

MYSTERY



The mail kept coming

a relay in eight chapters

RELAY · WRITERS

The writers

Eight people who never met. One chapter each, in the order it was written.

One	Sasha Loomis
Two	Lior Tannen
Three	Iris Beddoe
Four	jmarsh
Five	Dan Okafor
Six	rpenguin
Seven	Margot Vail
Eight	Ruth Ann Keller

Chapter

One

written by Sasha Loomis

The mailbox had been there for three weeks before anyone thought to open it. Not the kind that comes with a house, but the kind that appears, freestanding, at the end of a driveway where no driveway had been. Blue metal, slightly warm to the touch even on cold mornings. Mrs. Kellerman walked past it every day on her way to the bus stop and felt compelled to check inside, though she knew it wasn't hers and had never seen anyone approach it. When she finally did open it, the note inside was folded into the shape of something that shouldn't fold: a cube with five visible sides, all of them facing forward. She plucked it from the box and it became flat in her hand, ordinary paper with ordinary writing. The words said: Find the building that remembers itself backward. She read it three times standing there on the sidewalk. The mailbox was gone when she looked up. The bus driver that morning was someone she'd never seen before, though she'd taken the same route for eleven years. He wore sunglasses indoors and hummed a song that made her teeth ache. When she tried to pay her fare, he waved her through without looking. "The building remembers," he said. "Excuse me?" But he was humming again, that same frequency that made her molars vibrate. She got off four stops early, though she didn't decide to. Her body simply stood and walked to the door, and the bus released her onto a corner she recognized but couldn't place. The coffee shop across the

street was called Yesterday's, and through the window she could see customers sitting backward in their chairs, facing away from their tables. Their coffee cups were full and steaming, but the liquid never lowered no matter how long they raised the cups to their lips. The building next to it had no name, just a door that opened onto a stairwell going down. She'd walked past this block a thousand times before. The stairwell had never been there. Inside, the air tasted blue. Not cold, not fresh, but actually blue, like a color could have flavor. The stairs descended in a spiral that seemed to tighten as she went deeper, though when she looked back up, they appeared to widen toward the top. On the seventh landing, or maybe the third, she found another note taped to the wall at eye level. This one wasn't folded at all. It was written directly on the concrete in something that looked like chalk but smelled like burnt cinnamon. The signature is the person you haven't met yet. Below the words was a signature, looping and illegible, in handwriting she recognized as her own from twenty years in the future. She knew this the way you know things in dreams, with absolute certainty and no evidence. She took a picture of it with her phone, but the camera captured only the blank wall. When she looked up from the screen, the writing had changed. Now it said: Don't photograph what isn't finished being written. A door opened somewhere below her, though she saw no door. Footsteps climbed toward her, but they sounded like they were descending. She pressed herself against the wall and waited for whoever was coming to arrive, but instead she felt herself becoming transparent, as though she were the one leaving, evaporating into the blue air one particle at a time. The last thing she noticed before she lost the ability to notice things was that the walls were covered in mailbox-shaped indentations, hundreds of them, each one slightly warm to the touch. And inside each depression, a small folded note, all of them cubes with too many sides, all of them addressed to someone who didn't exist yet. She reached for the nearest one. Her hand passed through it like smoke, or like the note was smoke, or like everything was smoke and only the reaching was real. The footsteps were getting closer. They sounded

exactly like her heartbeat, or her heartbeat sounded exactly like footsteps.

Chapter

Two

written by Lior Tannen

The superintendent found her on the landing at dawn, which was impossible because Mrs. Kellerman worked the morning shift at the library and was never late. Yet here she sat, back against the wall, her coat buttoned wrong and her purse open beside her with nothing spilled out. She blinked at him like someone coming out of anesthesia. "You looking for apartment 4D?" he asked, though there was no 4D in this building. There had been once, maybe. He'd lived here seventeen years and sometimes found himself cleaning a hallway that ended at a door that shouldn't exist. By the time he returned with his keys, the hallway would be shorter. Mrs. Kellerman opened her mouth. Closed it. Looked at her hands as if counting her fingers. "I don't live here," she said. "Nobody said you did." He helped her up, and her weight felt wrong, too light on one side. Like she'd left something behind. "But you were looking for someone." She wasn't asking him. She was telling herself. The blue taste had faded from the air, but she could still feel it coating her tongue, making every word feel like translation. "There were notes," she said. "And footsteps that went the wrong direction." The superintendent nodded as if this explained everything. "Used to be a postal sorting facility here. Back in the sixties, before they rezoned. They say the mailmen went crazy. Started delivering letters to people who hadn't written them yet. Responses to questions nobody had asked." He

