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The Echoes of Evernight

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Introduction

Jessica Warren awoke in darkness, to the sound of waves beating against cliffs and strange voices murmuring outside her door. For a moment, she expected to find herself in her childhood bedroom, safe and familiar, but the room was too foreign—shadowed, heavy with brine and secrets. A photograph on the nightstand showed her with people she did not recognize: a man with gentle eyes who called himself her husband, and friends whose names stuck on the tip of her tongue, refusing to cross the threshold of memory. She could not remember their faces, nor even how she had come to be in this house on the edge of the restless sea.

Her last clear memory was five years old, clinging to a life that ended in a city apartment far from here. Now, Evernight Bay seemed both unfamiliar and horribly right—a town where every weather-beaten storefront and fog-laced alley hinted at something buried just out of reach. When Jessica looked in the mirror, she saw a woman transformed, more haunted than she remembered herself being, with eyes that scanned for phantoms in every corner.

It did not take long for the world to reveal its fractures: on her first morning, the police arrived. They asked questions she could not answer, voices tight with suspicion. A crime scene by the cliffside chapel—the victim already cold, her own name scrawled in blood at the edge of the altar. People she did not know flinched when they met her gaze, crossing to the other side of the street, or whispered behind closed doors. At night, dreams twisted through her mind: childhood lullabies, screams muffled by water, a ghostly figure watching from the dunes.

Desperate for answers, Jessica clung to fragile clues: fragments of lost conversations, half-remembered nightmares, scraps of a diary tucked in the lining of a forgotten coat. Every hour peeled back another layer of her amnesia, exposing glimpses of rituals held on moonless nights, warnings scratched into driftwood, and a presence watching from the angry surf. The divide between waking and dream thinned, and sometimes she glimpsed shapes moving just beyond her line of sight—always too late to catch.

As the walls of her isolation closed in, Jessica began to suspect that her forgetting was no accident, and neither was her return. Something tied her fate to the tragedies that clung like damp mist to Evernight Bay—a thread of memory, guilt, and unfinished bargains twisting through the marrow of the town itself. Haunted by visions, uncertain whom she could trust, and pursued by the relentless tides of her own mind, Jessica realized that the only path to survival was to confront Evernight's secrets, no matter where they led.

She would have to delve into the heart of her own darkness, risking not just her sanity, but her very soul. For in Evernight Bay, the past is not dead—it waits below the surface, whispering, longing to be heard. And some memories, once unearthed, can never be buried again.

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CHAPTER ONE: The Bloodied Message

The insistent peal of the doorbell sliced through the unnatural quiet of the house, dragging Jessica from the hazy borderland of a dream she couldn't quite grasp. The dream had been cold, metallic, tasting of salt and something acrid, like burnt bone. She blinked, the dim morning light seeping through unfamiliar curtains, illuminating dust motes dancing in the air. Her head throbbed, a dull, insistent pulse behind her eyes. She pushed herself up, the stiff unfamiliarity of the mattress beneath her a stark reminder of her disorienting awakening.

"I'll get it, Jess!" a voice called from downstairs, too bright, too cheerful for the fog in Jessica's mind. It was Michael, her supposed husband, the man whose gentle eyes held a warmth she couldn't recall ever having inspired. He moved through the house with an easy familiarity that only deepened her sense of alienation. She heard the click of the lock, followed by the murmur of voices, deep and official. Police.

Her stomach clenched. *Police?* Why would the police be at their door? The question was a pinprick in the thick curtain of her amnesia, but no answer presented itself. The house, she now realized, was on a small bluff overlooking the relentless grey expanse of the Atlantic. The roar of the waves was a constant presence, a mournful bass note beneath the mundane sounds of Michael's conversation.

She dragged herself out of bed, her legs feeling strangely heavy, as if she were walking through water. Her reflection in the full-length mirror on the closet door startled her. The woman staring back was undeniably Jessica, but subtly altered. Her usually vibrant brown hair seemed duller, and there were faint shadows beneath eyes that held a new, disquieting depth. She looked... older. And tired. Not just physically, but as though some invisible weight pressed down on her soul.

