

## Last Boat Home

The scene opens on a dark-haired sailor in his late thirties or early forties. His name is Robert, and he's ruggedly handsome, making his way toward a marina full of boats. He heads to a small yacht, and begins to untie it.

A neighbor and friend of his, Thomas, watches him for a moment from the dock, and they strike up a casual conversation about the weather, as it looks like a storm is brewing. Thomas remarks that it's a little late to be heading out, and wonders if Robert wouldn't be happier spending the night curled up with his wife, Lori. Robert remarks that he feels stifled in the house, and that he's only happy at home when he's coming back in from a long day on the water.

Thomas frowns at this, and quietly says that he thinks it's an awfully big house for Lori to live in alone. Robert cuts his eyes at Thomas, an unspoken tension running between them. He doesn't say much, only that he's entitled to take his boat out when he pleases, and that even if he strays for a long time, he always comes back to her. Thomas reminds Robert not to go too far, or the siren song might claim him. Robert scoffs at the old wives' tale, and unmoors his boat.

There is a brief montage of Robert driving his boat around the bay, looking at the sunset while the dark storm clouds continue to brew. He speeds along the water, his boat leaving a perfect wake behind him. His phone rings multiple times, every call coming from "Home." Robert frowns and ignores all the calls, but at last begins to steer home as dusk falls and a fog begins to roll in ahead of the storm.

Night has fallen by the time Robert nears the dock, and a thick fog has blanketed the bay. He glances up as the lighthouse flashes in the distance to guide him toward the shore. Then, a moment later, there is an identical flash of light from the opposite direction. Robert's face contorts in confusion, because now it appears there are two lighthouses. He hesitates, releasing the steering wheel and letting it spin idly for a moment. Glancing between the two, he eventually decides to continue toward the original lighthouse, thinking it's a mere trick of the light.

Suddenly, he's struck on the side of the head by a sturdy metal water bottle, brandished by a strange figure who emerges from below deck.

The scene then cuts to a flashback, of Robert and his wife arguing about whether or not he should take the boat out. It's earlier in the day, and there are clearly storm clouds brewing in the distance. Robert's wife has long brown hair, and is really quite beautiful, despite the worry lines that run across her face. Robert brushes her off, saying he just wants to get out of the house. His wife turns away, replying that that's what he always says, and she feels so alone, even when he's home. She says he didn't used to be like this when their son Ben was with them. Robert turns away from Lori, and a stricken look crosses his face where she can't see it. He doesn't say anything else, and starts down the path from his house that leads to the water.

Cut back to Robert on the floor of his boat. The assailant appears to be a young woman in a long trench coat, wearing gloves and a beanie. She may be homeless, or possibly a runaway, since she seems fairly young. There is a ragged beauty to her despite her tattered clothes. She has long blonde hair, and a face that reminds Robert of someone he used to know. The woman wrenches the wheel out of his hand, frantically spinning it back toward the other

lighthouse. Robert takes a moment to regain his senses, shocked by the appearance of this stowaway and at the sudden mutiny.

He finally pulls himself off the floor and grabs the stranger from behind, throwing her on the floor. With a knee pinning her down in the small of her back, he grabs a length of rope stored under the captain's seat. He ties her hands together behind her back, and then restrains them against her back. Cautiously, he eases off her, then helps her to sit upright on the floor. She doesn't struggle. She looks unearthly in the moonlight, and is actually quite pretty. She has grey eyes and a pretty mouth, pursed into a frown. He rubs the side of his head where she hit him, eyeing her up and down. The boat has come to a stop, the engine barely idling. The waves begin to lap against the hull, rocking them back and forth in the water.

Robert asks her who she is and where she came from. She doesn't answer, looking at him instead with wide eyes. He begins to speculate, throwing out ideas of her as a runaway, homeless, or maybe some sort of addict on the street. She looks at the floor and gives nothing away. Robert looks around at the fog and suggests she was trying to get out of the weather. She gives him the tiniest of nods. Robert softens a bit, understanding this motivation at least. He tells her she's too pretty to be out on the street, and starts to reach for her. She jerks away from him, and Robert remembers what she tried to do. Then his brow furrows and he asks her why she tried to hijack his boat. She opens her mouth, then closes it, and instead points at the lighthouse Robert has oriented the boat toward. Robert is getting frustrated now, and demands that she answer him. She speaks in broken sentences, stating that the second lighthouse is a dangerous siren call to wayward sailors, according to old legends. You must have a strong sense

of home to choose the right way, otherwise you will likely be pulled into a world from which you can't escape.

