

The Light House



This is the retelling of a tale of 19th century European origin, whose author I do not know.

It seems there was a traveling violinist, a young man, unattached, seeking his fortune in the fickle folds of fate. All over Europe he tramped from the town to town, set up in every city square, and begged quarters in exchange for his music. It was a lean, but free life.

One night he found himself caught in a storm. He had misjudged his distance, and was still far from a town, out on this high, windy, coastal road. The black clouds, split with lightning, had just begun to unleash their fury when the young man spied a lighthouse shining forth from a jutting, rocky peninsula. Fearing for his life, and not least for his violin, he made for the lighthouse, and knocked on the door.

Footsteps tapped their way down the towering, winding stair, the yellow lantern flickering out one window at a time as it spiraled to the bottom. The door opened to reveal a white-haired old man, so old indeed, that he appeared to have been summoned by ages past to come forward through time to open this magical door of destiny.

He welcomed the violinist in, fed him, and offered him a palette for the night. After they had dined, and drunk a bottle between the two of them, the violinist, in an expansive mood, attempted to repay the lighthouse keeper for his hospitality by entertaining with the violin. The old man was completely without culture; he had lived his entire life in the lighthouse, always tending the eternal fire; he had never read a book, never seen a painting, never heard music. To initiate the old man into the world of artistic abstraction, the violinist chose to play a Beethoven sonata, an appropriately dark and turbulent work, but, of course, without the piano part.

As if by some secret cue, the storm began to accompany the Beethoven, the sounds of nature weaving in amongst the vibrant, singing phrases of the violin. Raindrops articulated the light spiccato notes, the sea rolled under the expansive tenor melody, and at the exultant climax, the thunder crashed a distant amen cadence, and was still.

The old man, who had never heard of Beethoven before, never heard a philosophical concept before, never studied any religion except that connection between himself and God experienced in contemplation of the fire, that white-haired man rose, and allowed his gaze to drift down the shoreline. "That's true," he said.