

The Silent Locket

Chapter 1: The Symphony of Dust

The bell above the door of *Thorne's Curiosities* didn't just jingle; it sighed. It was a brass weary thing, forged in a Birmingham foundry in 1920, and it remembered every hand that had ever pushed it open. It remembered the rough callous of a long-dead delivery man, the gloved timidity of a widow selling her wedding china, and the sweaty palm of a thief who had once tried to lift a pocket watch in 1974.

Elias Thorne heard it all. Not the sound—the sound was merely a carrier wave—but the memory.

Elias was a listener. It was a condition without a medical name, a curse disguised as a talent. He didn't listen to people—people lied, exaggerated, forgot, and rewrote their own histories to suit their egos. Elias listened to things. Matter, he had learned long ago, was the only reliable witness. Matter held onto resonance.

In his shop, the air was never truly quiet. To anyone else, *Thorne's Curiosities* was a dusty, dimly lit emporium of junk smelling of beeswax and old paper. To Elias, it was a cacophony.

The mahogany walking stick near the umbrella stand hummed with the vibration of cobblestone streets in Victorian London and the distinct, rhythmic *thud-click* of a limp caused by gout. The chipped porcelain teacup on the second shelf whispered of a scandalous affair discussed in hushed tones over Earl Grey, vibrating with the thrill of illicit secrets. The rusted bayonet in the far corner screamed—a high, thin, metallic shriek of terror and adrenaline that made Elias's molars ache if he stood within three feet of it.

His life was a symphony of the past. He was the unwilling conductor for a thousand inanimate lives, navigating a minefield of emotional debris every time he made a cup of coffee. Even his own kettle, a modern electric thing, droned on boringly about the purity of filtered water and the indignity of limestone scale.

It was a rainy Tuesday in November when the silence walked in.

The rain usually made things louder. Water was a conductor; it soaked into the wood of the doorframe and amplified the memories of the oak. The shop was groaning with the damp misery of the storm when the door opened.

A woman stepped inside. She was soaked to the bone, her hair plastered to her skull in dark ribbons. She wore a coat that was too thin for the season, the fabric radiating a cold, synthetic misery. She didn't look at the shelves of whispering clocks or the murmuring statues. She looked straight at Elias, her eyes wide and rimmed with red.

"Do you buy things?" she asked. Her voice was brittle, like dry leaves stepping on gravel. Elias looked up from his ledger. He adjusted his spectacles, trying to tune out the ambient chatter of the room. "Depends on what they have to say," he replied, a standard line that usually garnered a confused look.

The woman didn't look confused. She looked desperate. She approached the counter, her movements jerky. She reached into her wet pocket and pulled out a small bundle wrapped in dark blue velvet.

"I need it gone," she said. "I don't care what you give me. I just need it out of my house." Elias leaned over the glass counter. Under his palms, the glass hummed with the reflection of a thousand faces that had peered down into it—greedy faces, curious faces, lonely faces.

"Let's see it then," Elias said gently.

She placed the bundle on the counter and peeled back the wet velvet with trembling fingers. Inside lay a locket.

It was silver, tarnished to a dull, matte grey. It was oval-shaped, unadorned by engravings or gems. It looked entirely unremarkable.

Elias reached out. Usually, before his skin even brushed an object, he would feel the *preamble*—a static charge of emotion, like the heat radiating from a sidewalk at sunset. A wedding ring might buzz with anxiety or warmth; a pocket watch might tick with the heartbeat of a dying man; a child's toy might giggle with sticky, frantic energy.

But as his hand hovered over the locket, he felt... nothing.

Not the quiet of a stone, for even stones hummed with the slow, geological grinding of the earth. Not the quiet of plastic, which murmured of factories and oil.

This was absolute, terrifying zero.

It was like stepping off a cliff into a void. As his fingers closed around the cold metal, the sensation was so jarring that Elias gasped and nearly dropped it. It wasn't just quiet; it was an aggressive absence of sound. It was a black hole in the middle of his noisy shop, a sudden drop in pressure that popped his ears.

"I'll give you fifty for it," the woman said quickly, mistaking his recoil for rejection. "Please. Just take it."

Elias looked up at her, really seeing her for the first time. She was terrified. Not of him, but of the thing in his hand.

"Where did you get this?" Elias asked, his voice tight. He felt dizzy. The silence was sucking the air out of the room. It felt like holding a piece of deep space.

"It was my grandmother's," she whispered, glancing at the door as if checking for an escape route. "She died last week. We were clearing out her attic. We found it in a box, wrapped in lead foil, buried under a pile of old linens."

"Lead foil?" Elias frowned. Lead was used to block radiation. Or, in older superstitions, to contain spirits.

"She... she didn't like it. I remember seeing it once when I was a girl. She screamed at me to don't touch it. She said it was a 'thief'. I thought she meant it was stolen." The woman shuddered. "But since I brought it home... the house feels wrong. My dog won't go in the bedroom. I can't sleep. It's too quiet."

