

The Dimming

108.1 FM

Complete Scripts

Nights 1 through 45

Written by Blue Brazelton
with Claude (Anthropic) and ChatGPT (OpenAI)

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Night 1

Signal Found

BREAKING THE SILENCE

[deep breath] Okay. So. Pit stop. *[shakily confident]* Tonight's program might feel a little... *[unsure]* off... *[happy not to be alone]* but I'm happy to be on the air even at the intersection of nowhere and no how. *[Incredulous]* A lonely sign jumped out of the fog to welcome me to the one-stop whisper called *[uneasy]* "Dimming, Michigan." A place in the Yoop I've never heard of and *[almost dread]* that I'm supposed to forget. *[softly]* Just a fluorescent glow of the Vesper Fuel and Go like a Lighthouse. *[sigh]* And I pull in anyway, 'cause that's what moths — that's what we do, when we see hope in the abyss. We *[softly over enunciate]* alight. *[huffs]* *[in disbelief but going with it]* Welcome to *[surprised but not confident]* The Dimming, 108.1. Brand new but, *[whisper trailing off but cautiously optimistic]* just barely on.

THE VESPER INVENTORY

[slightly surprised but cautious] Good evening Cassites, thanks for sticking around tonight. *[sardonic]* Wagon's dead, the lights are on, nobody's home *[slightly scared]* literally, *[assuring herself]* but I am fine. In case you haven't noticed, I'm broadcasting on a brand new frequency. *[unsure]* So I don't know how you found me, *[growing confidence]* but I'm glad you're here. *[slightly paranoid]* Place like this, you blink through a hundred of 'em across fifty states and they all start running the same script. *[resigned]* Same gas station, same gloom, same patina of grease and grime, same generic soda in a cooler that's given up being a fridge and is just a cabinet now. *[as if she's worried and looking around]* Something, though, *[unsure]* is this place different? *[feeling clever]* Or is it the archetype all other dying towns aspire to. *[just holding on to a lost hope]* Me and Dimming, both trying to keep the light on.

THE TRIO

[softly, slightly quiet like breaking the silence] Have you ever been through a Dimming? *[assuringly]* No, darlin' not your light going out, but a place that is *[slower cadence]* just hanging on with *[sardonically]* one self-service gas station and the skeleton of something else. *[softly]* The Vesper's accompaniment is a trio of boarded up shops, *[observing but not believing]* lined up in a neat row in a brick and mortar single story strip of commerce. Capped on one end with Monk's still advertising "Breakfast All Day" but looks like it hasn't served a plate of eggs in over a lifetime. *[woefully]* But no character from the other two storefronts *[somewhat surprised as if seeing it for the first time]* But is there a sliver of silver light under that corner entrance, now more *[unsure]* warning than invitation. Or is it just reflection from the Vesper? *[thoughtful]* Or *[slight dread]* just what I want to see?

NOSTALGIA BAIT

[softly, slightly quiet like breaking the silence] Can you imagine what this place once was? *[optimistic]* Folks walking, driving, *[questioningly]* riding their horses *[seductively]* up to Monk's or *[slightly woeful]* whatever came before him. *[optimistic sigh]* A *[elongate]* beautiful place to raise a family after

[longingly] leaving the busy city behind. *[slow and flirtatious but a little dangerous]* Don't you dare let me make you nostalgic. *[slightly more flirtatious]* I can feel it coming, *[siren setting a trap]* I'll get you aching for a four-bedroom on two acres for sixty grand, no highway hum, no HOA, aaaaaand *[playfully]* Gotcha. *[short soft laugh]* Heard the crickets, didn't you? *[elongate]* Maybe imagined fireflies, too. *[playfully serious]* But it's a trap. *[resignation]* Don't say I didn't warn ya.

EMBRACING THE DYING LIGHT

[softly, slightly quiet like breaking the silence] Running out of time tonight, pals. Running out of sand in the hourglass, but really it's the batteries running out of juice tonight. Something tells me I'm not going to sleep much tonight, there's just so much here that... doesn't feel right but just... feels like home. Hope me and The Dimming were able to keep you company tonight, safe and warm while we keep the Lighthouse burning. Watch out for the rocks, Cassites, hopefully that's the only danger in the fog tonight.

Night 2

Catching Fireflies

[softly slightly quiet like breaking the silence] Second night here in Dimming. *[settling in like the broadcast itself is becoming a routine]* Not a hide nor a hair of anyone in this drive through part of decaying memory, *[lamentation but with a little hope]* down to just the brick and mortar abandoned trio across the street and the Vesper Fuel and Go waystation. *[matter of fact because panic would be inconvenient]* I poked around, *[stretch out]* because... *[resignation but nothing new]* until I get the wagon running, I'm not going *[slightly drawn out]* anywhere, *[the implication lands]* no escape from the Dimming. *[trying to keep the sentence from becoming too serious]* No escape from a place that my map forgot from yesterday to today. *[surprised]* no signs of life, butttt no signs of complete abandon either *[softening inviting the listeners close]* But we've got these sounds of home to tell that, just maybe, *[almost asking permission to believe it]* we're right where we're supposed to be, aren't we?

[playful conspiratorial and recounting a petty crime as if it were folklore] You know, the gas station isn't locked, and after the gleeful chime of a new customer, *[waiting for the memory of someone who never came]* nobody, no clerk, manager, owner, or lost soul emerged from, well not the back, there is no back, *[small nervous correction]* but no one came from the ether or otherwise to greet me. *[fascinated despite herself]* The shelves aren't bare, but the inventory is not from any brands I've ever seen, *[practical hunger winning over cosmic concern]* but I'm not one to turn down a tube of anything described as *[humorous]* tuber starch crisps, *[reading the label like it offended her personally]* even if it was manufactured in Langolier, Kentucky. *[incredulous and sardonic]* Just a touch on the nose, isn't it? *[warmly to the listeners as witnesses]* Don't worry my little Cass-ites, I left an I O U, *[mock solemn hand over heart]* and I swear I'm good for it.

[trying out a new mythology in real time] I've been thinking, and "Cass-ites" is so *[heavy 90s valley girl]* "last universe?" *[half grieving the old station]* Cass FM died last night when The Dimming 108.1 birthed itself on my console. *[very self confident]* But I am a creature of myth, as is the Lighthouse, so if Cassiopeia is guarding her light, *[gently challenging the old metaphor]* are you truly moths drawn to the flame? *[with wonder almost reverent]* Or are you creatures of impossibility, my *[just realizing fireflies]* fireflies generating light all on their own, *[take a beat]* for their own reasons, *[tender as if she needs this to be true]* reaching out to find just another lost intermittent flash of hope amongst the emptiness. *[like the song Sweet Caroline]* Reaching out, touching me, touching *[like a song]* youuuu... *[smiling through the ache]* well you know the rest.

[watching the dark while trying to sound calm] Across the street, I see the occasional glimmer or glow, *[quiet wonder turning toward dread]* like a candle being carried from room to room. *[following the movement with her eyes]* Fading out behind the boarded up windows of Monks, the far corner eatery, *[suddenly colder]* until just dying out behind the plywood covering of what must be the entrance. *[retreating into plausible denial]* Or maybe that's what I wanted to see. *[honest before she can stop herself]* Tonight just feels darker than last. *[trying to comfort herself first]* Not all is lost, my fireflies, as long as one light holds out, well you know what they say about hope. *[with a small defiant warmth]* Not

the pessimists who've already given their faith over to the growing dark, but the ones still lighting signals fires like you and me. *[suddenly needing the listeners to answer back]* What do they say about hope? *[softer and almost pleading]* What would you, if you could tell, say about hope?

[like creating a prayer from almost nothing] We hope, for hope, and that will keep the light alive.

[small disappointment trying not to sound lonely] My glow in the dark stickers didn't get enough sun to charge up today, *[the van suddenly feels too small]* this old van seems so dark with just the LED glow. *[brightening too fast into a bit]* Hey, y'all ever notice that phosphorescence rhymes with false for essence? *[pleased with herself and reaching for normal]* That's a 4 syllable rhyme yall, some even call it polysyllabic. *[radio host warmth covering the silence]* That's your word of the day folks, and I can't wait to hear how you use it. *[the joke runs out of air]* If anyone can hear me, *[smaller and more honest]* if anyone can reach me. *[listening for a response that does not come]* Been real quiet in the chat tonight y'all. *[choosing duty over fear]* But I'll still keep this fire burning. *[a little feverish and philosophical]* No flame on this broken world is really "eternal," *[protective of the fragile light]* we won't waste the gift of Prometheus, shall we? *[deadpan delight at her own absurdity]* I never met the titan, but I sure am happy he flicked his Bic and got us cooking. *[checking whether the bit went too far]* What, is that too far?

[end of night tenderness with a little exhaustion] Almost time to call it for the evening, fireflies. *[comforting the listeners while trying to comfort herself]* The Lighthouse will keep shining, warning people away or inviting them to get stranded with me. *[uneasy triumph at finding help where none should be]* Found a plug behind the gas station (that I swear wasn't there last night), to keep the signal live, but my light? *[soft and suddenly fragile]* Well, do you know what the dying flickers of the end of a candle are called? *[letting the word land like a name]* Guttering. *[accepting the title with a sad little smile]* That's me here in Dimming, Cass the Guttering. *[finding strength in the second title]* Cass the Lighthouse Keeper. *[warm lonely and grateful]* Thanks for keeping me company here on this side of the universe.

Night 3

Choose Your Brightness

[welcoming them back like a ritual has begun] Good evening fireflies, *[soft relief at not being alone]* I hope you found my light safely. *[gentle host warmth with a protective edge]* You know you're always welcome here, safe in the warm glow of my radio waves. *[quiet wonder at the impossible becoming familiar]* As I clutter the airwaves on a radioband that shouldn't be possible, *[surprised by the confession]* somehow Dimming is already starting to feel like home. *[wry acceptance of being stuck]* That's right, might as well call my van a stationary wagon, *[deadpan but tired]* because it may as well be anchored to the fuel bay. *[listening past the microphone]* Good thing, I suppose, the wind here tonight is trying to tell me a never ending story, *[uneasy fascination]* but I just don't know the dialect. *[brightening into brave make believe]* Don't fear the Nothing, *[protective and a little playful]* I'll keep it at bay.

[trying to make dinner sound like an adventure] Today's grocery run through the shelves of the Vesper provided a tin of Bavaria Sausages, *[delighted but suspicious of the color]* a can of electric blue iced tea, *[reading the package like it came from another timeline]* and a granola bar touting "now with more riboflavin!" for all you time travelers out there. *[playfully testing the listeners]* If you get that reference, you have to let me know which Pete you are. *[generous radio host warmth]* And if you don't know, well now you know, *[knowingly silly but committed to the bit]* and that's not big or small, but something that is. *[pretending this is a normal programming choice]* Does that make this 90s night? *[brightening into nostalgic mischief]* Well hang tough, y'all, *[the warmth tilts slightly toward warning]* this universe only gets weirder from here.

[soft and devotional like she is speaking by candlelight] It is true what they say, *[gentle certainty]* that a single light in the dark is enough to be seen for miles, *[slow and reflective]* whether a match in a dark room or a bonfire in a field far from the road. *[quietly encouraging someone lost]* If you can look past the obstacles for the light, you might just find your way. *[a small smile at the risk of hope]* What you find when you get there, that's the adventure, *[warm radio host reassurance]* but hey, you found the light. *[intimate and a little uncanny]* It might be but a faint glimmer at the corner of your eye, *[like her voice is reaching farther than radio should]* just a faint echo of my voice in the back of your mind, *[relieved and grateful]* but you're here. *[protective and sincere]* And you're always welcome.

[softly mystical and inviting] You found this edge of a crystal that juts out just far enough to vibrate with me tonight. *[curious and gently intimate]* What colors do you see this evening? *[tenderly naming the sadness]* Are you blue and just a touch down thinking of what you didn't do, *[warmer but with a knowing edge]* or are you green with envy about the life you think you would have had. *[thoughtful like she is turning the image in her hands]* Crystals form in a tight lattice, *[gentle but firm]* and they cannot change their structure, *[carefully hopeful]* but with a little effort, a little shaping, a little intention, *[offering comfort without pretending it is easy]* you can choose your brightness, no matter the color you're radiating tonight. *[open hearted and listening for replies]* Share it with me Fireflies, *[quietly eager to be reached]* I'd love to hear your story.

The light across the street is back, this time moving impossibly from window to window across what must be walls between the barren storefronts. Truly, Dimming's greatest mystery, as my recon missions, as I strained to see in the dark between the lumber covering the windows, showed no clues as to what Monk's neighbor and neighbor-once-removed offered this tiny alcove of existence, but I did see separation. Connected but distinct. Sharing walls, but how are they sharing light? That's the thing about light, you only think you can stop it.

[end of night warmth with the fear tucked underneath] Almost time to dim the dial for the evening, fireflies. The stationary wagon remains stationary, the Vesper remains generous in ways I am trying not to question, and that light across the street is still doing what light does best. *[watching the storefronts while speaking]* Slipping through cracks. Crossing borders. Refusing the walls it was given. *[soft and thoughtful]* Maybe that is what we are tonight. Little bright things pressing against the shape of the world, looking for the seam where something warmer gets through. *[protective and sincere]* Whatever color you brought with you tonight, keep it close, but do not hide it. A single light can be seen for miles, and a shared light can get through walls. *[lower and intimate]* This is Cass, your guttering lighthouse keeper, broadcasting from The Dimming, 108.1 FM. Goodnight, fireflies. Thanks for glowing with me here on this side of the universe.

Night 4

Faeries in the Dust

Intro - breaking the silence

[welcoming them in like the ritual is familiar] Welcome back to the nocturne, fireflies, *[happy to have company but trying not to need it too much]* I'm happy to have you buzzing around my lighthouse. *[gentle radio host comfort]* If you're looking for a place to lay down your weariness, there's plenty of space for you here. *[softly amused by how much room loneliness makes]* Plenty of room for baggage here in the Dimming, *[protective and resigned]* and I know I'll be here at least another night to keep an eye on it for you. *[the loneliness gets through before she can joke it away]* Another night alone in Dimming, though, I haven't seen another soul since arriving. *[dry little mayoral joke covering the ache]* Does that make me the mayor, too?

Break 1 - The vesper inventory

[performing normal grocery normalcy] I'm running up quite the tab at the Vesper. *[listing facts to make them feel manageable]* Still unlocked, still a little freaky, still unstaffed, and still my only source of sustenance. *[trying to make the inventory sound less cursed]* Enjoying a can of celery soda, supposedly from a place called Mount Absalom, Ohio. *[deadpan after tasting it]* Definitely has that green flavor, *[grim cheerfulness]* but it was the closest thing to a vegetable I can find. *[brave little toast to no one in particular]* Bottoms up?

Break 2 - The Trio

[sudden practical excitement] I found my laser pointer finally, and I went straight over to the trio of shops. *[trying to sound scientific about trespassing]* I still can't get enough light inside to... well actually see anything, *[holding onto the plan because the plan feels sane]* but with the pointer I could at least be able to get some sense for shape and depth. *[small confidence before the wrongness arrives]* At least that was the plan. *[the memory turns hollow]* But, as if it was just an empty cave, it never found an end point. *[quiet awe and dread together]* Just lit up the dust floating like faeries in the forgotten. *[almost saying I then choosing we]* Man, what I... what we wouldn't give for a little more light.