Robert pauses for only a moment, before writing off her ramblings as complete nonsense. He ignores her protests and restarts his boat, a wake forming behind them as they zoom across the water toward the docks. They pull up to Robert's spot, and he takes a moment to secure his yacht with a series of expertly tied knots. The woman struggles against the ropes with which he has bound her, and Robert explains that if she promises to calm down, he'll untie her. She stops struggling, and allows Robert to help her step off the boat. She disappears into the fog.

Robert makes his way up a hill, on the path he came down earlier. As he disembarks, the scene cuts to a younger Robert in flashback disembarking from his boat, as a young blonde woman giggles behind him. She asks him to stay, and Robert leans back over into the boat to kiss her goodbye, stating that he'll only be gone a bit, and will be back with some champagne soon.

The scene jumps to a little later that same night, as Robert and the woman spend the evening together on the boat. His phone keeps ringing from home, and every time he ignores it.

The flashback fades as Robert enters his house. There is only one light on by the front door when he comes in, which is unusual because Lori typically stays up and waits for him to come home. He heads upstairs to his bedroom, and sees Lori laying in their bed, facing away from him. He assumes she's asleep, and undresses for bed. As he slips under the covers, Lori's voice—hard and icy—tells him that next time he's away for so long maybe she won't be here at all when he gets back. Robert is taken aback by this remark, and tries to sleep.

When he awakes the next day, Robert discovers the fog from last night still lies thick over the town. This is a bit unusual too, as the sun usually burns off any fog by midmorning. Robert is annoyed by the fog, because it's not safe for him to take his boat out. Even he can admit there are times it's better to stay on dry land. Lori barely speaks to him, and after a tense breakfast, she announces she's going out, and leaves before Robert can ask where specifically. Robert sighs, and glances over at an old family portrait featuring him and Lori and their five-year-old, Ben.

The scene cuts to a flashback of Lori and Robert in a somber counseling office. They sit on opposite ends of a green couch, and Lori has clearly been crying. She dabs a tissue at her eyes, and Robert stares at the floor. A well-meaning counselor looks at Robert and asks him how he's feeling about everything. Robert shrugs, which sends Lori into a rage. She yells that this is what he always does to her, he won't engage with her, and then leaves on his damn boat. First they lost Ben, and then he had the affair, and even now all he wants to do is sail away. Robert is struck by this, and icily responds to Lori that it's the only place he feels close to their son, since it was the last place they were together. Lori glares at him with bloodshot eyes, and says she hopes the boat brings him comfort in his grief. Then, she walks out. The counselor sighs, and tells Robert that was probably enough for today.

Robert is jolted out of his reverie by a call on his cell phone. He checks the caller ID, and it says it's an unknown caller. Assuming it's nothing too important, he picks up. The reception is terrible, and Robert hears only static and unidentifiable, broken words. He asks who's calling a few times, then hangs up.

He decides to go see what Thomas is up to, since they're both landlocked for the day. Robert makes his way out into the fog, and is struck by how unnaturally cold it is. The fog is thick, but he shouldn't be this chilly. He quickly makes his way down two houses to Thomas's place. The two of them often play cards and have a few beers when they can't sail.

Robert knocks on Thomas's front door, and after a moment, it opens. Thomas looks irritated, and Robert tries to come off as jovial as possible. He asks if Thomas wants to come over to his place for a few drinks and some cards. Thomas is stone-faced, and replies that he's busy. Robert hears a female voice in the background, and is surprised because Thomas is a perpetual bachelor. He winks at Thomas, and says not to worry about it, he understands. Thomas replies that he doesn't understand anything, and then slams the door in Robert's face. Robert is perturbed by this, as Thomas is rarely this aggressive.

Thomas's knocker is shaped like a mermaid, and it reminds Robert of something he said yesterday, before he went sailing. As Robert turns away, he sees someone round the corner away from Thomas's house. It looks like the strange girl from his boat last night, but as Robert is about to call out to her, his phone rings again. He answers, and is met with the strange, broken call he received before. This time, he thinks he can make out a woman's voice just barely on the other end, but the call drops unexpectedly before he can figure out who it is.

Robert decides to go into town, and maybe grab some lunch. It's a short walk to town, and when he arrives, there is no one to be seen. He walks down the main street, unnerved by how quiet it is. He's about to turn into a small diner, when he sees a slim blonde figure enter a local bookstore across the street. It's the girl from his boat. Robert doesn't call out to her, but instead enters the store. The bookstore is old and cramped, with musty wooden shelves that

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reach from floor to ceiling. Each shelf is so burdened with books it's a wonder they don't all collapse under the weight. Robert weaves through the stacks, but the girl is nowhere to be seen. After having lapped all the aisles, Robert realizes she's not in the store. He's about to leave when he notices a symbol on one of the books. It's a perfect replica of the mermaid knocker on Thomas's door. He picks it off the shelf, and has just started flipping through the pages when the voice of the shopkeeper makes him jump. The shopkeeper observes he must be interested in siren lore if he's looking at that book. Robert shrugs, and says it just looked familiar. The shopkeeper tells him to take it if he wants, it's been sitting on the shelf for months and no has even picked it up before him. Robert thanks him, and heads out of the store.

