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# The Lighthouse of Forgotten Names

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## Introduction

Greyhaven called just after dawn, the gulls already arguing over the tide line outside Mara Thorne's apartment window. The voice on the other end was official and spare—condolences edged in paperwork—and when it said her father's name, the room seemed to tilt with the certainty she'd avoided for years. A fall at the lighthouse, they said. Quick, they said. She listened to the static in the pauses and kept her voice steady, the way she had learned to do over a decade of decoding other people's records and holding their ghosts at arm's length.

By the time she reached the coast, the sky had folded into a low ceiling of pewter, and the wind came in sheets that smelled of diesel and kelp. Greyhaven rose out of the fog like a story half-told: clapboard houses with paint sloughed off like old scabs, a cannery refitted into condos, and banners promising a bright new waterfront printed in a developer's clean blue font. She saw her name, or what the town remembered of it, flicker across a few faces at the gas station, in the bakery window. The past in a place like this was less a chronology than a tide—always withdrawing, always returning.

The lighthouse stood on its knuckle of black rock, a white bone in the throat of the sea. Her father had kept it through budget cuts and storms, through the quiet modern indignity of automation, as if muscle and ritual could keep the light honest. Mara parked at the base and climbed, her hand skimming the wet rail. The door stuck on swollen wood; inside, the air was cold and dense, layered with salt, old oil, and the metallic tang of rain coiling through cracks. She told herself she was here to settle papers, collect a few things, make it clean and quick.

But habit took her further. She moved the way she did in archives—eyes soft but precise, catching what didn't fit: a board that wore its paint differently, a screw head scored by a tool sharper than the rest, a knot of dust that should have been disturbed and wasn't. In the keeper's room, where the bed was neatly made and the mug by the sink still wore a comet of tea, a seam along the baseboard betrayed a hidden latch. The tool she used was simple—a thin-bladed putty knife from a drawer—and the noise the panel made when it gave was small and final, like a breath held too long.

Behind it lay a narrow space. Inside, wrapped in tarred canvas and cord, was a book the size of her father's palm but twice as heavy. The cover was leather gone stiff with salt; the clasp had rusted shut and then, somewhere along the years, been forced open again. She eased it onto the table, set her fingers at the corners of the first page so as not to tear the paper, and smelled the centuries of moisture exhaled from its spine. Names marched down in a neat, familiar hand, the ink browned and bled at the edges. Some had been circled once, deliberately. Others were struck through with a

ruler-straight line that cut them clean.

She had seen ledgers in every state—bound in ribbon, burned to husks, scribbled by men who thought posterity owed them nothing—and yet this one raised the hair along her arms. In the margins, a different notation drifted in from the edges: numbers separated by dashes and dots, like coordinates written by someone who trusted the sea more than any map.

I have kept the light for twenty-three years, someone had written in a smaller book she found beside it, the spine cracked and soft as skin. The ink was darker; the voice inside it flared—first-person, spare. I say their names to the glass when the fog comes. If the sea can take a man whole, perhaps a name can keep a piece of him on shore.

Mara turned back to the ledger. The first name on the first page wasn't a stranger's. It ran at her with the force of a wave she could not brace against, letters she had traced once across a schoolbook cover, heard shouted across the dock, buried under years of leaving. Her father's hand framed it with a date that didn't match what the town had told itself. The wind pushed hard at the panes; the light swung its slow arc over the room and back again, as if marking time.

Outside, the foghorn bellowed once, low and mournful, and the rain came on in earnest. Mara closed the book just enough to hide the page and keep the name burning in the dark behind her eyes. She had imagined she would pack a few boxes, sign a few forms, and drive away with the tide. But the ledger had a gravity that tugged at what she thought she had escaped. In Greyhaven, forgetting had been a civic practice. The book in her hands made forgetting impossible.

## CHAPTER ONE: Arrival

The foghorn's mournful call seemed to scrape against Mara's bones, a sound she hadn't heard in years but recognized with the primal certainty of a heartbeat. She stood in the dim, salt-laced air of the lighthouse keeper's room, the hidden ledger a cold weight in her hands. The name on the first page, stark against the yellowed paper, was Elias Thorne—her father's name. Beneath it, a date, not the official one she'd been given for his death, but one a decade earlier. The discrepancy was a jolt, an electric current sparking through the careful detachment she'd built around herself. Greyhaven, it seemed, was already lying.

She slid the ledger back into its hidden compartment, the wood panel clicking shut with a soft finality. No one, she decided, needed to know about this just yet. Her purpose here was to disentangle herself from a life she had purposefully left behind, to sell the lighthouse, settle the estate, and return to the comfortable, predictable order of archives and undisputed facts. But the ledger hummed with a different kind of truth, a static charge in the quiet room.

Stepping back out onto the winding path that led down from the lighthouse, the wind snatched at her hair, whipping it across her face. Below, Greyhaven huddled against the gray sky, a patchwork of weathered shingle and brick. The new condos near the harbor, stark rectangles of glass and steel, seemed an arrogant intrusion on the town's rough-hewn charm. She passed a knot of fishermen mending nets, their faces etched with the sea's hard lines, their eyes following her with a familiar blend of curiosity and suspicion. A few nodded, almost imperceptibly, as if acknowledging a ghost.

