Title: The Lantern Keeper

In a small coastal town perpetually wrapped in mist, stood an old lighthouse that hadn't guided a ship in decades. The townsfolk called it "The Lantern of Echoes." They said the sea forgot its storms there, and that the waves grew calm out of respect for the keeper who once lived inside.

Mara arrived one autumn evening, suitcase in hand and a letter in her pocket. The letter was short—*"The Lantern is yours now. Keep it burning. —Grandfather."* She had never met him; he'd died before she was born. Still, she climbed the cliff path, each step swallowed by fog, until the lighthouse rose before her—tall, weathered, but somehow alive.

Inside, dust coated everything except the great lantern itself, which gleamed as if freshly polished. When she tried to light it, the match flared blue and whispered her name. Startled, she nearly dropped it—but the flame steadied, and the light filled the room with warmth.

That night, she dreamed of the sea. She saw ghostly ships drifting below the surface, their crews staring upward with longing. A man—her grandfather—stood among them, holding a dim lantern. "Keep it burning," he said again. "The lost need its glow."

When Mara awoke, she found the storm outside raging fiercely, waves hammering the cliff. But the lighthouse shone like a star, and in the distance, she could swear she saw ships emerging from the fog, gliding safely to shore.

The townsfolk noticed, too. "The Lantern Keeper's spirit must've found peace," they said. Mara only smiled. Every night thereafter, she climbed the spiral stairs, lit the lantern, and watched the mist part like curtains.

And sometimes, when the wind was right, she heard a quiet voice in the flame—calm, grateful, and proud.

She was no longer just Mara. She was the Keeper. And the sea would never forget her light.