The Lights of Yaquina Head

It was a cold November morning when Sam Peters stepped off the train in Newport, Oregon. The rain was coming down, almost horizontal in the wind, lashing against him. He was not prepared for this rain. Stepping onto the platform, pulling his trench coat collar up and his fedora down, he stalked off in the direction of the lone building with a light in the window. The bell jingled as he opened the door and stepped in. He stood dripping water on the floor for a moment, surveying the small train depot until he spied the man behind the ticket window and said, walking toward him.

“Nice weather.”

The ticket taker looked up from his magazine but said nothing. He had a flat look in his eyes like he'd heard that a million times, and this was one time too many. Peters stepped up to the barred ticket window and cleared his throat.

“Can I help you, sir?" the ticket taker said lazily.

“Hotel?” Peters jerked his head toward the door.

“It’s a block that way.” grumbled the ticket taker pointing out the window.

“How often do the trains run?"

“Where to?”

“Anywhere?”

“We got a train that pulls out at noon, headin' fer Portland. Then another going down south at two, but that's it. " Lifting the magazine and looking down to begin reading, he added, "You want a ticket?"

“Not at the moment. I'll be back." Peters turned around and headed back out into the rain. By the time he walked the block and a half to the hotel, his clothes were soaked. His well-worn shoes were making an audible sloshing sound with each step. When I find Alan, I'm going to have him buy me some new shoes. He thought as the motel sign's red glare revealed itself through the rain sheets. Crossing the street to the motel, he looked first left then right, nothing. This town is dead. Why did Alan want to come here?

The warm air of the Motel front office hit him as the door opened. He couldn't wait to get these wet clothes off and have a hot shower. The woman behind the desk smiled when she saw him enter, flipping her long dark hair over her shoulder with a wave of her hand. She moved over to the desk and opened a leather-bound book, flipping a few pages to find an empty line.

“You need a room stranger?" she said in a soft, slow voice.

She was pretty, not overly so, and not worth the distraction. "Yeah, something with hot water."

“I think we can find you something, you passin’ through?”

“I'm looking for my brother. I'll be here as long as it takes to find him. " Peters was not in the mood for small talk.

“Family man with two kids and a wife?” she raised her eyebrows as she began writing in the book.

“Yeah, you seen em’?” his eyes lit up as he pulled out his wallet and liberated a few dollars.

“They stayed here, doll. Not sure where they went. They left their things in the room almost two weeks ago, haven't been back since. That'll be three dollars for the night." She replied flatly, reaching her hand out.

Peters handed her two ten-dollar bills, "keep it, not sure how long I'm gonna be here. You still have their stuff?"

“Yeah, we have it in lost and found, but Mr. Brewer has the key. He'll be in tomorrow morning if you want to take a look." Grabbing the money, she pulled out a lockbox and stuffed the bills into a slot in the metal lid.

“I would. Is there a place to get something to eat?" Peters grumbled, looking at his watch. Two thirty, from the darkness of the rain clouds, you would think it was almost night.

“Up Oliver towards the water, you can't miss it." she gave him a smile and a sideways look. He guessed there weren't many outsiders that came through town. He wasn't what one would call handsome, but his blue eyes made up for other deficiencies. He smiled back. In any other town, she would be out of his league. He resisted the temptation to ask her to join him; he was on a matter of urgency and didn't have time to waste on such things.

“Your brother left in the morning. He said he was going to see the lighthouse on Yaquina Head. I told him not to bother, but he was insistent. Not sure why anyone would bring their family here for vacation. Not this time of year, at least." she offered, handing him the room key. "You need a wake-up call or anything?"

Peters reached out and grabbed the key. "No, I'll come by tomorrow morning to look at those things in lost and found."

“Name?”

“Sam… Peters.”

“Have a good night, Mr. Peters." she gave a smoldering look at him as he turned and made his way to the door. He felt her eyes on him as he left the office. Man, if only he were here for pleasure, not business, that's another thing I'll need to box Alan's ears for.

Sam made his way to the room, number seven of ten, all lined up like toy soldiers waiting to attack the gas station across the street. Each with its red door and black metal number nailed to the center. At least the walkway was covered. It didn't provide much protection from the rain falling at a steep angle. He walked down the row of rooms, there were no cars in the lot, and he wondered why he was given room seven. It didn't look like there was anyone else in the place. Reaching his room, he stared for a moment at the number on the door. Seven, lucky number seven, let's hope so, he thought. The key slid in smoothly, and he opened the door. It is gonna feel good to get out of these wet clothes and into a hot shower.

The room was a modest affair, one single bed in the middle of the wall to his right flanked on each side by a small table. The table closest to the door had a phone on it, the other a small lamp. A writing desk and chair occupied the left wall. At the back of the room was an open closet with a door next to it. The door was closed, but it was obviously the bathroom. The off-green carpet and mismatched floral curtains in deep red offended even his decorative sensibilities. That, coupled with the tan and brown-stripped bed cover, made the place look like a circus tent exploded. He wasn't here to give design advice, though; he moved to the back and opened the bathroom door. It was clean, and there were fresh towels. What more could he ask for? He removed his wet clothes and hung them on the radiator, then got into the shower. As the warm water shocked his cold, damp skin, he thought of Alan and his family. If they were not here, where could they be? Maybe they are staying at the lighthouse they went to see. It could be that the storm held them up. He hoped that was the answer and closed his eyes, letting the warm water run down his face.

Sam finished his shower and waited for his clothes to dry on the radiator as he thumbed through a handful of letters he had received from Alan. They had talked about the trip before he left, and Sam had warned that the Pacific Northwest was a bit rough around the edges and not suited for a man to bring his family for recreation. Alan had rebuffed him, saying that they were an adventurous sort, and it was just the place. They enjoyed the unspoiled beauty of the less-traveled paths, and Alan was a stickler for unorthodox travel plans. Why here, he thought, especially at this time of year. It made sense in the summer when the weather was mild, but it seemed as if this place hadn't seen a dry day in some time. He looked over the letters. They chronicled the trip from Chicago out to Portland, then the trip down to Newport. Every day or so, Alan wrote, letting his brother know what fun the family was having on their adventure. Something was off in the last letter, something so unlike his happy go lucky brother, then that was it. A week went by with no new message, and Sam knew something was wrong. There had better be, he thought, or he had dragged himself to this godforsaken place for nothing.

Alan's last letter must have been sent the day he left the motel. The time frame matched. Maybe he could find something in the things they left behind that would give him a clue. He held the letter in his hand, listening to the constant staccato of rain as it pelted the window. The wind howled relentlessly outside, setting an ominous background as he studied the letter. He had read it over and over, trying to find a place to start. The letter mentioned a man named Kent Marlowe, the lighthouse's current caretaker on Yaquina Head, who had agreed to show Alan and his family around the place. They were planning on heading there the following day, and Alan was excited to see a real working lighthouse. Sam needed to find this Marlowe. As far as he could tell, this person was the last to see Alan and his family. The letter mentioned a shantytown near the lighthouse, which the townsfolk don't like to talk about. It wouldn't be a stretch to think that Newport's upstanding denizens would frown on a hobo town springing up in their vicinity. It didn't seem like a likely place for Alan to go, but it was worth checking into nonetheless.