Elias gripped the locket tighter. The silence was spreading up his arm, numbing his skin, dulling the ache in his elbow that usually predicted rain. It was seductive.

"I'll take it," Elias said.

He opened the till. The bills rustled with the greed of a hundred previous exchanges—the grime of commerce, the desperation of gambling debts, the joy of birthday money. He ignored their chatter. He grabbed a handful of notes, totaling far more than fifty, and pushed them across the counter.

"Take it," he said. "And go."

She snatched the money and fled. The bell sighed in relief as the door slammed shut. Elias was alone with the void.

Chapter 2: The Sound of Erasure

Elias locked the front door and flipped the sign to *Closed*, though it was only two in the afternoon. He couldn't deal with customers. He couldn't deal with the mundane chatter of the world.

He carried the locket to the back room, his sanctuary and workshop. Here, the noise was more managed. He kept the loudest objects—a cursed mirror from 1750 and a fragment of a Spitfire wing—in soundproofed glass cases.

He set the locket on his workbench, under the harsh, clinical light of his magnifying lamp. He picked up a jeweler's loupe and examined the surface. Scratches. Thousands of microscopic scratches, running in every direction. But no maker's mark. No hallmark. No purity stamp. It was as if the metal refused to be identified.

He pried it open with a fingernail.

The catch gave way with a silent pop. Inside: empty. No photo, no lock of hair, no dried flower. Just the same scratched, dull silver interior.

He closed his eyes and leaned in, pressing his ear close to the cold metal. "Talk to me," he whispered. "What are you?"

Usually, it took focus to tune *out* the noise of the shop. Now, he had to strain to hear anything from the object. He pushed his mind against the metal, seeking a vibration, a memory, a sensation of heat or cold or skin.

Nothing.

It was smooth, cold, and utterly dead.

But as he held his focus, he began to feel something else. It wasn't a sound. It was a *pull*.

It was the sensation of water draining from a tub. A swirling, spiraling suction.

Elias pulled back, his heart hammering. He looked around the workshop. The usual ambient noise seemed... thinner. The screwdriver on the table, which usually grumbled about a stripped screw it had encountered in 2004, was faint. The old radio in the corner, which typically hummed with the ghosts of big band music, sounded like it was broadcasting from three rooms away.

"It's dampening them," Elias murmured.

He felt a sudden spike of curiosity mixed with fear. He grabbed a brass button from a tray—a button from a Civil War uniform that usually reeked of gunpowder and fear. He brought the button close to the locket.

As the button entered the locket's six-inch radius, the smell of gunpowder vanished. The scream of the soldier faded. The button became just a piece of brass. Silent. Inert.

Elias pulled the button away. The smell returned, but weaker. Faded. Like a copy of a copy.

"My God," Elias whispered. "It eats them."

He spent the next six hours running experiments. He brought objects of varying volume to the locket. A noisy 1980s digital watch (full of anxiety about being late) was silenced instantly. A heavy iron key from a jail cell (heavy with misery and guilt) took longer, fighting back with waves of cold despair, before finally succumbing to the grey silence.

The locket wasn't just mute. It was a predator. It fed on resonance. It fed on memory.

By midnight, Elias was exhausted. The air in the workshop felt scrubbed clean, sterile like a hospital operating room. His head, usually throbbing with the noise of the world, was blissfully, terrifyingly clear.

He knew he should put it in the safe. He knew he should wrap it in lead, like the grandmother had.

But the silence was so sweet. For the first time in forty years, his mind wasn't crowded. He felt light.

He sat in his armchair, the locket in his hand, and for the first time in decades, he fell asleep without the aid of whiskey or white noise machines.

Chapter 3: The Dream of the White Room

He dreamed.

Usually, Elias's dreams were chaotic collages of other people's memories—flashes of wars he hadn't fought, loves he hadn't felt, deaths he hadn't died.

But this dream was different.

He was standing in a white room. The walls were white, the floor was white, the ceiling was an endless expanse of white mist. There were no corners. There was no horizon.

In the center of the room sat an old woman. She was sitting on a simple wooden chair, her back to him. Her grey hair was pulled into a tight bun. Her posture was rigid.

Elias walked toward her. His footsteps made no sound.

"Hello?" he called out. His voice died instantly, absorbed by the white mist.

The woman didn't turn. Elias walked around to face her.

She was rubbing her thumb against something in her lap. Over and over. A frantic, rhythmic motion. She was holding the locket.

Her eyes were open, but they were blank. Not blind—just empty.

"Please," she whispered. The sound was dry, like paper sliding on wood. "Take it away."

"Take what away?" Elias asked.

"The day he didn't come home," she said. She rubbed the locket. *Scritch. Scritch.* "Take it away."

As she rubbed, a dark smokiness seemed to leak from her fingers into the silver.

"Take away the letter," she whispered. *Scritch.* "Take away the sound of the telegram boy knocking." *Scritch.* "Take away his face. I can't bear his face anymore if he's not here."

