
THE MAP OF
MISSING
THINGS
NARAVISTA MEDIA

THE MAP OF MISSING THINGS

An Urban Fantasy Short Story

NARAVISTA MEDIA

Chapter 1

The Map of Missing Things

The Unclaimed Map

The first thing Cassidy Vale learned about working in the Lost & Found Department was that people could misplace absolutely anything.

Umbrellas, certainly. House keys, inevitably. A wedding ring once turned up inside a library book about divorce.

But on Tuesday morning, someone had lost their sense of direction.

Again.

Cassidy studied the small brass compass resting on her desk. Instead of pointing north, its needle wandered in slow, uncertain circles. Every few seconds, it gave a discouraged little twitch.

“Third one this month,” she murmured.

“Fourth,” corrected Eleanor Whitcomb without looking up from her paperwork. “You're forgetting the gentleman who couldn't find his way out of his own kitchen.”

“That was different. He'd misplaced his common sense.”

“Which we never recovered.”

Cassidy smiled.

The Department occupied a forgotten basement beneath Bellwether City's Municipal Building. Its entrance stood behind a door marked ARCHIVED PARKING VIOLATIONS, a designation Eleanor considered sufficient protection against unwanted visitors.

Inside, towering shelves held things ordinary people never realized they could lose.

A glass jar contained someone's childhood courage, glowing faintly like a captured firefly. A velvet box held the last note of a song nobody remembered singing. On the highest shelf sat seventeen unclaimed promises, carefully wrapped in tissue paper.

Cassidy loved the place.

It was quiet, orderly, and full of extraordinary things that needed someone to care about them.

She only wished she felt quite so extraordinary herself.

“Cassidy.”

Eleanor's voice interrupted her thoughts.

A narrow envelope lay on the counter between them. Its paper had yellowed with age, and its edges appeared slightly blurred, as though it couldn't decide where they belonged.

“This arrived without a retrieval record,” Eleanor said. “See whether you can identify its origin.”

Cassidy turned the envelope over.

No stamp. No address.

Only three words, handwritten in faded blue ink:

For whoever notices.

“That seems rather vague,” Cassidy observed.

“Most important things are, until they're understood.”

Eleanor returned to her paperwork.

Cassidy carefully broke the seal.

Inside was a hand-drawn map of Bellwether City.

At least, it appeared to be Bellwether City.

There was the river, curving around the old commercial district. There was Clocktower Square, with its familiar circular fountain.

Even the narrow street where Cassidy bought her morning coffee appeared in precise detail.

But between familiar buildings lay streets she had never seen.

A crooked alley wound behind the public library, where Cassidy knew perfectly well there was only a brick wall. A bridge crossed the river at a place where no bridge had ever stood.

She leaned closer.

The ink moved.

Cassidy blinked.

A street near Clocktower Square stretched, twisted, and quietly rearranged itself. Buildings shifted like pieces on a game board. A narrow passage appeared between two houses, then vanished.

She looked toward Eleanor.

“Has anyone ever cataloged a map that—”

A bell rang somewhere above them.

Not the Department's telephone. Not the Municipal Building's clock.

This sound was deeper, older, and strangely mournful.

On the paper, Clocktower Square darkened.

A tiny symbol appeared beside the fountain: a circle enclosing an empty musical note.

Cassidy felt a sudden chill.

Outside, somewhere far above the basement, the familiar melody played by the square's mechanical clock stopped halfway through its tune.

Eleanor's pen froze.

For the first time since Cassidy had known her, the older woman looked frightened.

“Cassidy,” she said quietly, “where did you get that map?”

Cassidy looked down.

The ink was moving again.

And this time, it was drawing a path directly toward her.

The Street That Wasn't There

Eleanor crossed the Department in three hurried strides.

“Put it down.”

Cassidy had never heard her supervisor speak quite like that.

“It's a map.”

“I can see that.”

“A map that moves.”

“Yes, Cassidy. That would be the concerning part.”

Eleanor reached for the paper, but the moment her fingers touched its edge, the ink scattered like startled insects. Streets dissolved into thin blue threads before twisting themselves into an entirely different arrangement.

Eleanor withdrew her hand.

For several seconds, neither woman spoke.

“Where did you say this came from?” Eleanor asked.

“The morning deliveries. There wasn't a receipt.”

Eleanor examined the faded handwriting on the envelope.

For whoever notices.

Something changed in her expression.

“The old cartographers,” she whispered.