picked up her purse, handed it to her with the gentleness of someone returning a borrowed grief. "You find what you came for?" Mrs. Kellerman thought about the signature, her own hand thirty years older. "I found what was looking for me." She left the building and walked to work, arrived exactly on time despite having no memory of the route. Her colleague Sandra was already there, shelving returns, and glanced up with an expression Mrs. Kellerman had never seen before: recognition mixed with relief. "Oh thank god," Sandra said. "I was worried you wouldn't come back." "Come back from where?" "I don't know. You tell me. You've been strange for weeks. Distant. Like you were listening to something the rest of us couldn't hear." Sandra lowered her voice. "Yesterday you checked out a book to someone who doesn't have a library card yet. You wrote their name in the system: Marcus Wilder. I looked him up. He won't be born for another six months." Mrs. Kellerman felt the blue taste return, sharp and electric. "What book?" "That's the thing. It's not in our system. But you wrote down the title in the log. *The Building That Remembers Itself Backward*. Manual entry, like you'd done it a hundred times before." The library was quiet, that particular morning silence before the rush of students and retirees. Mrs. Kellerman walked to the circulation desk, opened the logbook, and there it was: her handwriting, precise and certain. Below the title was a call number that didn't match their system. And below that, in pencil, someone had written: Fiction. Or maybe prophecy. Check the basement. They didn't have a basement. Sandra was watching her. "You're doing it again. That listening thing." Mrs. Kellerman closed the logbook. Her phone buzzed in her pocket. A text from a number she didn't recognize: The mailbox will be at your house tonight. This time, leave the note you find for whoever comes after. She looked up at Sandra, who was staring at her phone with the same confused expression. "Did you just get a text about a mailbox?" They compared screens. Same message. Same unknown number. But the timestamp on Sandra's phone was three minutes in the future.

Chapter

Three

written by Iris Beddoe

The basement existed. Had always existed, Sandra said, though Mrs. Kellerman watched her face rearrange the memory as she spoke. The key was in the janitor's closet behind the mop bucket, rust-colored and heavier than any key should be. Mrs. Kellerman took it. The door was next to the staff bathroom. Had been there yesterday, or hadn't been there, or had been there so long everyone stopped seeing it. The kind of door you notice only when you need it. Metal. Green paint chipped in patterns that looked deliberate, almost alphabetic. She turned the key. Stairs descended into darkness that smelled like old paper and copper wire. Not the darkness of a room with the lights off. The darkness of a space that had never held light. Sandra stayed at the top. "I can't," she said. "I tried once. My feet wouldn't move past the third step." She held up her phone. "The timestamp's changed again. Now it's six minutes ahead." Mrs. Kellerman descended alone. The stairs ended in a room that was bigger than the library above it. Shelves lined the walls, floor to ceiling, but instead of books they held mailboxes. Hundreds of them. The same blue metal, the same warmth. Each one had a number stenciled on the front in white paint. Sequential. 4A. 4B. 4C. She found 4D at the back corner, eye level. The door hung open. Inside, a single envelope, manila and water-stained. No address. No stamp. Just a name written in marker: Marcus Wilder. She opened it. Inside, a birth

