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 for a moment dripping water on the floor surveying the small train depot until he spied the man behind the ticket window and walking toward him said.

“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 and his shoes were making an audible sloshing sound with each step. When I find Alan I’m gonna have him buy me some new shoes, he thought as the red glare of the motel sign revealed itself through the sheets of rain. 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 take a look.” Grabbing the money she pulled out a lock box 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 light house 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 the 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 was here for pleasure not business, thats another thing I’ll need to box Alan’s ears for.

Sam made his way to the room, room 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, which didn’t help much as the rain was falling at a steep angle from the wind. 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, lets hope so, he thought. The key slid in easily 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. On the left wall there was a small writing desk and chair, and at the back of the room was an open closet with a door next to it on the left. 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 entered the shower. As the warm water shocked his cold wet 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. 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 attempted to dry his clothes 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 as he waited for his clothes to dry. They chronicled the trip from Chicago out to Portland, then the trip down to Newport. Alan wrote every day or so letting his brother know what fun the family was having on their adventure. The last letter, there was something strange, something so unlike his happy go lucky brother, and that was it. A week went by with no new letter and Sam knew something was wrong. There had better be he thought, or he had dragged himself to this god-forsaken 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 current caretaker of the lighthouse 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 also mentioned a shantytown near the lighthouse, which the rest of the people in town don’t like to talk about. It wouldn’t be a stretch to think the upstanding denizens of Newport 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 to 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 when it came 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. This 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 could feel that his clothes were dry enough to put back on, he 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 and 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, he 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 deeply 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. 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.

“Twas 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 to pleasure, just looking for my brother. He didn’t happen to say where else he was going did he?”

“Naw, just hope he didn’t go over to the shanty town, 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 folk 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 just say they want to stay and turn their kin away. Most people just 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 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 light house 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 whats 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. 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 full bowl of soup.

As he walked through the driving rain to the docks he wished he had eaten the soup he left at the diner. The day was beginning to weigh on him but this was his first real lead in days and he had to follow it up as soon as possible. All the calls he had 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. He 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 brothers trip out here 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. As he came down the street he could see the iron archway with rusted lettering identifying this as the Newport Landing. In the rain he could barely tell were the ocean water ended and the dock started. Only a few dim lights hanging from poles evenly spaced along the sides of the dock 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 planks of the dock. The dock was about fifteen feet wide with no railing on either side. With the tide up the water was only about 3 feet below the planks and now and then a surge would push the water up through. Sam felt like the whole thing would be taken down into the sea, he stopped as he eyed the area. The dock extended out a hundred or so yards toward the angry sea and he could see the faint shapes of boats tied up, bobbing up and down in the darkness. He was wondering if it was safe to go out onto the dock when he spotted his query. A section of the dock up ahead about thirty yards and to the right, dark against the ocean with the exception of two windows that spilled light out into the miserable night. He hadn’t noticed the structure in the darkness until he was on the dock that must be the place. 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. He made the trek up the dock and to the door of the rickety building that was attached. 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. The sawing was less noticeable in here, though the place 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 large raging hearth in the left most corner opposite the entrance. There were a few rough looking customers at the counter but there were stools 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, “Lets 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 some 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 a table that was empty.

Once seated Sam began in a somewhat hushed voice. “My brother came here with his family, and he had been writing me, he said they were going to see the lighthouse in his last letter, after that the letters stopped coming. Thats 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 shanty down 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 as if to say 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. Maybe 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 quite dried from the night before. He was going to 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 was hoping 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 on his niece and nephew so that he could keep a level head. If anything happened to those kids this town was gonna burn so help me, he thought. He pushed those feelings down as he made the short walk from his room to the office. As he entered 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. This 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 and 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 around it. 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 and 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 personal scrutiny. It was obvious which where 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 affects, wallet and other important 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, everything was sill in the satchel. Suddenly Sam felt his heart pound, something bad 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 brothers 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 where not mentioned at all, which Sam found strange. It was the last line however, that 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 the fact 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. Nothing of any interest could be found but it was quite clear that they had left all of their things; essential items and toiletries were left. 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 and his head was on a swivel. Hurrying Sam down the dock 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 clear.

“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 drown. 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 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, which is 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 and that 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 not breathing heavy and Sam could tell he was truly frightened.

“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.”