The rhythm of the rain was slowly lulling Sam to sleep as he waited for his clothes to dry. His thoughts drifted to his childhood and Alan, his older brother. He had always looked up to him. Alan was the athlete, the outdoorsman, the all-around adventurous type, handsome and charming. It seemed there was nothing he didn't excel at. Sam was the polar opposite, smaller of stature, and less inclined to physical activities. Sam spent more of his time with his head in a book or doing something not altogether legal. Sam was a bit of a black sheep in the family and always in his brother's shadow. That didn't create any resentment toward his brother; it only served to heighten his estrangement from his parents. He loved his brother more than anyone. He was the one person who believed in Sam and never counted him out. He was one only member of the family who supported Sam. Whether it was coming to his art showings or bailing him out of trouble, Alan was always there, with a smile and a pat on the shoulder. He mused about their childhood until he felt that his clothes were dry enough to put back on. Sam didn't fancy going back into that rain, but Alan needed him, or so he thought, and nothing was going to stop him from finding his brother.

When he opened the door to his room, it felt colder than he remembered. Still raining, still windy, he wondered if it was always like this here. Pulling his trench coat tighter around him, he tilted his hat down and strode out into the evening dim. He walked the two blocks toward the ocean and found the diner the girl from the motel had told him about. It was going to feel good to get some warm food in his stomach after a day of cigarettes and coffee. He planned to ask around to see if anyone had seen Alan and his family. It didn't seem likely that anyone wouldn't notice an entire family of outsiders in this godforsaken place. Judging from the way everyone's head turned when he walked in the joint, it wouldn't be hard to find someone who had seen them.

Sam hung his coat and hat on the rack beside the door. With a sweeping glance around the room, he sidled up to the counter beside a man who looked like Captain Ahab himself. Skin weathered from years of ocean wind and salt spray. He was probably much younger than he appeared. His black heavy wool sweater and stocking cap marked him as a sea fairing type, probably a fisherman or boat captain. He stared intently into his soup as he ate. The old mariner was the only one who didn't look up when Sam walked in, and so naturally, he was the first one Sam wanted to talk to.

“How’s the soup?” Sam asked.

“Good enough." the old sea dog said with a voice like a growling dog as he focused more intensely on his soup.

“I'll have what he's having," Sam called to the waitress as he turned to face the man. "You got a name?"

“Jacob. Jacob Price and you?”

“Nice to meet you, Mr. Price, names Sam Peters. I'm in town looking for my brother, Alan. Have you seen a man and his family around? They came here about four weeks ago. Probably asking a lot of questions about the history of the area and sights to see."

“Yeah," he grunted, "They asked me if I could take them out on a fishing trip, but they never showed up." Jacob returned to his soup slurping heavily, the spoon giving a clinking sound as it met the bottom of the bowl.

“How long ago was that?” probed Sam as the bowl of soup he ordered arrived.

“Was about two weeks ago, they asked if I could take them fer the comin' Saturday. Saturday came and went, and they didn't show back up at the docks. I figured they changed their minds. No skin off my back, though. I'm not used to taking people out anyhow. The money would have been nice. I figured they got sick of this place and moved on ta somethin' better." With that, he sniffed and wiped his chin with a napkin. As he stood, he turned to Peters and offered, "I can take you out if you like."

“I'm not here for pleasure, just looking for my brother. He didn't happen to say where else he was going, did he?"

“Naw, hope he didn't go over to the shantytown. Those people have a way of convincing folks to stay. Can't imagine a family man would go there, though. Good luck, findin' yer brother." He gave Sam a solid slap on the back as he walked away. His rough sea-worn hand like a wooden oar striking his shoulder.

“Nice to meet you, Mr. Price. Thanks."

As the waitress approached with a pot of coffee, she held it up and nodded to Sam. Sam turned the chipped coffee cup that rested on a napkin in front of him over, and she filled it up.

“What’s this I hear about a shanty town?” he inquired.

“You do best to stay away from there, mister. Those folks are no damn good if you ask me."

“Why would you say that? They’re just hobos and the like, right?”

“I suppose, don't know why they choose to stick around, people say they take people in, convince em' to follow their ways like gypsies or somethin'. That shitty ramshackle town gets bigger every year. People go missin'. Then folks say they seen em' wandering around that shantytown. People have gone there to argue their loved ones back, but they won't come. They say they want to stay and turn their kin away. Most people stay clear of the place." she visibly shivered at that.

“How long has it been there?” Sam pressed.

“Years, when I was young, it was small. We used to say that the hobos would come to take you away if you got too close. The kids would dare each other to get close. I went one time, got good and close too. I could see folks walking around inside the town. They looked like they was drunk, wandering around with what seemed like no good purpose. They didn't seem to talk to each other or be friendly at all. For all the shacks they have there, not many people were ever out and about. It was creepy. With the lighthouse on the cliff right above em', it was like the lighthouse was some sort of lightning rod drawin' in all these folks. One of em' come towards me walking like he was drunk. I ran, never went back there. You stay away if you know what's good fer ya."

“Lighthouse, you say?"

“Yeah, they are just below it on the north side against the cliffs there. Don't you go there, mister. You'll end up staying." She looked at Sam sternly. She was dead serious about him not going there. She had a look in her eyes that made Sam's stomach turn, or maybe it was the soup. He couldn't afford to let local superstitions deter him; this shantytown near the lighthouse Alan was planning on visiting seemed like a likely place to check out. It could be that the transients tried to rob Alan and his family, and they were hurt. Maybe they were taken to a hospital outside of town. That would explain why they up and left and haven't been back. He needed to get over to that lighthouse and have a look around.

“How can I go take a look at that lighthouse everyone is talking about?” he asked, then lifted his coffee and drained the cup.

“Go ask, Marlowe, he's at the Dockside, head to the docs. You can't miss it. You want another cup?" she raised the coffee pot.

“That will do, thanks." Sam put money on the counter, enough for the meal and then some, and walked out as the steam rose in snake-like tendrils from his half-finished bowl of soup.

As he walked through the driving rain to the docks, Sam wished he'd finished the soup he left at the diner. The day was beginning to weigh on him, but this was his first real lead, and he had to follow it up as soon as possible. All the calls made before he hopped on the train in Chicago got him nowhere, and now walking along the same streets his brother had, he felt he was close. Sam tried hard to push that other feeling down, but there it was, deep down in the darkness, surfacing each time he made another discovery about his brother's trip to Newport, that feeling that Alan was gone. No time for that kind of glass half empty shit. He was going to find him, he was going to save his brother this time, and pay back all those times Alan had done so for him. He had to.

The docks were a rickety affair, barely holding fast against the pounding waves. An iron archway with rusted lettering identifying this as the Newport Landing marked the entrance onto the dock. In the rain, he could barely tell where the ocean water ended and the dock began. Only a few dim lights hanging from poles evenly spaced along the sides of the gave any indication that there was a dock at all. He walked under the archway and descended the ten or so slippery wooden steps that ended on the dock's planks. The pier was about fifteen feet wide, with no railing on either side. At high tide, water was only about 3 feet below the planks. Now and then, a surge would push the water up through the spaces between the old weather-worn boards.