Cassidy leaned forward. “The who?”

“People who understood that not everything lost is gone. Some things simply end up somewhere they shouldn't.”

“That sounds remarkably like our entire job.”

“Not quite.” Eleanor carefully folded the map. “We retrieve things. They followed them.”

She placed it inside an iron filing drawer and turned the key.

“Leave it alone.”

Cassidy stared at her.

“That's all?”

“That's all.”

“But the clock—”

“Cassidy.”

The warning was unmistakable.

For the next twenty minutes, Cassidy tried to occupy herself with ordinary Department business.

Unfortunately, ordinary Department business included returning a misplaced sense of humor to a retired magistrate and cataloging a bottle of someone's last summer afternoon.

Neither task distracted her.

At eleven forty-three, she climbed the municipal staircase and emerged into Clocktower Square.

The fountain splashed merrily. Pigeons argued over crumbs. A street vendor sold roasted chestnuts beneath a striped awning.

Everything looked perfectly normal.

Except the clocktower was silent.

Every quarter hour since Cassidy was a child, its mechanical bells had played the same cheerful little melody. She could remember humming it while walking to school, though she could never recall its proper name.

Now the clock's hands moved without a sound.

Cassidy approached the chestnut vendor.

“Excuse me. Has the clock stopped playing its tune?”

The vendor glanced upward.

“What tune?”

“The one it always plays.”

“Clock hasn't played music in the twenty years I've been here.”

Cassidy felt a strange pressure behind her eyes.

“Are you certain?”

He laughed. “Miss, I hear that thing strike the hour every day. I'd remember if it sang.”

She thanked him and stepped away.

Across the square, a mother lifted her little boy onto the fountain's stone edge. The child clapped his hands, delighted by something Cassidy couldn't hear.

And for one terrible instant, Cassidy wondered whether the city had lost the melody—or whether she was losing her mind.

Then she noticed the alley.

It stood between the bakery and an old redbrick bookshop.

That was impossible.

Cassidy knew these buildings. She walked past them almost every morning. The bakery's eastern wall joined the bookshop's western wall without so much as a crack between them.

Yet there it was.

A narrow passage paved with uneven cobblestones, disappearing beneath an archway of darkened stone.

Above the arch, someone had carved three words:

WHAT WAS FORGOTTEN.

Cassidy took a cautious step closer.

The street noises softened.

She reached for her bag, then remembered the map was locked in Eleanor's drawer.

A ridiculous thought entered her mind.

Perhaps I don't need the map.

She studied the alley's entrance.

Near the ground, almost hidden beneath ivy, someone had drawn a small blue symbol.

A circle.

An empty musical note.

The same symbol that had appeared beside Clocktower Square.

Cassidy's heart began to race.

She could return to the Department. Tell Eleanor. Wait for someone older, wiser, and considerably more qualified to investigate.

That would be sensible.

That would be safe.

Then she remembered the vendor's bewildered expression.

He hadn't known anything was missing.

How many other things had vanished without anyone noticing?

Cassidy looked into the alley.

"Well," she whispered, "someone ought to find out."

She stepped beneath the arch.

The air changed instantly.

It smelled of rain-soaked paper, distant woodsmoke, and something sweet she couldn't name.

Behind her, the square's cheerful bustle faded into silence.

Cassidy turned.

The bakery was gone.

The bookshop was gone.

The archway now opened onto a narrow street lined with unfamiliar buildings, their windows glowing with soft amber light.

And where Clocktower Square should have been stood a weathered wooden sign:

THE FORGOTTEN QUARTER

Beneath it, in smaller letters, someone had written:

Visitors are advised to remember why they came.

Cassidy swallowed.

"That," she said to the empty street, "seems unnecessarily ominous."

Somewhere in the distance, a bell rang thirteen times.

And the cobblestones beneath her feet began to move.

The Forgotten Quarter

The street folded beneath Cassidy's feet.

One moment she stood on solid cobblestones. The next, the pavement rippled like a blanket being shaken, sending her stumbling toward a lamppost.

“Don't step on the blue stones!”

The warning came from somewhere above.

Cassidy looked up just as a young man dropped from a low rooftop, landed beside her, and grabbed her sleeve.

“Unless you fancy spending Thursday inside a Tuesday,” he added.

“It's Tuesday.”

“Exactly. Terrible place to spend a Thursday.”

He pulled her onto a narrow strip of ordinary gray pavement.

