



# Beacon of hope in a time of despair

New Zealander Christopher Parker has plenty of shoreline in his own country, but he decided to use the Oregon coastline as the setting for his debut novel because, as he said in a recent interview, he felt his main characters, a rancher and a college student on a swimming scholarship, sounded “quintessentially American.”

And it may be only coincidence that he borrows the name of a Washington coastal community, Seabrook, for the name of his fictional Oregon town that, he says he built from scratch — in his imagination, at least.

Nonetheless, Parker notes that his beachside hometown of Takapuna, and the lighthouse there, were the inspiration for his story.

This tale, tinged with mystical elements, begins with the relationship between Kevin Tucker and his 18-year-old daughter, Amy. Separately, each is grieving the loss of Helen — Amy’s mom and Kevin’s wife — who recently died in a traffic accident. Since then, Amy hasn’t been eating, and she’s been suffering from insomnia.

Kevin, a Portland cop, had always deferred to Helen as the primary parent, and now he doesn’t know how to reach out to his daughter. But when he receives an assignment that will take him a couple of hundred miles down the coast to Seabrook to update a family about a missing person’s case involving their son, he invites Amy along, hoping a change of scenery will do her some good.

Amy goes along reluctantly. When they arrive in Seabrook and check in at the hotel, the lady at the front desk tells them that the town’s annual Lighthouse Festival will take place the next day. Amy goes for a walk down the beach to check out the landmark, and discovers that the lighthouse

## This week’s book

‘The Lighthouse’ by Christopher Parker

Beacon Press Limited – 368 pp — \$14.45 paperback

is dilapidated, boarded up and out of commission. Some townsfolk even say it is haunted.

This doesn’t do anything to pick up Amy’s spirits. In fact, she has never felt so low.

Meanwhile, on a dude ranch just outside of town, Ryan Porter also is grappling with bad news and unwanted changes. Scarcely into adulthood, he’s been caring for his widowed, convalescent father for years, while trying to keep the ranch running. Now the local bank manager wants Ryan to give him a call.

The first encounter between Amy and Ryan couldn’t be more awkward or less auspicious, but once any misunderstandings are cleared up, they wind up spending the next day together at the festival. Over just a matter of hours, they find themselves sharing some deeply guarded secrets with one another that they haven’t told anyone else.

But even as their relationship intensifies, they are drawn into some off-kilter events that are happening around town in conjunction with the festival. As the plot unfolds, it involves not only familial connections and teen romance, but also supernatural elements a la the “Twilight Zone.”

The explication may seem overlong to some readers, but the gist of the story is affirming.

And that abandoned old lighthouse? It may yet shed the light needed to ensure safe passage.

*The Bookmonger is Barbara Lloyd McMichael, who writes this weekly column focusing on the books, authors and publishers of the Pacific Northwest. Contact her at [barbaralmcm@gmail.com](mailto:barbaralmcm@gmail.com)*

