

The Man in the Lighthouse

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PROSE, 2nd PLACE (tie), (Grades 10-12)

There's a man who lives in the lighthouse. I've only seen him once, when I got lost after trying to watch the boats. I was out after dark—I wasn't supposed to be, I know, but I've always thought that the sea looks prettier with the moon shining on it. Regardless, I was out while it was dark, and I wasn't supposed to be. I must've lost my footing or something because one minute I was walking home along the path, and the next I was tumbling headfirst down the cliff side, kicking up trails of sand behind me.

I don't think I knocked myself unconscious necessarily, but I stopped being too alert after I went stumbling. I could see the lighthouse from the way I'd fallen. It was gorgeous, somehow, in its state of disrepair. The plaster was coming unstuck from the cinder block foundations, exposing the layer of crumbling rocks beneath. There was ivy climbing up the walls, somehow thriving on a diet of saltwater and little sun. The light on top was on, scanning back and forth across the waves like some sort of seafaring sentinel, warning sailors about deadly patches of rocks hidden beneath the waves. It was hypnotizing to watch the lighthouse illuminate the sea with giant swaths of light. I'm sure it pulled me into some sort of trance, because I didn't see the man approaching until he was already there.

One moment I was watching the lighthouse, the next, he was leaning over me, some indecipherable look crawling across his features. Looking at him made my eyes go wonky, as if they didn't want to process what they were seeing. The man had bone-white hair, the kind that comes from years of age, but his skin was still perfectly smooth and tight, like that of a child's. His sea-blue eyes looked wise and worldly, like they had seen more than I could ever understand, and gave me the impression that he wasn't just looking at me, he was looking *through* me. I could've stared at him for hours, but the St. Bernard standing at his side started licking at my face.

“Bruno. Stop that.” The man spoke softly, as if one careless cry would send the lighthouse crashing down behind him. “I'm terribly sorry, Bruno likes it when we get to meet people. Can you stand?” He held out one gloved hand to me and pulled me up with more strength than I would have expected from his wiry frame.

“Yes—I'm, er—thank you. Uh. Thank you, sir?” I stammered.

There was something about the man that made it hard to focus. His very presence made the edges of my mind become fuzzy. That, or I had hit my head too hard when I fell.

“Of course. Can’t abide by any injuries, land or sea. Happy to help.” The dog came over and began nudging its head against my leg. It stared up at me, and its eyes—dear god, its eyes. They were so similar to the man’s eyes, so human and so alive with wisdom. It made the skin on the back of my neck prickle.

“Well, do be careful.” The man nodded at me and turned around, motioning for the dog to come after him. I watched as they left, white hair followed by white fur, slowly shrinking as they walked further and further away until they melted into the night.

I haven’t seen them since, but I know they’re out there. The man in the lighthouse and his dog.

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