

PAPER & MOTIVE / CASE 002

The Hollow Tide

Some doors should stay beneath the water.

Blackwater. Halloween night. Thirteen bells, a borrowed voice, and a choice at the lower threshold.

A complete mystery told through printed records, letters and a reconstructed decision.

First edition / No website or account required.



ACT I · THE FIRST THIRTEEN

Please keep the whole night

Ada Fen · Letter accompanying the review copies, written after the incident



The council would like a short account. Someone rehearsed the bells. Someone borrowed a key. People frightened one another on Halloween. A paragraph, perhaps two, and we could put the telephone away.

I took the first call. I am not willing to shorten the night until it fits that explanation. I am not asking you to accept mine, either. I have sent the records because a harbour warden's conviction is a poor substitute for a clock that has been checked.

Blackwater is small enough that every name on a receipt belongs to someone who has held a door for you or lent you a ladder. That makes it difficult to ask an ordinary question without sounding as though you have already decided its answer.

Begin with two ordinary questions. Where did the thirteen strikes begin? Who had recorded custody of the service key when the door opened? Write down what the papers establish, and leave room beside it for what they do not.

You have the first packet. The later copies are kept separately so that you can follow the night without its ending making every earlier choice look inevitable. Keep the whole night, please. We have already tried telling ourselves the short version.

FROM NELL'S PREPARATIONS

Before anyone starts walking

Nell Saye · Recollection for the review, after the incident



My grandmother Ruth could carry a tray through the hall while naming everyone who had failed to bring a coat. I used to think that was the work of the lantern walk: tea, spare gloves, finding somebody's father before he wandered home with the lantern box.

You came even if you had nobody particular to remember. You came because someone else did. The children counted the lights; the adults pretended they were only there to keep the children out of the mud. Afterward there was always a person who stayed behind to fold the tables without being asked.

Ruth taught me the route as something done carefully with your hands. Check the labels. Put things back where they belong. Do not improve the arrangement because it looks uneven. I learned the instructions before I thought to ask why they had survived.

I have spent years making the evening easy for people. Someone arrives late and you find them a place. Someone forgets a lantern and you lend them one. That sort of kindness becomes a habit.

The trouble is that making people feel welcome had become the whole explanation I gave them. I could repeat the instructions without explaining why the gaps mattered. I wish I had tried to understand that before this year's walk.