Sam felt like the whole thing could be taken into the sea at any moment. He stopped as he eyed the area. The dock extended out a hundred or so yards toward the angry sea, the faint shapes of tied up boats bobbed up and down in the darkness. He was wondering if it was safe to go out onto the dock when he spotted his query. Up ahead, about thirty yards to the right, dark against the ocean except for two windows that spilled light out into the miserable night, was the Dockside. He hadn't noticed the structure in the darkness until he was on the slick wet planks of the pier. As he walked toward the place, he could feel the dock swaying side to side. Maybe this was not such a good idea. He didn't like the thought of swimming in the tumultuous waters, but with the rain, it was almost as if he already was. He certainly wasn't getting any dryer. Sam made the trek up the dock and to the door of the rickety building that was attached. Standing at the door, he could hear the sound of conversations inside and laughter. The sign above the door was faded and barely legible in the darkness. "The Dockside," this was the place. He steeled his stomach against the swaying and pushed open the door.

Inside, the place was warm and well lit with a strong smell of stale beer. The swaying was less noticeable here. Though the establishment stood on stilts like the dock, a portion of the building was resting on land. There was no mistaking this place for what it was; nobody was trying to hide it. Unlike the speakeasies he was used to, this was a tavern right out of an old seaman's tale, with barrels of some spirits in racks behind the counter, all with spigots dripping from liberal use. Men talked and laughed, playing cards and other games around various tables, mostly pushed closer to the sizeable raging hearth in the left-most corner opposite the entrance. There were a few rough-looking customers at the counter, where stools were available, so Sam pulled one up and waved the man behind the counter over.

“Whatcha havin’ lad?” said the man with a grin that didn’t boast too many remaining teeth.

“Something strong, to take the chill off.” Sam was scanning the room.

“You bet." the man chuckled and walked over to grab a cup. He filled it from one of the barrels and put it down in front of Sam. "You passin' through?" he inquired as he put up two fingers.

Sam put two quarters on the counter and pulled a dollar out of his pocket. He set the cup down on the dollar and looked the man in the eye. “I’m looking for a man named Marlowe, you know of him?”

Eying the money, the man nodded and motioned to the hearth with his chin. "He's the one in the wool cap," he said, smiling.

Sam followed his gaze to see a group of about six men at a table by the fire, all wearing wool caps. "Thanks." Sam put another dollar on the counter and said, "Let's have a round for the table." He pushed his stool back and walked over to the men by the fire. As he approached, he called out, "Which one of you gentlemen is Marlowe?"

A man Sam assumed was Marlowe stood up, eying Sam with suspicion, “Who wants to know?”

“The names Sam Peters, I’m looking for my brother, Alan, he was looking to take his family to see the lighthouse on Yaquina Head. I was told you were the man to speak to in that regard.”

The drinks showed up as Sam finished speaking, which brought smiles and thanks from the men around the table. "That would be me, said the man who stood. Maybe we should talk." he motioned to an empty table.

Once seated, Sam began in a somewhat hushed voice. "My brother came here with his family, and he had been writing to me, he said they were going to see the lighthouse in his last letter, after that the letters stopped coming. That's not like my brother, so here I am. I want to make sure he and his family are OK."

“You can call me Kent. I saw your brother; he came in asking to see the lighthouse. I am taking care of it until the next keeper shows up. I took him and his family up there, showed em’ around. I brought em’ back into town after, haven’t seen em’ since.” he took a large pull from the drink Sam had bought him.

“Did they say where they were going after that? Anything about plans, anything would be helpful.”

“Nope, he was interested in the shantytown below the lighthouse, though. I told him to stay away from there, not the kinda place you should take the family. Ya know what I mean?"

“Yeah, I think I do. Alan's just the kinda stubborn jackass that wouldn't heed the warning." Sam took his first drink, it was strong, burned going down, and tasted like turpentine, but it was just the thing he needed at the moment.

“You said your waiting for the next keeper. What happened to the last one?” Sam asked.

“Took off, I suppose. It happens sometimes. It's lonely up at the lighthouse. Henry didn't see many people, just came into town now and again to get some supplies, then we wouldn't see him for weeks. One day one of the fishing boats noticed there was no light on up there. I went to check it out, he was gone, his stuff was there, but he wasn't. I checked all over. I've been lighting the light and taking the readings till a new keeper comes." Kent laughed slightly at that, "Your brother said maybe he'd like to do it." He shook his head. "I wouldn't stay up there. Everyone knows that place is haunted. Ever since Shadrack Wass, he..."

“Kent, you in on this game?" an old man from the table called to Kent. There was a look in his eye as he nodded when Kent looked his way. "You come on over now, if so."

“Excuse me. I hope you find your brother."

“Wait, can you take me up to the lighthouse? I need to have a look around. Maybe I can find a clue as to where he was headed next." Sam protested.

“It's too dark, and the storm. Come by the docks tomorrow morning." Kent waved his hand at Sam, indicating he didn't want to talk further about it here in the tavern. The other men eyed Sam sternly. Sam could take a hint. Tipping back the drink in his hand, he left it on the table and headed for the door. One last look back at the table of men as he pushed the door open found the old man who had cut Kent short staring at him intently. Sam let the door swing shut and staggered back down the dock, trying not to lose his footing on the slippery planks. Something about the way that man had cut him off was troubling. Every town has secrets; there would be hell to pay if that secret involved any harm coming to his brother and his brother's family, hell to pay. He adjusted the .38 revolver he had hidden away in his trench coat, hell to pay.

Sam woke early the next morning against the protest of every part of his body. The rain felt like it soaked into his very soul. As he opened his eyes, he could hear the familiar rhythm of the rain as it beat steadily on the window to his room. Is it ever going to stop? Not with his luck. He hoped the office opened early enough for him to take a look at his brother's things before going to meet Kent at the docks. Maybe there was some clue left behind. His brother would not have left all of his things unless something had happened. Perhaps he had to get out of town fast, or maybe he was being held somewhere. Neither of these seemed plausible. Why would anyone be interested in Alan? In Sam's experience, people did things for money, power, or love, and there wasn't a single one of those cards on the table when it came to Alan. Putting the whys on hold, he headed out for the office to start on the what.

After a hot shower, Sam put on his clothes, which had not entirely dried from the night before. He would have to work on getting some new clothes if he planned to be here for much longer. The rain never seemed to let up. Today the rain was lighter than it had been since he arrived; he hoped that was a good sign. He felt as if he hadn't gotten as much sleep as the time would have him think, restless, tossing and turning all night. He had a dream, he couldn't quite remember it, but he thought Alan was in it, and the kids. He put those thoughts away; he'd been trying not to think too much about his niece and nephew so that he could keep a level head. If anything happened to those kids, this town would burn, so help me, Sam thought. He pushed those feelings down as he made the short walk from his room to the office. The smiling face of the woman who had given him his room greeted him. He was going to have to remember to ask her name this time around. There was another man in the office as well; he was watering the plants as Sam entered. That must be Brewer.

The man Sam took for Brewer looked to be in his early fifties, although time had not been kind. Balding to a shine on top and gray the color of city snow on the sides, sporting a gin blossom that confessed of a town where prohibition hadn't asserted itself in any meaningful way. He turned to look as Sam entered the office but didn't say a word; it was Ms. Smiles a lot who spoke first.