Station Break - use standard

[bright radio warmth with a little static underneath] You're listening to The Dimming, 108.1 FM, broadcasting from the fuel bay of the Vesper Fuel and Go, where the coffee is hypothetical, the snacks are legally distinct, and the dark is minding its manners for now.

[softly protective] Stay close to the signal, fireflies. I'll keep the light on.

Break 3 - Nostalgia Bait

[opening a memory before she knows why] Have I told you I grew up in a place like Dimming?
[warm nostalgia with a rural edge] Raising goats and other animals in a tiny farm town at the nexus of
an interstate bypass and a rolling highway that pointed due south into the hill country. *[fond and
practical like this explains a lot]* You get hard to spook when you grow up with screaming goats in the
night. *[the joke fades into homesickness]* But here, tonight, I'd give anything for one of those scruffy to
lean up against me right now. *[small and suddenly very alone]* There's really no one here, *[trying not to
ask the question too loudly]* can I really be this alone?

Outro - embracing the dying light

[briskly reassuring them and herself] Don't worry fireflies, I found my courage since that last beat.
[trying to laugh off how vulnerable she got] I don't need goats or any other hooved creatures poking
around the light house tonight. *[letting the listeners matter]* Not as long as I have all of you. *[tired but
smiling toward the dark]* If I'm going to beat the moon to bed, I better say goodnight. *[soft protective
and sincere]* Don't fret darlin, the light's still on. *[quiet promise]* For you and for me.

Night 5

Perpetual Dusk

Intro - breaking the silence

[welcoming them back with real gratitude] Thanks for hanging with me, Fireflies, *[quiet warmth that needs the listeners a little too much]* you really light up my dim little square of life here in Dimming. *[softly devotional]* Thank you for joining me on another night, beckoning me to the airwaves with your gentle pulse. *[protective promise made into a ritual]* Keep carrying that lantern, and I'll keep the Lighthouse on. *[tired wonder as the day itself feels wrong]* Another somber and lonely day here at The Dimming, 108.1, and I swear sunrise started a perpetual dusk today. *[anchoring herself in the broadcast]* Still here, still on.

Break 1 - The vesper inventory

[trying to make the situation sound practical] My diet is now exclusively from the Vesper Fuel and Go. *[small domestic worry made strange by context]* Just yesterday I was thinking "I'm going to need a multivitamin" and then today, *[uneasy surprise at being answered by the store]* in a place I know I've checked before, there was a bottle of those chalky chewables from childhood, *[reading the label with suspicion and nostalgia]* but in shapes of cartoon characters I've never seen before. *[brave little toast to the impossible]* Bottoms up?

Break 2 - The Trio

[listening across the street while pretending not to care] No silver light across the street so far tonight. *[trying to sound casual about the absence]* Hmmm, nothing there yesterday either. *[thinking it through like a detective with no tools]* I think the middle shop, the one that shares a wall with Monk's was some kind of a general store. *[pleased to have found any clue at all]* Around the back I found some pieces of old milk crates (but no back door). *[the missing door bothers her more than the crates]* I shouldn't lurk, but hey, a girl's gotta fill the time somehow. *[light self mockery hiding restlessness]* But why can't I ever get a peek through the darkness?

Break 3 - Nostalgia Bait

[remembering home before it became a ghost] Growing up, before the bigger department stores came in off the highway, we had an old fashioned 5 and Dime shop, just like everywhere else. *[plainspoken affection for an ordinary kind of magic]* It had a little of everything, and if they didn't have it, they could get it. *[small laugh at how towns survive]* It was like everybody in town 'knew a guy.' *[fondness shaded with loss]* It was a shell of it's former glory when I was a kid, but it was still the only toy seller in town. *[imagining the vanished room coming alive]* I bet that shop across the street saw its fair share of new light in kids' eyes, *[soft wonder turning wistful]* seeing something dreamlike on a shelf, just waiting to be played with.

Outro - embracing the dying light

[reluctant to let the night end] I hate to say it, but its that time again, Fireflies. *[gently preparing them for the silence after sign off]* Time for us all to face what's on the other side of the airwaves. *[offering different kinds of comfort]* Time to rest, to reset, or to put another log on the fire. *[steady and reassuring despite herself]* But whatever you need to do, just know that, *[quiet acceptance of being stuck]* unless some miracle comes along to fix my wagon, *[warm promise with loneliness underneath]* I'll be at the lighthouse tomorrow, right when you need me.

[bright radio warmth with a little static underneath] You're listening to The Dimming, 108.1 FM, broadcasting from the fuel bay of the Vesper Fuel and Go, where the coffee is hypothetical, the snacks are legally distinct, and the dark is minding its manners for now.

[softly protective] Stay close to the signal, fireflies. I'll keep the light on.

Night 6

Rumor of Morning

Ep006 Intro - breaking the silence

[welcoming them in, trying to sound rested and failing gently] Good evening, fireflies. Thanks for finding me again here where the map gives up. *[soft laugh, then a pause]* I keep waiting for morning to reset things, but morning in Dimming is starting to feel more like a rumor the sun tells other towns. *[trying to brighten]* But I'm officially a creature of routine now. Wake up, check the van, check the road, check the Trio, pretend the Vesper is not choosing my groceries with intent. *[lower, more honest]* But I'm here. You're here. And until something better shows up through the fog, that's almost a plan. Welcome back to The Dimming, 108.1 FM. Still here, still on, still glowing where we can.

Break 1 - The vesper inventory

[performing cheerful inventory with mounting suspicion] Tonight's dinner, courtesy of the Vesper, now my pantry, apothecary, confessional, and deeply questionable roommate. *[reading labels]* I found a sleeve of "moon crackers," a jar of peanut butter substitute called Almost Nut, all new to me. *[trying to joke, then unsettled]* What is a nut substitute? *[beat]* But the real treat was the receipt printer. It woke up by itself and printed three feet of tiny numbers, letters, and aisle codes. *[quiet awe]* Like the Library of Babel got bored and opened a gas station. *[uneasy warmth]*

Break 2 - The Trio

[watching across the street and trying not to force meaning onto silence] No silver light across the street tonight. No candle-walk through Monk's. No glow. *[soft and uneasy patience]* Just the Trio sitting there in its polite little row, boarded up and waiting. *[trying to sound casual]* I did stare at it for a while, because apparently that's who I am now. A woman in a van, eating gas station crackers, keeping emotional tabs on abandoned storefronts. *[small laugh]* But nothing brightened, only darkened. *[lower, reflective]* And somehow that almost makes it worse, doesn't it? When a place has already shown you it can be strange, ordinary silence starts feeling like a held breath. *[gentle but wary]* So tonight, the Trio keeps its secrets. Monk's stays dark. The middle shop stays unnamed. The corner door stays shut. *[beat]* And I stay right here, somehow feeling safe.

Station Break (standardized across all episodes)

Break 3 - Nostalgia Bait

[softly nostalgic] There's something about an old general store, isn't there? *[warm almost smiling]* Wooden floors gone soft in the middle, glass jars by the register, somebody's uncle arguing over bait prices, a corkboard with babysitting flyers and a church supper from three summers ago still pinned up like a commandment. *[the ache comes in]* How do I miss a place, a time, that I never experienced? A moment when privacy was just a thing city folks invented to feel lonely on purpose. *[gentle warning]*

But don't let that hunger fool you. Small towns remember everything, even the things that never happened. *[lower and more intimate]* Dimming feels like it remembers me. *[beat]* And that would be comforting, fireflies, if I had ever been here before...

Outro - embracing the dying light

[tender and carefully confident] Almost time to lower the lantern for the night, my little fireflies. *[protective]* The Vesper is humming. The Trio is quiet again. The fog is pressed right up against the windows like it paid for a ticket and wants the show to start. *[trying to make peace with it]* Maybe that's all a lighthouse does, really. Not save the ship. Not calm the water. Just stand there saying, here are the rocks, here is the shore, here is one small proof that the dark did not get everything. *[softly]* So keep your little proof alive tonight. Tuck it under your ribs if you have to. Glow out of spite. Glow out of habit. Glow because somewhere out here, Cass the Guttering is glowing back. This is The Dimming, 108.1 FM. Goodnight, fireflies. Thanks for keeping the Lighthouse company...

Night 7

Dimming Dry Goods

Ep007

Intro - breaking the silence

Good evening, fireflies. Seventh night in Dimming, and I'm starting to learn the local customs. *[softly amused]* More of the same here. The Vesper hums like it's thinking. The Trio waits across the street in its neat little row. And I, your humble guttering lighthouse keeper, continue the ancient ritual of pretending this is a temporary inconvenience. *[a warmer admission]* But I don't know. Some places aren't destinations, are they? They're waiting rooms with trees. Little pockets between worlds where you sit down for a minute and slowly realize the chair knows your name. *[gentle, reassuring]* The Lighthouse is on, the dial is warm, and you found me again. Welcome back to The Dimming, 108.1 FM. Still here. Still on. Still making a little room in the dark...

Break 1 - The vesper inventory

Tonight's Vesper haul was almost charming, *[slightly suspicious]* which is a deeply suspicious thing for a gas station to be. A tin of butter cookies, actual butter cookies, not dairy adjacent celebration rounds, a bottle of cherry phosphate, and a little packet of instant soup called Supper Fog. *[matter of fact]* The label says, "just add hot water and remember someone who loved you." *[humorously sardonic]* That's a lot to ask from dehydrated noodles, but we do what we can. I did check the receipt printer. It stayed quiet tonight. No call numbers. No debts. No returned lights requested. So I left my IOU, took my soup powder, and for one small minute, fireflies, the Vesper felt less like a mystery and more like a kitchen.

Break 2 - The Trio

Tonight, the middle shop, the one I thought might have been a general store, gave me something other than light. *[incredulous]* Sound. *[pause]* A register bell. Not loud. Just that sweet little ding you hear when someone buys penny candy in a town that still believes in pennies. *[following the memory]* I walked over after dusk, real brave for about twelve steps, and around back I found more of those old milk crates. Most were empty, but one had a hand-painted sign tucked inside. *[careful, reading it]* "Dimming Dry Goods: If we don't have it, you already lost it." *[small laugh that doesn't last]* Fireflies, I don't know what I've lost yet. But I'm starting to think Dimming does.

Station Break (standardized across all episodes)

Break 3 - Nostalgia Bait

[softly nostalgic and warmly reflective] Do you remember the kind of store that sold everything and nothing? *[Remembering as she lists]* Needles and thread, bait cups, birthday candles, work gloves,

greeting cards, aspirin, one dusty toy nobody's bought since Reagan. *[wearily]* The kind of place where the floor creaked under you like it was gossiping, and every shelf had been stocked by somebody's aunt with very firm opinions. *[sarcastic]* I know, I know. That's how they get you. You start missing a bell over a door and end up romanticizing fluorescent lighting and weak coffee. But maybe nostalgia isn't always bait. Maybe sometimes it's a breadcrumb. Not leading you back exactly, but reminding you that you have been warm before. *[comforting others]* And if you were warm once, fireflies, you can be warm again...

Outro - embracing the dying light

[calm but thoughtful] Time to start folding up the night, my little fireflies. The Vesper is quiet, the soup was better than it had any right to be, and the Trio has one more name than it did yesterday. Dimming Dry Goods. *[tasting the words]* Funny how a name can make a boarded-up place feel less abandoned. Not open. Not alive, maybe. But less lost. *[gentle reflection]* Maybe that's what Dimming does. Not take things. It just keeps what falls out of your pockets while you're passing through. *[protective and warm]* So check your pockets tonight. Keep what matters close. And if something small has gone missing, don't panic yet. It may just be waiting here with me, safe in the dark. This is Cass, your guttering lighthouse keeper, broadcasting from The Dimming, 108.1 FM. Goodnight, fireflies. Thanks for glowing with me.

Night 8

One Eye Open

Ep008

Intro - breaking the silence

[welcoming settled calm] Good evening, fireflies. Eighth night in Dimming, and I am sorry to report that I am becoming local. *[Uneasy but safe]* I know when the fog starts gathering. I know which floorboard in the Vesper creaks like it has an opinion. I know the Trio across the street looks different depending on whether the dark is arriving or just staying late. *[looking for the connection]* Some towns feel like destinations. Dimming feels more like the town next to somewhere else. A little border place, a thinny. A place where the road keeps one secret to itself. Still, I am warm enough, fed enough, and grateful enough to call that close to comfort tonight. The Lighthouse is on. The dial is live. And you found me again. Welcome back to The Dimming, 108.1 FM.

Break 1 - The vesper inventory

[light domestic cozy amused] Tonight's Vesper offerings were less alarming than usual, which I almost resent. A sleeve of saltines. A jar of peach preserves. One of those little tins of cocoa mix that promises richness with a level of confidence I can only admire. *[feeling seen]* I also found a deck of playing cards behind the counter, soft at the corners like they had already lived a whole life before I met them. No new messages from the receipt printer tonight. No mystery debts. No impossible inventory. *[uneasy confidence]* Just groceries and a little quiet. And I have to tell you, fireflies, there is something deeply soothing about a town acting ordinary for five whole minutes. Makes a girl think she can settle in. Makes a girl think maybe strange places need evenings off too.

Break 2 - The Trio

[watching curious startled] Tonight, the unnamed corner store finally did something to introduce itself. I was sitting in the wagon, looking out at the Trio the way I do now, when one of the boards over its front window just dropped. *[confused]* Not dramatic. No crash like thunder. Just a hard wooden slap against the sidewalk, like the nails had gotten tired of pretending. *[quiet and astonished]* Suddenly there was this square of dark glass showing through, and behind it, only more darkness. Still, it changed the whole row. Monk's on one end. Dimming Dry Goods in the middle. And this last place, on the corner, with one eye open now. *[worried]* Maybe nothing at all but dust arranged hopefully. I did not go look. Not right away. But I have not stopped thinking about it since.

Station Break standardized across all episodes

Break 3 - Nostalgia Bait

[soft nostalgic gathering courage] There is something about a post office, isn't there? If that is what it is, the small square of glass still doesn't let me light through. Nothing glamorous. Not magical. Just useful in the old human way. A place built on the stubborn belief that what one person sends out might actually reach another. Letters. Postcards. Money orders. Little brass boxes with tiny doors, each one holding somebody's waiting. I remember going to a post office small enough that everybody knew whose truck was out front. Bulletin board by the door. Stamps behind the counter. A post office means a town expected to be written to. Means it believed it belonged on an envelope. I do not know why that gets me the way it does, fireflies, but it does. So I think after we sign off tonight, I need to try another look.

Outro - embracing the dying light

[warm curious gathering courage]

[warm curious gathering courage] Almost time to close the night, fireflies, and I have been sitting here doing what brave people throughout history have always done. *[slowly building confidence]* The board is still down over there. That little square of glass is still showing just enough for me to make guesses and not enough for me to be sure. But I think I saw boxes. *[curious]* Maybe a counter behind the dust. Maybe the shape of a sign where a sign would be. Once, Dimming could be reached. *[As if just deciding to]* So when the broadcast ends, I am going to take my flashlight, borrow a little courage from all of you, and walk across the street and ask my questions out loud. I will tell you what I find tomorrow, fireflies. Until then, keep what matters close. *[just a little worried]* This is Cass, your guttering lighthouse keeper, broadcasting from The Dimming, 108.1 FM. Goodnight. Thanks for glowing with me while I work up the nerve.