Behind them, the blue cobblestones folded upward, twisted into a spiral, and settled into an entirely different street.

Cassidy stared.

The stranger grinned. He was perhaps twenty-two, with unruly brown hair, an oversized coat, and the cheerful expression of someone who considered danger a conversational inconvenience.

“First visit?”

“Is it that obvious?”

“You were standing on the moving pavement.”

“Fair point.”

He offered his hand. “Finn Alder. Resident, occasional guide, and professional avoider of unfortunate circumstances.”

“Cassidy Vale.”

She shook his hand.

Finn's smile faded when he noticed the small brass emblem pinned to her coat.

“The Keepers.”

“I work in the Lost & Found Department.”

“That's what I said.”

He released her hand.

Cassidy looked around.

The Forgotten Quarter was unlike anything she had imagined.

A crooked row of shops leaned against one another beneath glowing lanterns. One window displayed glass bottles labeled First Kisses Never Given. Another advertised Abandoned Ambitions — Reasonable Prices.

Across the street, a violin played without a musician. Its melody drifted through the air like smoke, disappearing whenever Cassidy tried to remember it.

Overhead, a flock of paper birds fluttered between rooftops, their wings covered in tiny handwritten sentences.

“This is where lost things go?” she whispered.

“Some of them.” Finn followed her gaze. “Others wander. Others hide. Some decide they rather like being lost.”

“And the people?”

Finn's expression changed.

“Sometimes people get forgotten too.”

Cassidy turned toward him.

“By accident?”

“Does it matter?”

The question was sharper than his earlier jokes.

Finn looked away.

“I had a family once. Friends. A perfectly ordinary life. Then one morning nobody remembered my name. My mother looked straight at me and asked whether I needed directions.”

Cassidy felt something tighten in her chest.

“That's horrible.”

Finn shrugged, but the gesture seemed practiced.

“You get used to it.”

She doubted that very much.

“Can the Department help?”

“The Keepers have known about people like me for generations.” His voice hardened. “They file reports. Discuss procedures. Occasionally offer tea.”

Cassidy thought of Eleanor's endless paperwork.

For the first time, the Department's careful organization seemed less comforting.

“I'm sorry,” she said.

Finn glanced at her.

“Most Keepers explain why it's complicated.”

“I imagine it is. That doesn't make it right.”

He studied her for a moment.

Then his grin returned, though more cautiously.

“Well, Cassidy Vale, perhaps you're a defective Keeper.”

“I've been called worse.”

“By whom?”

“My supervisor. Usually before lunch.”

Finn laughed.

Somewhere nearby, a shop bell rang without making a sound.

Cassidy noticed the shopkeeper across the street staring at an empty glass jar.

“What happened there?”

Finn's humor vanished.

“That's been happening everywhere.”

He led her to the window.

A handwritten label beneath the empty jar read The Smell of Rain on Summer Pavement.

“Yesterday it was full,” Finn said. “Last week, the market lost seven childhood memories and an entire lullaby. Things aren't just being forgotten anymore. They're disappearing from here too.”

Cassidy remembered Clocktower Square's silent bells.

“Someone is taking them.”

Finn nodded.

“We call them Collectors. Nobody knows where they're bringing everything.”

Cassidy hesitated.

“Have you ever seen a map that changes?”

Finn went very still.

“What kind of map?”

“Hand-drawn. Blue ink. Streets move when you look at them.”

He stared at her.

“Where did you find it?”

“In the Department.”

Finn glanced toward the shifting street behind them.

“Come with me.”

He led her through two narrow passages and beneath an arch decorated with rusted compass needles.

They emerged before a tiny shop squeezed between buildings that seemed to be leaning away from it.

Its windows were dusty. Its wooden sign hung crookedly from a single chain.

THE CARTOGRAPHER'S WORKSHOP

Finn pushed the door.

It opened with a sigh.

Inside, hundreds of maps covered the walls. Some were painted on glass. Others were stitched into cloth or carved into thin sheets of copper.

At the center stood an enormous drafting table.

Cassidy approached it.

An unfinished map lay beneath a sheet of cracked glass.

Bellwether City.

Clocktower Square.

The Forgotten Quarter.

And beside the square, drawn in unmistakable blue ink, was a circle enclosing an empty musical note.

Cassidy touched the glass.

A second symbol appeared farther across the city.

Then a third.

Thin blue lines connected them, converging on a single point beneath the Forgotten Quarter.

