilst you have captured the location and atmosphere, your writing is predictable and littered with unwanted clichés. I bet you put a shipwreck scuppered on the rocks next?’

‘David, you’ve been my agent for over thirty years. You’ve enjoyed the seafaring adventures of Captain Amis just as the next reader. The pirates, the treasure, the ghosts of wrecked ships and jagged lives – you’ve even sent me advances to secure my manuscripts from prying eyes. My books have sold well, made into screen dramas, and you’ve not done badly on it at all. How are the penthouse and the Porsche by the way?’

‘John, this is the twenty first century. Nobody reads *Treasure Island* anymore. Why not take the preverbal lifeboat and leave the sea behind. Come ashore? Write something that the twenty first wants – a scandalised story of crime and betrayal. Drug cartels being chased by enforcement patrols?’

‘I’m not signing a contract to produce books for the bloody masses. I’ve had it with your stupid requests for me to change course. I have always written about the sea and will go on writing about the sea. And right now, I am pleased that *The Lantern* is confidently moving forward. I have another 50,000 words waiting to unleash. I can assure you *The Lantern* is my best work to date.’



‘John, I know you’ve been unwell this past year, but that’s no excuse for producing another melancholic eighteenth-century pitch battle on the high seas. I don’t want it. Nor do the publishers.’

‘In that case David, I will bid you farewell for good. I won’t be back. Stromness calls and my retreat from public life will finally be realised. I don’t need you or the publishers for that matter. Whilst I bring to life stories of heroic endeavours, and very successfully at that, it may surprise you to learn I am acquainted with a twenty first century invention called a laptop and have moved away from the antiquated typewriter. Just as the shipping forecast talks of “automatic lights” rather than lighthouse lanterns and the BBC prefer to push *Sailing By* into oblivion, there is no remorse as you set me adrift. Goodbye David.’

‘John, aren’t you forgetting something.’

‘I’ll transfer the pieces of eight back into your company’s treasure chest tomorrow me ‘earty!’