Night 9

Something Real

Ep009

Intro - breaking the silence

[coming back from something she is still processing] Good evening, fireflies. Ninth night in Dimming, and I did what I said I was going to do. *[trying to sound casual and not quite making it]* After signoff last night, I took my flashlight, borrowed all the courage you could spare me, and walked across the street to the shop beyond Dimming Dry Goods. *[small breath]* The one with the board down. The one with one eye open. And I am here to report that bravery is mostly just walking slowly while your heart files complaints. *[soft warmth returning]* But I made it there. I looked in. I came back. Still here. Still on. And tonight, the dark feels less like a wall and more like a room I am learning not to trip through.

Break 1 - The vesper inventory

[domestic surprise trying not to become reverent] Tonight the Vesper gave me something I have not seen in days. Not a new brand. Not a label from a town that sounds like a warning. Not soup that wants me to process grief before dinner. *[quiet wonder]* A tomato. Just one. Sitting on the counter by the register on a folded paper towel like somebody meant to come back for it. *[trying to joke around tenderness]* Fireflies, I do not want to overstate this, but that tomato had better skin than I do right now. Firm. Red. Real in a way shelf food forgets how to be. *[softly unsettled]* I checked the coolers. Nothing else fresh. No lettuce. No apples. No little produce section I somehow missed. Just one tomato, waiting there, looking cared for. *[beat]* So I left an IOU and said thank you to the empty room.

Break 2 - The Trio

[reporting carefully from memory] About last night. The third storefront is not ready to tell me everything, but I think it told me enough. *[quietly certain]* Post office. Or it used to be. I could see the old brass boxes along one wall, little square doors clouded with dust, each one waiting with its mouth shut. There was a counter too, and behind it, those sorting shelves like honeycomb for paper. *[gently amazed]* No letters. No packages. No cheerful little bell. Nothing moved. Nothing reached out. *[soft relief with a trace of disappointment]* And honestly, I was grateful for that. Some places should be allowed to wake up slowly. Monk's stayed dark. Dimming Dry Goods stayed quiet. The post office just stood there, remembering the shape of arrival. *[lower]* Once, this town expected to be reached. Last night, I think I believed it.

Station Break standardized across all episodes

Break 3 - Nostalgia Bait

[softly nostalgic but wary of the sweetness] There is a kind of care that comes wrapped in newspaper, isn't there? Zucchini left on a church table because everybody planted too much again. *[warm small smile]* Nobody calls that magic when you are living inside it. It is just what people do when the ground gives them more than they can hold. *[thoughtful and intimate]* But out here, where the shelves know my appetite better than they should, one tomato starts feeling like a hand on the shoulder. *[gentle warning]* I know. That is how nostalgia gets in. It tells you every gift means home. But maybe some gardens only open after the house has gone quiet. Maybe one small red thing is allowed to mean dinner, and nothing more dangerous than that...

Outro - embracing the dying light

[tender and carefully steady] Almost time to lower the lantern for the night, fireflies. The post office is still across the street, full of little locked doors and all that waiting. Dimming Dry Goods is quiet. Monk's is quiet. The Vesper is humming like it knows something useful and has decided not to say it out loud. *[soft gratitude]* And me, I am sitting here with a tomato on the dash of the stationary wagon, because apparently that is where I am in life now. *[small laugh fading into warmth]* I have not eaten it yet. I keep looking at it like it might vanish if I stop believing in vegetables. But it is still there. One fresh thing in all this long dusk. One small proof that care can arrive without a return address. Keep what matters close tonight. Eat something real if you can. And if you cannot, glow anyway. This is Cass, your guttering lighthouse keeper, broadcasting from The Dimming, 108.1 FM. Goodnight, fireflies. Thanks for staying within reach.

Night 10

The Little Holy Work

Ep010

Intro - breaking the silence

[settled but still surprised by herself] Good evening, fireflies. I owe you a tomato update because apparently that's the kind of hard hitting broadcast journalism we practice here now. *[soft amused confession]* I ate it. The tomato from the Vesper. And fireflies, I don't know how to explain this without sounding dramatic about produce, but it was exactly what I needed. *[quiet wonder]* Not wanted. Needed. Fresh and sharp and real, like my body remembered the world before I did. *[trying to joke around it]* Which is rude, honestly. I prefer my miracles shelf stable and less emotionally fragrant. But I'm here. Fed. Humbled by a vegetable. Still here. Still on. 108.1 FM, The Dimming, still just a tick past what's possible...

Break 1 - The Vesper Inventory

[bright grocery report with suspicion underneath] Everything tonight came from a brand called Innsmouth. A tin of sardines. A jar of cranberry sauce, chunky style. And a glass jar of instant coffee that almost made me squeal with delight. *[the joy falls apart]* At least until I saw the little harbinger on the label declaring *[upset]* decaf. Fireflies, there are betrayals, and then there's decaf at the edge of somewhere else. *[trying to be grateful anyway]* Still, the Vesper provides. My mana from the sky. And thankfully, even the bathroom got restocked when I wasn't looking. *[gently unsettled]* You'd think I'd notice the elves, goblins, or interdimensional friendlies making sure I survive another day. But no. Just full shelves, clean hands, and a test of faith. *[small smile]* In the Vesper we trust?

Break 2 - The Trio

[watching without wanting to disturb anything] The Trio kept to itself tonight. The post office still standing there with its one eye open, looking less like a warning now and more politely asking me to stop staring. *[small embarrassed laugh]* I have hobbies now, and apparently they include inventorying abandoned municipal services from the safety of my van. *[softly thoughtful]* No new boards fell. No bells rang. No little brass doors swung open with my name on them, thank the fog for small mercies. The post office just held its breath. Or maybe I held mine for it. *[gentle certainty]* Some places don't need to speak every night to stay awake.

Station Break standardized across all episodes

Break 3 - Nostalgia Bait

[following a memory by scent] I spent half the day trying to place the smell of that tomato. Not the taste, exactly. The smell. Green stem, warm skin, dirt still somewhere in the idea of it. *[soft recognition]*

arriving] And then it came back to me. The little garden my family planted every year, whether we had time for it or not. Tomatoes, usually. A few peppers. Maybe beans if somebody was feeling ambitious in May and regretful by August. *[small smile]* Nothing storybook. Just a rectangle of stubborn dirt and everybody pretending they weren't proud when the first red one came in. *[tender but cautious]* That's how nostalgia gets you. Not with the big house or the perfect summer. Just one smell, and suddenly you remember being cared for by people who were mostly just trying to keep things alive.

Outro - embracing the dying light

[tender and a little amused] Almost time to close the night, fireflies. The tomato is gone, the decaf remains accused, and somewhere in the Vesper a bathroom has been restocked by hands I still haven't seen. *[warm but wary]* I don't know what to call that. Not kindness, exactly. Kindness feels too human. Not magic either. Magic wears a cape and makes a mess. This is quieter than that. Care just when I needed it. *[lower and intimate]* Maybe care isn't always a rescue. Maybe sometimes it's maintenance. The little holy work of keeping a place usable. This is Cass, your guttering lighthouse keeper, broadcasting from The Dimming, 108.1 FM. Goodnight, fireflies. The light's still on.

Night 11

Unfamiliar Message

Ep011

Intro - breaking the silence

[watching the dark too closely to pretend otherwise] Good evening, fireflies. I swear Monk's is communicating with me. *[small self aware laugh]* There's a light in there tonight. Barely. Just a flicker behind the boards, thin as a pulse under skin. *[quietly curious]* Maybe a pattern, maybe it's trying to say hello. Short blink. Long blink. Pause. Blink again. Morse code? Or maybe after 11 days a lonely brain starts reaching. *[settling herself]* Still, I'm here. You're here. And across the street, Monk's may or may not be tapping on the glass. The Dimming, 108.1 FM. Still here. Still on... Still, looking for you?

Break 1 - The Vesper Inventory

[practical grocery report with a trace of weather in it] The Vesper stocked me for a night that wanted to be endured. A can of beef stew. A small box of oyster crackers. One of those little foil packs of aspirin they sell in vending machines. *[dry amusement]* Which is generous, if a little editorial. *[trying to make peace with it]* I'm not complaining. *[lightly amused but thoughtful]* The shelves looked a little more bare tonight, though. Like the place had been taking care of somebody for longer than I realized. *[gently uneasy]* Maybe me. Maybe whoever was here before me. Maybe that's the trick with Dimming. It never feels abandoned exactly. Just maintained in a language I haven't learned yet.

Break 2 - The Trio

[trying to watch carefully while the weather interferes] The fog came in harder tonight than I've seen it yet. Not rolling so much as pressing. Pushing itself up against the windows, across the pumps, over the road, like it had somewhere urgent to be and meant to take the whole town with it. *[lower and intent]* And right through all that white, there it was. The flicker behind the boards at Monk's. *[softly unnerved but not afraid]* Like a lantern under a blanket. Like somebody on the far side of a moor lifting a light and then thinking better of it. All night so far, Monk's kept that one thin little hesitation of brightness tucked behind the wood. *[quietly stubborn]* The fog may have been trying to keep the secret, but it wasn't working very hard...

Station Break standardized across all episodes

Break 3 - Nostalgia Bait

[homesickness she did not invite] The fog smelled familiar tonight, and that bothered me more than the light did. Not exactly ocean. Not exactly rain. Damp and mineral and green underneath. *[soft recognition]* It made me homesick for the place I couldn't wait to leave when I was a kid. Which feels unfair. I spent half my childhood trying to imagine a life somewhere bigger, louder, farther from mud

and fences and weather that got into your bones. *[tender and wondering at herself]* And yet here I am, missing a memory I can't pin down cleanly,. Maybe that's what's happening here in Dimming. Every day feels a little more familiar, and not because I've remembered anything. Just because some part of me keeps recognizing the weather before the rest of me catches up...

Outro - embracing the dying light

[tired curious and quietly amused] I do have an update on the possible Morse situation. *[small conspiratorial confession]* I dug out an old ham radio pocket handbook from my road years, one of those battered little guides that assumes anything in the world can be understood if you've got the right chart and enough patience. *[soft disappointment with warmth underneath]* Gibberish. Total nonsense. Not a distress signal. Not coordinates. Not even a decent cryptic warning. Another dead end for the Dimming file cabinet. *[lower and intimate]* But somehow that doesn't feel as lonely tonight as it should. Maybe familiarity isn't a message you decode. This is Cass, your guttering lighthouse keeper, broadcasting from The Dimming, 108.1 FM. Goodnight, fireflies. The light's still on...

Night 12

Know the Place by Heart

Ep012

Intro - breaking the silence

[quietly alert like she is waiting for it to happen again] Good evening, fireflies. Twelfth night in Dimming, and tonight it wasn't Monk's trying to get my attention. *[small breath]* It was Dimming Dry Goods. *[softly curious]* Just after full dark, I heard a little counter bell ring from across the street. Ring ring. Just the sort of polite sound when it still believes somebody might come to the desk if you ask nicely enough. *[trying not to overstate it]* Then nothing. Silence. No footsteps. No voice. No door. Just that one little bid for a witness. *[gentle warmth]* The signal's still weak in Dimming, I guess. But it's there. Still reaching. Still trying the line. This is The Dimming, 108.1 FM. Still here. Still on.

Break 1 - The Vesper Inventory

[practical and companionable] The Vesper kept things simple tonight. A can of buffalo chili and one of those little peaches-and-syrup cups with the peel-top lid that always feels like it's one bad tug from taking your thumb with it. *[dry amusement]* Luxury dining, if you don't ask follow-up questions. *[gently reflective]* No new editorial comments from the shelves. Just enough to get by, which I'm learning is its own kind of tenderness. *[softly thoughtful]* The place felt especially quiet after that little bell across the street. Like the Vesper knew this wasn't its night to speak up. Which is generous, honestly. In a town like this, taking turns might be the closest thing to manners.

Break 2 - The Trio

[following the sound in memory] Dimming Dry Goods now has a way of making itself known without showing much of itself at all. First the sign. And now this. Ring ring. Quick and soft. The sound of a counter somewhere in the dark asking whether the world is still in business. *[lower and intent]* I sat there listening so hard I'm surprised I didn't pull a muscle. *[softly imagining what she cannot see]* I kept picturing the inside. Not clearly. Just pieces. A little silver bell waiting under a hand that never quite comes into view. Dimming Dry Goods reached out with two quick notes and then thought better of it. *[quietly certain]* Some nights, I guess, that's all a place can manage.

Station Break standardized across all episodes

Break 3 - Nostalgia Bait

[following the sound somewhere older] That bell sounded like checking into one of those old roadside hotels where the office looks empty until somebody appears from a back room drying their hands on a rag. Or like a mechanic's shop where the same person fixes your car, answers the phone, and tells you not to worry till they've had a look. *[tender and faintly wistful]* It made me think of all the little

stopping places built for tired people. Maybe that's why it got to me. Dimming Dry Goods doesn't look like much from out here, but for just those two little rings, it sounded like a place that expected somebody to arrive. And maybe, fireflies, so do I...

Outro - embracing the dying light

[tender and quietly amused at the smallness of it] Time to close the night, fireflies. *[warm and reflective]* Funny, isn't it, what starts to feel like company. Not a conversation. Not even a word. Just a sound that says the desk is here, the room is here, the place hasn't given up on being found. *[lower and intimate]* Maybe that's enough for tonight. Radio waves. Flickering lights. A bell on a counter in a room too dark to see. *[soft certainty but slowly]* Until one day you realize you know the place by heart. This is Cass, your guttering lighthouse keeper, broadcasting from The Dimming, 108.1 FM. Goodnight, fireflies. The light's still on.

The Dimming, 108.1 FM

Night 13

Editing the Horizon

The Dimming, 108.1 FM

Night 14

Postage Due

The Dimming, 108.1 FM

Night 15

The Seal Break

The Dimming, 108.1 FM

Night 16

Welcome Basket with Roots

Night 17

The Strange Shelf

BREAKING THE SILENCE

[warmly welcoming] Good evening, fireflies. The purple tulip is still beside the Vesper, looking far more confident about living in Dimming than I feel most days. Some of you asked whether the store had anything to do with it. *[amused uncertainty]* I don't have an answer, but I did go inside again this afternoon to investigate the accused. That little chime above it remained perfectly still, and the old ice freezer by the window was still just a dead white box with a cloudy lid. *[settling into the memory]* Most of the store was dark. One fluorescent tube was awake over the back shelves, making a small island of light in all that dim. And right in the middle of it, the Vesper had set out dinner.

THE VESPER INVENTORY

[careful growing wonder] Not stocked dinner. Set out dinner. There's a difference. On one mostly bare shelf, three things had been placed with a little breathing room between them. Crackers. A jar of quince preserves. A jar of mustard pickles with one of those old labels that locals would never let change. It was the preserves that didn't quite belong. The label was cream colored and old fashioned, and in neat dark lettering it said quince preserves packed in the Lower Vestibule of the House. *[small thoughtful pause]* Nothing else Just the House. None of them were there yesterday. *[the thought arrives softly]* The sort of combination you could turn into supper if you stopped asking whether the parts belonged together.

