

'Lavishly layered with magic, mystery and secrets to uncover.' Richard Pritchard

# REECE CARTER

# The Lonely Lighthouse of Elston-Fright



Illustrations by  
**SIMON HOWE**

# Being a Lightkeeper is Very Serious Business.

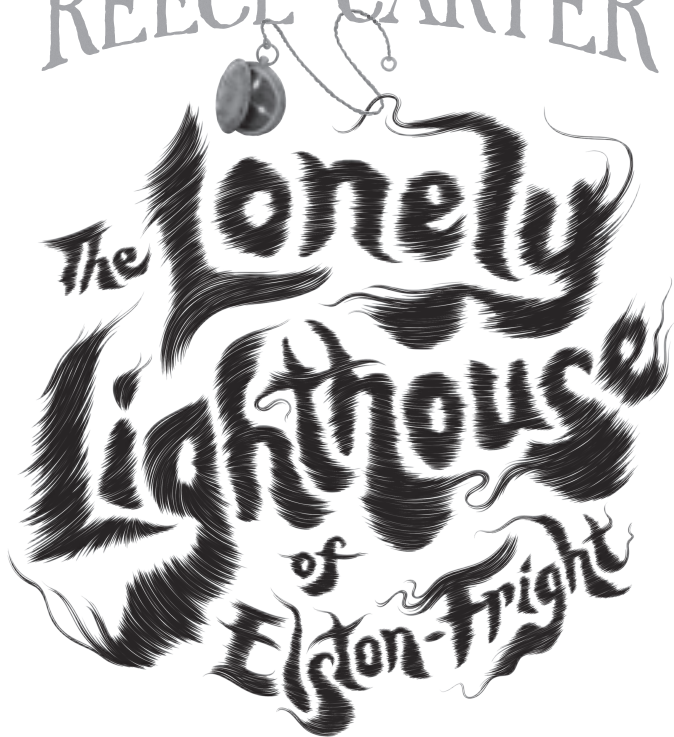
Nobody in Elston-Fright believes in magic anymore. Well, nobody except for Flip Little, his nan and his friends: a girl called Corpse, a ghost called Girl and a very large spider called Simon.

But when Simon is spider-napped by ancient weather ghouls called the Poltergusts, Flip and his ghostly companions turn to the last Lightkeeper's journals for answers. To rescue their friend, they will need to find and return the missing Light to the lighthouse, restoring its lost magic.

Only nothing in Elston-Fright is as it seems. Questions bubble up from the deep. Dark secrets come to light. And pretty soon, Flip and his friends learn that in order to save the future of Elston-Fright, they'll first need to understand its past.



REECE CARTER



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Lighthouse  
of  
Elston-Fright

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SIMON HOWE



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*For Mum, as promised.*



# The Not-a-Chapter

Far to the south and a long way from all that's good is a place that, luckily, few people have ever had the misfortune to visit. It's a bitter place, a tall and craggy mountain, resting at the very edge of the inhabitable earth. A bleak and barren landscape, nothing grows there save for the blackfrost berries whose bushes huddle in hidden spaces, and the creeping wintertide vines, heavy with sour pods, which thrive in shadow – savouring the dark.

The mountain is a solitary one, and perched upon its side is a solitary stronghold with a solitary purpose. Built from the same black stone as the mountain,

the fortress enjoys near-perfect camouflage. Indeed, the only living creatures to know about it – save for the ones imprisoned inside its walls, plus a handful of well-informed villains – are the rats that take cover from the cold there.

At night, when the sky and everything else turns dark, you can hear two prisoners inside the fortress. In hushed voices, they speak softly to one another, remembering something that happened long ago. Remembering somebody they left behind.

But this story doesn't take place in the icy stronghold on the desolate mountain. The events of *this* story happen far, far away from it, on an entirely different continent and in a town where – for now, at least – the sun is beginning to rise, bringing with it the false promise of a perfectly pleasant day. Soon, flocks of broad-winged seabirds will circle in the sky, on the lookout for breakfast, and local fisherfolk will be out on their trawlers, pulling in empty nets with confused looks on their faces.