“Morning, stranger, how did you like the diner?” she gave him a once over, noting the wrinkled and damp condition of his clothes. “We have some machines at the end of the row if you want to do some laundry.”

“Maybe later." turning to the man with the watering can. "You Mr. Brewer?"

“Yeah, Sue tells me your related to that family that up and left all their stuff here, is that right?" He set the watering can on the window sill.

“Any way I could take a look, I am trying to find out where they’ve gone.”

“Follow me, son," he said, walking behind the counter and through the door directly behind Sue's chair.

Sam followed; Sue eyed him as he walked back. The room was small, packed with a desk on the left side, which was neat and orderly, some file cabinets next to it, a door directly across the room, and to the right was what looked like everything anyone had ever left at the hotel since the dawn of time. Most of it looked like junk. Sam was surprised they didn't just toss it all into the garbage, then he noticed the familiar brown shoulder satchel that his brother always had with him. The other luggage around it must have been theirs. It was newer and in much better repair than the rest of the junk. Sure enough, Mr. Brewer walked over and motioned to it, four suitcases, and the satchel was the lot. Mr. Brewer began to reach for the first suitcase. Sam motioned for him to stop, "I got it, don't worry."

“You got a cart or something?”

Brewer nodded, and in short order, the luggage was hauled into Sam's room for his scrutiny. It was apparent, which were the kids. He put those aside and went for the satchel. His brother would leave anything behind, but not this. He always had it on him; he carried his notebooks, personal effects, wallet, and other essential things in it. There's no way he would have left it unless he was in some trouble.

Sam's mood turned dark as he looked inside. Everything, his wallet, notebooks, money, was still safely tucked inside. Suddenly Sam felt his heart pound. Something terrible had happened. He needed to hurry. It had already been almost two weeks since the letters stopped coming, with the trip out here. They could be... He let the thought trail off as he opened his brother's notebook and turned to the last entry.

It was dated November 3rd, just two weeks ago. The writing didn't sound like his brother at all. It was mechanical, without any emotion, which his brother was so inclined to add to even the most mundane entries. It spoke of the plans to take a second trip to the lighthouse, this time without a guide. It seems Judith was not so happy about the idea, and Alan was trying to persuade her. The kids were not mentioned at all, which Sam found strange. However, the last line brought the hair up on the back of Sam's neck.

“It is for us and ours to take our place and our time, and so it shall be.”

Sam couldn't put his finger on it, but that last line rubbed him the wrong way. It wasn't just that his brother would not write in such a fashion. It was also the contents of that line. Us and ours, was he talking about our family, Sam thought. Place and time where? It made no sense.

Sam put the journal in his pocket and set about going through the other suitcases. He found nothing of interest. It was quite clear that they had left all of their things. Even essential items and toiletries were left behind. Sam hoped they had to leave in a hurry; the other alternative was too much for Sam to process at the moment.

He made his way back to the docks to meet with Kent Marlowe and get to that lighthouse. There was something there, some sign. There had to be. It didn't take long for him to find Marlowe in the daytime bustle of the docks. He seemed nervous for some reason. His eyes darted back and forth, his head on a swivel. Hurrying Sam down the pier and onto one of the boats moored there, he motioned for Sam to enter the wheelhouse. Once inside, he slid the door shut and took off his cap. "You still wanna go out there eh?"

"Why shouldn't I? My brother and his family are missing, and I need to get to the bottom of it." Sam's voice wavered slightly as he said the last. He could see what looked like remorse in Kent's eyes.

“No, I just, that place, it’s not a good place. If there is some connection with that lighthouse and your brother, it can’t be good.” Kent looked genuinely concerned.

"What do you mean? You saw them last, you should know." anger was welling up inside Sam, and it was visibly evident.

"Me, I, no, I brought them back safe and sound, it's that place, it has a way of making you get confused, you know, I feel it when I am out there. Sometimes I find myself stayin' too long, lettin' nightfall and then realizing I'd been staring out the window for hours. I try to go there and do what I need to do as quickly as possible and get right back. The longer you're there, and the dreams." Kent trailed off.

“What dreams, and who is Shadrack Wass?” Sam pressed.

"Shadrack was one of the lighthouse keepers a ways back, he was never found guilty, but they say he got drunk one night and didn't light the lamp. A ship went down, and everyone on board was lost. It was a man named Ellis. He was a bit of a drunk. He said he saw Shadrack the morning of the wreck, said he had bodies laid on the shore, lined up next to one another. He ran back to town to tell the constable. When they all come back, there were no bodies on the shore, and Shadrack was at the lighthouse as if nothing had happened. No trace of the ship was ever found, but there was a ship bound for San Fransisco that never made it, and no one knows where she went."

"And the dreams.”

"Ever since I've been tending the lighthouse, I've been having dreams, same ones in different parts. The boys, they laugh at me fer worrying about some silly dreams, but they feel so real. I dream I am walkin' down into a cave of some sort in the cliffs off the beach. The cave seems to go on forever, and I just keep walkin' down there. Then at the end, there is an underground lake. The water looks almost black and oily. It smells horrible. Then something moves in the water, which is when I usually wake up. I know it doesn't sound like much to hear it, but when I am dreamin' it, it's terrifying." Kent was now breathing heavily, and Sam could tell he was terrified.

“You have to take me to the lighthouse. I have to find out what happened to my brother and his family. I can pay you.”

"There's no need, I'll take you there, but I'm not stepping foot off this boat, you hear me. You go in and check it out and come on out when you're ready." Kent turned to the controls of his boat and began preparations for a trip out to the lighthouse.

“Is it only accessible by boat?” Sam asked.

“No, but it’s faster this way. The road going up gets washed out sometimes too.” Kent said as he fired up the engines.

The two men stared silently out into the gray skyline before them as the boat slipped out of the small harbor and into the open water. Sam had not been on a boat in a long time and never on the ocean. He felt his stomach begin to tighten as the motion of the boat became more noticeable. Whatever was going on in this place, and however Alan had been swept up in it, that lighthouse was the common denominator. Nothing was going to stop him from getting there.

"Storm coming," Kent said as he pointed to the ominous black clouds to the north. The wind carried the dark clouds quickly towards them like black smoke billowing out of a burning building. "It's coming in fast. We better hurry out there."

They made it to the lighthouse quickly as Kent had said and tied the boat up to the small one boat dock at the bottom of the cliff. Sam looked at the stairs that climbed the cliff's daunting height and provided the only access to the lighthouse above. Shaking his head, he stepped off the boat onto the dock as the rain began to increase its intensity.

"I'll be here waiting. Just hurry it up, that storm is coming in fast, and I don't want to be bashed up against this cliff." Kent gave Sam a worried look.

Sam took another look up the stairs and shrugged. It was for Judith and the kids. Alan was going to get a punch in the nose for all this. As the wind and rain grew in intensity, Sam began his arduous climb to the mystery-shrouded lighthouse whose secrets were yet to unlock the ill-fated consequences of his brother's eclectic vacation plans. Sam would find out what happened to Alan, Judith, and those kids one way or another. Uncle Sam is coming. Just hang in there a little longer.