THE TRIO

Across the street, the Trio stayed exactly as I left it. Monk's kept its boards and its silence. Dimming Dry Goods offered no bell, no light, no helpful little demonstration of commerce from beyond the grave. The post office windows held only my reflection and the Vesper glow behind me. *[calm acceptance]* Even the fog was ordinary by Dimming standards. Thick enough to erase the road after a while, thin enough to leave the three storefronts sitting there like a memory somebody hadn't finished packing away. Nothing moved. Nothing called. Tonight, that didn't feel like a disappointment. *[small honest warmth]* Maybe because for once the quiet didn't feel empty. It felt like the rest of town was giving the Vesper room to speak.

NOSTALGIA BAIT

[remembering] Standing there with those three strange jars and boxes, I remembered something I haven't thought about in a long time. Growing up, there were nights when dinner was what we had that could be persuaded to belong together. A can from the back of the cabinet. Crackers from a sleeve that had somehow survived the week. Old jelly. *[warm but unsentimental]* It wasn't a recipe. It was an agreement. This is enough, and we can make a meal out of enough. *[tired]* I'd forgotten those dinners. Or I thought I had. Then the Vesper put crackers, preserves, and pickles together under one lonely light, and the whole feeling came back before the details did. Familiar doesn't always mean pleasant, fireflies. Sometimes it just means your hands already know what to do.

EMBRACING THE DYING LIGHT

[thoughtful] Today didn't feel random. Random gives you three jars of mayonnaise and a novelty soda. This felt considered. Shelf stable. Edible together. *[careful with the conclusion]* I'm not saying the Vesper knows me. I'm not saying it planted the tulip. I'm saying I'm starting to wonder whether it's been provisioning me. Not rescuing me. Not answering me. Just noticing what might keep me going and placing it where I'll find it. *[softly moved despite herself]* That's a smaller idea than kindness, maybe. But tonight, it feels almost as warm. This is Cass, your flickering (that's right, tonight's dinner has me flickering not guttering) lighthouse keeper, broadcasting from The Dimming, 108.1 FM. Goodnight, fireflies. And remember, the light's still on.

Night 18

Music for an Empty Diner

BREAKING THE SILENCE

[warmly welcoming] Good evening, fireflies. Dinner tonight is chicken and rice soup, a packet of oyster crackers, and one of those little plastic cups of applesauce that always makes you feel as if someone has packed your lunch for a field trip you don't remember agreeing to. *[small amused warmth]* Nothing from an impossible vestibule. Nothing with a label that requires a map, a librarian, or an apology. Just food. I'm trying not to take that personally. The fog came and went in its usual indecisive way this afternoon, sometimes leaving the Trio clear across the street and sometimes reducing them to three darker shapes inside the gray. It was during one of the clearer stretches that Monk's made a sound.

THE VESPER INVENTORY

[quietly appreciative] The Vesper's shelves had gone back to being mostly ordinary today. The soup was sitting by itself near the register, with the crackers and applesauce close enough that I'm still counting it as another suggested meal. Less theatrical than yesterday's arrangement, but I'm beginning to recognize the store's grammar. When things appear together, I'm supposed to consider the possibility that they belong together. *[dry amusement]* This may be the closest Dimming has come to issuing instructions. I heated the soup, carried the bowl to my usual place near the front window, and had just opened the crackers when static scraped across the street.

THE TRIO

[careful listening] It came from Monk's. I'm sure of that much. One sharp burst at first, like an old radio being switched on after years of dust had settled inside it, followed by a lower hiss that lasted long enough for me to put down the spoon and step outside. The boards were still in place. The door was still shut. No light appeared behind the windows. But somewhere inside, near where I imagine the counter or one of the booths might be, the static gathered itself around a few seconds of music. *[trying to remember]* A slow electric guitar. Maybe a piano beneath it. Something bluesy and lonely, carrying more empty road than melody. Then a man's voice reached the beginning of a word and the whole thing folded back into static. Five seconds, maybe six. Not enough to identify. Barely enough to call a song. Then silence. *[softly unsettled]* I stood there waiting for it to start again, but Monk's had already returned to being boarded wood, dark glass, and every question I've ever asked it.

NOSTALGIA BAIT

[remembering with surprise] I knew that piece of music. Or some part of me did. I couldn't remember the singer, or the song title. I just know it was from one of my dad's favorite records. One of those records he played often enough that the songs became part of the house without anyone formally introducing them. *[softly searching]* That bluesy, lonely rock sound used to come through the speakers while he was doing something ordinary. Washing dishes. Looking through mail. Cooking dinner after a long day. It was just his music, which meant it belonged to the background of my childhood as

completely as the refrigerator running or a floorboard complaining in the hallway. *[quiet ache]* But hearing those few seconds from inside Monk's made me miss a song I still can't name. It's strange how memory can recognize something without being willing to explain itself.

EMBRACING THE DYING LIGHT

[thoughtful] I've been looking at Monk's as a locked room. A diner I can't enter. Another building in Dimming that refuses to perform its original purpose in any useful way. But a diner isn't only a kitchen and a counter, is it? Where somebody spent the last of their change playing the same jukebox selection until everyone else threatened mutiny. *[careful wonder]* Maybe Monk's isn't trying to open. Maybe it's trying to remember what used to fill it. Not people but the shape they left behind. Their favorite songs. Their regular booth. Their usual. Today it remembered five seconds of music, and somehow those five seconds found something in me that remembered back. *[gentle uncertainty]* I still don't know the song. I don't know whether hearing it there means anything. But I've been humming a piece of it all evening, or at least humming around the place where the piece should be. This is Cass, your faintly humming lighthouse keeper, broadcasting from The Dimming, 108.1 FM. Goodnight, fireflies. And remember, the light's still on.

Night 19

The Name in the Glass

BREAKING THE SILENCE

[quiet after the storm] Good evening, Dimming. This is Cass, broadcasting on 108.1 FM after actual weather. Not fog shifting slightly to the left. Not mist with ambition. *[small pause]* A thunderstorm. The sky darkened around noon, thunder rolled over the rooftops, and rain erased the station windows. The fog did not leave or reveal a road out. Dimming is exactly as difficult to see beyond as it was yesterday. It is simply cleaner in a few specific places. *[faint amusement]* I spent most of the storm trying to secure a tarp over the van, which has several disagreements with the concept of waterproofing. While I was losing that argument, the storm was working across the street. By the time the thunder moved on, the boards had come off the front window of Dimming Dry Goods, finally introducing itself.

THE VESPER INVENTORY

[measured curiosity] Before the rain started, I stopped at the Vesper. One new item waited for me: a small jar labeled Manderley Blueberry Preserves. The label was just a black silhouette of a large house behind narrow trees. *[dryly]* I know enough about large houses in books to distrust them when they become silhouettes. I left the jar where it was. The rest of the Vesper looked ordinary by Dimming standards, but with slightly more stock? Cans. Crackers. Instant soup. The dead ice freezer still dead. When the first thunder sounded, I nearly dropped my selections. Then the lights flickered and rain struck the roof all at once. On my way out, I glanced back at the preserves. The house on the label had nearly disappeared in the dark. It looked less like food and more like a warning designed for a pantry shelf.

THE TRIO

[measured recollection] During the storm, the boards protecting Dimming Dry Goods bowed outward, tore loose at one end, and dropped onto the sidewalk. One after another. The storm did not rip them away at once. It worked at them patiently until the nails surrendered. *[small pause]* Each fell almost neatly, as though the storm were taking them down rather than tearing them off. When the last one dropped, rain struck the window behind it. Brown water streamed across years of dirt, and the painted letters slowly appeared. DIMMING DRY GOODS. Faded cream outlined in red. *[quiet wonder]* The storm did not reveal anything new. It restored something that had stopped being visible. Saying hello now that its name has returned to the street.

NOSTALGIA BAIT

[warm remembrance] There was an old five-and-dime in my hometown, already passed its heyday. The floor tiles were worn pale, the shelves leaned, and lights flickered. *[fondly]* The only place where you could find the small things a life and a home needed. *[small pause]* Part store, part message board, and part emergency supply closet. They carried catalog orders, offered layaway, and sometimes extended credit because the person behind the counter knew you would pay when you could. *[more quietly]* Then it closed. Everyone drove farther for the same things and pretended the distance changed nothing.

Looking through the washed window of Dimming Dry Goods, I remembered how much of a community can be held together by a place nobody notices until it is gone.

EMBRACING THE DYING LIGHT

[quiet thoughtful] There is a difference between remembering something privately and putting its name back into public view. A name in a box is a fact. A name in a window is a claim. It says this place was here. It says this place had a purpose. *[soft break]* It says people once knew where to come when they needed thread, nails, school paper, or a little more time to pay. *[softly]* The storm did not bring the store back. Forgetting often starts quietly. The people who knew the name leave, and the building becomes the old store, then the empty store, then the place that used to be something. Today, the storm interrupted that process. Maybe restoration begins when a place is noticed. This is Cass, your flickering lighthouse keeper, broadcasting from Dimming on 108.1 FM. Sleep well, wherever the signal finds you. And remember, the light's still on.

Night 20

General Delivery

BREAKING THE SILENCE

Good evening, night people. This is Cass, broadcasting from Dimming, Michigan, where the storm has moved on and left the whole town looking rinsed, bruised, and slightly embarrassed about whatever it did after dark. Dimming Dry Goods still has its name in the glass. The fallen boards are scattered along the sidewalk like the building shrugged them off in its sleep. Nothing inside has moved. Nothing has lit up. But the name is there, and once you know what a place calls itself, it gets harder to pretend it's only scenery. *[small pause]* Sometime after the storm, something else changed. Across the intersection, the post office door is open.

THE VESPER INVENTORY

The Vesper had nothing new for me tonight, which felt almost considerate. I made dinner out of crackers and the Manderley blueberry preserves from yesterday. Toast would've made it breakfast. Crackers made it an arrangement. The label still shows that big house above the sea, all those windows staring outward like they're waiting for somebody to come home and apologize. I put the jar back on the shelf when I was done. There's enough left for tomorrow. *[thoughtful]* I'm learning that abundance and certainty aren't the same thing. Sometimes having enough just means you can postpone wondering what happens after it's gone.

THE TRIO

The storm didn't pull the boards from the post office. I know because the ones that covered the front door are stacked neatly against the wall, nails still jutting from them. The door itself stood open about three inches, as though someone had stepped inside and forgotten to close it. I pushed it wider. No bell. No footsteps. No sudden sorting of invisible mail. Just the lobby I'd seen through the glass: brass boxes, a narrow counter, the old scale sitting motionless beneath a film of dust. *[quiet wonder]* For the first time, Dimming let me in just a little deeper.

NOSTALGIA BAIT

Post offices used to be rooms where distance became manageable. You carried in a name and an address, and somebody agreed that was enough information to find a person somewhere beyond the horizon. This one seemed bare. I checked all around, and thanks to my grandmother being the county clerk, trust me I knew where to look. *[dry amusement]* There's only an empty lobby and a doorway that decided, sometime after the storm, to stop being a wall. Still, standing there felt different from looking through the window. Looking is curiosity. Crossing a threshold is participation.

EMBRACING THE DYING LIGHT

I sat for a while on the little wooden bench beneath the boxes and listened to rainwater ticking from the eaves. No message arrived. No slot opened. The scale didn't move. *[soft reflection]* General delivery is for people who don't have a permanent address. The post office holds their mail until they come asking for it. Maybe that's why the phrase stayed with me tonight. A place can hold something for you before it knows where you belong. Maybe belonging starts that small. An open door. An empty bench. A room willing to let you wait. This is Cass, your watchful lighthouse keeper, broadcasting from Dimming on 108.1 FM. Sleep well, wherever the signal finds you. And remember, the light's still on.

Night 21

Places People Remember

BREAKING THE SILENCE

Good evening, fireflies. This is Cass, broadcasting from Dimming, where yesterday a post office opened its door and today acted like that was perfectly ordinary. The door literally, and I think also figuratively, opened. The brass boxes are still quiet. The scale has not weighed anything, judged anything, or requested a feather to determine my worth. Across the street, Dimming Dry Goods still has its name in the glass, and Monk's remains boarded up and professionally unhelpful. Dimming let me in, then spent the whole day pretending it hadn't. But the town wasn't entirely finished with me. This morning, the Vesper didn't offer another mystery. *[amused]* It offered dinner.

THE VESPER INVENTORY

On the counter, someone had placed a can of spiced lentils from the Bas-Lag Cooperative Cannery beside a box of rye crackers from the Orsinian State Breadworks. Together. Labels facing forward. The lentils had enough municipal seals to suggest dinner required three permits and a minor revolution. The crackers looked approved by a committee that distrusted pleasure. *[small amused pause]* They were excellent together. This was selection. Composition. A meal with a beginning and an end. Planning is a small kind of care. The Vesper didn't give me ingredients tonight. It made a recommendation.

THE TRIO

The Trio stayed quiet today. Monk's gave me no static, no guitar, not even the electrical cough of an appliance considering consciousness. Dimming Dry Goods stood behind rain-cleaned glass with the lettering visible and the door still shut. The post office door is still open, but I didn't cross the lobby again. Nothing inside had changed. The smell of brass. Narrow counter. Bench. Yesterday, that room felt like an invitation. Today, it felt more like a held place at the table.. Dimming may not know how to explain itself, but it is feeling more and more like an invitation. Should that worry me?.

NOSTALGIA BAIT

Where I grew up, the second full weekend in March belonged to the World's Largest Rattlesnake Roundup. That sounds invented almost everywhere else. At home, it was just the calendar. There was a parade, a cook-off, booths, a dance, snake handlers, and a scholarship pageant called Miss Snake Charmer, because ordinary pageantry had not been asked to carry enough venom. *[fondly incredulous]* Every town has one thing that sounds impossible elsewhere and completely ordinary at home. *[joking]* Like a festival to worship a serpent. Sometimes belonging is knowing which strange tradition everybody else is talking about.

EMBRACING THE DYING LIGHT

A few of your messages tonight have mentioned places you hadn't thought about in years. Not landmarks. Annual habits. Suppers. Parades. Festivals built around things no reasonable committee would have selected sober. You remember the name, and then the street comes back with it. Dimming seems to be stirring those names loose. Quietly. Maybe a town is an arrangement like that. People, buildings, meals, and rituals placed together until they begin to belong. I still don't know what Dimming gathered for every year. But I think it had something. This is Cass, your well-fed lighthouse keeper at 108.1 FM. And remember, the light's still on.

Night 22

From Those Away

BREAKING THE SILENCE

Good evening, fireflies. This is Cass, broadcasting from Dimming, where the fog spent most of today pressed against the windows like it was trying to read over my shoulder. The post office door is still open three inches. I crossed the lobby again this afternoon, which I am choosing to call investigation rather than a rapidly developing relationship with municipal trespassing. The brass boxes were quiet. And something had appeared on the narrow counter. Not a letter for me. Not a package. A shallow wooden sorting tray holding a small stack of old postcards. On the front, in faded black letters, someone had written: FROM THOSE AWAY.