The town in question is little more than a tumbledown collection of faded-white houses, winding streets and a well-worn wharf, and off its



coast rests a rock – a rock that had once been rusty red but which over time turned dull and grey. Inside the rock is a cave, and inside that cave sits a shack, haunted by a ghost made of wax. She’s not alone. Another ghost, this one not made of wax, haunts the shack too, and together the pair share their home with a spider. An extraordinarily *large* spider.

Until recently, the shack had been home to three Witches too – but not anymore.

Not even a month has passed since the ghost made of wax banished the Witches with a magic spell. They’re long gone now, and in the time that has since passed, the rock has turned from grey to white. These days, reaching up from the depths of the ocean, the rock appears as if it’s made of bone.

Across the water and back on dry land, a lighthouse stands on a point. Sturdy and weathered, the lighthouse was built at a distance from the town, and the townsfolk themselves rarely think about it. This very moment, though, something is happening there. With the sun peeking over the horizon and the sky lit up orange, a boy is peering out from his window on the lighthouse’s third floor, rubbing his eyes in disbelief.

He snatches up an old brass telescope and presses it to one eye, trying to get a closer look at the strange movement he spied. Then, once absolutely certain he didn't imagine it, the boy turns and sneaks stealthily from his bedroom. After listening for the sound of snoring from above, he ignores what would be the faster way to the bottom of the lighthouse and creeps down its stairs instead. The boy slinks out the front door, heading to investigate what it was that he saw from his window.

It's *here* that this adventure begins. Here that this story takes place.

Here, by the lonely lighthouse of Elston-Fright.

# 1

## Flip

If there's one thing I know, it's this: being a Lightkeeper is Very Serious Business. Protecting an entire town from dangerous magic? That's a big responsibility. *Seriously* big. But somebody's got to do it. After all, you can't just let your home become overrun by wickedness and shadow, can you? You can't allow briny bogey people and wily wraiths to roam about freely, hurting people as they go. No, you have to *defend* your home. You have to protect it from harm. And when it comes to the fishing town of Elston-Fright, which I call *my* home, the person who's always protected it from bad magic has been a Little.

Like me. I'm a Little – Flip Little.

And Littles are Lightkeepers.

My family's been doing it forever – taking care of Elston-Fright, that is – ever since my great-great-great-grandfather Lionel Little built the lighthouse where, these days, I live with my nan. The town wasn't much more than a handful of cottages back then, and the wharf was only a single crooked jetty. The fish mill hadn't been built yet, and the town hall didn't even have its bell.

The lighthouse was one of the very first buildings to crop up in Elston-Fright, and it quickly became the most important. It was from the lighthouse, at its far-flung place on the point, that Littles would fulfil their duty to protect. Ever vigilant, Lightkeepers would keep an eye – both eyes, actually – on Elston-Fright, ready to respond to whatever magical threat might be the next to arrive on its shores.

That's why, after seeing the very-weird-and-totally-not-normal thing that I saw from my window this morning, I know it's up to *me* to investigate. Strange things don't just happen, after all. Mysteries don't solve themselves.

Somebody has to look into it – who better than a Little?

Bertie's motor growls loudly. My hand is squeezed so tightly around the tiller that if I looked back at it, I'm sure my knuckles would be bone white. I don't look back, though. I look forwards, towards my destination, with my eyes narrowed against the morning sun. The wind whipping off the ocean is icy, and every now and again Bertie's bow crashes into a wayward wave and kicks water up in my face. It gets in my mouth, salty and sharp, and it goes up my nose too, but I quickly wipe it away with my free hand and urge Bertie to move faster. My heart thumps in my chest.

Bertie is my little yellow dinghy, by the way. Or, well, it's my *nan's* little yellow dinghy. I'm only borrowing it.

*Does it count as borrowing if Nan doesn't know about it?*

I shake the thought from my head. There's no time for thinking about all that right now. It's one of the first rules of Lightkeeping: there are times for thinking, and there are times for acting. After spotting the mystery-in-question from my window, now definitely counts as a time for acting.

