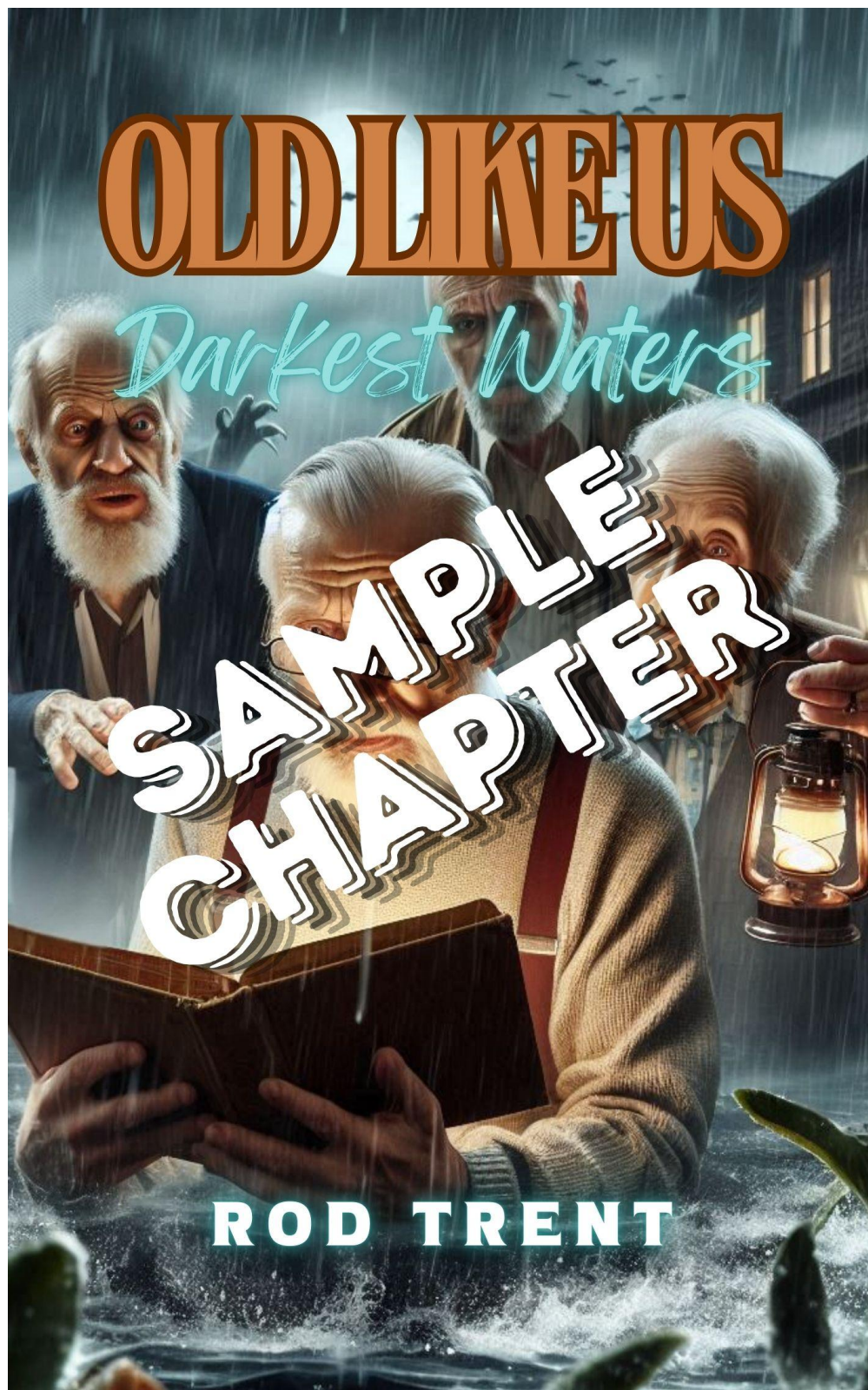


OLD LIKE US

Darkest Waters

SAMPLE
CHAPTER

ROD TRENT



Sample Chapter 3

Whispers in the Water

Eleanor Grace Hudson stepped out into the sun-dappled garden, her curiosity piqued by the unusual sounds that had filtered through her open window earlier. The buzz and chirp of the afternoon was familiar, but something about the rhythm of those splashes had caught her attention – out of place in the serene backdrop of Starlight Eldercare Facility's well-manicured lawns.

