

Text to Audiobook: The Mill Lane House (short story)

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The demo input is invented for this sample (for handwriting, a public-domain historical letter). It contains no customer data.

Chapter One: The Key

The house at the end of Mill Lane had been empty for eleven years when Clara Hale finally turned the key. Dust lay over everything like a pale blanket, and the air smelled of old paper and rain. She walked slowly through the rooms, touching the backs of chairs and the edges of picture frames, as if each one might tell her something her grandmother never had.

In the kitchen, a calendar still hung beside the window. The page showed March, and someone had circled the fourteenth in red ink. Clara stood in front of it for a long time. Her grandmother had died in the autumn, not the spring, and nobody in the family had ever mentioned anything happening in March.

She opened the drawers one by one. Spoons, string, a box of matches, a ration book with a name she did not recognize. In the last drawer, under a folded tea towel, lay a brass key with a paper tag tied to it. The tag said only one word, in her grandmother's careful handwriting: Lighthouse.

Clara laughed out loud, and the sound surprised her in the quiet house. There was no lighthouse in Mill Lane, or anywhere in the town. The nearest coast was two hours away. She put the key in her coat pocket anyway, and when she locked the front door behind her that evening, she could feel its weight against her side.

Chapter Two: The Tide Tables

The library closed at six, and Clara arrived at a quarter to. The man at the desk looked at the brass key for a long moment before he answered her question.

"There was a lighthouse," he said. "Not here. On Gull Point, before they built the new harbor. It was taken down in the sixties. My father worked there for a summer."

He went to the back room and came out with a thin folder of tide tables, the kind printed for fishermen. On the inside cover, someone had written a list of dates in pencil. The fourteenth of March appeared three times, in three different years.

Clara turned the pages slowly. Next to each circled date was the same small drawing: a house with a single window, and a line of light going out from it across the water.