Cassidy noticed something peculiar. Although the lines converged beneath the Quarter, each was drawn with a tiny arrow pointing in both directions.

“Why would a map show two ways along the same path?” she wondered aloud.

Finn studied the markings. “Perhaps whoever drew it expected things to come back.”

Finn leaned closer.

“What does it mean?”

Cassidy watched the lines darken.

“I think,” she whispered, “someone's been drawing a map of everything they're stealing.”

Beneath the glass, a final message surfaced in faded ink.

The collection must never be completed.

The Collector's Sanctuary

Cassidy read the warning beneath the glass a second time.

The collection must never be completed.

“That sounds encouraging,” Finn muttered.

The blue lines on the workshop map pulsed faintly, converging beneath a narrow staircase at the back of the room.

Cassidy followed them with her eyes.

“There's something underneath us.”

“Of course there is.” Finn sighed. “Nobody ever hides dangerous magical machinery somewhere pleasant, like a bakery.”

They descended the staircase.

The steps seemed older than the buildings above them. Strange symbols shimmered along the walls, and the air grew warmer with every turn.

At the bottom, a heavy wooden door stood slightly open.

Beyond it lay a chamber so enormous that Cassidy couldn't understand how it fit beneath the city.

Thousands of glass vessels floated in the darkness, each containing a fragment of impossible light.

Some glowed with the soft gold of remembered summers. Others shimmered with laughter, whispered promises, and dreams that had never become real.

Near the ceiling hovered an entire cobblestone street, perfectly preserved inside a transparent sphere.

Cassidy recognized it.

“The old Market Lane,” she whispered. “It was demolished before I was born.”

“Not demolished,” said a voice behind them. “Forgotten.”

A tall man stepped from the shadows.

His silver-streaked hair was neatly combed, and his dark coat bore the faded insignia of the Keepers.

He looked less like a dangerous sorcerer than a tired university professor.

“Silas Veyne,” Cassidy said, recognizing the name from the Department's oldest records.

The man's eyebrows rose.

“Eleanor still keeps my file?”

“She doesn't throw much away.”

A faint smile crossed his face.

“No. She never did.”

Finn moved closer to Cassidy.

“You're the Collector.”

Silas considered the accusation.

“I prefer preservationist.”

He gestured toward the floating vessels.

“Everything you see here was abandoned. Forgotten songs. Misplaced hopes. Memories their owners no longer wished to carry. Without my work, they would eventually dissolve into nothing.”

Cassidy approached a small glass sphere containing the sound of children's laughter.

“Then why are things disappearing from places where people still need them?”

Silas's smile faded.

“The mechanism has become… ambitious.”

At the center of the chamber stood an enormous brass apparatus resembling an astrolabe. Rings rotated around a suspended crystal, drawing thin threads of light from somewhere beyond the walls.

Cassidy recognized the symbols engraved along its rim.

They matched those on the workshop map.

“You built this?”

“I completed what the ancient cartographers began.”

“And now it's taking things that aren't lost.”

Silas glanced away.

“Temporarily.”

A deep vibration passed through the chamber.

One of the floating vessels brightened. Inside it, Cassidy heard the familiar melody of Clocktower Square.

Her breath caught.

“That belongs to the city.”

“It belongs to everyone who ever loved it,” Silas replied. “Here, it can never be forgotten.”

“But nobody can hear it!”

His expression hardened.

“Better preserved in silence than destroyed by indifference.”

Cassidy studied him.

“Who did you lose?”

For a moment, Silas seemed unable to speak.

“My wife,” he finally said. “Not her life. Her memory.”

He touched a small silver locket hanging beneath his collar.

“One morning I woke and could no longer remember her voice. Then her laughter. Eventually, even her face became uncertain. I knew I had

loved someone more than anything in the world, but I could no longer remember who she had been."

His fingers tightened around the locket.

"I promised myself nothing else would disappear."

Cassidy felt a sudden ache of sympathy.

Then the chamber shuddered.

The brass rings accelerated.

A tremendous rushing sound filled the room as new threads of light poured through the walls.

Above them, the sphere containing Market Lane flickered.

Finn staggered.

"Cassidy?"

She turned.

His outline had become strangely translucent.

She could see the stone floor through his fingers.

"Finn!"

He stared at his hands.

"Oh," he said faintly. "That's new."

Silas hurried toward the mechanism.

"It shouldn't be drawing living identities."

"Then stop it!"

"I can't. The collection is approaching completion. If I break the mechanism now, everything inside will be destroyed."