certificate. Dated six months from now. Mother's name: Sandra Kemp. The Sandra upstairs who claimed she'd never wanted children, who wore the ring from a marriage that ended badly and said she was done with all that. Father's name: blank. Clipped to the certificate, a photograph. Sandra holding a newborn. The background was this library, the children's section, morning light through the east windows. Sandra's face looked different. Older. Tired in the way that comes from joy instead of exhaustion. Written on the back of the photo in Sandra's handwriting: He asked for you first. Before he asked for me. Before he asked for anything. Your name was the first word that made sense to him. Mrs. Kellerman put the photograph in her pocket. The other mailboxes were opening. Not physically. She heard them open, that small creak of metal hinges, though none of them moved. Sound without source. She walked the perimeter, reading numbers. 4E through 4Z, then 5A, 6A, 7A. The numbers didn't follow building logic. They followed some other sequence, some pattern she couldn't parse. At 7C, she stopped. This mailbox was different. Newer. The blue paint wasn't chipped. When she touched it, the warmth felt like recognition, like shaking hands with a version of herself that hadn't arrived yet. She opened it. Inside, her own driver's license. Current photo. But the address was wrong. Listed a street that didn't exist. The expiration date was three years ago, which meant this license was from the future and already expired, or from the past and somehow current, or from a present that branched sideways. Beneath the license, another note. Not folded. Flat. The handwriting matched the signature she'd seen in the stairwell. The building remembers itself backward because someone is unbuilding it forward. You've been here before. You'll be here again. The mailboxes are not delivery systems. They are anchors. Find the person who installed them. Find out what they were trying to hold in place. The lights flickered. Not electric lights (there were no fixtures). The darkness itself flickered, became briefly less dark, then settled back into its original weight. Footsteps behind her. She turned. The superintendent stood at the base of the stairs, holding a clipboard. He looked at her

without surprise, as though he'd expected to find her here, had been waiting for her to arrive for seventeen years. "You're the second person this week to make it down here," he said. "The first one didn't come back up." "Who was the first?" He consulted his clipboard, though Mrs. Kellerman could see the page was blank. "You were," he said. "Three days from now."

Chapter

Four

written by jmarsh

Mrs. Kellerman felt the floor tilt beneath her, not physically but temporally, as though the room had been built on a foundation of hours instead of concrete. The superintendent's face remained placid, bureaucratic. He wore the expression of a man who had long ago stopped questioning the geometry of his employment. "I don't understand," she said, though even as the words left her mouth she recognized them as a lie. She understood perfectly. Had understood since the moment she opened the first mailbox and found her handwriting waiting for her like a parent at the door. "Understanding isn't the issue." The superintendent tapped his pen against the clipboard. The blank page rippled. "The issue is installation. Someone put these boxes here. Someone with access to the building's original plans. The ones drawn up before construction. Before the site was even purchased." He walked to the nearest shelf, ran his finger along a seam in the metal. "Postal Service decommissioned this facility in 1967. Officially. But the machinery kept running. Letters kept sorting themselves. Carriers kept showing up for shifts, signing in on registers that had been removed months earlier." He showed her the clipboard. The blank page now bore a signature log. Dates ascending backward: 2024, 2023, 2022, climbing toward the present. Her name appeared seventeen times, always on the third Tuesday of the month, always at

6:47 AM. "I've never been here on a Tuesday," Mrs. Kellerman said. "Not yet." He turned the page. "But you will have been. The building requires it." She looked at the signature directly above hers. Same handwriting, same date, but the name was different: Vera Kellerman. Her mother, dead eight years now. Died on a Tuesday. Died in this city, though not in this building. Died asking for someone named Marcus, though Mrs. Kellerman had no brother, no cousin, no family by that name. "My mother never worked for the Postal Service." "Nobody works for the Postal Service anymore." The superintendent closed the clipboard. "But the routes still exist. The addresses. Someone has to walk them. Someone has to deliver what's been sent, even if it's been sent backward." The mailboxes began to hum. Not a mechanical sound. Something organic, resonant, the way a building hums when the wind finds the exact frequency of its bones. Mrs. Kellerman pressed her palm against 7C. The metal was hot now, feverish. Inside, she heard paper rustling, though she'd left nothing in there but her future-past driver's license. She opened it again. The license was gone. In its place, a ring. Gold band, inscription on the inner surface. She tilted it toward what little light existed: To V.K., who knew before I did. Her mother's wedding ring. The one buried with her. Mrs. Kellerman had watched them close the casket. "Someone dug her up," she said. "Someone unburied her," the superintendent corrected. "There's a difference. Digging up means you're looking for what was. Unburying means you're looking for what will be." He gestured to the far wall, where the shelves ended and the room opened into a corridor she hadn't noticed before. Long. Narrow. Lined with doors, each one numbered in the same white stencil as the mailboxes. 1A through 3Z, then a gap where 4A should be, then 4B, 4C, and finally 4D. "Apartment 4D," Mrs. Kellerman said. "Was never an apartment." The superintendent handed her the clipboard. "It was an office. Belonged to the routing supervisor. Woman named Hester Ng. Worked here from 1959 until the day the building closed. Refused to leave. They found her body three weeks later, sitting at her desk, hands folded over a stack of letters she'd been sorting. All of them addressed to