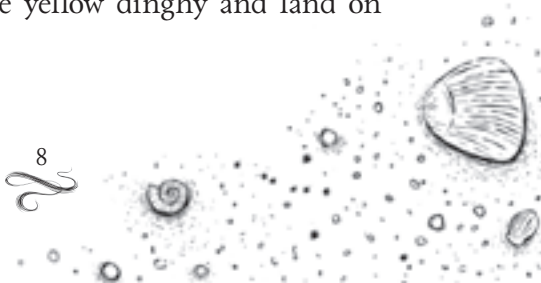
Besides, I'm about as used to breaking rules as a person comes.

But before I can investigate the very-weird-and-totally-not-normal thing, there's something else that I need. Every hero needs their sidekicks, and so that's why now I'm racing across the water at full speed, headed for backup. Directly ahead of me, breaching the waters like some kind of supersized whale, is the rock where I'll find it. It's the rock where my very best friends live.

Come to think of it, it's where my only friends live.

I guess if I'm going to get technical about it, only one of them really *lives* there. The other two are dead. I suppose it's more correct to say they haunt the place.

As I approach the reef that circles the rock, I raise the propeller from the water. Once Bertie is done gliding over the reef and has come to a stop beyond its fringes, right at the place where the rock flats and the tide pools begin, I kill the motor. Moving as quickly as this morning's Very Big Discovery demands, I drop the anchor over the side of Bertie's hull with a *splash!* and don't pause to watch it vanish into the depths. I spring from the little yellow dinghy and land on the rock flats.



My blood begins to fizz a little, like it's been pumped full of sherbet. My shoulders tingle and the blood rushes behind my ears. I'm a Little, after all, and it's only natural for a Little to be a bit excited at the prospect of an adventure.

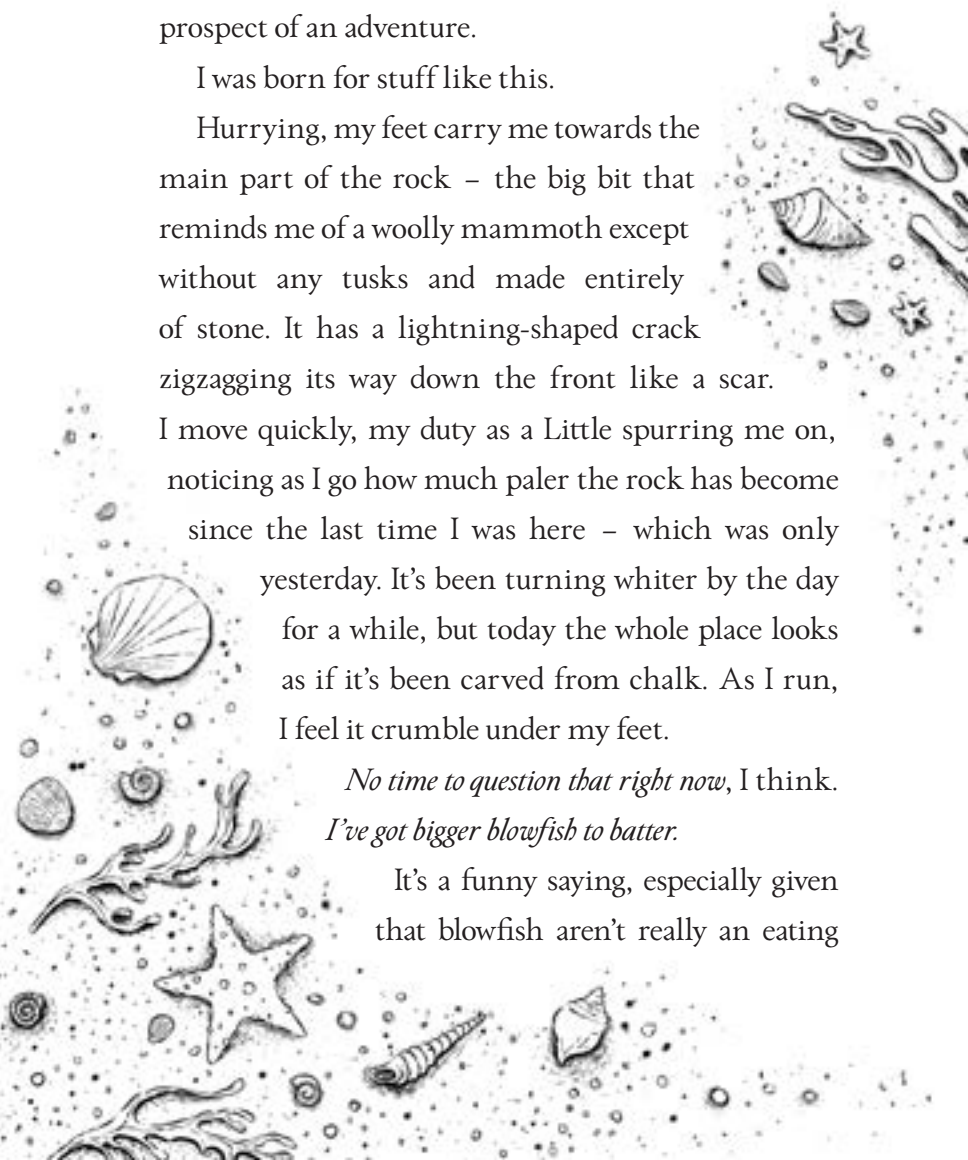
I was born for stuff like this.