Elias watched in horror as her features began to blur. Not metaphorically. Her nose, her mouth, the lines of age around her eyes—they were softening, fading, like a watercolor painting left out in the rain.

"Stop," Elias said. "You're erasing yourself."

"It hurts too much," she wept, though no tears fell. "I just want silence. I just want it to stop."

She rubbed harder. The locket pulsed with a grey light.

"I don't want to remember!" she screamed.

And then, she was gone.

The chair was empty. The locket hovered in the air for a moment, suspended in the white void, before falling to the ground with a sound that wasn't a clatter, but a heavy, final *thud*. Elias woke up screaming.

Chapter 4: The Hunger

He was on the floor of his workshop. The locket had slipped from his hand and lay on the rug.

The shop was silent.

Too silent.

Elias scrambled up, his breath coming in ragged gasps. He ran to the door of the workshop and threw it open.

The main shop floor was bathed in moonlight. The grandfather clock by the window, a majestic piece from 1880 that usually projected a pompous, ticking baritone, was silent. The pendulum wasn't moving.

Elias rushed to it. He placed his hand on the wood.

Nothing. No memory of the craftsman. No memory of the house it had stood in for a hundred years. Just wood. Dead, seasoned wood.

He ran to the counter. The glass, which usually hummed with reflections? Silent. Silica and cold.

He ran to the bayonet in the corner. The screamer. The object he hated most in the world. He grabbed the rusty metal handle.

Silence.

The locket hadn't just dampened them. While he slept, while his guard was down, it had reached out. It had consumed the memories of every object in the main room. Years of history, centuries of emotion—gone. Eaten.

Elias fell to his knees. Tears streamed down his face.

He hated the noise. He had always hated the noise. He had prayed for silence a thousand times. But this... this was a massacre. These objects were his companions. They were the world's memory. And he had let a predator loose among them.

He felt a coldness in his pocket.

He looked down. He hadn't picked up the locket. It was still on the rug in the back room. But he *felt* it.

He scrambled back into the workshop. The locket was there. But it looked different. The tarnish was gone. The silver was gleaming, bright and predatory, shining with a light that didn't come from the lamp.

It was full.

And it was waking up.

Elias realized with a jolt of horror that the silence in the shop wasn't the end. It was the appetizer.

He felt a tug in his mind. Not a sound this time. A direct hook into his own psyche.

Forget, the locket whispered. Not in words, but in intent. *Forget the pain. Forget the noise. Forget the loneliness.*

It was offering him the same deal it had given the grandmother. Peace. In exchange for everything that made him human.

Elias backed away, hitting the workbench. The locket didn't move, yet the pull grew stronger. It was magnetic. It wanted his memories now. It wanted the listener. Who better to feed a device of oblivion than a man who remembered everything?

He grabbed a pair of iron tongs. He wouldn't touch it with his skin. Not again.

He clamped the tongs around the locket. It vibrated, a low, angry hum—the first sound it had ever made. It was the sound of a swarm of locusts.

"No," Elias gritted out.

He looked around for a container. The lead foil was gone, discarded by the woman. He needed something dense. Something with its own power.

His eyes landed on the safe in the corner. It was a heavy, cast-iron beast from the 1890s. It had belonged to a bank that had burned down. It was stubborn. It was angry. It remembered fire.

Elias rushed to the safe, spinning the dial. The lock clicked—a sound that usually carried the memory of the bank manager's panic, but was now dangerously faint. The safe was dying too.

He threw the locket inside.

The locket seemed to fight the air, slowing its descent as if defying gravity. It glowed brighter, pulsing with the stolen memories of the grandfather clock and the bayonet.

Peace, it promised him. Just let go.

For a second, Elias hesitated. To live without the screaming bayonet? To sleep without the whispering walls? It was the greatest temptation he had ever known.

He saw the grandmother in the white room. He saw the empty chair.

"I'd rather hurt," Elias said.

He slammed the heavy iron door shut. He spun the handle. He engaged the tumblers.

The silence cut off instantly.

The shop rushed back in.

It wasn't a full symphony. The front room was still largely lobotomized; the grandfather clock would never tick with pride again. But the back room—the tools, the workbench, the safe itself—roared back to life. The safe screamed in indignation at the cold thing inside it. The tongs in Elias's hand complained about the heat of his grip.

Elias slumped against the safe door, sliding down until he hit the floor. He was weeping, shaking, surrounded by the cacophony of the surviving objects.

The safe hummed against his back. Deep inside the iron walls, muffled by inches of steel and fire-hardened determination, Elias could hear a faint, scratching sound.

Scritch. Scritch.

It was the sound of something trying to erase its way out.

Elias closed his eyes and listened to the beautiful, terrible noise of the world. He would have to buy more lead. He would have to warn the others—if there were others like him. But for tonight, he just listened to the bayonet in the corner, faintly recovering its scream, and he thought it was the sweetest song he had ever heard.