Once outside, Robert goes to the diner, and orders himself some lunch. He sits in a booth by the window, and notices that the fog still has not let up, and that he is the only person who seems to be out and about. He flips through the old book, noting many references to sirens and illusions, fog, and trickery. The pages are yellowed and thick, and many of the images appear to be hand drawn. He is shocked when he turns the page and discovers an image of two light houses beaming out of the fog. It looks exactly like the lights did when he came back last night. The text tells him that sirens create false worlds, and gain their power by trapping sailors in the illusions. Robert is unnerved by this, and spends a long time sitting at the diner, thinking about how strange the last day has been.

Robert gets a phone call, and jumps when his cell phone rings. It's Lori. When he picks up, she despondently tells him it's all over, and he better get home right now. Robert is concerned by her tone of voice, and rushes out of the diner with his book tucked under his arm.

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He passes the strange girl on the street as he leaves. They make eye contact, and Robert shudders.

When he reaches his house, Robert finds the front door ajar. Alarmed by this, he calls out to Lori, and hears no response. He runs upstairs, and sinks to his knees in horror. Lori lies pale and still on the bed, an incriminating bottle of pills sits empty on the nightstand next to her. Robert sobs, and tries to shake her awake, but it's too late. He jumps when he hears Thomas's voice behind him. Thomas looks upset, and says it's about time Robert checked on his poor wife. Robert is too shaken to say much, but he asks why Thomas is here. Thomas responds that he was with her when she did it, and that she's happier this way. He says that Robert didn't deserve Lori. Robert stands up, shaking with rage, and screams at Thomas for letting Lori kill herself. Thomas screams back, saying that at least he paid attention to Lori, unlike Robert. Thomas says that he loved Lori, and that for the past year they had been seeing each other whenever Robert went out to sea.

Robert is visibly shaken by this news, but pulls himself together enough to punch Thomas square in the jaw, and send him to the floor. He once again sinks to the floor, sobbing, when his phone rings. He takes it out of his pocket and is about to hurl it across the room when he notices the caller ID. It says it's Lori. Robert slowly looks behind him at Lori's body on the bed. Her phone sits on the nightstand.

Robert picks up the phone, and cautiously answers. He stands, and walks over to the window to look out at the darkening sky. Lori's voice answers on the other end, a little broken up, but clearly her. She sobs into the phone that Robert needs to come home right now. She doesn't care what he's done or who he's been with, she just needs him to come home so she



Alex Baker  
Feature Film Treatment

knows he's safe. Robert listens in silence, a realization beginning to dawn on his face. He looks at the other Lori on the bed, the old siren book on the floor of the bedroom, and back outside. He sees the stowaway from his boat peeking out from behind a tree in his yard. Robert is about to cry out when someone grabs him from behind.

It's Thomas, who has risen from where Robert knocked him out on the floor. He takes the phone from Robert and throws it aside, asking why Robert would want to leave all this. Robert struggles against him, saying he needs to get home, he needs to see Lori and make everything better between them. Thomas simply shakes his head and says that this is Robert's world now, and that Lori has a new, better husband. Robert tries to question, but stops when he watches in horror as Thomas's features lengthen and darken, until Robert is looking at a mirror image of himself. The doppelganger winks at Robert and says it's not too bad, right? Robert screams, and the doppelganger punches him, and says he needs to catch the last boat home. He sprints out of the house, as Robert struggles to comprehend everything that is happening.

Robert gets off the floor, wincing as he rubs his face. He looks out the window at the now-dark sky, and sees the two lighthouses once again blinking in the fog. Robert realizes suddenly that he has to get to his boat before the doppelganger. He sees the doppelganger jogging down the path to the marina from his house. He sprints after him, but his double has a decent lead.

Robert follows him to the dock, and sees the doppelganger only a few yards ahead of him. If he can just catch up, he could make it. As he's within arm's length of his doppelganger, something drags Robert to the ground. He sees the stowaway, and finally recognizes her for

Alex Baker  
Feature Film Treatment

what she really is—a siren. He elbows her face, and runs to the end of the dock, but it's too late. The doppelganger has already pulled away, and is sailing toward the true lighthouse in the fog. Robert stands despondent at the end of the dock, as he watches his only way home sail away without him.

A moment passes, and Robert is tackled into the water by the siren. There is a struggle in the water, and they both disappear under the waves. Splashes and bubbles rise to the surface. After a few seconds of stillness, the siren reemerges alone, and smiles.