Another tremor shook the chamber.

Cassidy looked toward the doorway, then at the suspended vessels.

Thousands of lost things.

Thousands of fragile connections.

The mechanism wasn't simply storing them.

It was severing the paths that led back to where they belonged.

The map, she thought.

The workshop's ancient maps had shown where the stolen things originated.

What if the mechanism could follow those same paths in reverse?

“Silas,” she said, “the cartographers didn't create maps to imprison lost things. They created them to find the way home.”

He shook his head.

“Some things have no home left.”

“Then we must find somewhere they can belong now.”

Finn stumbled against a stone pillar.

His voice sounded distant.

“Cassidy, I'm beginning to think your plan needs hurrying.”

She rushed toward the central apparatus.

The rings were engraved with thousands of tiny symbols. Most were connected by threads of light leading inward toward the crystal.

Cassidy recognized one of them.

A circle enclosing an empty musical note.

Clocktower Square.

She traced the symbol with her finger.

The thread brightened, revealing a faint path winding through the city toward the square.

Another symbol depicted a small house.

Another, a rose.

They were locations.

Connections.

“Silas! The paths still exist!”

He stared.

“The return channels,” he whispered.

“You knew about them?”

“I thought they were obsolete. Most of these things have been forgotten for decades.”

“Maybe their original owners have forgotten. But that doesn't mean every connection is gone.”

Cassidy pressed the musical-note symbol.

The thread reversed direction.

A golden spark shot outward through the chamber wall.

Far above them, Clocktower Square's melody began to play.

The mechanism lurched.

The brass rings slowed, then accelerated again.

Cassidy realized the return channels were working, but the central crystal was still drawing everything inward.

“Silas, you have to release the collection!”

“I can't lose her again.”

Cassidy looked at the locket.

“You don't have to forget her to let these things go.”

His hands trembled.

“I don't even remember her voice.”

“No,” Cassidy said softly. “But you remember loving her. That matters, too.”

For a long moment, Silas stood motionless.

Then he reached beneath the apparatus and pulled a small brass lever.

The crystal changed from violet to gold.

Thousands of threads unfolded outward like the branches of an enormous luminous tree.

The chamber filled with movement.

Promises flew toward people who might still keep them. Forgotten songs raced through unseen streets. Lost courage scattered like sparks into the night.

But Finn continued fading.

Cassidy seized his hand.

“Look at me.”

He tried to smile.

“Rather difficult. You're getting blurry.”

“Finn Alder,” she said firmly. “You helped me when I was lost. You showed me this place. You made terrible jokes about bakeries.”

“They were excellent jokes.”

“And I'm going to remember every one of them.”

A thin golden thread appeared between their joined hands.

Cassidy stared.

It stretched toward the mechanism, then curved back toward Finn.

Not a connection to his forgotten past.

A connection to someone who knew him now.

The golden light steadied.

Finn's hand became solid in hers.

He blinked.

“Well,” he said, “that's a surprisingly effective argument for friendship.”

The chamber trembled once more.

Silas stood beside the silent crystal, tears shining in his eyes.

Above them, thousands of restored memories continued their journeys home.

“What happens to the things that have nowhere left to go?” Cassidy asked.

Silas watched a small silver light drift back toward the sanctuary.

“Someone will have to care for them,” he said quietly. “Without keeping them prisoner.”

“The Keepers could help.”

He looked at her, uncertain.

“Eleanor would never agree.”

“Perhaps you should give her the chance to decide.”

For the first time, Silas smiled without sadness.

“Tell Eleanor I'll come to the Department tomorrow. If she'll have me, I'd like to help put things right.”

Cassidy tightened her grip on Finn's hand.

“Come on,” she said. “Before this place decides to become something else.”

Together, they hurried toward the stairs, leaving Silas beneath the fading light of everything he had finally allowed to go.

What the Map Remembered

The first thing Cassidy heard when she returned to Clocktower Square was music.

It drifted between the buildings, bright and familiar, as the clocktower's bells played their cheerful melody across Bellwether City.

Cassidy stopped walking.

Around her, people continued their ordinary afternoon. The chestnut vendor tended his cart. Children chased pigeons around the fountain. A woman sitting on a bench hummed along with the bells.

Nobody appeared particularly astonished.

That, Cassidy thought, was probably the most astonishing part.

Beside her, Finn tilted his head.

“Not a bad tune.”

“You've never heard it before?”

“Cassidy, until this morning, I didn't know this square existed.”