She made her way toward the cement pond, her sensible shoes crunching softly on the gravel path. As she neared the water, Eleanor noticed an oddity – a series of strange ripples disturbing the usually placid surface. "That's peculiar," she murmured under her breath, her historian's mind already sifting through possibilities.

"George! Oh, George!" Eleanor's voice carried over the hedge roses as she called out to her old friend, who was sitting on a nearby bench reading the newspaper.

"Coming, Eleanor!" George Alexander Reynolds responded, his voice steady as he folded the paper with a precise flick of his wrist. He rose to join her, his wiry frame moving with a purposeful gait. As he approached, he adjusted his wire-rimmed glasses, his detective's eyes taking in the scene before him.

"Look at this, George," Eleanor said, gesturing towards the water. "Have you ever seen such a thing?" She leaned in, her silver hair catching the light as she studied the ripples with a keen intensity.

"Most curious indeed," mused George, joining Eleanor at the edge of the pond. They leaned in together, their heads almost touching as they observed the disturbance.

"Could be a fish, I suppose," Eleanor speculated, "but I don't recall us having any that are sizable enough to cause such a commotion."

"Or perhaps it's simply the wind playing tricks on the water," George offered, his analytical mind considering the most logical explanation.

"Ah, but there's barely a breeze today, George." Eleanor's blue eyes sparkled with mischief, clearly enjoying the puzzle before them. "And besides, a mystery is always more fun than a straightforward answer, wouldn't you say?"

"Indeed," George chuckled, the corners of his eyes crinkling with amusement. "And since when have we shied away from a little excitement? Let's keep watching; it may reveal itself in time."

Together, they stood by the pond, two seasoned minds ready to unravel whatever secret lay beneath the rippling waters.

"Curiouser and curiouser," Eleanor murmured, peering intently at the agitated surface of the water. "It's not gas; there are no bubbles. And it's too rhythmic for it to be random."

"Ah," George said, stroking his neatly trimmed beard in thought. "Have you considered thermal currents, Eleanor? Warm patches of water rising unexpectedly?"

"Thermal currents in a cement pond? In our mild English garden?" Eleanor replied with a playful arch of her eyebrow. "I think we might have to entertain some less conventional theories here."

"Less conventional..." George repeated, barely suppressing a smile. He admired Eleanor's refusal to settle for mundane explanations.

Before he could reply, a voice rang out from behind them, rich with dramatic flair. "Perhaps it's the awakening of an ancient aquatic beast!" Mabel exclaimed as she bustled into the garden, her brightly colored scarf fluttering like a flag of excitement.

"An ancient beast, you say?" Eleanor turned, her face alight with interest. "Now that would be quite the historical discovery."

"Or a creature from the depths of Arthurian legend!" Mabel continued, her green eyes dancing with the thrill of her own imagination. "Maybe Excalibur is down there, waiting for the rightful ruler of Britain to claim it!"

"Wouldn't that rust after all these centuries underwater?" George asked dryly, though a twinkle in his eye betrayed his enjoyment of Mabel's colorful speculations.

"Details, dear George, details!" Mabel waved her hand dismissively. "The point is, something extraordinary is afoot!"

Eleanor chuckled, the sound a gentle chime in the afternoon air. "Extraordinary indeed, Mabel. But let us not get ahead of ourselves. We'll need more than speculation to solve this mystery."

"Of course, of course," Mabel conceded with a nod, but Eleanor could tell her friend was far from done with her wild theorizing.