End Part 1

Clutching the ring of keys Kent provided, Sam ascended the creaking, slippery wooden stairway leading up the cliff face to the lighthouse. He could see the coming storm as it approached. It was as dark and brooding as his mood and moving in fast. Sam knew he needed to finish his search of the lighthouse quickly. Kent wouldn't be able to keep the boat against the dock long before fear of being battered against the rocks would demand that he get out of there. Lashed by the rain, wet, and legs aching from the seemingly endless climb of the cliff stairs, Sam felt a sense of dread. The gray and black boiling sky and the crashing of ever-intensifying waves gave the feeling of insurmountable bleakness. He crested the stairs, and there it was before him, stark white against the gray clouds, reaching to the sky like the arm of a dying man calling for gods redemption, the Yaquina Head Light.

He wasted no time getting to the two-story keeper's house attached to the conical tower. He tried the keys on the ring until he found one that slid home. As the lock clicked open, he felt a shock go through his body. This is it, he thought. Pushing the door open, he peered into the darkness of the building. The door creaked in protest as if letting out a moan of disapproval at being disturbed. Taking a deep breath, he stepped inside. It felt good to be out of the rain. He searched for a light switch and found it to his left. The room was a small mudroom with a door into the main house on the opposite wall. Some raincoats hung from hooks to his right, and a collection of boots lay haphazardly arranged on the floor. Sam moved to the door. It opened silently, casting light onto the worn wooden floor of what looked to be a common room. He strode into the main house. Finding the light switch, he turned it on. It was before noon, but you wouldn't know it from the darkness of the sky outside. Any light that was present was blocked by the drawn curtains and shuttered windows. The place was not much warmer than it was outside, but at least it was dry. He listened to the sound of the rain as it beat on the building, amplified by the echoing tower. He could see the flashing pattern of the light, two seconds on, two seconds off, two seconds on, then fourteen seconds off. The boat horn from Kent on the docks below pulled him out of the trance brought on by the light's rhythm. He needed to get this done before Kent left him here.

Sam quickly looked around the room. It was a living room of sorts with a wood-burning stove and couch facing it. There were built-in bookshelves, which boasted volumes on maritime history, local geography, and other popular literary works, nothing that seemed of any real interest. A phonograph positioned in front of the large window on the north wall reminded him of his younger days with Alan. They would listen to music on their father's phonograph, pretending they were important men hosting grand parties full of important people. He checked the collection of records on the shelf next to it; nothing was worth listening to. A flash of lightning lit up the room, followed shortly by a low rumble of thunder. The storm was closing in. He needed to hurry.

Quickly checking the other rooms on the bottom floor, he found a serviceable bathroom, a mop closet stocked with all of the appropriate cleaning supplies, an oil room stocked with ten five-gallon kerosene containers for the light, and a small study. He hastily scoured the study for any trace of Alan and his family. Nothing; Sam didn't even know what he was looking for, something, a sign that they had been there or a trace of where they might be going. Looking through the old wooden writing desk, he found the bottom right drawer locked. Turning behind him, Sam reached up, scanning the top of the bookshelf with his fingers. Amateurs, he thought as he pulled down the small silver key. He unlocked the drawer to find a single leather journal with the initials SW branded into the front cover's leather. As he opened the journal, he could hear the sound of the boat engines starting from below. The storm had picked up, and Kent would be pulling out. It was too dangerous to keep the boat against those cliffs any longer. Sam didn't blame him. He'd do the same if the shoe were on the other foot. Peering out the study window, he could see the small boat breaking the waves as it traversed the dangerously rocky corridor and broke free into the open water. He was on his own now. At least he didn't have to rush his search any longer.

It was just a bit after noon, and Sam knew he would not be able to make the trek back to Newport with the increasing storm. He resigned to stay at the lighthouse for the night; if the storm let up tomorrow, he could make it back to his hotel. Sam needed to get a fire started in the woodstove; it was as cold as a tomb. He wished he'd thought of a different comparison. Staring intently at the journal, Sam noticed that he could see his breath. The storm was increasing outside, with the flashes of lightning and peels of thunder getting more frequent. He tucked the journal under his arm and went about starting a fire.

There was wood by the stove, and it only took him a few minutes to find matches in the kitchen. The warmth of the fire was a relief as it sprang to life. He hung his coat and hat upon hooks above the stove; the heat would dry them quickly. He decided to look at the upstairs rooms before scavenging some food from the kitchen pantry. The stairs creaked loudly, protesting his ascent to the second floor. The hallway at the top of the stairs was dark and forbidding, with two doors on either side midway down and one door at the end. It was as cranky as the stairs, creaking with every step he took. If there were anyone here to alert, they would know full well someone was in the house by now. He opened the door to his left first. It was an empty room with no furnishings and no closet. The opposite door opened into another vacant space. The last keeper didn't have a family, so these rooms were rarely if ever, utilized. A layer of dust was visible on the floor of each, undisturbed and waiting. The room at the end of the hall was another story entirely. He opened the door and switched on the light. The tidy, modest room with it's neatly made four-posted bead had a nightstand and lamp on the left and a large dresser and mirror to the right against the wall. A taller chest of drawers to the entrance's right had a few pictures and decorative items on top. Lightning flashed, followed by an almost immediate crack of thunder. The storm was almost on top of him now.

Focusing on the chest of drawers, he began to open up each of its namesakes in turn. Some old clothes in each, but Sam found nothing of any interest. Sam's shirtsleeve snagged on the handle of the last drawer as he pushed it in, impatiently, he jiggled the handle to release his shirt. Doing so dislodged a yellowed envelope from behind one of the pictures on the top of the chest. This intrigued Sam. The envelope was old and had no apparent connection to his missing brother, but Sam's interest was peaked. As he reached to grab the envelope, it slid down behind the chest of drawers.

Moving around the battered wooden bureau, he could not manage to see where the envelope had fallen. He pulled it away from the wall and swung it slightly to the side, finding the envelope resting in years of dust. A flash of panic shot quickly through him as the lightning and accompanying thunderclap rocked the room. There before him manically gouged into the wooden paneling of the wall, sketchy and haphazard, betraying some panicked and horrified madman, were the words that Sam could not erase from his mind once he gazed upon them. It was an apparent warning or reminder to the crazed author of this ominous phrase that had been concealed from its intended audience. It read, "Not alive. They are all dead". Sam fell back against the bed sitting on the floor, staring at the hastily scrawled phrase.

The hair rose on the back of his neck as he sat watching the lightning light up the words on the wall, still aware of the lighthouse beacon's steady pattern. After a moment, he reached out and snatched up the old envelope, thrusting it into his pocket. He gave a hasty search of the rest of the room, which turned up nothing. He could almost feel the presence of the words on the wall as if they were a physical being, regarding him, waiting to pounce and drag him down into the hell from which they came. He was happy to leave the room and head back downstairs to the warmth of the fire. What had his brother stumbled into? Could he have found something that caused some devious keeper of secrets to feel inclined to silence him? What about his family? He needed to uncover the secret this sinister and lonesome beacon of the sea was holding. It had to come back to Shadrack Wass, the man Kent had told him of. He looked to the end table by the chair positioned in front of the wood-burning stove in the living room. The letters burned into the leather of the journal he had found in the study's locked draw, SW, initials, Shadrack Wass.