Hurrying, my feet carry me towards the main part of the rock – the big bit that reminds me of a woolly mammoth except without any tusks and made entirely of stone. It has a lightning-shaped crack zigzagging its way down the front like a scar.

I move quickly, my duty as a Little spurring me on, noticing as I go how much paler the rock has become since the last time I was here – which was only yesterday. It's been turning whiter by the day for a while, but today the whole place looks as if it's been carved from chalk. As I run, I feel it crumble under my feet.

*No time to question that right now, I think.  
I've got bigger blowfish to batter.*

It's a funny saying, especially given that blowfish aren't really an eating



fish around here. Still, my nan has always said it – she has lots of funny sayings – so I do too.

I pass through the lightning-shaped crack and enter the rock's cave. Ahead of me sits my friends' shack. I can't see it, because it's got a cloaking glamour over it to turn it invisible. I know it's there, though. As I approach, I begin to feel queasy, but I expected that because there's also a turnaround charm filling this cave, designed to make trespassers go back the way they came. Sometimes, like today, the charm makes you feel sick; at other times it might make you desperately need to pee, or else suddenly remember an important appointment that you'd forgotten about.

It's very effective magic for keeping unwanted visitors away.

I'm not unwanted here, though. It's my friend who put the turnaround charm in place, and I know how to block out its effects. I'm used to it by now, and in a few strides I'm through.

The shack appears before my eyes.

It's a crumbling old thing made of wood, metal and rot, and despite my friends patching it up in places, the shack still feels just about ready to give in and



collapse into a pile of rubble. Panting, I raise my fist—

*KNOCK-KNOCK-KNOCK.*

‘Flip?’ says a familiar voice from inside. ‘Is that you?’

The door swings open and I come face to face with a patchwork cape, suspended in mid-air as if it’s being worn by some big invisible bird.

Which it isn’t, of course. It’s being worn by a ghost.

‘Hi, Girl.’ My words escape between pants and puffs. Gasps and wheezes.

Over the place where I assume her shoulder is, I can see all the parts of the shack that I know well. I only came here for the first time three-and-a-half weeks ago, but it’s not often you come across a shack that used to belong to Witches, and so that’s more than enough time to remember it by heart. I spy the familiar fire pit in its centre. The wooden bench that stretches along one wall. The hundred candles, lined up on shelves.

‘You’re soaked!’

Girl says it as if me being drenched from sea spray is a completely delightful turn of events. A welcome discovery. Maybe even like I *chose* to get this wet. And even though I can’t see her face, I can tell from Girl’s voice that she’s beaming.

