

THE LAST LIGHTHOUSE

Chapter One: The Night the Sea Changed

The storm had started before sunset, but by midnight, it had become something different. The waves ~~were hitting~~crashed against the rocks below the lighthouse with ~~a~~such force that ~~made~~ the entire building seemed to shake. From the narrow window at the top, Elias could barely see the sea. Everything outside was black except for the occasional flash of lightning, which ~~showed the~~revealed waves rising like walls around the island. He had worked in the lighthouse for almost eleven years, and ~~he~~ had seen many storms before. ~~This, but this~~ one felt wrong.

Elias checked the old brass clock on the wall. It was 12:17 a.m. He wrote the time in the logbook, then ~~stopped for a moment~~paused when he heard a sound coming from outside. At first, he thought it was only the wind, but then he heard it again. ~~Three:~~ three short knocks ~~came~~coming from the lighthouse door.

Elias looked toward the wooden door of the lighthouse room. Nobody could be there. The island was nearly three miles from the mainland, and no boat would come this close during a storm. Even the fishermen knew better than to challenge the sea tonight. ~~Another~~Then another three knocks came, louder this time.

He stood ~~up~~ slowly and walked toward the door. "Who's there?" he called, although he already knew there was probably no answer. For several seconds, nothing happened. Then the knocking came again. Elias reached for the handle and opened the door.

A young woman ~~was standing~~stood outside. She was soaked from head to toe, her dark hair ~~stuck~~plastered against her face. She was barefoot and wearing a thin gray dress ~~that was~~ torn near the shoulder. She looked exhausted, but what frightened Elias most was the expression on her face. She wasn't surprised to see him. Instead, she looked at him as if she had been expecting him.

"You came," she whispered.

Elias frowned. "What?"

The woman looked ~~behind~~past him, and into the lighthouse. "I knew you would open the door."

"Who are you?" Elias asked. His voice sounded more nervous than he ~~wanted it to~~intended.

She didn't answer. Instead, she stepped inside and nearly fell. Elias caught her by the arm and helped her toward the small table near the fireplace. "You shouldn't be here," he said. "Where did you come from?"

"The sea."

Elias stared at her for a moment. "That's not possible."

She looked at him with tired eyes. "It is tonight."

Before Elias could ask what she meant, the lighthouse light went out. The room became completely dark, and for a few seconds, the only thing he could hear was the storm outside. Elias turned toward the stairs. The great lamp at the top of the tower had never failed in all the years he had been there. He kept emergency fuel for situations like this, but before he could move, the woman grabbed his hand.

"Don't go upstairs."

Her voice had changed. It was no longer weak or frightened.

"Why?" Elias asked.

"Because someone is already there."

Elias looked toward the staircase. The darkness seemed thicker than before. For a moment, he heard nothing except the rain striking ~~against~~ the windows. Then came the sound of footsteps above them. Slow and heavy, each step seemed to echo through the entire lighthouse. Elias felt his heart begin to pound.

"Who is that?" he whispered.

"I don't know," the woman said.

Elias moved toward the wall and reached for the old metal lantern hanging beside the door. His hands were shaking slightly as he lit it. The weak flame pushed a little light into the room, but it wasn't enough to reach the top of the staircase. He raised the lantern and took one careful step forward.

"Who's there?" he called.

There was no answer.

He took another step.

Then a shadow appeared on the wall above them.

Elias stopped breathing for a ~~second~~ moment. The woman moved closer to him and held onto his arm. He could hear her breathing quickly beside him. Elias raised the lantern higher, trying to see the person standing somewhere above the stairs.

Then a voice came from the darkness.

"Elias."

He froze.

The voice was familiar. Too familiar.

His face went pale as he stared into the darkness. He had not heard that voice in seventeen years, but he knew it immediately.

It was the voice of his brother.

Daniel had been dead for seventeen years.

Elias dropped the lantern. The flame went out, leaving them in complete darkness once again. For several seconds, there was only the sound of the storm and Elias's uneven breathing. Then, somewhere above them, someone began to laugh.