It was now just past two in the afternoon. It didn't seem like he had been rummaging around that long, but his watch read 2:10. With a sideways look at the journal on the end table, he crossed the room and headed for the kitchen. Clean and orderly, the last keeper must have been a military man. He opened the door to the right of the small, gleaming white, washtub sink. Relief washed over him as he stared into the wooden shelves crammed full with various cans, some labeled and some not. There were also dried meats and bags of flour and rice. He found a can of beans and pulled a few pieces of dried beef from the shelves. It didn't take long to find an opener for the can. With the can of beans in one hand, top tipped back, and the spoon he found sticking halfway out, and the jerky in the other, he returned to the chair to warm himself by the stove. The storm raged on outside with flashes of lightning and loud booming thunderclaps breaking the endless sound of the hard rain driving against the building and the chaotic tumult of the ocean below. He picked up the journal that lay on the table beside him, running his hand over the worn edges daring himself to open the thing. After a moment, he pulled back the leather cover revealing the yellowing pages beyond. Sam read the first line, September 19th, 1876, this was going to be a long night, and this was not what he would call favorable reading.

The journal began relatively benign, entries about taking the job as a keeper, his love of the sea, and his hopes that the position's solitude would offer a chance to pursue other interests. He spoke of a fondness for woodworking and art, which came as a surprise to Sam. He was expecting a miserly old sea dog but found a sensitive artist instead. There were day-to-day notes written about various mundane occurrences that Shadrack thought profound. The mating rituals of the gulls that made their home in the rocky cliffs below the lighthouse. The weather patterns for particular times of the year. It seemed as though Shadrack was happy here, at peace. All the while, there was an undercurrent of loneliness. It never seemed to kill his undying love of the sea. He spoke fondly of the sea's beauty, which proved to be his undoing and the cause of the loneliness that ate away at his mind like termites in the wood. Sam found nothing of real interest. He was lulled by the sound of the storm and sea, and the endless droning pattern of the light, two seconds on, two seconds off, two seconds on, fourteen seconds off.

Finally, an entry in February of 1883 broke the droning lull to which Sam had succumbed. It matched itself perfectly with a clap of thunder that shook the storm shutters and echoed up the tower to the light as if to challenge the beacon's authority to illuminate the night. It was a short entry, disjointed, unlike the entries thus far. It would make little sense had he not heard Kent's tale of old Shadrack Wass. The entry read, "How could I, one indulgence and now this. They seem to be fine. I understand them somehow. They won't survive down there. What have I done, how many more. The sea has betrayed me."

Sam put two and two together, one indulgence, they said he got drunk and forgot to light the light. That could be what he was referring to, but what did he mean by they won't survive down there. Was this the fledgling ravings of a man who had finally reached the breaking point? The termites had finally sapped the integrity of the wood; it was only a matter of time before the collapse. The guilt must have been too much to bear. He believed he could communicate with the drowned victims of his negligence.

Sam noticed that it had gotten considerably darker as the evening approached. How long had he been there reading? The lull of the storm and the ocean had taken him away. That light, the endless droning of the light, two seconds on, two seconds off… He turned on the lamp beside the chair. The light thrust back the encroaching shadows and served to dampen his awareness of the droning beacon in the tower above. He checked his watch, five, he thought of getting something more to eat, but his curiosity got the better of him. He returned to the journal, giving a glance around the room. What a fine place to be reading the writings of a madman, he thought in the madman's self-made asylum.

The journal entries took a steep dive off the deep end after that. They were strange and broken. Never a full thought completed riddles and fragments. Obviously, something had shaken the man. He had made a complete change. It was as if the man who loved the sea was gone. Some stanzas struck Sam, he couldn't put his finger on it, but there was a narrative there somewhere. He spoke of a book, in one entry, "That book of ole, they kept it, they wrote it, they gave it. I will read the nine, but it hurts. I dream of them, they gave it to me". Another spoke of some cave around the cliffs of the lighthouse, "I didn't even know it was there, they did, they showed me, just like my dreams, a lake of black, inside, underground, darkness, the cold waste." Another seemed to speak about this, "they," he kept referring too. This entry solidified in Sam's mind that Shadrack was to blame for the shipwreck and its passengers. "I woke to the cracking and grating sound of the ship going down. I tried, I found them in the water, and they were alive, are they. I brought them to the beach, survivors, I could help. And that chest the one held onto, they all raised in unison, as if they were one, motioned for me to follow, showed me the cavern. They stare, deep and dark, like the depths of the ocean. They told me to open the chest, the books, that thing. They want me to use it. I must learn,". There was a sound outside that startled Sam. He looked toward the window. He sprang from the chair cautiously approaching. He couldn't see anything. The rain was driving against the window in a steady wash. He stared into a wall of black. All light blotted out by the dark rolling clouds. Lightning flashed against the horizon. In an instant, Sam could see the silhouette of a man at the edge of the north cliff. He was just standing there. Fear gripped him for a moment as Sam tried to adjust his eyes to the darkness. He could no longer see anything near the cliff. It was so dark, could it be someone who needed help, could it be Alan?

Rushing to the door, Sam instinctively rested his hand on the .38 tucked in his pocket. He drew the weapon and unlatched the door. The old iron deadbolt resisted then finally slid free with a high-pitched squeal. The door opened into darkness and rain. The wind blew rain into Sam's face as he strained his eyes to see anything in the inky blackness. He closed the door behind him, sealing off the light from inside, allowing his eyes to get accustomed to the dark. The lightning flashed again, illuminating the section of the cliff where he had seen the figure. The figure was gone. Sam moved toward the edge and stopped short. He must have been mistaken. The darkness can play tricks on you in the rain. On a night like this, it was hard to see your hand in front of your face, let alone a figure in the distance. He turned and headed back inside.

Quickly shutting the door behind him, eyes scanning the room, he let his weight fall on the closing door leaning back against it. He was still holding the revolver in front of him. He looked at the journal on the end table, closed, with those letters burned into the cover. SW, the man had gone mad. He couldn't hold up against the crushing weight of guilt he felt for the tragedy he had caused. Sam stalked across the room and into the kitchen. He checked the back door and found it locked. He turned and went back to the living room. Checking the door that leads to the tower, he found it locked, which allowed him to lower his weapon. Sam slowly slid it back into his pocket, more aware than ever of its weight. When he did, he felt the envelope he found upstairs. He held it up to the light; there was a letter inside, but nothing on the front or back. It wasn't sealed. He pulled out the letter carefully. It was old and brittle. He sat in front of the stove again and began to read the fading yellowed pages.

“If you are reading this, then you may already know what I am about to put to page. I do so only as a warning to those who come after me. This place is cursed. Leave immediately. Do not take the job as keeper. They will lull you. They will promise things. Do not be swayed. I have taken the book and hid it from them. I think they can read minds. I will write this down as quickly as possible and tuck it away. If you have found it, please heed the warning I left behind the bureau. There is a loose stone in the wall at the eightieth step in the tower. The book is there, do not read it, keep it hidden, keep it from them. Don't go to that cave, don't. God help me, I am going now if I can just make it to town, get help."

Signed FH.