Eleanor, George, and Mabel stood at the edge of the garden's cement pond, the water still murmuring with mysterious ripples. Mabel leaned forward, hands on her hips, her scarf casting a kaleidoscope of colors onto the disturbed surface.

"Or maybe," she said, eyes twinkling with mischief, "it's a portal to another dimension. Imagine that! A whole new world beneath our lily pads."

George raised an eyebrow, his arms folded across his chest. "I'm fairly certain interdimensional physics doesn't operate through suburban pond scum," he quipped, though the corners of his mouth tugged upwards.

"Ah, but what fun is science if it can't entertain the possibility of the impossible?" Mabel shot back, her gaze still fixed on the water.

Eleanor laughed softly, the sound blending with the rustle of leaves around them. She loved how Mabel's mind skipped across ideas like stones over water. "Well, I, for one, would welcome a chance to meet our other-dimensional neighbors. But let's keep our theories within the realm of the probable for now."

No sooner had the last word left Eleanor's lips than Harold shuffled into the garden, a pair of binoculars slung around his neck. "Heard there was a bit of an aquatic mystery going on," he announced, peering over the rim of his glasses with an inquisitive squint.

"Harold, just in time!" Mabel greeted him with a flourish. "We need your technological expertise to spy on our possibly mythical pond dweller."

"Technological expertise, eh?" Harold chuckled, hoisting the binoculars up to his eyes. "Let's see if we can't get a closer look at the source of all this commotion."

With a few deft adjustments, he scanned the pond's perimeter, his brow furrowing in concentration. Eleanor watched, admiring the way Harold's eagerness for solving puzzles never seemed to wane despite his years.

"Find anything yet, Harold?" George asked, leaning in with genuine interest.

"Give me a moment," Harold replied, the binoculars sweeping back and forth. "This old tech grandpa isn't as quick as he used to be."

Mabel chuckled, resting an arm on Eleanor's shoulder. "If anyone can uncover the secrets of this pond with gadgetry, it's Harold."

"Indeed," Eleanor agreed, smiling at their friend's determination. "We're lucky to have him on our investigative team."

And so they stood, a quartet of curious minds by the pond, each bringing their own unique perspective to the unfolding garden mystery.

Harold's fingers, gnarled with wisdom and age, toyed with the focus wheel of the binoculars like a maestro tuning his instrument. He panned slowly across the water's surface, the lenses zooming in on every leaf, every floating twig.

"Ah," Harold murmured enigmatically, "there seems to be a gathering of algae at the northeast corner, it's... rather thick."

"Algae?" George interjected, frowning. "That can't be responsible for the ripples, surely?"

"Unlikely," Harold concurred, still surveying the water. "But it's peculiar —"

"Perhaps it's a sign!" Mabel exclaimed dramatically. "An omen from the deep!"

"Or perhaps it's just time to clean the pond," Eleanor suggested, her voice laced with mirth as she winked at George, who tried to suppress a chuckle.

Before they could delve further into aquatic horticulture, a sudden gurgle from the nearby fountain snagged their attention. Like an orchestra coming to an abrupt halt, the splashing melody of water ceased, leaving behind an eerie silence.

"Good heavens," Eleanor gasped, her hand flying to her chest.

"Did someone forget to pay the water bill?" Mabel quipped, but her eyes betrayed a flicker of concern.

"Let me take a look," George said, stepping forward with the decisiveness of a man who had unclogged many a drain in his time.

"Doesn't seem like a simple mechanical failure," Harold observed, his engineering mind already sifting through possibilities. The binoculars dangled forgotten around his neck as he squinted at the now-still fountain.

"First the pond, now this," Eleanor remarked, her voice low. "It's as if something is tampering with our little haven."

"Or *someone*," George added, casting a wary glance over his shoulder as if half expecting a culprit to emerge from the rhododendrons.

"Let's not jump to conclusions," Harold interjected soothingly. "Could be a mere coincidence."

"Coincidences are mysteries hiding in plain sight," Mabel declared, her tone conspiratorial. "I say we keep an eye out, my friends. Who knows what secrets lay beneath our very noses?"