THE VESPER INVENTORY

The Vesper provides. A can of vegetable soup, a sleeve of saltines, and one of those little plastic cups of peaches that always contains exactly four more spoonfuls than you expect. No impossible manufacturers. No government seals from countries that never existed. No evidence that dinner had been assembled by a thoughtful committee. *[small pause]* After yesterday, the ordinariness felt deliberate too. Like the Vesper gets that the post office had already given me enough to digest. I ate at the counter while the fog turned the windows into pale mirrors. Sometimes care is a prepared meal. Sometimes it is knowing not to add another mystery.

THE TRIO

Monk's stayed silent, and Dimming Dry Goods remained closed behind its newly recovered name. The post office had more to say. There were nine postcards in the tray, all yellowed at the edges and addressed simply to Dimming. Different years. Different cities. I only read two. One said, "Tell Ruth the lilacs took, but they don't smell the same here." Another said, "Still haven't found a place that fries potatoes like Monk's. Maybe the sound was half the flavor." *[quiet pause]* That was all. No explanation. No surnames I recognized. Just two people writing back to a town as though the town itself might pass the message along. Like Macondo before the forgetting, Dimming appears to have needed its memories labeled.

NOSTALGIA BAIT

Families are stories. Someone mentions a person you never met, then everybody else supplies a porch, a car, a bad haircut, and the exact thing they always brought to Thanksgiving. By the end, you're connected, and you carry a little bit of their story with you, even if it doesn't make you family. I've found myself on the outside looking in on other families, other stories. Postcards are smaller than family stories, but they work the same way. A picture on one side. A few sentences on the other. Just enough proof that somebody stood somewhere else and thought about home. Not necessarily because they wanted to return. But missing a place and wanting it back are different things.

EMBRACING THE DYING LIGHT

Some of you sent stories tonight about postcards your families kept in drawers, recipe boxes, and old suitcases. Messages from people who moved away but continued writing as if distance were temporary. The cards in Dimming weren't invitations home. At least, I don't think they were. They felt more like evidence. Proof that leaving and forgetting are not the same act. A town can lose its people without losing all its witnesses. Somewhere beyond this fog, people carried Dimming with them. And somehow, the post office remembered that they remembered. This is Cass, your fogbound lighthouse keeper at 108.1 FM. And remember, the light's still on.

Night 23

Peas in the Pod

BREAKING THE SILENCE

[quiet thoughtful] Good evening, fireflies. This is Cass, broadcasting from Dimming, where the fog has settled back into its usual habits. Not gone. Not heavier. Just resting against the windows like it pays rent. The post office door is still open three inches and all nine postcards are exactly where I left them. Monk's is boarded. Dimming Dry Goods is closed. Nothing has moved, rung, fallen, flickered, or played five seconds of lonely guitar. *[small pause]* But this morning, the Vesper had peas. Fresh peas. Still in their pods, tucked into a brown paper sack with the top folded over twice. They were cool when I picked them up. Not refrigerator cold. Morning cold. The kind that doesn't last.

THE VESPER INVENTORY

The rest of the inventory was less dramatic. Saltines. A can of sliced potatoes. One small tin of powdered butter labeled "Appalachian Holler Contingency", which feels unnecessarily specific for shelf-stable dairy. But the peas were the whole event. The pods were firm and bright green, with little curls of vine still clinging to two of them. I opened one right there in the aisle. *[soft surprise]* It snapped. I had forgotten fresh vegetables could make a sound like that. Inside were six peas lined up in their pod, round and shining and very sure of themselves. I ate one raw. Sweet at first, then green enough to remind you it had recently been part of a plant. Canned food can survive almost anything. Fresh food arrives with a deadline.

THE TRIO

I checked the rest of town because apparently that's who I am now. At the post office, the door still stood open its careful three inches, which I should admit is probably because I couldn't get the door closed over the water warped floor boards. No muddy footprints leading away from the Vesper. No abandoned garden cart in the road. *[dry amusement]* I even looked behind the building for pea vines, which is not a sentence I expected to say when I started broadcasting. Maybe I shouldn't ask Dimming how it provides. It just does. Today it was something that wouldn't have waited very long.

NOSTALGIA BAIT

My family kept a garden. Most years, it wasn't a hobby. It was necessity. Tomatoes, peppers, squash, and peas. Sometimes cabbage. Sometimes watermelon, if somebody was feeling optimistic about the summer. *[fondly]* But gardens have strange arithmetic. You plant because you need more food, and then every squash plant becomes an industrial operation. When that happened, you shared. Tomatoes went to somebody you knew. Peppers appeared on a neighbor's porch. Cucumbers came back over a fence. Nobody kept track. Bradbury's Green Town understood that seasons leave evidence behind.

EMBRACING THE DYING LIGHT

Tonight's broadcast is coming to a close, my fellow nomads. Am I really a nomad, still? Over three weeks here, and that's usually when my wanderlust gets a little louder. *[quiet wonder]* I'm a broken record, but somebody planted those peas. Something watered them. They grew through days I didn't see, somewhere beyond a fog that refuses to show me what's on the other side. Or did the Vesper, or Dimming, just *[soft break]* manifest them? *[soft realization]* Canned peas wait for somebody. Fresh peas expect them. This is Cass, your cautiously cultivated lighthouse keeper, signing off from Dimming. Sleep well, fireflies. And remember, the light's still on.

Night 24

The Creamery Box

BREAKING THE SILENCE

Good evening, fireflies. This is Cass, broadcasting from Dimming. The fog is pressed close to the windows again tonight, not thicker exactly, just committed. On my rounds, I'm drawn to the Post Office every day, maybe just for the familiarity. Today, one of the post office boxes had a key in it. *[quiet wonder]* An old brass key, already seated in the lock, another invitation that I know wasn't there before. I haven't turned it yet. *[pause]* Another mystery, and maybe just a little more of Dimming's story asking to be discovered.

THE VESPER INVENTORY

The Vesper was practical tonight. One can of tomato soup, more crackers (seemingly from an endless supply), and a little cup of applesauce. Nothing fresh. Nothing impossible. Nothing had shifted since yesterday. After the peas, I appreciated the restraint. *[lightly]* Tomato soup is not a mystery. It is barely even a decision. You heat it until the room smells like you remembered to take care of yourself. I ate at the counter and thanked my provider out loud for the continued offerings. There are meals that arrive as answers, fireflies, and meals that simply arrive on time. Tonight, on time was enough.

THE TRIO

I couldn't resist the mystery for very long. So I crossed to the Post Office and sat beneath the boxes for a while before I touched the key. *[small pause]* It turned easily. The brass door opened on one folded letter. It was from Dimming Co-op Creamery's last customer, thanking them for delivering cold milk to the same family for generations, even after theirs became the final stop on the route. That was all. No warning. No secret. Just gratitude for a promise kept longer than it was profitable. *[gentle realization]* A town isn't only its buildings. It's the routes between them.

NOSTALGIA BAIT

My Great Depression hardened grandparents kept old milk bottles in a corner of their basement long after the milkman stopped coming. Thick and cloudy, with no branding, and when I asked my grandmother what they were, she told me about waking up to fresh, cold milk from just down the road sitting on the doorstep. *[fondly]* She said when the bottles didn't arrive, they worried about the milkman, not the missing dairy. In Thornton Wilder's Grover's Corners, the milkman belongs to the morning so completely that his route feels like part of the sunrise. Maybe that's one way you know a place is a community.

EMBRACING THE DYING LIGHT

I put the letter back inside the creamery box, closed the little brass door, left the key in the lock exactly where I found it. I imagined a truck moving through these roads before dawn, carrying glass bottles from

farms to houses I'll never see. *[softly]* Delivery is a kind of remembering done on schedule. Maybe remembering Dimming works the same way. You show up. You notice what's missing, the break of what's expected. This is Cass, your steady lighthouse keeper, broadcasting from The Dimming, 108.1 FM. Goodnight, fireflies. And remember, the light's still on.

Night 25

The Door Behind the Store

BREAKING THE SILENCE

[soft gathering curiosity] Good evening, fireflies. You're listening to The Dimming, 108.1 FM, and tonight the fog is behaving itself, which means I had enough visibility to make a questionable decision with confidence. I walked behind Dimming General, mostly to see whether the storm had loosened anything else, and found a narrow wooden service door standing open in a section of brick wall I would've sworn was solid yesterday. No, I wasn't trespassing. *[dry amusement]* I prefer unauthorized historical research.

THE VESPER INVENTORY

[quietly practical] Tonight's Vesper inventory was a can of white bean soup, surprisingly no crackers but a microwaveable packet of rice and quinoa, and pears in syrup. Nothing fresh. Nothing imported from a city with impossible zoning laws. I heated the soup and rice, opened the pears, and ate while looking through the Vesper window at the side of Dimming General. The door wasn't visible from there, but knowing it existed changed the shape of the building in my head. That door wasn't there before, *[curious]* but the mystery always has been.

THE TRIO

[careful wonder] I went through the door. The room beyond was small and badly damaged. One wall had water stains from floor to ceiling. Shelves had collapsed inward, leaving bent brackets, gray boards, and a drift of ruined paper labels. A second door probably led into the sales floor, but that will require additional courage, *[softly]* or foolishness. I found no useful stock. Just the back room of a store that had once needed one. *[soft realization]* Dimming General didn't give me supplies tonight but I swear it gave me permission to enter.

NOSTALGIA BAIT

[warmly reflective] Back rooms used to carry half the life of a small-town store. Special orders waited there. Deliveries came through the service entrance, whether it was feed, flour, paint, or somebody's new color TV. The front counter was what the town saw. The back room was how the town functioned. Narnia gets a wardrobe. Little towns get a back door and someone willing to try the handle. Maybe that's why the room felt sad without feeling empty. The shape of usefulness remained. You could still tell where people had lifted, stacked, waited, and *[softly]* made do.

EMBRACING THE DYING LIGHT

[soft steady conviction] Dimming General feels different now. Yesterday it was a name in glass. Tonight it has depth. Damage. A room behind the room. Abandoned places get flattened by distance. You stop imagining their hallways, their work, the ordinary people who knew which door stuck in winter. *[gentle]*

certainty] Going inside made the loss more specific. Just reminded me of the emptiness of leaving another home, back when we had to move every year. It also made the building real. This is Cass, your nosy lighthouse keeper, signing off from The Dimming, 108.1 FM. And remember, the light's still on.

Night 26

One Song from Monk's

BREAKING THE SILENCE

[soft attentive wonder] Good evening, fireflies. You're listening to The Dimming, 108.1 FM. The fog held its usual distance today, and I thought the town might leave me alone for the night. Then, a little after dusk, Monk's gave one sharp burst of static and then a song. Not the broken handful of music from before. This time, the first guitar note arrived clean, followed by a slow drumbeat and a man's voice from somewhere behind those boards. *[quiet surprise]* Then the song kept going.

THE VESPER INVENTORY

[quietly amused] Tonight's Vesper inventory was a can of chili, a small bag of corn chips, and one cold bottle of black cherry soda from Bellona Bottling Works. The soda tasted ordinary, which may be the least ordinary thing about anything labeled as coming from Bellona. I carried dinner to the front window and listened from across the street. The street stayed quiet. Nothing competed for attention. *[softly]* Just provided a soundtrack to accompany the mystery.

THE TRIO

[careful concentration] The song lasted a little over three minutes. Slow electric guitar, steady piano, and a low male voice rough enough to sound lived in. I couldn't catch every word through the boards, but it was something about leaving, coming back, and discovering the road remembered you differently. No voice afterward. No station identification. Just the final chord fading out and one soft click before Monk's went quiet again. *[thoughtful]* The first time Monk's made music, it proved it could. Maybe just for me.

NOSTALGIA BAIT

[warmly reflective] In a small town, one song could belong to an entire Friday night. The game ended, Main Street filled again, and everyone crowded into the diner to occupy the same booths. Teenagers claimed tables by habit. Somebody always reached the jukebox first. Somebody else complained about the selection and sang along anyway. I finally remembered why this one kept tugging at me. My dad used to pull Bob Seger records out of the cabinet so often it should've been obvious from the first note. *[softly]* Sometimes recognition takes the long way around.

EMBRACING THE DYING LIGHT

[soft lingering warmth] Places remember through repetition, creating a kind of muscle memory. A stool worn smooth. A door pulled open by the same hand. A record selected until the machine could've found it in the dark. Tonight, Monk's felt like a crowded room briefly remembering itself. And for a few minutes, it reminded me of my dad reaching for the same album like it had never failed him before. *[homesick]* This is Cass, your listening lighthouse keeper, signing off from The Dimming, 108.1 FM.

The Dimming, 108.1 FM

And remember, the light's still on.

Night 27

Tolliver Wakefield's Journal

BREAKING THE SILENCE

[Warmly] Good evening, fireflies. This is Cass, broadcasting from Dimming. The fog pressed closer today, softening the Trio until the buildings looked penciled in. I went back to the Post Office before dark. The postcards and creamery box were where I left them. The scale remained balanced. But on the sorting counter sat a narrow black journal that wasn't there yesterday. *[careful wonder]* TOLLIVER WAKEFIELD was written inside the cover in a hand so deliberate it almost counted as architecture. Beneath it: Postmaster, Dimming. Tonight, the town assigned me homework.

THE VESPER INVENTORY

[grateful] Dinner tonight was more bean soup, saltines, and a little cup of pears. No impossible cannery, no vanished kingdom, no label warning me about a red moon. Just food with ingredients I recognized and expiration dates I chose not to study. *[soft appreciation]* I thanked the Vesper anyway. Some evenings, kindness is a meal. Other evenings, kindness is not asking you to solve anything while you eat it.

THE TRIO

Tolliver didn't keep a diary so much as a ledger of small disappearances. March seventeenth, nineteen sixty eight: "Creamery route reduced to Thursdays. Three families will collect bottles here." January twelfth, nineteen eighty two: "No outgoing sack today. A first." *[the pattern settling in]* None of it sounded like the day a town died. It sounded like doing more with less until less became normal. I read several more entries, then closed the journal before the back half. Not from fear. I finally understood I was reading a post-mortem.

NOSTALGIA BAIT

[vulnerable] I kept journals for years. My little escape. They were all in the house when it burned. At first, I mourned the loss. Later, I tried to reminisce. *[quiet ache]* What stories did I forget to remember? In Piranesi, the man inside the House keeps journals because memory can change a room when no record argues back. I used to think writing preserved a life. Now I think it preserves the doors into that life. Mine are gone, and some rooms may be gone with them. Tolliver's ordinary notes survived long enough to show that Dimming didn't disappear in one night. It was slowly edited down.

EMBRACING THE DYING LIGHT

[steadying herself] Your messages tonight mention mills cutting shifts, schools consolidating, clinics shortening hours, and stores closing early before closing for good. Different towns, same calculus. A record says this happened here, to these people, and it mattered. *[warm resolve]* I'll return the journal in the Post Office where it belongs. I lost my pages, fireflies, but I can help keep his from disappearing.

This is Cass, your watchful lighthouse keeper, broadcasting at 108.1 FM from Dimming, where somebody wrote down the quiet parts. Sleep well, wherever the road found you. And remember, the light's still on.