‘Have you been swimming, Flip?’ she asks me. ‘Did you meet any nice fish?’ The cape wriggles, and I know that she’s shaking her head. ‘No, of course you didn’t. I keep forgetting that you’re not a ghost and so can’t talk to animals like I can.’

‘Wasn’t swimming,’ I say between lungfuls of air. ‘Came quickly. Bertie kicked up a bit of spray on the way.’

I put on my most serious Lightkeeper voice when I tell her: ‘We have an emergency.’

‘An *emergency*?’

I nod. ‘I’m afraid so.’

Girl can Fly, which I happen to think is pretty cool. She glides back from the open doorway and I step inside. The cape, which is tied up under the place where her chin must be, dances and sways from the sudden movement. It’s made of little patterned squares in the colours of the rainbow. Some squares are decorated with tiny orange goldfish, others with seascapes and little sailboats, and others still with grand seabirds, wings outstretched. Girl also wears two delicate white gloves, one of which grips the doorhandle.

She pushes it shut behind me.

The gloves and cape were gifts from me. Ghosts

don't remember their lives at all, and Girl has no memory of birthdays or Christmases or anything like that. That made me feel sad, so I asked Nan to sew the cape (I told her it was for me) and then I wrapped it and the gloves in brown paper (I couldn't find any of the nice glossy stuff) before tying a bow on it with fishing wire (I also couldn't find any ribbon) and giving them to Girl. Now she wears them all the time, which turned out to be super helpful for me too because, since Girl is invisible to living people, I've never actually been able to see her. And not being able to see someone is confusing, especially when they're one of your best friends. At least now I can tell where she is.

'What's the emergency?'

Before I can answer, a huge mass of shaggy grey-brown fur and segmented legs launches itself at me. I'm knocked off balance and topple to the floor.

'Whoa – hey, Simon!'

Simon lands on top of me, eight huge glossy eyes centimetres from mine, and the giant huntsman spider nuzzles his pincers into my face like an excited golden retriever.

Despite the Seriously Serious Nature of my visit,

I can't help but feel a smile bubble up from somewhere deep in my belly. It swells, moving to my chest and then all the way up to my mouth, and suddenly I find myself grinning widely. Because really, how many people can say that one of their best friends is a magically enlarged spider? Not many. Simon is very, *very* cool.

'Good to see you too,' I tell him.

'What's going on?'

The voice belongs to the *other* ghost who haunts this shack. My third and final friend. Once Simon scrambles off and I drag myself back to my feet, I see that she's sitting cross-legged on the floor, at the far side of the room, with a heavy book resting open on her lap. I recognise it as *Magikal Maledictions*, her book of spells that used to belong to the Witches who lived here. My friend's hand is raised, her fingers are wriggling, and I'm certain I've interrupted her in the middle of her daily spell practice. It might be early, but ghosts don't sleep. She's probably been practising all night.

'Corpse,' Girl says to her seriously. 'Flip says there's an emergency.'

Girl and Corpse are very different kinds of ghost, by the way. For one: Corpse can't Fly like Girl can. She's different in other ways too. While Girl is invisible and made of nothing, Corpse has built herself a body made of wax. She's got seaweed for hair, polished abalone shells where her eyes should be and two rows of pebbles for teeth. Right now, the bottoms of her bare wax feet are all grubby and, as always, she's wearing her favourite overalls.

Beside her sits an oval-shaped something. *The Cemetery Stone.*

Another gift from me, the Stone is the only reason I can hear Corpse's voice. Just as Corpse can't Fly, she also can't talk to people like me (*living* people) the way Girl can. Not without the Cemetery Stone, anyway. The Stone allows her to do it.

'What kind of emergency?' Corpse asks.

I step closer, readying myself to tell them about what I saw from my window. I clear my throat and puff my chest out, the way you do when you're about to say Something Very Important. Then, with my most serious voice, I announce: 'One that requires our *immediate* investigation.'

A TANTALISING NEW TALE  
FROM THE BESTSELLING AUTHOR OF  
*A GIRL CALLED CORPSE*



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