“Theres 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 your 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 they 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 black ominous 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 daunting height of the cliff 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. This was for Judith and the kids, Alan was gonna 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. One way or another Sam was going to find out what happened to Alan, Judith (who was the only other family member besides Alan who cared for him), and those kids. 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 stair way leading up the cliff face to the lighthouse. He could see the coming storm as it approached. It was as black 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 the 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 increasing waves gave the feeling of insurmountable bleakness, which Sam was now beginning to feel the weight of. He crested the stairs and there it was before him, stark white against the gray sky, 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 keepers 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 as it swung inward and he stepped in. It felt good to be out of the rain. He searched for a light switch and found it to his left on the wall. The room was a small mudroom with a door into the main house on the opposite wall. There were some raincoats hanging from hooks on the wall to his right and a collection of boots on the floor. He moved to the door, it opened silently and 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 outside 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 rhythm of the light. He needed to get this done before Kent left him here.

Sam quickly looked around the room he had entered. It was obviously a living room of sorts with a fireplace and couch facing it. There were built in bookshelves, which boasted volumes on maritime history, local geography and other works of popular literature, 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; there was nothing worth listening to there. A flash of lighting light up the room, followed shortly but the 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 containers of kerosene for the light and a small study. He hastily scoured the study for any trace 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 desk he found the bottom right drawer locked. Turning behind him he 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 leather of the front cover. 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. He needed to get a fire started in the wood stove so that he would have some heat. Staring intently at the journal he 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 up on hooks above the stove; the heat should dry them in short order. He decided to take a look at the upstairs rooms before trying to scavenge some food from the kitchen pantry. The stairs creaked loudly as if protesting his assent 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 a cranky as the stairs creaking with every step he took. If there was 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, no furnishings and no closet. The opposite door opened into another empty room, 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 room, undisturbed and waiting. The room at the end of the hall was another story entirely. He opened the door and switched on the light. It was a tidy and modest room. The 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 right of the entrance 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 nothing of any interest was found in the drawers. Sam’s shirtsleeve snagged on the handle of the last drawer as he pushed it in, impatiently he jiggled the handle and released 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 obviously 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 through him quickly 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 obviously concealed from its intended audience. It read, “Not alive, they are all dead”. Sam fell back on 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 steady pattern of the lighthouse beacon. After a moment he reached out and snatched up the old envelope, thrusting it into his pants pocket. He gave a hasty search of the rest of the room, which turned nothing of interest up. 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 that they came from. He was happy to leave the room and head back down stairs to the warmth of the fire. What had his brother stumbled into, could he have found something that had caused some devious keeper of secrets to feel inclined to silence him? What of his family? He needed to uncover the secret this sinister and lonesome taunting beacon to wayward travelers 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 locked draw of the study, SW, initials, Shadrack Wass.

It was now just past two in the afternoon, it didn’t seem like he had been rummaging round that long but his watch read two ten. 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 skink. 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 of the top, 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 lighting and loud booming thunder claps breaking the endless sound of the hard rain driving against the building and the sounds of 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. The journal of Shadrack Wass, Sam read the first line, September 19th 1976, this was going to be a long night and this was not what he would call favorable reading.

The journal began rather benign, entries about taking the job as a keeper, his love of the sea and his hopes that the solitude of the position would offer a chance to pursue other interests. He spoke of a fondness for woodworking and art, this 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 there home in the rocky shore below the lighthouse. The weather patterns for particular times of the year. It seemed as though Shadrack was happy here, at piece. 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 beauty the sea, 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 the 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 that Sam had succumbed to. 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 beacons 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 wont survive down in 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. This could be what he was referring to, but what did he mean by they wont survive down in there. Was this the fledgling ravings of a man who had finally reached the breaking point. The termites and finally sapped the integrity of the wood. The guilt must have been to much to bear. He believed he could communicate with the drowned victims of his own 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 he was in. 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. Pulling the open journal from the end table, he gave a quick glance around the room, what a fine place to be, reading the writings of a madman in the madman’s own self made asylum.

The journal entries took a steep dive off the deep end after that last entry Sam had read. 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. There were stanzas that 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 too 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. It was this entry that solidified in Sam’s mind that Shadrack was in fact to blame for the ship wrek and the lives of those aboard. “I woke to the cracking and grating sound of the ship going down. I tried, I found them in the water, they were alive, are they. I brought them to the beach, survivors, I could help. And that chest the one held onto, they all rose in unison, as if they were one, motioned for me to follow, showed me the cavern. They stare, deep and dark, like the oceans depths. They told me to open the chest, the books, that thing. They want me to use it. I must learn”. A sound outside 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, the night was black, all light blotted out by the dark rolling clouds. Lightning flashed against the horizon and in an instant Sam could see what looked like the silhouette of a man at the edge of the cliff to the north, just standing there. Fear gripped him for a moment as he 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 coat. 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 cliff where he had seen the figure. The figure was gone. He moved toward the cliff 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 tell your hand in front of your face, let alone a figure in the distance. He turned and headed back inside.