

**Elizabeth Ottosson Grace**

*(For Grace Darling, 1815-1842)*

The sheet is tight at her neck, a wave about to subsume her. Bubbles pop as she breathes. In her lungs, another tide is rising to meet the first.

Darkness. No moon, no lamps in the corners of this room. Not Father's lantern, which guided them to the shipwreck. No lighthouse to signal a warning; the time for lighthouse-keeping is past.

*So brave*, they whisper. *Such a heroine*. But they will not rescue her. She is going down.

Amusing at first: her image on postcards, china, a figurine! Until the image became everything, leaving Grace hollow for the sea to rush in.

It rises ever higher within her now, and there are no heroines to row her safely home.

The blanket creeps over her nose; the tide rises. She is drowning, water agonising where air should be. Pricked by bedsprings, she is tossing in the North Sea with the dead, her chest a labyrinth of pain.

She inches a breath. There will not be many more now; she knows that. She will sink like other shipwrecks: fabled, but never found. The gentle folk will speak of her in hushed tones; there will be poems and shanties; perhaps a tribute from the Queen; and none of them will approach the truth of who she is.

She is Grace, rowing with her father as the waves crash over them in the darkness. She is Grace, soothing the mother of the drowned boys. She is Grace, laughing at the society ladies and unkempt artists. She is Grace, crunching shells under her feet and watching for the fishing boat that will never return.

She is Grace. She is the lighthouse. She is home.

Water bubbles where air should be. Grace holds the breath out and turns toward the sea.