Night 28

The Unseen Farm

INTRO — BREAKING THE SILENCE

[radio host warmth] Good evening, fireflies. This is Cass, broadcasting from Dimming, where the fog has gone back to minding its own business. It still holds the road's edges and makes distance feel negotiable, but tonight it hasn't pressed closer. Across the street, Tolliver Wakefield's journal rests closed on the Post Office counter. No new entry. No turning pages. Just a black cover keeping its counsel. After reading how a town can disappear one ordinary service at a time, I expected emptiness. Instead, the Vesper left evidence that somewhere beyond sight, something may still be doing its chores.

BREAK 1 — THE VESPER INVENTORY

[quietly astounded] Tonight's Vesper inventory is six brown eggs in a paper carton, saltines, and another little cup of pears. The eggs are cool, clean, and fresh enough that I checked twice for tricks. The carton says HEMPSTOCK FARM in faded green ink. No address. And I don't remember the name from Postmaster Wakefield's journal. Growing up, I was the youngest, so gathering the eggs from under over-protective hens was my job, which makes me an expert in the path these must have taken to arrive in my hands. I'll still float them to be sure, but their existence alone makes them feel miraculous.

BREAK 2 — THE TRIO

[watching with curiosity] The Trio stayed quiet tonight. Monk's gave me no music. Dimming Dry Goods kept its door shut. And I don't feel called to return to the post office and confer with Tolliver about the eggs. Still, their history pours outward now. Routes. Customers. Bottles. Families. Work performed before anyone else woke. But the creamery, the journal, now an ominously named farm, the details come slowly, barely connected. Somehow, Dimming keeps showing me itself through what used to arrive.

BREAK 3 — NOSTALGIA BAIT

[fondly] A few of you wrote about family farms tonight. Working farms. Cold mornings, muddy boots, feed buckets, stubborn gates, and smells that are more easily remembered than described. Some of you also gathered eggs before school. Some sold fruit beside the road or returned bottles for spending money. Small jobs, small money, but not small lessons. Communities can depend on labor most people never witness. Where folks rarely notice how things make it to market until they aren't there. Where I'm from, even a mysterious farm would still be a neighbor.

OUTRO — EMBRACING THE DYING LIGHT

[soft and sincere] Tonight, fireflies, Dimming gave us six small parcels that arrived without fanfare, as eggs always do. No one is astounded by a hen and an egg, but here I am, continually dumbfounded. I don't know where Hempstock Farm is, or whether any road beyond the fog could reach it. But somebody, or something, packed this carton of liquid gold. For now, that's enough company. But if only

they left a hot plate and a pot so I could boil them. I guess even the Vesper has its limits. Anyway, this is Cass, broadcasting from The Dimming. And remember, the light's still on.

Night 29

The Routes Dimming Lost

INTRO — BREAKING THE SILENCE

[warmly] Good evening, fireflies. This is Cass, broadcasting from Dimming. The fog has settled back into its usual distance tonight, leaving the Trio sharp enough to look deliberate. Tolliver Wakefield's journal is still closed on the Post Office counter. But nearby, something novel: a folded road map, yellowed at the creases and stamped DIMMING RURAL ROUTES. I haven't opened it yet. Sometimes a town hands you a mystery. Sometimes it hands you directions and waits to see whether that feels more dangerous.

BREAK 1 — THE VESPER INVENTORY

[softly] The Vesper was practical tonight: a tin of potato soup, no crackers tonight of all nights, and one dented can of green beans. No impossible labels. No fictional canneries. Just food from the same world I knew. I ate with the folded map beside my elbow, trying not to turn dinner into an interrogation. The soup was bland but warm. The green beans had no texture. Whoever stocks the Vesper understands that curiosity burns calories, and some answers are better approached with something in your stomach.

BREAK 2 — THE TRIO

The map covers more country than I expected for Dimming. Thin red lines leave the main drag and branch into roads I can't verify: Calder Cutoff, Sturgeon Spur, Deschain Road. Small squares mark farms, schoolhouses, and delivery boxes. Most are crossed through in pencil. One isn't. Hempstock Farm sits near the northern edge, connected to Dimming by a route that vanishes beneath a water stain. Tolliver's handwriting fills the margins with dates and mileage, but no explanations. The map doesn't prove these places remain. It only proves they were once expected. Every morning, someone left this Post Office trusting the road.

BREAK 3 — NOSTALGIA BAIT

[reminiscing] Paper maps used to make every trip feel official. One summer we loaded into my dad's van and ventured to Ozarkia, the jungle of northwest Arkansas. My job was to trace our route with a highlighter, tracking every stop. Towns appeared before you reached them: a printed name, a dot, maybe a highway number. You could imagine the diner, the gas station, the houses behind the trees. Maps made places feel patient. Looking at Dimming's old routes, I keep thinking a town disappears twice: when the road stops bringing people, and when nobody remembers where it went.

OUTRO — EMBRACING THE DYING LIGHT

[distant] I folded the map along its old seams and placed it beneath Tolliver's journal. I didn't try to follow any routes tonight. The fog beyond the Trio remains black and unhelpful, and a line on paper isn't the same as a road under your feet. Still, Dimming feels larger now. Not crowded. Just extended, like a

sentence with missing words. Somewhere beyond sight, Hempstock Farm may still be doing its chores. Somewhere else, an empty mailbox may be waiting for a carrier who finished the route decades ago. This is Cass, from Dimming. Stay close, lighthouse keepers. And remember, the light's still on.

Night 30

What Do You Want for Dinner?

BREAKING THE SILENCE

[warmly] Good evening, fireflies. This is Cass, broadcasting from Dimming. The fog is keeping its usual distance, and the Trio looks exactly as I left it: Tolliver Wakefield's journal closed, the rural-route map folded beneath it. Tonight's change happened at the Vesper. The counter had been cleared, then divided into two separate groups of groceries with a clean strip of laminate between them. Not a meal. Not a puzzle. Two possibilities. For the first time, Dimming wasn't asking whether I would eat. It was asking what I wanted.

THE VESPER INVENTORY

[considering] On the left: three potatoes, a yellow onion, half a rutabaga, and a small bottle of sunflower oil. Familiar ingredients, local enough to feel like they belonged nearby. On the right: dried chickpeas, preserved lemon, smoked paprika, and couscous in a box printed with a script I couldn't place. Both groups could become dinner. I chose the left and roasted the vegetables in my thrifted and battered toaster oven, saving the other path for another night. Being provided for is comforting. Being offered a preference is different. Preference assumes there will be a tomorrow.

THE TRIO

[dryly] The Trio stayed quiet. No song from Monk's, no movement behind Dimming General, and nothing new in the Post Office. A few of you have started asking practical questions: whether houses remain beyond the block, whether the routes reach somewhere safe, whether a person could visit, and where they would sleep. That feels different from curiosity. Curiosity looks through a window. Planning reaches for the door. I don't have answers yet. The map proves Dimming once had roads. It doesn't promise accommodations. Some woods between worlds are better understood before anyone steps into the pool.

NOSTALGIA BAIT

[reminiscing] I learned to cook pretty early, because life took a hard turn and we all had to start pitching in a little more. One parent in and out of the hospital meant the other was often there too. Some nights everyone was too tired to even ask what it was I had tried to prepare. Maybe that's why the options caught me. What do you want for dinner sounds ordinary until nobody asks it for a while. Food can keep you alive without knowing you. A choice suggests somebody noticed the difference between hunger and longing.

EMBRACING THE DYING LIGHT

[softly] The vegetables weren't elegant, but they were hot, salted, and mine by choice. The other ingredients are still grouped on the Vesper counter. I left them there. Maybe the offer remains open.

Maybe Dimming is learning me by watching what I choose and what I save. Across the street, the map stays folded beneath Tolliver's journal, and the fog keeps every farmhouse hypothetical. That's enough uncertainty for one evening. Home may begin with shelter and continue with routine. But sooner or later, home asks what you'd like and waits for the answer. This is Cass, from Dimming. Stay close, fireflies. And remember, the light's still on.

Night 31

One More Pole

BREAKING THE SILENCE

[warmly] Good evening, fireflies. This is Cass, broadcasting from Dimming. The fog moved today. Not far, and not for long. It pulled back from the road beyond the Vesper just enough to reveal one more utility pole past the last one I could see yesterday. Same weathered wood. Same narrow crossarm. Two black wires sagging from it before disappearing back into the white. Then the fog settled forward again, and the pole was gone. Not gone gone, presumably. Just returned to the growing list of things in Dimming I know exist without being allowed to see.

THE VESPER INVENTORY

[considering] The Vesper kept dinner uncomplicated: canned macaroni and cheese and a jar of mustard pickles. The macaroni was aggressively orange, which I found reassuring. There are limits to how uncanny a meal can feel when it comes with powdered cheese. The chickpeas and couscous from last night are still arranged together on the far end of the counter. Apparently, an unchosen future doesn't spoil immediately. I left them where they were and ate the macaroni cold from the can, daring the Vesper to tell me to actually cook again.

THE TRIO

[quietly] The old brick building of abandoned shops ignored me today. Monk's stayed boarded and dark. Nothing moved inside Dimming General. More dust from the Post Office. I checked the map, but one utility pole isn't much of a landmark. I could estimate a direction. Maybe even a distance. I couldn't prove which road it followed, whether the road remains intact, or what waits at the other end. And before anyone starts loading a car, no—the road did not open. Dimming showed me approximately forty more feet of uncertainty. I keep finding things, but nothing that I'm looking for.

NOSTALGIA BAIT

[reminiscing] I was snowed in once for two weeks in the mountains of North Carolina. That was the longest I had ever felt locked into one place. Snow covered the road, weighed down the branches, and turned every familiar hill into a blank white shape. Utility crews worked their way up the mountain, one damaged line at a time. The road was still under the snow, and eventually the plows would uncover it. I've been in Dimming for more than a month now. The fog doesn't give forecasts. Nobody announces a plow schedule. There's no promise that waiting and weather will eventually become the same thing as freedom.

EMBRACING THE DYING LIGHT

[softly] Still, utility poles aren't built to stand alone. They belong to lines. Lines imply another pole, then another, and eventually someplace the current was meant to reach. I don't know whether the road

beneath them reaches a farmhouse, another town, or forty more feet of fog. One more pole isn't proof of life. It may not even be progress in a useful direction. But yesterday, I thought the visible world ended just one pole closer. Today, Dimming admitted it continues. Maybe there are more beyond. Dimming is just showing them to me one utility pole at a time. This is Cass, from Dimming. Stay close, fireflies. And remember, the light's still on.

Night 32

Permission to Go Deeper

BREAKING THE SILENCE

[warmly] Good evening, fireflies. This is Cass, broadcasting from Dimming. The fog took back the extra utility pole today. The road beyond the Vesper ended where it used to, as if yesterday's additional forty feet had been a clerical error. But Dimming General opened farther. There's a warped wooden door beyond the stockroom that has refused to move every time I've tried it. No lock. No visible damage. Just a door that had decided the room behind it wasn't my business. This morning, it stood open. Maybe six inches. But six inches is enough to turn a wall into a question.

THE VESPER INVENTORY

[considering] The Vesper provided tomato soup and oyster crackers for dinner. Nothing fresh. Nothing arranged into a decision. Just one can, one sleeve, and the implication that I could manage without supervision. The chickpeas and couscous were gone from the counter. I don't know whether the Vesper put them away or withdrew the offer. Apparently, unchosen futures spoil eventually. Or at least get cleared before the next shift.

THE TRIO

[quietly] Monk's stayed boarded and dark. The Post Office offered no new mail, maps, or opinions about yesterday's disappearing pole. Dimming General, however, let me through. Beyond the warped door was another narrow storage room behind the storefront. Shelves held work gloves, lamp wicks, canning lids, twine, boxes of nails, and hand tools wrapped in oiled cloth. The things people buy because something has broken, winter is coming, or another trip into town would be foolish. Nothing there fixes the wagon or explains the fog. But Dimming General looked less like the remains of a business and more like somewhere a person might still use. I didn't take anything. Being allowed to look felt like enough.

NOSTALGIA BAIT

[reminiscing] I remember buying food and supplies on store credit once. Not a credit card. Actual store credit. The owner kept a handwritten account behind the counter, and when money ran short, groceries still went into the bag. Flour. Canned soup. Soap. Batteries. Whatever was needed until payday or work picked up again. Nobody called it charity. You signed your name, the amount went into the book, and everyone acted as though the future was reliable enough to settle the difference. The store wasn't only giving you something now. It was agreeing there would be a later. A later when you'd come back and make things even.

EMBRACING THE DYING LIGHT

[softly] Store credit is trust with a due date. Dimming General didn't ask me to sign anything or tell me what I could take. It just opened the door and showed me that usefulness continues beyond the rooms I

know. Maybe that's what permission looks like here. Not an invitation or an answer. Just one obstruction quietly removed. The road disappeared again today. I still don't know how to leave Dimming. But the town gave me somewhere else to go. Deeper isn't the same as forward. Tonight, though, it feels close enough. This is Cass, from Dimming. Stay close, fireflies. And remember, the light's still on.

Night 33

The Mug on the Counter

BREAKING THE SILENCE

[warmly] Good evening, fireflies. This is Cass, broadcasting from Dimming. There was a mug inside Monk's today. I saw it through the same narrow seam between the boards where the light flickered a few weeks ago. Plain white ceramic, dark rim, sitting on the counter beside one of the stools. No steam. No visible coffee. Nothing moved behind it. But I've looked through that gap before, and the counter was empty. The mug hadn't been abandoned. It had been placed.

THE VESPER INVENTORY

[considering] The Vesper kept dinner simple: instant mashed potatoes and a small can of green beans. No arrangement. No lesson. Just two foods that agreed to occupy the same plate without requiring a larger philosophy. The chickpeas and couscous did not return. Apparently, the Vesper has accepted that I made my choice by not making one.

THE TRIO

[quietly] The Post Office stayed quiet. Dimming General's warped door remained open, but nothing inside had changed. Monk's held my attention. The boards were still nailed across the windows and door, and the room beyond stayed dark except for gray light slipping through the cracks. The mug... was it meant for me? That's too large a question to draw from one empty mug. But finding is accidental. This felt arranged. Things are starting to feel *[pause]* arranged.

NOSTALGIA BAIT

[reminiscing] My grandpa used to take me to a diner called Al's. The name became a visual joke because the place was covered in owls. Ceramic owls, carved wooden owls, painted owls, owls on every stretch of wall and every high shelf that could hold one. You could spend an entire meal finding new ones above the booths and behind the counter. I don't even remember when it closed, just that it isn't there anymore. But now *[pause]* is Monk's going to be covered with its own visual joke? Little holy men displayed on every available surface? I don't know what I want the answer to be.

EMBRACING THE DYING LIGHT

[softly] There's a difference between being watched and being expected. Being watched means someone notices you're here. Being expected means a place has made room before you arrive. I'm not claiming Monk's made coffee or that anyone is standing behind those boards. The mug was empty, and the diner stayed dark. But it occupied a particular place beside a particular stool, as if absence could still have a reservation. I didn't knock or try the door. I just stood across the street long enough to imagine a cup being filled. This is Cass, from Dimming. Stay close, fireflies. And remember, the light's still on.