A flicker of movement caught her eye. In the corner of her vision, a shape seemed to detach itself from the shadows, a faint, translucent outline. She spun, but there was nothing. Just the empty corner, the morning light painting stripes across the wooden floor. *Imagination*, she told herself, a word that felt like a flimsy shield against an invisible threat.

She dressed quickly, pulling on the first comfortable clothes she found – a soft, oversized sweater and a pair of worn jeans. As she descended the creaking staircase, the murmur of voices grew louder. Michael stood in the entryway, looking pale and slightly agitated, talking to two officers in dark blue uniforms. One was a burly man with a neatly trimmed beard and kind, but watchful, eyes. The other, a younger woman with keen, intelligent eyes that swept over Jessica the moment she appeared.

"Jessica," Michael said, his voice laced with a forced calm. "These are Detective Miller and Officer Hayes. They... they have a few questions."

Detective Miller stepped forward, his expression grave. "Ms. Warren. We apologize for disturbing you so early, but it's urgent. We found your name at a crime scene. Written in... well, in blood."

The words hit her like a physical blow. Her name. Written in blood. At a crime scene. The room seemed to tilt. "My name?" she managed, her voice a thin whisper. "Where? What are you talking about?"

Officer Hayes spoke, her voice crisp and professional. "At the old cliffside chapel, Ms. Warren. There's been a murder." She paused, her gaze holding Jessica's. "The victim is a woman named Eleanor Vance. Do you know her?"

Eleanor Vance. The name hung in the air, utterly meaningless to Jessica. She searched her mind, but there was only a vast, echoing emptiness where any memory of that name should be. "No," she said, shaking her head. "I... I don't remember anyone by that name." The truth sounded like a lie, even to her own ears.

Michael stepped forward, placing a hand on Jessica's arm. "Jessica had an accident, Detective," he explained, his voice strained. "She's... she's suffering from pretty severe amnesia. She doesn't remember anything from the last five years."

Detective Miller's eyes narrowed, a flicker of skepticism in their depths. He looked from Jessica to Michael, then back again. "Amnesia," he repeated slowly, as if tasting the word. "Convenient."

"It's not convenient, Detective," Jessica retorted, a sudden surge of anger cutting through her confusion. "It's terrifying. I woke up yesterday in this house, with a man I don't remember, in a town I don't remember moving to. And now you're telling me my name is tied to a murder? Do you honestly think I'm making this up?" Her voice cracked on the last word.

Officer Hayes exchanged a look with Detective Miller. "We understand this is distressing, Ms. Warren," Hayes said, her tone softening slightly. "But we need to ask you about your movements last night. And your relationship with Ms. Vance, however brief it might have been."

"I don't know where I was last night," Jessica admitted, her voice flat. "I don't know where I've been for the last five years. I can tell you my last memory is of living in an apartment in Boston, working as a graphic designer. That was... five years ago." She gestured vaguely around the unfamiliar living room. "This house, this town, none of it

rings a bell.”

Michael cleared his throat. “Jessica was here with me all last night, Detective. We had dinner, watched a movie, went to bed. She was disoriented, as she has been since she woke up. She hasn’t left the house.”

Detective Miller’s gaze lingered on Michael for a moment, a silent question passing between them. Then he turned back to Jessica. “We found a note in Ms. Vance’s pocket. It had your name on it, along with an address. This address, in fact.” He held up a small, evidence-bagged slip of paper. Through the plastic, Jessica could see her full name, Jessica Warren, followed by the street and house number. The handwriting was neat, elegant, yet utterly alien to her.

“Did Ms. Vance ever visit you here, Ms. Warren?” Miller pressed. “Or did you arrange to meet her?”

“I don’t know!” Jessica cried, frustration bubbling over. “I don’t know her! I can’t remember! How can I answer questions about someone I don’t even recognize?”

A wave of dizziness washed over her. The room seemed to recede, the voices of the officers becoming muffled. A sharp, icy chill pricked at her skin, and for a fleeting second, she smelled it again – that faint, metallic tang, like old blood and cold stone. And then, at the periphery of her vision, a swift, almost imperceptible shadow. It darted across the wall, too quick to properly register, leaving a lingering impression of something gaunt and tall.