"Agreed," Eleanor nodded, her gaze lingering on the inert fountain. "For now, let's keep this matter between us."

"Discreetly," George emphasized, "until we have more to go on."

"Discreetly," they all echoed, a pact made amidst the backdrop of their disrupted tranquility.

As they dispersed, each lost in contemplation, Eleanor remained by the pond a moment longer. The water was still again, its secrets veiled beneath a placid surface, but her resolve to protect their cherished home was anything but calm.

Eleanor strode purposefully toward the fountain, her friends following in a curious procession. "Let's have a closer look," she said, gesturing for them to join her at the water's edge. They circled the ornate stone structure, eyes scouring for any clue.

"See here?" Eleanor pointed to a crack snaking along the base of the fountain. "That wasn't there last summer."

"Could be the frost heaves," Harold suggested, leaning in with his hands clasped behind his back. "Old concrete doesn't fare well in the cold."

"Or maybe our pond creature has a taste for stone," Mabel quipped, winking at George, who rolled his eyes but couldn't suppress a grin.

"Let's stay grounded," George admonished gently, though the twinkle in his eye belied his stern tone. "What we need is evidence, not fairy tales."

"Though a touch of magic never hurt anyone," Mabel retorted, her laughter like chimes in the stillness.

"Look at this," Harold interrupted, pointing to a section of pipe exposed by the crack. "These markings—could they be teeth marks?"

"Teeth marks?" Eleanor echoed, her historian's mind racing through possibilities. "But what sort of creature in these parts would...?"

"Let's not borrow trouble," George interjected wisely. "Could be simple wear and tear."

"Simple wear and tear doesn't explain the ripples or the stoppage," Eleanor countered, her blue eyes alight with the thrill of the hunt. "We need to consider all angles."

"Agreed," Harold nodded, adjusting his binoculars thoughtfully. "Perhaps we should document the changes. Keep a logbook of sorts."

"An excellent suggestion!" Eleanor beamed, pleased by their collective initiative. "This could be an important piece of history unfolding right before us."

"And if it turns out to be a beastie from the depths?" Mabel asked impishly.

"Then we shall write a new chapter of local folklore," Eleanor declared with a chuckle, her voice rich with affection for her friends and their shared adventure. "Together."

The group smiled at one another, united in their determination to solve the mystery of the troubled fountain. The afternoon sun dipped lower, casting long shadows across the

garden as they set about their task, the warmth of camaraderie enveloping them like a cozy blanket.

Eleanor ran her fingers along the edge of the fountain, her touch gentle as if not to disturb more than what had already been disturbed. "Do you all feel it?" she asked, without turning to face her companions. Her voice held a tremor of concern that was as rare as a misprint in a history textbook.

"Feel what exactly?" George questioned, his brows furrowing with a mix of intrigue and skepticism as he scanned the area.

"The connection," Eleanor replied, her gaze fixed on the water's still surface. "The pond, the ripples, now the fountain — there's a thread weaving through these oddities."

Mabel nodded vigorously, her own eyes wide with the thrill of conspiracy. "It's like we're in a detective novel, and the plot is thickening!"

"Only we're lacking a detective," Harold quipped, his binoculars hanging from his neck unused, a silent testament to their need for answers rather than magnified views.

"Perhaps not," Eleanor said, sharing a knowing look with each member of the group. "We have our wits, our shared experiences, and this — " She tapped her temple lightly, " — a lifetime's worth of curiosity."

"Right," George agreed, though his tone suggested he was bracing himself for whatever wild theories might follow. "So, what's your thinking, Eleanor?"

"Something's taken up residence here," she stated, her words carrying the weight of her suspicion. "Something we're not meant to find... easily."

"An aquatic squatter?" Mabel offered with a snort of amusement, only half-joking.

"Let's not get ahead of ourselves," George cautioned. "Before we conjure sea monsters or submarine invaders, we should keep a level head."