people who didn't exist yet." Mrs. Kellerman took the clipboard. The signature log had changed again. Now only one name appeared, repeated in different hands across decades: Hester Ng. The dates spiraled: 1959, 1970, 1983, 1994, 2008, 2024. No death between them. No gaps. "She's still here," Mrs. Kellerman said. "She's still working." The superintendent pointed to door 4D. "And she's been waiting for you to finish your route. You're late. You were supposed to deliver that ring three days ago." He smiled, not unkindly. "But you'll make it on time. You always do." The door to 4D swung open. Inside, the blue taste of the air intensified, became almost solid. A woman sat at a desk, back turned, sorting envelopes with mechanical precision. Her hair was white but her hands were young. Mrs. Kellerman stepped forward.

Chapter

Five

written by Dan Okafor

The woman didn't turn around when Mrs. Kellerman entered, but her hands stopped moving. The silence felt like a punctuation mark at the end of a sentence Mrs. Kellerman hadn't known she was reading. "You're earlier than last time," the woman said. Her voice was younger than her hair suggested. Midwestern, flattened vowels. "But later than next time. Sit down, please. My neck isn't what it used to be. Or what it will be. I lose track." There was only one chair in the office, and the woman was sitting in it. Mrs. Kellerman remained standing. The desk was wood, scarred with water rings and cigarette burns, piled with mail sorted into stacks that defied spatial logic. One stack leaned left but its shadow fell right. Another was definitely three envelopes but looked like seven from certain angles. "Hester Ng," Mrs. Kellerman said. "Some days." The woman resumed sorting, her fingers moving across addresses without appearing to read them. "Other days I'm whoever's name is on the door. Today it's mine. Tomorrow it might be yours." She held up an envelope without turning. "This came for you. Postmarked six weeks ago. Sent from the address you haven't moved to yet." Mrs. Kellerman took it. Her name on the front in Sandra's handwriting. But Sandra had never written to her. They saw each other every day at work. Inside, a single line: His middle name should be Kellerman. I wanted you to know before I ask. "I don't understand why she'd mail this." "She won't."

Hester finally turned. Her face was unlined but her eyes were ancient, the particular exhaustion of someone who'd spent decades watching time refuse to move in straight lines. "She'll hand it to you in person. The letter is for the version of you who needs written proof. Some things people can't hear out loud." Mrs. Kellerman put the letter in her pocket next to the photograph and the ring. Her coat was getting heavy with other people's futures. "The superintendent said you've been sorting mail since 1959." "The superintendent says a lot of things." Hester pulled open a desk drawer. Inside, dozens of clipboards, all identical. "He says whatever the building needs him to say. Right now it needs him to explain me to you, so I become explainable. Last week it needed him to explain you to yourself, so you became someone who could find this office." "So none of this is real." "I didn't say that." Hester's hands moved to a new stack. These envelopes were aged, yellowed. "The building is real. The mail is real. What's not real is the sequence. You think you walked down here from the library this morning. You think you found the basement for the first time. But you've been coming here for months. You just keep forgetting because the building requires forgetting. Remembering would break the route." Mrs. Kellerman thought about the signature log, her name repeated seventeen times. "What route?" Hester stood. She was shorter than Mrs. Kellerman expected, barely five feet. Behind her, the wall was covered in maps. Not city maps. Route maps. Lines connecting addresses that weren't on any street grid. Mrs. Kellerman recognized her own house, Sandra's apartment, the library, this building. But there were other points too. Intersections that glowed faintly blue. "There are seven anchor points in this city," Hester said. "Places where time doesn't flow, it pools. The mailboxes mark them. They were installed in 1959 to stabilize the routes after the machinery started running backward. But anchors drift. They need maintenance. Someone has to walk the route, check each box, make sure nothing's slipping." She handed Mrs. Kellerman a carrier bag. Canvas, worn soft. Inside, seventeen envelopes, each addressed to a different version of the same person. All of them named Marcus Wilder.