Sam stared in shock as he remembered the words carved into the wall behind the chest of draws upstairs. "Not alive. They are all dead." Lighting flashed, and quickly the thunder followed with a loud crack. He went to the window again, nothing. He stared out the window, the rhythm of the rain as it battered the glass, waves crashing, and that light, two on, two off, two on, fourteen off. Turning quickly around, he went to the tower door. He unlocked it and entered the conical tower heading straight for the stairs. They ran around the tower and up, he counted, at the eightieth he stopped. Kneeling, he began to run his hands over the bricks in the wall. One of the stones shifted as he touched it. Moving the stone away, he found a cavity some two feet deep, by two feet wide, having a height of around six inches. It was empty. If there had been a book here, it had long since been pinched, judging from the cobwebs. Suddenly, Sam caught a sound from outside, a voice, more specifically a moan. He rushed down the stairs and back to the living room, locking the door to the tower behind him. Heading straight for the window, Sam gazed out as a flash of lightning lit the sky. Again he saw the figure on the cliff.

Another flash of lightning lit the sky. This time there was no mistaking the silhouette on the cliff. It was a man. It was, moving towards him. He dashed from the window to the door; the old wood made a loud slap against the wall as he threw it open, raising the gun as he walked out into the darkness and rain. Lightning again, thunder boomed above his head. There was no one at the cliff's edge.

“Come on out, you coward, you wanna play games, I've got a game, it's called catch the bullet. Come on, you bastard". Sam screamed, his voice carried off by the storm.

Then Sam heard the sound again. A low moaning sound, it sounded human. It wasn't a seal from the rocks below.

“Whose out there? Show yourself,"

Silence, just the sound of the rain and ocean, the rumble of thunder and that light, that damn light, two on, two off, two on, fourteen off. Backing his way to the lighthouse, he strained to see anything in the darkness. He rushed inside and began looking for an electric torch or lantern. He grabbed the oil lamp in the windowsill above the phonograph. Then moved quickly back to the door. Raising the lantern to the sky with his left hand, he cautiously walked toward the sound he had heard. With his pistol held tightly in his other hand, he moved out toward the cliff's edge. Sam reached the edge and noticed a trail that ran on a ledge along the cliff's face. With the light of the lantern, he could see the shelf ran down, around the cliffs' bend toward the north side of the outcropping. Against every ounce of better judgment he had, he began to follow the trail.

The ledge was barely two feet from the cliff face to a sheer drop. You'd die from the fall. If you happened to survive, you'd be battered against the rocks by the raging sea. It was not a good idea to traverse this in the rain. The ledge angled down as it ran around the cliff. Once Sam had rounded the north side, he could see the beach below. The white sand seemed to glow against the darkness around it. He had followed the trail a good hundred yards and was now fully twenty feet below the top of the cliff. Where does this go, he thought as he followed along? Then the moaning sound was heard ahead. Sam increased his pace. The roar of the ocean waves dampened as he headed further down the trail and toward the beach. The trail wound itself along the cliff face, inland, and let out on the sand north of the light. Sam walked further up the beach, and then he saw it. The shantytown everyone had talked about.

It stood before him; small tin shacks and tents made from driftwood and salvaged garbage in all manner of construction. He saw a single light, almost at the center of the camp. The sound of the rain drumming on the tin roofs and siding concealed Sam's approach as he got a closer look. Crouching behind an outcropping of rocks, he could see right to the center of the town, where the light was. There was a figure moving around the shack. Maybe this was the figure he saw at the cliff. He was probably coming to steal from the lighthouse and was not expecting it to be occupied.

No one seemed to be around. There were no sounds. Even if they were all inside keeping out of the rain, there should be some sound. Sam checked his watch, seven. The whole place can't be sleeping this early. He moved from structure to structure, waiting each time for signs of movement or sound. The light was some fifty yards further into the disreputable, squatter town. The place was disturbingly quiet. Looking behind him, he could barely make out where the trail was. Only a maze of crudely built structures haphazardly positioned. It was going to be a difficult trip out of here. He could hardly tell which direction he came in. He stalked in deeper, gun drawn, finally, he heard a sound. It came from ahead where the light was. Is this the only person here? The smell of the place lingered even in the storm. It smelled like an animal rotting. He moved to the next shack and slowly leaned out to look. The figure was just ahead another twenty feet. He could see him now, a man moving around the outside of his shanty. The light was coming from an oil lamp he had burning on a rotting barrel by the front door.

A sudden wave of relief washed over him, followed quickly by terror. In tattered clothes and moving slowly, the man he saw before him, holding what looked like a large book, was Alan. He was moments from revealing himself to his brother when another figure moved out of the shadows. The second figure was hard to make out in the darkness and rain. He moved slowly and deliberately, also in rags, he pointed at Alan and then behind him. It was then that Sam saw it, just beyond the camp, a gap in the cliff. Beyond it was darkness. As Sam watched, his brother wordlessly complied and began walking toward the opening. The other man followed. It wasn't possible to see if Alan was willing or forced from this distance, though it seemed as though this man had some sort of control over his brother. Maybe he had Judith and the kids somewhere and was using them as leverage against Alan. To what end, Sam could not guess. He kept up with them, moving from shack to shack, keeping an eye on the man following Alan. The closer they came to the gap, the further dispersed the sheds became. There would be nothing to hide behind soon. Sam let them get further ahead, making it easier for him to go unnoticed. When he reached the last row of shanties, he stopped. Watching the other two men enter the gap in the cliffs. He counted to ten then followed, he couldn't see them any longer, but he knew they were heading into a cove.

Sam made it to the gap without notice. He peered around the edge of the cliff and could see the white sand of the cove dimly against the stark black of the cliffs. The entire cove was approximately fifty feet in a half-circle that started and ended at either side of the gap. He could see the two figures moving. They were just beyond the center of the cove. Sam stayed against the darkness of the cliffs and quietly moved along the left wall. Fear gripped him as he saw where the two silent figures were heading. The mouth of a cave at the innermost point of the cove seemed to be their destination. Could it be the cave of which Shadrack had spoken? They didn't look in any other direction but straight ahead as they walked. If he could stay quiet, they would not notice him. First, Alan, then his silent captor, entered the cave. Again, Sam gave an internal count of ten and then followed them into the cave's black depths.

Foul warm air was coming up from the bowels of the cave. There was a sickly sweet smell that made Sam want to wretch. He kept his composure and followed, with only the echoing footsteps to guide him in the near pitch black. He felt along the wall to keep from falling. The cave sides were damp, and the air was humid as if some heat source deep within the cavern was present. The two ahead of him didn't speak and seemed to be unhindered by the wall of blackness before them. Now further from the cave mouth, the darkness was stifling. He followed as quietly as possible, listening to the footfalls. They journeyed gradually downward and deeper into the cave.

A light appeared ahead, first a pinprick, then eventually getting larger as they trudged on. The light flicked and wavered; there was the unmistakable sound of water ahead. Sam was happy to have the light but feared what it would reveal. He could see that the cave opened into some massive cavern. Sam stopped and let the others step out. He waited for a moment, then moved to the cave mouth. Sam was amazed to find himself staring at a large underground lake. The lake from Shadrack's dream, he thought as he once again picked up the two men walking to the right along the shore. The cavern was immense; Sam could not see the ceiling as it extended beyond the light that was provided by the torches evenly spaced along the water's edge. The smell in the cavern was horrid. The murky black waters seemed to be a fetid pool of putrid still water that was eons old. There was no hiding any longer. The light revealed everything from the lake to the cavern wall. If they so much as looked back, they would see him. He followed anyhow, still keeping a distance but no longer hiding his presence.