"Agreed," Eleanor said, nodding sagely. "But discretion will be our ally. We carry on quietly, observe, and gather evidence. If we're to be believed, we'll need more than speculation."

"Secret agents of Starlight Eldercare," Harold said with a smirk, adjusting the binoculars around his neck as if they were a spy's gadget.

"A clandestine operation," Mabel added with a chuckle, her imagination already running wild with possibilities.

"Then it's settled," Eleanor concluded. "We keep this among us, for now. Let's meet tomorrow, same time, and share any findings. But remember, mum's the word."

"Understood," they murmured in unison, a pact made beneath the softening light of the evening sky.

As shadows stretched across the garden, the group disbanded with nods and small smiles, each person stepping away with a sense of purpose. They would continue their discreet investigation, bound by friendship and the lure of a good mystery yet to be solved.

The evening air had grown cooler, carrying with it the scent of fresh earth and the fading perfume of day-blooming flowers. Eleanor watched as her friends wandered back towards the warmth of the common room, their silhouettes slowly merging with the encroaching dusk. Mabel's laughter, a tinkling bell in the calm twilight, receded into the distance.

"Another mystery, eh?" Harold murmured, squinting at the horizon before turning on his heel.

"Seems like old times," George added, his analytical gaze lingering on the pond one last time.

Eleanor, left alone by the water's edge, allowed herself a small smile. The reflection of the first stars appeared on the pond's surface, like a mirror to another world. She tucked a stray lock of silver hair behind her ear and let out a soft sigh.

"First the ripples, now the fountain," she mused out loud, her voice barely more than a whisper. "What are you hiding from us?"

She bent down, her fingertips grazing the cool water, sending tiny waves across the stillness. Her reflection stared back at her, a mixture of wisdom and determination etched into her features. The past had taught Eleanor that every detail mattered, that

history was often a puzzle waiting to be solved. And she, for one, never could resist a good puzzle.

"Protect and investigate," she whispered to her watery counterpart. "That's what we'll do."

With a final glance at the tranquil scene before her, Eleanor straightened up and wrapped her cardigan tighter around her shoulders. The garden, once a place of leisurely strolls and quiet afternoons, had taken on a new significance. It was now a backdrop for an enigma that called to her spirit of inquiry, a challenge she readily accepted.