Mara drove her rental car, a practical, anonymous sedan, through the narrow streets. The bakery still smelled of yeast and cinnamon, the general store's bell still tinkled, and the faded mural of a whaling ship still adorned the side of the old fish market. It was the same, and yet irrevocably altered. A decade was a long time. People died, new people arrived, and memories, like the tide, reshaped the landscape.

Her first stop, despite the growing chill in her bones, was the Greyhaven Public Library. It was a sturdy brick building, older than most, set back from the main street. Inside, the scent of old paper and dust was a balm. And then she saw her. Eden Clarke, head bent over a towering stack of returned books, her dark curls escaping a loose bun. Eden hadn't changed much—still wore the slightly oversized sweaters, still had that intense, focused gaze.

Mara paused, a knot forming in her stomach. Eden had been her closest friend, her

confidante, the keeper of secrets in a town that hoarded them. Their last conversation had ended badly, a fractured mess of unspoken accusations and youthful pride. Mara had left Greyhaven the next morning, never looking back.

Eden looked up, startled, her eyes widening as they met Mara's. A slow smile spread across her face, hesitant at first, then genuine, warming the cool air between them. "Mara? I... I heard you were coming back. For your father." Her voice was softer than Mara remembered, tinged with a weariness that hadn't been there before.

"Hi, Eden," Mara managed, the words tasting like rust. "Yeah. For that." She gestured vaguely. "It's... a lot."

Eden walked around the circulation desk, a stack of books still in her arms. "I'm so sorry, Mara. Your dad... he was always so much a part of the lighthouse. It's hard to imagine Greyhaven without him there." She looked at Mara, her gaze searching. "Are you okay?"

Mara shrugged, a practiced motion. "I'm fine. Just... paperwork. And emptying a house I barely remember." She didn't mention the ledger, the hidden name, the gnawing suspicion.

"Well, if you need anything, anything at all, you know where to find me," Eden said, her voice earnest. "I'm still here. Still reading dusty books." She offered a small, self-deprecating smile. "The library's seen better days, but we manage. Lots of new development planned, though. Maybe we'll get a new wing." She gestured to the window. "You must have seen the banners for Evelyn Harrow's company."

Mara nodded, her eyes lingering on Eden's. The old easy familiarity wasn't there, not yet, but a fragile bridge had been offered. "I saw them. So, still the local historian, then?" she asked, trying for a lighter tone.

"Someone has to keep track of Greyhaven's stories," Eden replied, a faint shadow passing over her features. "Especially with all the new ones trying to overwrite the old." She cleared her throat. "Listen, I'm free for lunch tomorrow, if you are. We could catch up properly. There's a new coffee shop, if you can believe it."

Mara hesitated. The thought of revisiting the past, of picking at old wounds, was daunting. But the ledger beckoned, and Eden, the town's walking encyclopedia, might be an invaluable resource. "Yeah," Mara said, a decision solidifying. "Lunch sounds good. I'll meet you there. Twelve?"

Eden's smile returned, brighter this time. "Perfect. I'm really glad you're back, Mara. Even if it's for... this." She glanced towards the window, where the lighthouse was just visible through a break in the clouds.

Leaving the library, Mara felt a strange mix of relief and unease. Connecting with Eden was a step, a necessary one. But it also pulled her deeper into the town's current, a current she had fought so hard to escape.

Back at the lighthouse, the air had grown colder, the light from the lantern casting long, dancing shadows. She spent the rest of the afternoon meticulously examining the keeper's room, her archivist's eye scanning for any other anomalies. The ledger had been a surprising find, but her father had always been a man of hidden depths, a silent keeper of more than just the light.

She found nothing else immediately, no other secret compartments, no other cryptic journals. The small, spartan room was exactly as a lighthouse keeper's should be: functional, weathered, imbued with the stoic scent of duty. But the presence of the hidden book, the single name on its first page, whispered of a different kind of duty, a darker vigil.

As dusk deepened, painting the sky in shades of bruised purple and angry red, Mara pulled out the ledger again. She set it on the scarred wooden table, under the beam of a desk lamp, its light a small, defiant circle against the encroaching gloom. The pages, thin as onion skin, crackled faintly as she opened it.

Elias Thorne. The name was written in a hand that was unmistakably her father's, firm and deliberate. But the date beside it - October 17th, 1999 - gnawed at her. She remembered that date. She remembered the whispered arguments, the hushed phone calls, the sudden, strained silences that had descended over their small household. It was the year before her mother had finally packed her bags and left Greyhaven for good, taking a bewildered Mara with her. Her father, she had been told, had simply stayed. Stuck.

She ran her finger over the faded ink. Why was her father's name in a ledger of disappearances, and with a date that predated his official death by so many years? The questions began to form, sharp and insistent, like the wind worrying at the windowpanes. This wasn't just about settling an estate anymore. This was about a secret, a lie that had festered in Greyhaven for decades. And the first name in the book was the one that pulled her deepest into the dark. Her own.

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