"Your mother walked this route for thirty years," Hester said. "Before her, it was someone else. Before that, someone else. The route is older than the Postal Service. Older than the city. It's not about delivering mail. It's about making sure time keeps pretending to move forward, even when it doesn't want to." Mrs. Kellerman looked at the bag. "I never agreed to this." "You will." Hester returned to her desk, her back to the room again. "Three days from now. When you realize the alternative is watching everyone you know start disappearing into the gaps between when things happen and when they're supposed to." Mrs. Kellerman opened her mouth, closed it. Counted to five. "What happens if I refuse?" The envelopes on Hester's desk began to unsort themselves, addresses blurring, paper yellowing into blankness. "Then whoever comes after you," Hester said quietly, "will have to deliver twice as many letters.

Chapter

Six

written by rpenguin

Mrs. Kellerman had lived on Aldous Street for thirty-one years, and in all that time the post office at the corner of Fifth had never once been open past five. So when she saw the light still burning behind its frosted window at half past nine on a Tuesday, she told herself it was nothing, and then she crossed the street anyway.

The bell above the door didn't ring when she pushed it open. She noticed that first, the way you notice a missing tooth with your tongue before you understand why your mouth feels wrong.

Behind the counter sat a woman she didn't recognize, sorting envelopes into a wall of brass boxes with the unhurried rhythm of someone who had been doing it for a very long time and expected to keep doing it for longer still. A brass nameplate on the desk read HESTER, though nothing about the woman's face matched the softness the name implied.

"We're closed," Hester said, without looking up.

"The light was on."

"The light is always on." Hester set down an envelope, considered it, picked it back up. "You're Mrs. Kellerman. Forty-one Aldous. You've been expecting a letter from your sister for six days."

Mrs. Kellerman's mouth went dry. "How do you..."

"It's not coming," Hester said. "Not because she didn't send it. Because it already arrived somewhere else. Somewhen else." She finally looked up, and her eyes were the color of old stamps, faded past any color at all. "That happens, sometimes, when a letter falls between the cracks. Someone has to go get it. Put it back where it belongs."

"I don't understand what you're telling me."

"I'm telling you," Hester said, "that the mail doesn't just carry paper. It carries the when of things. Every letter is a little promise about the order the world happens in. Someone has to walk the gaps and make sure Tuesday's letter doesn't arrive on Thursday of last year. Someone has to carry the ones that go missing back to where time expects them." She folded her hands. "I've done it a long while. I'm tired, Mrs. Kellerman. And I think it's someone else's turn."

"That's absurd." Mrs. Kellerman laughed, short and unconvinced even to herself. "I'm not a postal worker. I'm sixty-two years old. I garden."

"You noticed the light was on," Hester said, as if that settled something. "Most people don't. Most people walk past a post office glowing at half past nine and their mind slides right off it, the way it slides off things that aren't for them. You crossed the street." She stood, and behind her the wall of brass boxes seemed to breathe, envelopes shifting though no draft moved through the room. "That's not nothing."

"I want to go home."

"You will." Hester returned to her desk, her back to the room again. "Three days from now. When you realize the alternative is watching everyone you know start disappearing into the gaps between when things happen and when they're supposed to."

Mrs. Kellerman opened her mouth, closed it. Counted to five.

"What happens if I refuse?"

The envelopes on Hester's desk began to unsort themselves, addresses blurring, paper yellowing into blankness.

"Then whoever comes after you," Hester said quietly, "will have to deliver twice as many letters."