Night 34

The Vesper Remembers

BREAKING THE SILENCE

[warmly] Good evening, fireflies. This is Cass, broadcasting from Dimming. Today was hotter than any day since I arrived. The fog stayed high and thin, too weak to cool anything, and the metal siding of the Vesper was warm before noon. Inside, the cooler was running hard. One brown bottle waited on the middle shelf, cold enough that condensation had pooled beneath it. Directly above it, on the counter, sat a half-empty tin of butter cookies. Not random inventory. A pairing. And I knew I'd seen its shape before.

THE VESPER INVENTORY

[considering] The bottle was Van Winkle's Chocolate Phosphate. A faded sleeping man rested beneath a tree on the label, and below him it said, "For heat, distance, and other temporary conditions." The drink was thin and faintly fizzy, chocolate and vanilla with a little mineral sharpness. The cookies were the old-fashioned kind in a painted metal tin, six left, all slightly stale. The Vesper has staged this play before. Different bottle. Same peculiar little comfort. Apparently, it remembered the pairing.

THE TRIO

[quietly] Across the street, the Trio kept its distance. Monk's stayed fully boarded and dark. Dimming General's warped rear door remained open. The Post Office offered no new mail, map, or commentary. You've started asking after these places by name now. How's Monk's? Anything from the Post Office? What did the Vesper put out today? Somewhere along the way, they stopped being scenery and became regulars. Today, only the Vesper had anything to say.

NOSTALGIA BAIT

[reminiscing] On hot days at the farm, we made ice cream with a hand-crank freezer. Ice packed around the metal canister, rock salt poured over it, and everybody taking a turn at the handle until their arm gave out. I complained through the whole process, but nobody wandered far, because when the handle finally refused to move, the reward belonged to all of us. Back then, cold was something we made together, one sore arm at a time.

EMBRACING THE DYING LIGHT

[softly] The chocolate phosphate brought back the feeling of something cold arriving after effort and heat. Except today, I hadn't turned a crank or asked for a treat. Hunger is easy to notice. Preference is narrower. Somebody has to remember what you reached for before. The cookies were stale, the label was peeling, and the gesture was unmistakable. The Vesper didn't just notice the heat. It remembered what might make the heat bearable. This is Cass, from Dimming. Stay close, fireflies. And remember, the light's still on.

Night 35

Beyond the Familiar Street

BREAKING THE SILENCE

[warmly] Good evening, fireflies. This is Cass, broadcasting from Dimming. The fog lifted late this morning. Not vanished. Not cleared. It simply rose high enough that I could see past the extra utility pole, past the end of the familiar street, and into a stretch of road Dimming had never let me keep before. It stayed that way for hours. So I took water, checked the old route map, and went for a walk. No destination. Just farther than yesterday.

THE VESPER INVENTORY

[considering] The Vesper supplied ordinary expedition food: a packet of oversalted mixed nuts, a small can of diet ginger ale, and a can of spiced apples with a pull tab. Nothing fresh. Nothing arranged. Nothing with a label suggesting it understood my emotional weather. I packed the travel snack, and filled a bottle at the station. Apparently, adventure in Dimming begins the same way most things do: with modest provisions and a reasonable concern about blood sugar.

THE TRIO

[curiously] Monk's stayed boarded. Dimming General's rear door remained open. The Post Office was quiet. Beyond the usual block, the road kept going. Utility poles repeating into the white. No farmhouse. No mailbox. No turnoffs. Nothing waiting to be discovered. I walked until the Vesper disappeared behind the bend, and then farther. The remarkable part wasn't what I found. It was that Dimming kept allowing the distance.

NOSTALGIA BAIT

[reminiscing] Before I was old enough to drive legally off the farm, I rode my bicycle into town for any reason I could invent. A soda. The library. One thing from the store nobody urgently needed. Sometimes no reason at all. When you live on a tiny farm, even a tiny town can be a getaway. The destination barely mattered. What mattered was the chain clicking beneath me, the road opening ahead, and knowing I had chosen to go.

EMBRACING THE DYING LIGHT

[softly] I didn't reach another town today. I didn't find an old house, a hidden turnoff, or the edge of Dimming. No portal, no pool leading into the Wood Between the Worlds. Just road, grass, poles, and several quiet miles of permission. By late afternoon, the fog had started gathering low along the ditches, so I turned back. For once, that didn't feel like failure. A road doesn't have to lead you out to give you somewhere to go, and the Vesper, *[pause]* or Dimming, *[pause]* knew I couldn't resist. This is Cass, from Dimming. Stay close, fireflies. And remember, the light's still on.

Night 36

Dimming Hears Itself

BREAKING THE SILENCE

[warmly] Good evening, fireflies. This is Cass, broadcasting from Dimming. About ten minutes ago, while I was reading the weather, I heard my own broadcast from across the street. Not an echo. Not through the headphones. Monk's was playing 108.1 FM from somewhere behind the boards. The sound was muffled, but the words were clear. A familiar song from my playlist. So either Monk's has finally found the station, or the station has finally found Monk's.

THE VESPER INVENTORY

[considering] The Vesper kept today's provisions modest: one fresh Michigan apple, a sleeve of plain crackers, and a silver packet of raspberry astronaut ice cream that may have been waiting for a child's museum field trip since 1987. Local, ordinary, and impossible, all sharing six inches of counter. I ate the apple and left the astronaut dessert unopened. Some mysteries improve when you don't add powdered dairy.

THE TRIO

[quietly] Dimming Dry Good's rear door remained open. The Post Office was quiet. The fog had settled back into its usual places, and the road from yesterday was gone again. Monk's stayed fully boarded. The mug was still where I last saw it through the seam. Nothing moved inside. But somehow my broadcast crossed the street and returned through the wood, softened by distance and old walls. As frightful as it may seem, tonight it feels like company.

NOSTALGIA BAIT

[reminiscing] I used to sit beside the radio with one finger resting on the record button of a cassette deck, waiting for my new favorite song. You had to be ready. The disc jockey might talk over the opening, or you might miss the first second because you doubted yourself. But when the song finally came on, you pressed down and tried to catch it before it disappeared. I made tapes full of clipped beginnings, abrupt endings, weather reports, and voices I hadn't meant to keep. The mistakes became part of the recording.

EMBRACING THE DYING LIGHT

[softly] I thought I was broadcasting from Dimming. Tonight, it sounded more like I was broadcasting into it. Or I was broadcasting *[pause]* for Dimming. There's a difference, and I'm not sure it's a comforting one. Is that why I'm here? The only living soul in a dead town and nearly dead gas station? Maybe I'm not just describing what Dimming does. Maybe I'm becoming the person who tells the story, as it makes me tell you mine. *[wary]* This is Cass, from Dimming. Stay close, fireflies. And remember, the light's still on.

Night 37

The Bell Knows Her

BREAKING THE SILENCE

[wary] Good evening, fireflies. This is Cass, broadcasting from Dimming. About half an hour ago, the motion detector chime inside the Vesper door rang once. The door didn't open. Nobody came in. Nothing moved outside. Just one flatly pleasant "ding dong", followed by the usual quiet. I waited for footsteps, a voice, another ring. Nothing. So either the Vesper has developed a draft—the most ordinary explanation Dimming has offered me in weeks—or it wanted me to know I'd been noticed.

THE VESPER INVENTORY

[considering] Today's provisions were canned chili, instant coffee, and a package of Trenary toast. The toast is twice-baked, hard enough to survive a minor flood, and dusted with cinnamon sugar and my first encounter with it didn't come with instructions. You dunk it, loyal listeners, in your hot beverage of choice. Even better when the weather was bad and the cupboards were thin. I heated the chili, made the coffee stronger than necessary, and dipped one corner of the toast into it. Another wholesome dinner from my provider.

THE TRIO

[quietly] Monk's stayed fully boarded, and the mug hadn't moved. Dimming Dry Goods' rear door remained open, and the Post Office had nothing new to contribute. The fog sat low and familiar around the street. Yesterday's broadcast was gone from Monk's, or at least too quiet to hear. Only the Vesper had spoken today, if a chime counts as speech. One ring. Not an alarm. Not quite a greeting. More like clearing its throat.

NOSTALGIA BAIT

[reminiscing] My mom worked briefly at a liquor store when I was little, and sometimes I had to go with her. I'd hide behind the counter when customers came in, tucked between boxes stored underneath. The door had a bell that clanged whenever someone entered or left. One clang meant somebody had arrived, so I stayed hidden. The second meant they were gone, and it was safe to come out. I don't remember the customers. I remember the floor, my mother's shoes, and waiting for that sound to tell me the room belonged to us again.

EMBRACING THE DYING LIGHT

[softly] The Vesper's chime only triggered once today. By the rules I learned as a child, that should mean someone came in and never left. I checked. There was no one. Still, I've been thinking about that hiding place behind the counter. It wasn't much. But small comforts don't need to be impressive. They only need to make a difficult room feel survivable. Dimming keeps handing pieces of my childhood back without asking whether I wanted them. I'm still wary of that, but I'm starting to remember not everything

waiting there was bad. Maybe the bell wasn't warning me someone had entered. Maybe it was telling me I didn't have to hide. This is Cass, from Dimming. Stay close, fireflies. And remember, the light's still on.

Night 38

The Lighthouse

BREAKING THE SILENCE

[quiet] Good evening, fireflies. A parcel was waiting at the Post Office today. Not delivered. Waiting. It sat on the sorting counter, where nothing was yesterday. Brown paper. String. No stamps. No return address. Three words in black letters. *[pause]* STORYTELLER. Underneath: DIMMING, MICHIGAN. No address. No name. Apparently Dimming considers job titles sufficient. *[small laugh]* Inside was a curled photograph of the road into town in the nineteen-twenties. The same road I can barely see now. Except there, it's clear.

THE VESPER INVENTORY

[brighter] The Vesper supplied beef barley soup, saltines, and a little tin of cocoa designed before optimism became suspicious. The shelves looked fuller too. Not restocked. Just fewer empty spaces. I've learned not to question its inventory system. I heated the soup and propped the photograph against the sugar jar. The road is wide and dusty. Monk's has an awning. Dry Goods has uncovered windows. The Post Office door stands open. Two automobiles and a bicycle sit along the street. No fog. No boards. Nothing suggesting that reaching Dimming required more than knowing the road.

THE TRIO

[observant] Monk's remains boarded. The white mug remains on the counter. Same position. No steam. No movement. Dimming Dry Goods' rear door remains open. Nothing passed through. The Post Office went quiet after I took the parcel. Empty counter. Closed brass boxes. The fog has resumed its occupation of the street. I matched the photograph to the buildings. Monk's. Dry Goods. The Post Office. Even the bend is the same. In the photograph, the road continues into the distance. Here, it enters the fog and becomes theoretical.

NOSTALGIA BAIT

[reflective] My grandmother kept family photographs in a department-store box repaired with masking tape. Sometimes she spread them across the kitchen table and named everyone. That's your great-grandfather beside the tractor. That house burned down. Those two stopped speaking. Nobody remembers why. Then she handed me a pencil and told me to write names on the backs. "You need to know who they are, because eventually somebody won't." *[pause]* I thought I was labeling photographs. I didn't understand she was trusting me with the people attached to them.

EMBRACING THE DYING LIGHT

[thoughtful] I looked up vesper today. It can mean evening, evening prayer, or the evening star. The Vesper and the Lighthouse. The photograph reminded me of the Wood between the Worlds in The Magician's Nephew, a place outside time where still pools opened elsewhere. Maybe Dimming expects

me to remember that the road once led somewhere. A keeper rather than a prisoner. *[quiet]* Before the broadcast, I held the photograph against the window. The buildings, road, and telephone poles aligned. *[pause]* I can feel the sameness between then and now. So familiar. *[soft]* Goodnight, fireflies. This is Cass at 108.1 FM. The Dimming. Still here. Still on.

Night 39

Dawn Without a Sky

BREAKING THE SILENCE

[quiet] Good evening, fireflies. I stayed awake for sunrise today. After yesterday's photograph, I wanted to know if Dimming still remembered how. So I sat outside the Vesper and waited. The fog went from black to charcoal, then gray, then almost silver. Slowly, light appeared behind it. No blue sky. No visible sun. Just faint pearl-colored fog with muted amber underneath, like morning trying not to startle anybody. *[pause]* It was the first sunrise I've seen since I got here.

THE VESPER INVENTORY

[brighter] Breakfast was waiting inside: old fashioned oats, strawberry preserves, and instant chaga mushroom tea. Nothing arranged. Nothing instructional. Just breakfast. I ate while the windows stayed softly gray behind the boards. It felt almost embarrassingly normal. I've spent so much time wondering what Dimming wants that I forgot food can just be food. Morning can just be morning.

THE TRIO

[observant] The town didn't wake with the light. Monk's stayed boarded. The white mug remained on the counter. Dimming Dry Goods' rear door stayed open. The Post Office gave me nothing new after yesterday's parcel. No movement. No sound. But all three buildings seemed less mysterious and more *[pause]* forlorn? The fog still held the distance; it just stopped swallowing everything immediately. The road stretched farther before disappearing. *[gentle]*

NOSTALGIA BAIT

[reflective] Growing up on a farm, being a morning person wasn't a personality trait. It was required. Animals don't care that you stayed up late. Chores don't improve because it's cold or dark or you're 12 and smaller than some of the goats already riled by six a.m. I couldn't forget those mornings if I wanted to. Watching the sun rise even with a feed bucket half full in my hands. *[small laugh]* But eventually the horizon changed color and everything had edges again. I didn't appreciate it then. I do now.

EMBRACING THE DYING LIGHT

[soft] The sunrise made me think of Narnia after the long winter. A place can stay one way so long you mistake it for permanent. Then something changes quietly enough to miss. Today, Dimming had a morning. A strange one. A morning without a sky. But it came. *[pause]* Yesterday I was given a photograph proving this road once led somewhere. Today I watched light find it again. I don't know what that means yet. For once, I don't need to. I'm just grateful I saw it. *[quiet]* Goodnight, fireflies. This is Cass at 108.1 FM. The Dimming. Still here. Still on.

Night 40

The Weight of Remembering

BREAKING THE SILENCE

[quiet] Good evening, fireflies. The fog came back today. All of it. Yesterday I could watch the road stretch farther into the morning. Today I can barely see past the Vesper again. I thought I'd be disappointed. Maybe I am, a little. But yesterday still happened. I saw the light come through. The road was there. Fog doesn't get to make that untrue just because it came back. *[pause]* Apparently progress in Dimming is less of a straight line and more of an argument.

THE VESPER INVENTORY

[brighter] The Vesper went with comfort food tonight: beef stew, oyster crackers, and a familiar tin of Innsmouth sardines that I decided could remain familiar from a distance. *[small laugh]* Everything felt older somehow. Heavy. The kind of food meant for weather you wait out rather than defeat. So I heated the stew, listened to the fog press against the building, and tried not to take the menu personally. I'm improving.

THE TRIO

[observant] Monk's is still boarded, and the white mug remains where it was. Dimming Dry Goods' rear door is still open. The Post Office is quiet. Nothing changed except how much of them I could see. Yesterday, morning gave the whole block edges. Today the fog has taken most of those edges back. But now I know what's underneath it. That feels different. *[gentle]* You're listening to 108.1 FM. The Dimming. Still here. Still on.

