

The Visitor at Blackthorn House

The telegram arrived on a rain-hammered Thursday, when the sky pressed low enough to touch the chimneys. It was addressed to Miss Evelyn Hart of Blackthorn House, though she had lived alone there for nearly a decade.

COMING AT DUSK. DO NOT LOCK THE DOOR. - J.H.

Evelyn read it three times.

Her brother, James Hart, had been dead for nine years.

She set the telegram by the window, where it trembled in the draft. Blackthorn House, with its long corridors and shuttered rooms, held its breath.

By dusk, Evelyn had convinced herself it was a mistake. A cruel prank. A misdelivered joke. Yet she didn't lock the door.

The evening deepened into a violet bruise as she lit the hallway lamp. The shadows stretched long and thin, like they had when the police came to tell her James's ship had gone down near the Faroe cliffs. Nothing recovered. No body. No grave.

A knock echoed through the house.

Not loud.

Just... familiar.

She opened the door.

A man stood on the step, dripping rainwater, a travel case in one hand. His coat was old-fashioned, the colour of storm clouds. His hair - dark, unruly - fell into the same shape James's had at twenty-five.

She felt her breath rupture. "James?"

He smiled. "Evie. You kept the door open."

He stepped inside, trailing the scent of salt and something colder, deeper. Evelyn reached to touch his sleeve but hesitated. His skin looked too pale, like moonlight poured into a man's outline.

They sat by the fire. He told her stories - not of death, but of horizons and storms, a ship refusing to sink, carried by currents no sailor charted.

"It's not the sea you think it is," he murmured. "Not when it takes you for its own."

Evelyn's heart thudded painfully. "Why come back now?"

He looked at the flames, for a moment burning blue. "Because you called me."

"I never -"

"You did," he said gently. "Every night you sat by this hearth wishing for one more hour. One more word. One more chance."

Evelyn felt tears rise. "And now you're here?"

"The sea keeps what it claims," James said softly. "I have only one visit."

Silence settled between them - heavy, sacred.

When the clock struck midnight, James rose. His outline flickered, as though the lamplight struggled to hold him.

"Evie," he said, brushing a ghost-soft hand against her cheek. "You must stop waiting on the shore."

She clutched his wrist. "Stay."

"I can't."

His fingers faded first. Then his arm, his face, dissolving into a spray of light like seawater catching the moon.

The last part to disappear was his voice.

"I kept the door open, too."

When morning came, Evelyn found his travel case by the hearth. Inside lay a single object: his signet ring, cold as deep water, still carrying the scent of the sea.

She closed the door of Blackthorn House for the first time in nine years. This time, she locked it.