“Right.”

He listened for another moment.

“Catchy, though.”

She smiled.

The city was healing.

As they crossed the square, Cassidy noticed a little boy laughing so hard that he nearly dropped his ice cream. An elderly man paused beside the fountain, smiling at a memory that had apparently returned to him. Somewhere nearby, someone began singing a song they hadn't realized they'd forgotten.

Not everything had been restored. Cassidy knew that.

Some memories had no surviving owners. Some dreams belonged to people who had moved on. And some lost things might never find their way home.

But they would no longer be imprisoned.

Silas had promised to work with the Keepers to protect what remained unclaimed, though Eleanor would undoubtedly have several opinions about the arrangement.

Cassidy suspected those opinions would involve paperwork.

An extraordinary amount of paperwork.

Finn stopped at the edge of the square.

“This is as far as I usually go.”

Cassidy turned.

“Why?”

He glanced at the passing crowds.

“Old habit. Nobody here knows me.”

“I do.”

Finn looked at her.

“And I imagine Eleanor will know you soon enough,” Cassidy continued. “Although I should warn you, she's rather particular about visitors.”

“Does she offer tea?”

“Relentlessly.”

“Perhaps I'll survive, then.”

He smiled, but this time there was no sadness behind it.

Cassidy extended her hand.

“Come on. There's someone I'd like you to meet.”

Eleanor Whitcomb was waiting when they entered the Lost & Found Department.

Her arms were folded, and an ancient brass communication device sat on her desk, its indicator still glowing faintly blue.

“Silas contacted me,” she said before Cassidy could speak. “He told me what happened in the sanctuary. He also said you found a solution he couldn't see.”

Cassidy glanced at the device, surprised that Eleanor and Silas still possessed a means of communicating.

Eleanor's expression softened.

“We have a great deal to discuss. But first…”

Her expression suggested that several very important rules had been broken and that she intended to enumerate each one.

Cassidy prepared herself.

Instead, Eleanor crossed the room and embraced her.

For a moment, Cassidy stood completely still.

Then she hugged her back.

“You frightened me,” Eleanor whispered.

“I'm sorry.”

“You disobeyed direct instructions.”

“Yes.”

“You entered the Forgotten Quarter without authorization.”

“Yes.”

“And apparently convinced Silas Veyne to dismantle a magical catastrophe that several generations of Keepers failed to understand.”

Cassidy hesitated.

“Technically, he dismantled it himself.”

Eleanor released her.

A small smile appeared at the corner of her mouth.

“Always so precise.”

Her gaze moved to Finn.

“And you are?”

“Finn Alder. Occasional guide. Professional avoider of unfortunate circumstances.”

Eleanor studied him.

Then, to Cassidy's surprise, she offered her hand.

“Eleanor Whitcomb. Keeper of Lost Things.”

Finn shook it.

“Do you really offer tea?”

“Of course.”

He glanced at Cassidy.

“I like her already.”

Later, when Finn had departed with an invitation to return whenever he wished, Cassidy sat at her familiar desk.

The Department was much as she had left it.

The glass jar of childhood courage glowed softly on its shelf. The unclaimed promises remained neatly wrapped. A brass compass on her desk had finally remembered which direction was north.

Cassidy opened Eleanor's filing drawer.

Inside lay the old envelope.

For whoever notices.

She unfolded the hand-drawn map.

Bellwether City's familiar streets appeared beneath her fingers. Clocktower Square gleamed with a tiny golden musical note.

The Forgotten Quarter shimmered along the city's edges, no longer entirely concealed.

Cassidy traced the route she had taken.

The impossible alley.

The shifting streets.

The Cartographer's Workshop.

For a moment, she felt the familiar temptation to fold the map, file it properly, and return to the comfort of routine.

Then a new line appeared.

It began at the edge of the city, curved through an empty space, and ended at a tiny drawing of a lighthouse.

Cassidy frowned.

Bellwether City was hundreds of miles from the sea.

Beneath the lighthouse, words slowly formed in blue ink.

The Harbor of Unfinished Dreams.

Cassidy stared at the impossible destination.

A week ago, she would have called Eleanor immediately.

A day ago, she might have been frightened.

Now she reached for a fresh notebook.

Outside, the clocktower began playing its melody again.

Cassidy smiled.

“Well,” she whispered, “I suppose every map has another story to tell.”

And somewhere beyond the edges of the ordinary world, a new street quietly unfolded.