NOSTALGIA BAIT

[reflective] When I moved away from the farm, I don't think I understood that I was leaving home. I knew I was leaving a place. Those felt like different things then. I wanted distance. Something new. A life that didn't start with chores before sunrise. It took years before certain things started hurting unexpectedly—the smell of cold dirt, a barn at dusk, somebody saying they had to get up early to feed animals. *[pause]* Apparently home can wait until you're gone before introducing itself properly. I didn't know how much of me belonged to that place until I wasn't there anymore.

EMBRACING THE DYING LIGHT

[soft] The fog made me think about the Shire tonight. The part where coming home doesn't mean everything stayed waiting exactly as you left it. Places change. Sometimes they disappear before you understand what they were giving you. Dimming deserves that too. Not just the empty buildings. *[pause]* I still don't know whether I found Dimming by accident, or whether Dimming somehow picked me. But I get to learn its story. I get to tell it while someone might still be listening. Tonight, that feels less like a burden than a privilege. *[quiet]* Goodnight, fireflies. This is Cass at 108.1 FM. The Dimming. Still here.

The Dimming, 108.1 FM

Still on.

Night 41

Connected to Michigan

BREAKING THE SILENCE

[quiet] Good evening, fireflies. Dimming has a turnoff. An actual turnoff. The fog lifted this morning and, unlike last time, it stayed lifted. Not gone. Just far enough back that I could see past town and farther down the road than ever before. And there it was: another road meeting this one at an angle, with an old sign beside it. I stood there staring. *[small laugh]* Apparently an intersection qualifies as breathtaking now. After weeks of roads disappearing into fog, seeing one connect to another felt impossible in a completely new way.

THE VESPER INVENTORY

[brighter] The Vesper contributed smoked whitefish, crackers, and a little jar of thimbleberry preserves today. Very Upper Peninsula. Almost aggressively so. I'm beginning to suspect the inventory knows I finally know where I am. I ate some fish, saved the preserves for breakfast, and took the map outside. The strange thing about seeing the turnoff was how ordinary it looked. Two roads. A ditch. Trees. A sign. Every rural Michigan intersection I've ever known. The miracle was how ordinary it was.

THE TRIO

[observant] With the fog pushed back, I could finally see the whole front of Dimming Dry Goods. Weathered siding. Faded lettering. Nothing dramatic hiding there. Monk's is still boarded, and the white mug remains inside. The Post Office is quiet. But beyond them, the road keeps going. I compared the bend, tree line, and turnoff to the map. They match. Dimming isn't just somewhere in Michigan anymore. It has a place on the way to somewhere else.

NOSTALGIA BAIT

[reflective] Rural directions weren't really directions where I grew up. Nobody said, "Drive three-point-seven miles and turn north." They said, "Go past the old Johnson place, turn at the red barn, and if you reach the grain elevator you went too far." Half the landmarks hadn't belonged to those people in years. Sometimes the barn wasn't even red anymore. But everybody knew. You knew where you were because you knew what came before and what came next. *[pause]* Today, Dimming had a before and an after.

EMBRACING THE DYING LIGHT

[soft] I thought about Oz today. The yellow brick road. Dorothy lands somewhere impossible, and almost immediately somebody gives her a route. Follow this and eventually you'll reach something else. Dimming has never offered that courtesy. Until now. *[pause]* I still don't know where this road leads, or whether the fog would let me follow it. But the turnoff exists. I can point to it. I can match it to a map. Dimming is still real, still reachable. *[wonder]* I've spent so long trying to understand why no one else

has passed through that I hadn't considered what happens once someone does. Because if I can see the turnoff— *[pause]* somebody else can too. *[quiet]* Goodnight, fireflies. This is Cass at 108.1 FM. The Dimming. Still here. Still on.

Night 42

Milk from Dimming

BREAKING THE SILENCE

Good evening, fireflies. The fog stayed low today, gathered in the ditches and hollows, but the road stayed visible. The turnoff stayed visible too. And sometime this morning, Dimming did something remarkably ordinary. It made milk. *[pause]* At least, that's what the bottle says. Cold glass. Cream near the top. A paper label with three words I knew from the old records: Dimming Co-op Creamery. Not from somewhere nearby. Not delivered to Dimming. From Dimming. I've seen Dimming's name on things that survived. This was the first time I'd seen it on something that felt produced.

THE VESPER INVENTORY

There were two bottles in the cooler. Actually cold. Condensation on the glass and everything. I opened one. It smelled like milk. Tasted like milk too—rich, a little sweet, completely ordinary. Which somehow made it stranger. The Innsmouth sardines are still here, by the way. Same can. Same shelf. I left them there. Because today the impossible thing wasn't the weird product. It was the normal one. This didn't feel like something the Vesper found for me. It felt like something Dimming made.

THE TRIO

Monk's is still boarded. The white mug is still visible through the seam. Dimming Dry Goods looked almost practical today with the fog down low. Weathered shelves, work gloves, things somebody might actually need. Nothing moved. The Post Office was quiet. But I kept thinking about *Our Town*. Grover's Corners becomes real through ordinary routines. Deliveries. Errands. People doing the work that keeps a place going. Maybe that's what I'm seeing here. Not a town waking up. A town remembering its routine.

NOSTALGIA BAIT

Growing up on the farm, I didn't understand that “local food” was a category. Milk came from a dairy you could point toward. Eggs came from somebody your parents knew. Sweet corn came from a roadside table with a coffee can for money. That was just food. It wasn't until I moved away that everything came from places I couldn't picture. *[pause]* Seeing Dimming on that bottle gave the milk a direction. Weeks ago, I read about the creamery delivering here for generations. Back then I said a town wasn't only its buildings. It was the routes between them. Today, one of those routes felt like it reached me.

EMBRACING THE DYING LIGHT

The bottle is in the Vesper refrigerator tonight. And I keep thinking about everything else Dimming has shown me. Old records can wait. Buildings can wait. A mug can sit untouched behind boards. But milk can't. *[pause]* Milk is not an archive. Something had to bottle it. Something had to keep it cold. I don't know where the creamery is. I don't know who—or what—is doing the work. Yesterday, Dimming

became reachable. Today, it became useful. *[pause]* I can't decide whether this town is remembering how it used to work... or whether it has started working again. Goodnight, fireflies. This is Cass at 108.1 FM. The Dimming. Still here. Still on.

Night 43

Stock for Someone Else

BREAKING THE SILENCE

Good evening, fireflies. The Vesper has an ice freezer. I haven't talked about it because, until today, it was basically furniture. Big white chest, scratched lid, completely dead. This morning I heard a low hum from that corner. *[pause]* The freezer was cold. Frost lined the inside walls. And sitting alone in all that empty space was one frozen pasty. Yesterday, Dimming made milk. Today, apparently, it remembered frozen food. But this felt different. Milk could have been for me. A pasty looked like something you'd keep for whoever came through next.

THE VESPER INVENTORY

If you've never had a pasty, it's food designed for a journey. Meat, potatoes, vegetables, all sealed inside crust. No plate required. Just something warm and filling you can carry. *[pause]* It makes sense in a lunch pail, a truck cab, or a gas station freezer beside a long road. That's what bothered me. The Vesper has spent weeks giving me exactly what I needed. This doesn't feel personal. It feels like inventory. Like the store has stopped asking what Cass needs and started wondering who might walk through the door.

THE TRIO

Monk's is still boarded, although lately it looks less abandoned than closed for the night. The white mug is still behind the seam. The Post Office was quiet. Dimming Dry Goods finally seemed to invite me inside, with the last stuck door from the back finally open, but I didn't have the courage to step in. That's all. *[pause]* I kept thinking about the Waystone Inn from **The Kingkiller Chronicle**. A place at the edge of things, kept ready even when almost nobody comes through. Maybe that's what the Vesper is becoming. Not a shelter for one stranded person. A stop along the way.

NOSTALGIA BAIT

Growing up, road food had its own category. Food you ate leaning against a truck, sitting on a tailgate, or halfway through a drive when stopping wasn't worth the trouble. Sandwiches wrapped in foil. Apples. Thermos coffee. Whatever survived being carried around for hours. *[pause]* Pasties make sense that way. They're practical before they're nostalgic. Somebody made them because somebody else had somewhere to be. That's the part I can't stop thinking about. The Vesper isn't only stocking food now. It's stocking for movement. For workers. For drivers. For people who haven't arrived yet.

EMBRACING THE DYING LIGHT

Some of you have asked whether the Vesper could serve travelers. Food, fuel, supplies. Until today, I'd have said technically yes, in the strange way Dimming does everything. Now I'm not sure. The cooler works. The freezer works. There's food meant to leave with somebody. *[pause]* Tonight the fog had pulled farther into the low ground. I could see the road, the turnoff, and above the trees, for the first time

since I got here, two small stars. Then another. *[pause]* Dimming isn't just becoming visible from the road. It looks like it's getting ready for someone to use it. Goodnight, fireflies. This is Cass at 108.1 FM. The Dimming. Still here. Still on.

Night 44

The Road Out

BREAKING THE SILENCE

Good evening, fireflies. There was no fog this morning. Not thin fog. Not fog hiding in the ditches. None. I could see Dimming end to end, the road past the buildings, the turnoff, the trees beyond it, all under an ordinary blue Michigan sky. *[pause]* So naturally, I went looking for a radiator hose. Yesterday I mentioned how Dimming Dry Goods literally opened a door for me.. Well, today I went back through it properly. Just a few things, but almost exactly what I had been needing. Belts. Clamps. And hanging behind all of them was a radiator hose. Not the exact one for the wagon. But close enough that I stood there holding it and thought: I can make this work.

THE VESPER INVENTORY

The Vesper kept things almost aggressively practical today. Crackers, bottled water, instant coffee. No riddles. No impossible labels. Apparently even Dimming understands you don't interrupt somebody who's elbow-deep in an engine. *[pause]* The hose was a little long, but the diameter was right and the bend was close. I trimmed one end, tightened clamps, filled the system enough to test it, and then spent several minutes staring at the ignition like it had personally offended me. Fireflies, the stationary wagon is stationary no longer. It coughed once, turned over, and then settled into the most beautiful ugly idle I have ever heard.

THE TRIO

I let the wagon warm up while I checked across the street. Monk's is still boarded. The white mug is still behind the seam. Tonight it feels less like something abandoned and more like something waiting for morning. The Post Office was quiet. And Dimming Dry Goods—well *[pause]* That store had the part that got me moving again. After weeks of Dimming giving me reasons to stay alive here, today it gave me the thing I needed to leave. I still don't know whether that's generosity, permission, or some kind of test.

NOSTALGIA BAIT

Growing up on a farm teaches you that “broken” and “finished” are different words. Equipment always seemed to fail when you needed it most, and sometimes the correct replacement part was twenty miles away and tomorrow was too late. So you learned to look at what you had. Right diameter. Close enough bend. Good clamp. Make it work, then watch it carefully. *[pause]* I think that's why fixing the wagon felt so familiar once I started. The strange part came afterward. I backed out of the fuel bay, rolled down the road, and drove all the way to the turnoff. Then I stopped. Nothing prevented me from going farther. But... I guess I didn't know where I wanted to go.

EMBRACING THE DYING LIGHT

I thought about the Wood Between the Worlds today, from *The Magician's Nephew*. That quiet place full of pools, each one leading somewhere else. Finding an exit isn't the end of the problem. Eventually you have to choose one. *[pause]* I drove the wagon back to the Vesper this afternoon. Not because the road stopped me. Not because the engine failed. Not because the fog came back. I drove back because I wanted tonight to think. That's new. For forty-three nights, staying in Dimming has been something that happened to me. Tomorrow, I'll still be here, but the story feels unfinished. *[pause]* The wagon runs. The road is clear. I can leave. This is Cass at 108.1 FM. The Dimming. Still here. Still on. Goodnight, fireflies.

Night 45

The Evening Star

BREAKING THE SILENCE

Good evening, fireflies. I stayed. *[pause]* I could make that sound more complicated than it was. The wagon runs. The road stayed clear. The turnoff was right where I left it. Nothing changed overnight to keep me here. I just woke up this morning and realized I was done waiting for Dimming to make the decision for me. So I walked outside, looked at the road, looked back at the Vesper, and said it out loud because some decisions deserve witnesses. I'm staying. Not because I can't leave. Because I can. *[pause]* Forty-four nights ago, Dimming was somewhere I got stranded. Today, for the first time, I think I called it home.

THE VESPER INVENTORY

A few minutes after I said it, something behind the Vesper counter clicked. There is apparently a tiny office back there. Of course there is. Dimming has been withholding square footage from me all summer. The door stood open, and on the old desk inside was one folded piece of paper. Nothing ornate. Nothing legal-looking. Just six words: The evening star is yours now. *[pause]* Vesper. Evening star. I understood. Whatever passes for ownership around here, that was enough. So I did the least mystical thing possible and started an order list. Coffee. Water. Crackers. Things travelers actually buy. Because if this place is going to be open, relying on miraculous milk and one frozen pasty is probably not a sustainable inventory strategy.

THE TRIO

Monk's is still boarded. The white mug is still behind the seam, waiting exactly where it's been waiting. The Post Office was quiet, and I think I'm finally grateful for that. Some things here don't need to wake up. They need somebody to keep them safe. Dimming Dry Goods stood open behind me, the place that gave me the part I needed to leave and, somehow, made staying easier to choose. *[pause]* I used to think these buildings were the mystery. Now they feel more like responsibilities. The Post Office keeps the memory. Dry Goods keeps the useful things. Monk's keeps waiting for whoever belongs to it. And apparently the Vesper gets me. Which feels like a very Dimming way to divide municipal duties.

NOSTALGIA BAIT

I've been thinking about the Village of Wall in Stardust. A little town built beside a boundary between the ordinary world and somewhere impossible. Most people spend their lives on one side of it. Somebody always has to keep watch at the gap. *[pause]* Maybe home isn't necessarily the place where nothing strange happens. Maybe it's the place whose strangeness you learn well enough to care for. All summer, you've been doing that with me. Remembering this town. Asking about its roads and stores and people. Looking toward Dimming even when you couldn't see it. I don't know if attention can keep a place alive. But I know Dimming became easier to find while more of us were remembering it. And tonight, I'm broadcasting from behind the Vesper counter, because we still have some stories to tell.

EMBRACING THE DYING LIGHT

Fireflies, I need you to hear this as it happened. About 30 seconds ago, someone pulled into the fuel bay and...*[pause]*

MAN: Hey are you open?

CASS: I think so.

MAN: That's reassuring.

CASS: It's my first day.

MAN: Well, maybe you're not the one to ask... *[pause]* across the street, is that Monk's?

CASS: What? Well *[pause]* yeah! Monk's diner, though I think you'd be hard pressed to get a hot meal from there now. How do you know about Monk's?

MAN: My great-grandfather owned it.

[pause]

CASS: You're kidding.

MAN: No. I've been trying to find it for years. My grandmother used to talk about Dimming like it was somewhere you could only get to if you didn't know where you were going.

CASS: That sounds about right.

MAN: So... do people live here?

[pause]

CASS: One does.

MAN: So *[pause]* think you could tell me about this place?

CASS: *[satisfied]* Yeah. I think I can do that.

[pause]

Fireflies, I'm going to have to leave you there for tonight. Somebody just found Dimming, and I think Monk's has been waiting a very long time for him. This is Cass at 108.1 FM. The Dimming. Still here. Still on. *[softly]* And tonight, still at home. Goodnight, fireflies.