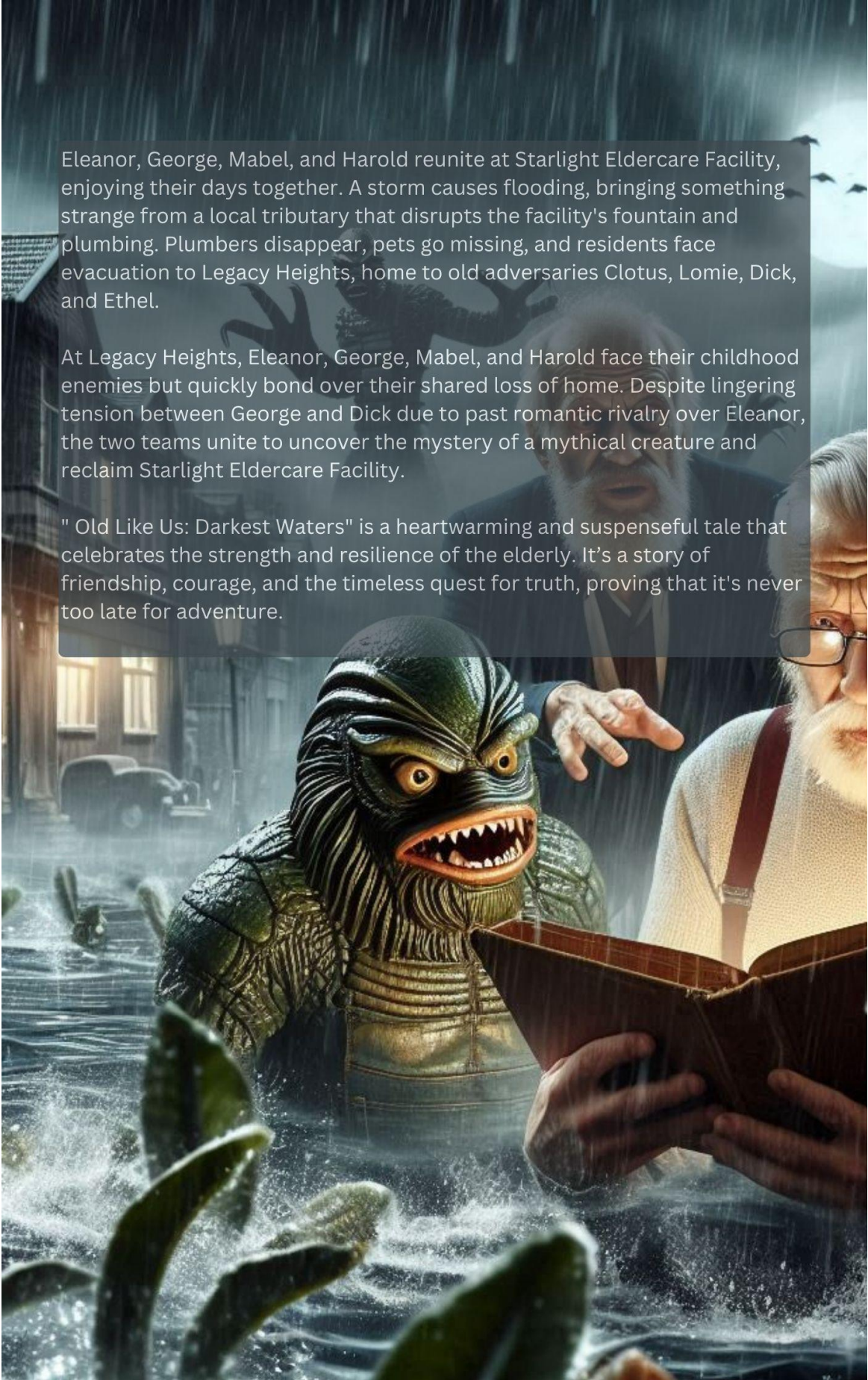
"Tomorrow then," she said quietly, as if sealing a promise with the night itself. "We'll begin anew."

Eleanor's steps were measured and thoughtful as she made her way back, her mind already racing with possibilities. What secrets did the pond conceal? What stories awaited them beneath its serene facade? One thing was certain: she and her companions were about to embark on an unexpected chapter in their lives at Starlight Eldercare. And whatever lay ahead, Eleanor felt a fierce resolve to protect the home and the friendships that meant everything to her.

As the lights of the facility came into view, casting a warm glow against the darkening sky, Eleanor felt a sense of anticipation. The tranquil life they knew had been disrupted, yes, but it was in those disruptions that life's true adventures were found. And so, with a heart full of curiosity and a determined step, Eleanor Grace Hudson walked forward to meet whatever awaited them.

Old Like Us: Darkest Waters - Coming soon! <https://amzn.to/4jojLxS>

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Eleanor, George, Mabel, and Harold reunite at Starlight Eldercare Facility, enjoying their days together. A storm causes flooding, bringing something strange from a local tributary that disrupts the facility's fountain and plumbing. Plumbers disappear, pets go missing, and residents face evacuation to Legacy Heights, home to old adversaries Clotus, Lomie, Dick, and Ethel.

At Legacy Heights, Eleanor, George, Mabel, and Harold face their childhood enemies but quickly bond over their shared loss of home. Despite lingering tension between George and Dick due to past romantic rivalry over Eleanor, the two teams unite to uncover the mystery of a mythical creature and reclaim Starlight Eldercare Facility.

"Old Like Us: Darkest Waters" is a heartwarming and suspenseful tale that celebrates the strength and resilience of the elderly. It's a story of friendship, courage, and the timeless quest for truth, proving that it's never too late for adventure.