THE LIGHTHOUSE KEEPERS

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Nayeem believed that night-time was the only time when the lighthouse was truly beautiful. During the day, it looked nothing more than an ugly slab of concrete right in the middle of a tiny island, with a glaring light that served no purpose under the blaze of the sun. But when the sun set, and night fell, that was when it truly shone in more ways than one.

Under the blanket of the stars, the lighthouse stood tall as a beacon of hope – one that existed to guide awry sailors and others those who dared to brave the ruthless waves. The night was when they truly shone for a reason. Just living inside it and taking care of all the little things made him feel like he was contributing to its cause. An important cog in a machine that functioned as a safe haven.

Hassan, on the other hand, did not have such a rosy view of it (Nayeem never knew how to introduce Hassan to other people – "co-worker"seemed too formal while "friend" was too casual). He never voiced his distaste for the place, but he made it obvious through the little things. For one, he liked to spend most of his waking hours sitting on the edge of the island, watching the ocean that stretched all around them. Other than doing the bare minimum upkeep, Hassan had rarely ever contributed in taking care of the lighthouse. Half the time, Nayeem would wonder what he was actually doing there. It seemed like all he ever did was just look at the waves crash.

"You could just move into a house next to the beach if you like the view so much," suggested Nayeem one day.

"Who would I live with?" asked Hassan. "I don't have anyone left to go back home to."

Nayeem didn't know how to answer that, so he let Hassan be. Yet, he always wondered how Hassan ended up here of all places. Was it just loneliness, or something deeper, more visceral? For Nayeem it was the loss of his wife. Everything in their old home reminded him of her, and he needed some time by himself to recuperate from the grief it caused and try to move on. Instead, he had fallen in love with this place and could not see himself anywhere else.

On more than one occasion, he had tried to find out what Hassan's reason could be, but he appeared not to have one. He was a happy man, full of smiles and funny jokes all the time. He was the kind of person one expected to be the life of the party, the centre of attention in a crowd of people, not live in a secluded lighthouse that was miles away from human life.

Nayeem never found out what it was that haunted him. He never explained what it was, not even when he left him.

It happened on a particularly stormy night. It had been raining torrentially since morning. The two of them were shut inside. Hassan was getting fidgety and complaining about how he was feeling suffocated.

"I need some fresh air," he said.

Nayeem glanced at the window and found his view obstructed by sheets of rain. "Where are you going to find that?"

"I'll just go outside for a bit."

Hassan was already wearing his raincoat and was in the process of putting on his boots. "I'll be back soon, see you on the other side."

He frowned at the last line, but he didn't think much of it. He let it slide.

"Alright then, don't stay out for too long, though. You might catch a cold."

Hassan nodded in reply and left. Nayeem made himself two warm drinks – one for Hassan, one for himself – to pass the time while he waited.

Minutes passed and then a full hour. Nayeem had already made several drinks for himself, while Hassan's went cold from being untouched. He was trying to drown out the panic with his drinks, but that wasn't working anymore. So, he finally gathered all his resolve and went out to see how he was faring.

The island was small, and it only took him five minutes to scan the whole area, and yet Nayeem spent twice that time scrambling around because he was nowhere to be seen. The only trace that he had left was in the form of a neatly folded raincoat in one corner and the boots lying on top of them. Nayeem knew what it meant, but he refused to believe it, and was hell-bent on finding him. He eventually returned back to the lighthouse to radio the onshore officials to let them know about the tragic news.

He supposed it was a fitting end for his friend – yes, maybe friend was the best way to describe him. He had gone back to the ocean he found solace in. He still hopes that wherever Hassan is now, he is happy and loved.