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Unfriendly Woman

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Introduction

Everyone in town knows her, and knows not to cross her threshold. She has walked these streets for years, her shoulders squared against the wind, face set in lines that neither winter nor laughter have softened. Yet, everyone also knows a story or two—a theory about how she came to be so unfriendly, so distant, so reluctant to return a neighbor’s greeting. This book is about that woman, and about how the world puts a name to what it fears, what it does not understand, or what it chooses to misunderstand.

“Unfriendly Woman” explores the delicate, often brutal machinery of reputation. It is set in a small community that prides itself on knowing its members intimately—at least the parts they are willing to display. Our protagonist has chosen a kind of invisibility, or the world has forced it upon her. Behind drawn curtains and late-night lights, she conducts her life with care, but the town has already written its judgment. This story is not about whether that judgment is justified, but about the consequences of such stories, and the silences they demand.

As we move through these chapters, her world—tight, contained, and meticulously ordered—will be shaken. She may seem difficult, stubborn, even unfriendly in the way she closes the door, in the way she holds back a single word too many. Through the eyes of others, her actions become myth; through her own, necessity. Both versions are true, and both are incomplete.

This novel examines the discomfort we feel around those who do not fit expectations, the blind spots we cultivate, and the small cruelties that pass as kindness. Living alone is an act of courage for some; for others, it is an admission of defeat. Between these meanings lies the story of an ordinary woman with a complicated history—a story as familiar as it is strange.

Ultimately, “Unfriendly Woman” invites the reader into the quiet rooms of a life considered unfathomable by many, to listen for the echoes of what is unsaid. As the chapters unfold, the boundaries between perception and reality blur. Where, and to whom, do we owe our friendliness? And what are the costs of withdrawing, or of being pushed to the edges of a community’s care? In answering, or merely considering, these questions, I invite you to step across her threshold—if only in these pages.

CHAPTER ONE: The Arrival

The bus always arrived at precisely 4:17 PM, a lumbering beast of chrome and faded municipal green, spitting a fine mist of exhaust into the quiet air of Oakhaven. Most days, it was a solitary event, the driver exchanging a terse nod with old Mr. Henderson who swept the station platform, then pulling away with a groan that rattled the windows of the general store. But on a Tuesday in late spring, a passenger alighted, and the rhythm of Oakhaven tilted ever so slightly on its axis.

She stepped down onto the tarmac with a small, battered suitcase and a large, unassuming canvas bag slung over one shoulder. Her clothes were practical—a dark, sensible coat, thick trousers, and sturdy walking boots, despite the mild weather. She didn't look around with the wide-eyed curiosity of a newcomer, nor did she betray any signs of weary travel. Her gaze, instead, was fixed on the cobblestone street that wound up toward the town square, as if she knew precisely where she was going.

Mr. Henderson, leaning on his broom, watched her. He'd lived in Oakhaven for seventy-odd years and considered himself an unofficial keeper of its comings and goings. New faces were rare, especially those arriving on the 4:17, which typically carried only day-trippers returning from the city or a stray delivery of specialty pickles for Mrs. Gable's deli. This woman was neither.

She moved with an almost imperceptible efficiency. She didn't hesitate, didn't consult a map, didn't even glance at the 'Welcome to Oakhaven' sign, painted with a whimsical oak tree and a suspiciously cheerful squirrel. Her destination, it seemed, was already etched into her mind. She crossed the small square, past the dormant fountain and the flower beds that were just beginning to burst with early tulips, and turned onto Willow Creek Lane.

Willow Creek Lane was perhaps the quietest street in Oakhaven, lined with houses that had seen generations come and go, their stone facades mellowed by time and weather. At the very end of the lane, where the pavement gave way to a narrow, overgrown track leading to the old mill, stood number 17. It was a house that everyone knew, if only by reputation.

The house at 17 Willow Creek Lane had been empty for years, a relic of a time when the mill at the creek's edge had still hummed with activity. Its windows were boarded up, its garden a riot of unchecked weeds and stubborn rose bushes, and a faint, musty odor seemed to perpetually cling to its porch. Local children dared each other to touch its rusted iron gate, whispering tales of what might lie within.

As she approached, the woman paused, not in surprise, but in appraisal. She surveyed the peeling paint, the sagging porch, the overgrown brambles that clawed at the front door. A flicker, something akin to a sigh, seemed to pass over her face, quickly masked. Then, with a decisive squaring of her shoulders, she pushed open the creaking gate.

Mr. Henderson, having finally swept the last of the dust motes from the platform, ambled slowly up Willow Creek Lane, a natural detour on his way home. He didn't hurry, but his pace suggested a keen interest in the unfolding scene. He saw her fumble in her bag, produce a set of keys, and with a surprisingly swift movement, unlock the heavy, oak door of number 17.

The door opened with a groan that echoed down the lane, a sound that seemed to awaken the quiet street. A faint scent of damp earth and forgotten dust wafted out. She stepped inside, the dim light swallowing her figure, and the heavy door swung shut behind her with a definitive thud. The sound, final and resonant, seemed to settle over Oakhaven like a pronouncement.

Mr. Henderson stopped at the edge of the property line, contemplating the closed door. He knew the house. It belonged to the late Miss Mildred Finch's estate, a woman whose eccentricity had bordered on reclusiveness. The legal wrangling over its ownership had been whispered about in the general store for years. No one in Oakhaven had expected it to be occupied again, least of all by a stranger.

He considered turning back, but curiosity, a trait he usually managed to suppress, pricked at him. He shuffled a little closer, peering at the front windows. They remained dark, impassive. The silence from within was absolute, broken only by the distant caw of a crow.

Later that evening, the lights in number 17 flickered on, one by one, tentative beacons against the deepening twilight. First a downstairs window, then an upstairs, casting a pale, hesitant glow onto the tangled garden. Neighbors, peeking from behind their own curtains, noted the activity with a mixture of apprehension and fascination. Mrs. Gable, two houses down, sent her husband out to "check the mail," a thinly veiled excuse to observe.

No one saw her again that night. The lights stayed on until late, a silent testament to the work being done inside. The arrival of the 'Unfriendly Woman' had not been heralded by fanfare, nor had it been preceded by local gossip, which was unusual for Oakhaven. It had been, instead, a quiet assertion, a simple turning of a key. And with that single act, the stage was set for a new kind of story in the quiet town.

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