She gasped, clutching at the doorframe. “Are you alright, Jess?” Michael asked, his hand flying to her back.

“I... I just felt a little faint,” she murmured, trying to steady herself. She glanced at the corner where the shadow had been, but there was nothing. Only the ordinary play of light and shadow. *Get a grip*, she chastised herself. *You’re stressed. You’re confused.*

Detective Miller seemed to observe her carefully. “We’ll need you to come down to the station later today, Ms. Warren,” he said, his voice gentler but still firm. “Just to go over a few things. See if anything jogs your memory. And we’ll need to take a statement from you, Mr. Warren.”

“Of course, Detective,” Michael said, his voice flat.

As the officers turned to leave, Officer Hayes paused at the threshold, her eyes lingering on Jessica. “Evernight Bay is a small town, Ms. Warren,” she said, her voice dropping slightly, as if imparting a secret. “Everyone knows everyone. And everyone knows things. Things that don’t always make sense.”

The door closed, leaving the house in an unnerving silence. Jessica stared at the closed door, her mind reeling. Her name, scrawled in blood. A murdered woman she didn't know, yet somehow was connected to. The fleeting shadows, the scent of something metallic, the unnerving feeling of not being alone. Evernight Bay. The name itself felt like a heavy, moss-covered stone, pulled from the depths.

Michael came to her, his face etched with worry. "Are you okay, Jess? This is... it's a nightmare."

Jessica looked at him, truly looked at him, trying to find some anchor in his familiar-yet-foreign face. "A nightmare that feels sickeningly real," she whispered. "Michael, who is Eleanor Vance? And why would my name be at her crime scene? Why would she have our address?"

He ran a hand through his hair, his gaze evasive. "I... I don't really know her, Jess. Just by reputation. She was a bit of a recluse, lived up in the old lighthouse keeper's cottage. A local oddity, you know? Never really mixed with anyone." He paused, then added, almost as an afterthought, "People said she dabbled in... unusual things."

"Unusual things?" Jessica prompted, a prickle of unease spreading through her.

Michael shrugged, a dismissive gesture that didn't quite ring true. "Just local gossip. Old wives' tales. People in small towns talk, you know? Especially about anyone who doesn't fit in." He avoided her gaze, his eyes darting towards the window that overlooked the crashing waves.

Jessica's eyes narrowed. He was holding something back. Something more than just "local gossip." The evasiveness in his eyes, the slight tremor in his voice - it spoke of a secret, perhaps one he thought he was protecting her from. But if her name was on a murder scene, if she was somehow implicated, she needed every scrap of truth.

"What kind of unusual things, Michael?" she pressed, her voice firm.

He sighed, finally meeting her gaze, his expression a mixture of fear and resignation. "Look, Jess, it's nothing. Just... people said she was involved in some kind of local coven, or some such nonsense. Performing rituals down by the sea. They say the old chapel, where they found her... it's always been a place for that kind of thing." He swallowed hard. "But it's just talk, Jess. Don't pay it any mind."

Rituals. The word echoed in her mind, sending a shiver down her spine. It connected, somehow, to the cold, metallic scent she'd briefly experienced, to the shadow that had darted in the corner of her vision. And to the strange, chilling dreams that had plagued her since her awakening. Dreams of chanting voices, of firelight on ancient stone, of a

feeling of profound dread.

"A coven?" Jessica repeated slowly, the idea both absurd and unsettling. "Are you serious?"

Michael's shoulders slumped. "It's Evernight Bay, Jess. People believe in all sorts of things here. Old curses, vengeful spirits... things that supposedly cling to the land itself." He took her hand, his touch cool. "Don't worry about it. We'll go down to the station, we'll explain about your amnesia, and they'll see it's a misunderstanding. They'll find the real killer."

But a chilling thought blossomed in Jessica's mind, cold and sharp. What if she was connected to Eleanor Vance? What if her amnesia was not just an unfortunate accident, but a deliberate erasure? And what if the secrets Michael was so desperate to protect her from were not just town gossip, but something far more dangerous, woven into the very fabric of her forgotten life? The bloodied message, her name scrawled at a crime scene, was not just a question for the police. It was a question for herself, one that promised a terrible answer.

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