

*North Point Lighthouse,
Ross Island, Kingsport Mass.
October 16, 1844*

Dear Mr Joseph Coffin,

My name is Mrs Rebecca Carter Elton, wife of Mr Thomas Elton, until late the keeper of the North Point Lighthouse above Kingsport. I have the honor of succeeding my husband in this position, an appointment made official earlier this year after Mr Elton was stricken with vertigo. It is, as you can no doubt imagine, an unfortunate malady for a man in his occupation!

I trust you will forgive the forwardness of this letter; I assure you my intentions are honorable. And allow me to offer my condolences on the death of Mrs Philomena Coffin. I know she was a good Christian, and I have faith that Heaven rewards the just.

By now, your imagination is aflame with questions. How does this married woman know my name? Was she acquainted with my beloved mother? What business have I with a lighthouse three miles from haunted Kingsport? This is not how we do things in New Bedford, and certainly not in Nantucket!

All good questions indeed. So, to my point. I have something very important I must tell you, something I durst not commit to pen and parchment, and may only communicate in person. As my situation naturally makes a shore meeting difficult, I must beg your indulgence, and ask you to call upon my family at Ross Island. According to the Essex County Compass, the Quiddity is scheduled to sail on November 1. Fortunately, we are expecting to be resupplied the afternoon of October 30. Weather permitting, the sloop Guernsey shall depart from the Kingsport Revenue Marine at 3:00 post-meridiem. I have already discussed the matter with Lieutenant Costello, and he has graciously offered to transport your personage to Ross Island. Once our business has concluded, Mr Elton will return

you to Kingsport soon after sunset. At the very least, I promise you an excellent meal and a wondrous strange story!

My dear Mr. Coffin, I know how unexpected and mysterious this must all appear! I am hoping the manly sense of adventure that first propelled you to sea also compels you to accept this stranger's invitation. I truly have your best interests at heart. At the risk of compounding the mystery, I must ask that you share this invitation with nobody else, particularly not your fellow officers. Nor must you write back. I leave you with these enticing lines, the words of the great English poet and seer—

*Five miles meandering with a mazy motion
Through wood and dale the sacred river ran,
Then reached the caverns measureless to man,
And sank in tumult to a lifeless ocean;
And 'mid this tumult Kubla heard from far
Ancestral voices prophesying war!*

Godspeed, Mr Coffin. I shall proceed with this endeavor as if you have accepted my invitation. Should I not see you arrive on the Guernsey, I shall not make another attempt to gain your confidence.

Your name is not your fate, Joseph.

*Mrs Rebecca Carter Elton,
Keeper of the North Point Light*