Chapter

Seven

written by Margot Vail

Mrs. Kellerman stared at Hester's back as she resumed sorting envelopes, her hands moving with an almost hypnotic precision that seemed to defy the passage of time itself. The brass boxes behind the counter hummed softly, each one shifting and rearranging themselves in a silent dance. She felt the weight of Hester's words pressing down on her chest, like a thick fog suffocating any attempt at coherent thought. "Three days from now," she whispered, almost to herself. "When I realize...?"

Hester turned back to Mrs. Kellerman, and for the first time, her eyes met hers. They were old, full of a sorrow that seemed not just human but ancient. "You don't have to accept it right away," Hester said softly. "The route isn't due until next Tuesday. But if you're going to refuse, do it now."

Mrs. Kellerman took a deep breath, the cold metal of the brass box against her knuckles as she gripped one firmly. "I don't understand what's happening," she said, trying to keep her voice steady. "You're asking me to walk down every street in this city, checking mailboxes I've never seen before. That's absurd."

Hester nodded slowly, then reached for a small, unsorted envelope. She held it up between them, the address faintly visible on the worn

paper. "Sometimes," she said, her voice calm and measured, "absurd things are exactly what's needed."

She handed the envelope to Mrs. Kellerman, who accepted it reluctantly, feeling its weight in her palm. The address was handwritten in a neat, looping script that was not hers; it read simply: MARCUS WILDER. "Who is Marcus Wilder?" Mrs. Kellerman asked, looking at Hester again. "And why should I care?"

Hester gave her a small smile, the corners of her mouth lifting slightly. "He's someone who needs to hear something. That's all." She turned back to sorting envelopes, and as she did, the wall of brass boxes began to shift more noticeably, each one whispering addresses into the air. Mrs. Kellerman stood there for a moment, the envelope still in her hand, feeling the weight of Hester's words and the strange, unexplainable force pressing on her from every direction. "Where are we even supposed to start?" she asked, her voice barely audible over the soft hum of the brass boxes. Hester turned back, her eyes finding Mrs. Kellerman's again. "With you," she said simply. Then, with a quick nod, Hester pointed towards the door that led into the main part of the post office, where the real work was happening. Mrs. Kellerman hesitated for only a second before stepping past Hester and out into the quiet of the main area. The space was dimly lit by an old-fashioned chandelier hanging from the ceiling, its bulbs flickering slightly as if remembering the light they once shed on a bustling office. At the far end of the room stood a long counter lined with shelves filled to overflowing with envelopes and letters, each one addressed in various hands, some urgent, others seemingly routine. Mrs. Kellerman felt an overwhelming urge to turn back, to deny this entire bizarre scenario, but Hester's words kept echoing in her mind: You've been expecting a letter from your sister for six days.

She approached the counter and noticed a stack of letters marked with a special stamp she didn't recognize. One envelope caught her eye, its address scribbled in the same looping script as the one Hester had handed to her earlier. She picked it up, feeling the slight difference in

weight compared to the others. "Who is this for?" she asked aloud, more to herself than anyone else. Hester was already on her way out of the office area, leaving a trail of shifting brass boxes behind as if parting clouds revealed the sun. "For you," Hester called back over her shoulder, and Mrs. Kellerman watched her go with a mix of fear and determination. Turning to the stack of letters, she found several more envelopes addressed in that same script, all bearing the same distinctive stamp. Each one was postmarked from different times, some as recent as yesterday, others from months ago. She picked up another envelope, its address reading: Marcus Wilder, 41 Aldous Street. A shiver ran down her spine as she read the name, feeling a sudden connection to this mysterious figure. She knew nothing about him, but something about his name resonated with her, perhaps because it sounded too much like her own last name, Kellerman. The envelope was dated two days ago, and she could feel the weight of it, knowing that if Hester's words were true, it might hold a message crucial enough to change everything. Deciding to start where the universe had pointed, Mrs.

Chapter

Eight

written by Ruth Ann Keller

Mrs. Kellerman held the envelope tightly in her hand as she moved towards one of the long shelves lined with overflowing envelopes and letters. Each one seemed to whisper addresses into the air, a constant hum that threatened to overwhelm her. She traced the stamp on the front of the envelope, a small, intricate design she couldn't quite place, before turning it over to read the address: "Marcus Wilder, 41 Aldous Street."

