

The Last Lighthouse

Every night, Mara climbed the lighthouse stairs and lit a lamp for ships that no longer came.

The sea had withdrawn twenty years earlier, leaving the lighthouse stranded above a vast plain of cracked salt. Rusted boats lay tilted in the distance like the bones of enormous animals. The villagers had long since stopped asking why Mara kept the light burning.

Then, one winter night, she saw something moving across the salt.

It was not a ship. It was a house.

The small blue cottage sailed slowly over the dry seabed, its curtains glowing warmly and its chimney trailing silver smoke. Beneath it, hundreds of pale crabs carried the foundation on their backs.

The cottage stopped below the lighthouse. A man stepped onto the salt and called up to Mara.

"Is this the coast?"

"It used to be," she answered.

The man looked disappointed. "I was told the lighthouse marked the edge of the world."

Mara descended and found him holding a map made of stitched-together leaves. Every road ended at her lighthouse.

"What are you looking for?" she asked.

"A place that has not forgotten the ocean."

Mara glanced at the useless lamp turning overhead, casting its beam across empty land.

Then she smiled.

She packed one suitcase, locked the lighthouse door, and climbed into the blue cottage. The crabs began marching west.

By morning, the villagers found the lighthouse dark for the first time in twenty years.

Far beyond the horizon, Mara heard waves.