The shore rounded to the right for over a hundred yards ending in a solid wall. The lake seemed to extend under the rock beyond that point. Against the wall beside the shoreline was what looked like a large altar? A square stone shape standing four feet high and flat on top rested close to the water's edge. The two men stood before it silently. Sam tried to creep against the cavern wall towards the altar. Then he saw something atop the altar. It was a statue or fetish of some sort. It was nine inches tall and half that around. It looked like a stone obelisk with a spherical object at the top. The sphere on top was rough and irregular in shape, hundreds of needle-like quills extending from it. Alan approached the altar and laid the large book he was carrying on it. He opened the thing and began to read. It was a language Sam had never heard before. It sounded like a chant of sorts with a rhythm to it. Alan repeated the words over and over, echoing in the vast cavern. "Mehamn gl'ka soleh gla'aki, ia, ia gla'aki."

The droning of the chant fell in lockstep with the droning from the lighthouse beacon. He began to lower his pistol and slowly started moving towards the two men at the shoreline. To his left, something stirred in the water, breaking him out of his trance. Something huge was moving in the water. Alan then placed his hands on the spherical portion of the statue on the altar. He was holding the top with both hands, palms down on the spines that protruded from it. Blood washed over the thing in his hands, and as it did, the movement in the water intensified. Sam screamed out, "Alan, no, what are you doing?" Alan did not respond, continuing to chant louder and louder. The other man moved toward Sam as a gigantic mass began to rise from the sickly waters of the lake.

As it breached the water, Sam could smell that terrible odor more strongly. The vile water was displaced and washed up the shore. Sam turned from the approaching man to the lake. The mass was still rising. He could see now the maw packed tightly with needle-like teeth. The thing had huge spines protruding from various portions around it. So huge, so powerful, the very air in the room seemed to shake and bend, and in his mind, he heard a voice. "Come," it said.

“Alan," he screamed into the vastness of the cavern. Alan continued to chant with his hands pouring blood on the hideous idol to this abomination that rose from the sickening depths of the putrid lake. "No!" he screamed as he fired off two shots in succession. Both shots took the oncoming man in the chest, but he only wavered slightly and continued toward Sam. He broke for the cave they had come from, running as fast as he could along the shore. Suddenly a long sharp spike shot from the thing in the water. Burning pain in his side told him it had found purchase. Sam fell to the ground just before the cave entrance. He looked back at his pursuer, he was slowly shambling towards him, but the thing in the lake, it was moving too. Grabbing one of the torches protruding from the ground, he bolted for the cave.

With the torch, he could navigate the cave as he ran with everything he had inside him. The voice echoing in his head "Come," two seconds on, two seconds off, two seconds on, fourteen seconds off. It was hard to tell how long he was running when he saw the light at the end of the tunnel. It was much brighter than it should be outside the cave. What was happening? When he reached the mouth of the cave, he could see what was causing the light. The cove's white sand lay before him, but he could see the shantytown burning through the gap in the cliffs.

His ears adjusted to the sounds, and he could hear screaming. There were voices as well, yelling commands. Something to his right took him by surprise as it lunged forward. He used its forward momentum to throw it past him. Then he saw what it was. "Judith?" he questioned with tears running down his cheeks. "Thank god, you're alive. Are you OK?" The thing before him looked like Judith but was not. Sunken eyes with dark discoloration around them, the pale drooping skin, blood covering her mouth and chin. It could not be, and standing behind it, with the same lifeless staring eyes and pale sagging skin, the children. She lunged at him with a fierce snarl, and he went over backward, landing hard on the sand. He fired his revolver, pulled the trigger, and kept pulling until everything went black.

He woke in a hospital bed, nurses and doctors moving about the room checking on other patients. He grabbed the arm of a dark-haired woman in a nurse uniform. She was startled, then the realization registered in her eyes. "You're awake. That's good, doctor, he's awake." A short man with gray close-cut hair and mutton chop sideburns wearing a long white lab coat moved towards Sam.

“Where am I? What happened." Sam pleaded.

“You're safe. You're at the hospital, Lincoln City." she tried to soothe Sam.

“How did I," his eyes darted from left to right.

“You were hurt when that mob in Newport burned down those homeless folks town. Lots of folks were brought in that night.”

“That night? How long have I been here?”

“Four days, sir. You haven't made a sound until now." she gently put her hand on his shoulder and lowered him back down. "You need to rest. You were injured."

Sam could feel the pain in his side when he took in a breath. It wasn't a dream; it had to be a dream.

“How?”

“I don't know anything, sir. You were brought in with several others. Those people in Newport just went mad and attacked those hobos. It makes no sense to me. I mean, people died. Is having those people leave worth all that?" she shook her head disapprovingly. "Oh, there is a note on your tray there. Someone named Kent came to see you. He left it." she waved her hand toward the tray beside Sam's bed.

The doctor came over then and began looking in Sam's eyes, poking and prodding him. He pushed on Sam's side, and a flash of pain shot through his body.

“Take it easy, doc."

“This wound just refuses to heal up. What happened?"

“I, ah, fell, on a log, a broken branch got me.”

“Well, it looks like it's infected. The skin around it won't heal. It has a foul odor too. You're going to need to keep it clean and change the bandages regularly. You think you can handle that?" the doctor said, pulling up a clipboard and writing something on it.

“Yeah.” Sam winced.

As the doctor walked away, Sam lifted his gown. The wound was a hole the size of a broom handle in his side, under his last rib. The skin around the puncture was black and moist. That smell, like an animal rotting, sweet, like decay. It was the same smell he encountered at the shantytown and more strongly in the cavern.

He reached for the note on the tray beside him. It was in a sketchy hand, with many words crossed out and written again. It was a note from Kent Marlowe.

“I'm sorry I left you. I had to, you see. The boat would have been dashed on the rocks if I stayed. I'm sorry. When I got back, I couldn't stop thinking I had left you to some terrible fate. I got the boys at the Dockside up in arms over that shantytown. I knew you would end up there. I just knew it. It got away from me. All the hate this town has had for that place came out, all the stories and suspicion. Folks were saying those people had taken their kin. We went to roust em out, get them to leave. But when we got there and saw them. My god. You know, you were there. They weren't human. They were, I can't, I am leaving this place. I just wanted you to know I didn't leave you to die. I found you with one of em on you. Looked like you kilt it. My god, two children were standing over you. They came at me, would have killed me. Were they? I don't want to know. It's done now. There's nothing but the nightmares left."

Kent

Sam rolled over, tears in his eyes. He failed. Why, Alan, why would you come here, why would you come to this little nothing town? Why would you bring your wife and children along? What was it that brought you here? Why dammit? Tears were running freely down Sam's face as he thought of his brother, Judith, and the kids, why. Then it came from the depths of his mind, like a razor cutting through the grief, the pain, the sadness. Pushing out all other feelings and thoughts, that one single word droning on and on, in rhythm with the throbbing pain in his side, "Come," two seconds on, two seconds off, two seconds on, fourteen seconds off.