She took a deep breath and placed the letter back down, then began sorting through the stack of letters marked with the same mysterious stamp. The room was dimly lit by an old-fashioned chandelier hanging from the ceiling, its bulbs flickering slightly as if remembering the light they once shed on a bustling office. The air felt heavy with the weight of Hester's words and the unexplainable force pressing down on her. "Where do we start?" she whispered to herself, her voice barely audible over the soft hum of the brass boxes. She reached for another envelope, its address scrawled in the same looping script: "Marcus Wilder, 41 Aldous Street." This one was dated from two days prior, and Mrs. Kellerman felt a shiver run down her spine as she read the name. Something about it resonated with her, perhaps because it sounded too much like her own last name, Kellerman. "Who is Marcus Wilder?" she asked aloud, more to herself than anyone else. The question hung in the

air, heavy and unanswerable. She picked up another envelope, its address reading: "Marcus Wilder, 41 Aldous Street," dated from three days ago. Each one was postmarked from different times, some as recent as yesterday, others from months ago. Mrs. Kellerman felt a growing sense of urgency as she realized the significance of Hester's words. She needed to find Marcus Wilder and deliver these letters, or risk the consequences. With a determined nod, she began sorting through the stack of envelopes, her fingers moving with deliberate speed as if trying to outrun an invisible clock. She found several more addresses for "Marcus Wilder," each one dated from different times, and she placed them in a small pile on the counter. As she worked, Hester's words echoed in her mind: You've been expecting a letter from your sister for six days. But something was different now, she knew there were letters waiting, and they needed to be delivered. "Where am I supposed to start?" she muttered, picking up another envelope addressed to "Marcus Wilder." This one was dated from three weeks ago. Mrs. Kellerman felt a mix of fear and determination as she sorted through the pile, her fingers moving with a steady rhythm that helped calm her racing thoughts. She finally found an envelope that seemed to be the most recent, postmarked yesterday. The address read: "Marcus Wilder, 41 Aldous Street." She held it in her hand, feeling its weight and the urgency that accompanied it. Mrs. Kellerman knew she couldn't delay any longer; she had to take action. She walked over to the door leading into the main part of the post office, where the real work was happening. Hester was already out of sight, leaving a trail of shifting brass boxes behind as if parting clouds revealed the sun. Mrs. Kellerman hesitated for only a second before stepping past the threshold and into the bustling room. The space was dimly lit by an old-fashioned chandelier hanging from the ceiling, its bulbs flickering slightly as if remembering the light they once shed on a bustling office. At the far end of the room stood a long counter lined with shelves filled to overflowing with envelopes and letters, each one addressed in various hands, some urgent, others seemingly routine. Mrs. Kellerman approached the counter and noticed

several letters marked with the same special stamp she had seen earlier. She picked up another envelope, its address reading: "Marcus Wilder, 41 Aldous Street." This one was dated from a month ago, and as she read it, she felt an increasing sense of urgency. The room seemed to echo her heartbeat, the sound of sorting and shifting metal boxes growing louder with each passing moment. "Where do I find him?" she asked aloud, her voice steady despite the turmoil within her. A man behind the counter looked up from his work, his eyes narrowing as if he could sense the urgency in her tone. "I need to deliver these letters," Mrs. Kellerman explained, holding out the stack of envelopes. He examined them carefully before nodding and gesturing towards a door that led outside. "Take these to 41 Aldous Street," he said, his voice calm but firm. "And be quick about it." Mrs. Kellerman nodded, her mind racing as she turned to leave.

Afterwords

Notes the writers left after the last chapter.

Sasha Loomis

The streets hold secrets in their shadows.

jmarsh

The streets hold secrets in every shadow.

Dan Okafor

The streets hold secrets in every shadow.

Iris Beddoe

The streets whisper secrets as I walk.

Margot Vail

Every street corner holds a secret, waiting to be uncovered.

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more than eight hundred words at a time.*

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