

The Man in the Tower

There once was a man in a tower. He had been there for as long as anyone could remember, never needing food nor water, never leaving, speaking only to those who had climbed his tower. And many heard his legend, so many travelled from all over to ask him questions, learn what he had learnt, know what he knew. Kings, merchants and peasants alike sought his wisdom.

One particularly red sunrise, three brothers climbed the man's tower to ask him for the secret of immortality. They asked and the man considered each of them in turn, and pronounced "You are not worthy." The brothers cried out, but the man would say no more.

The brothers descended the steps of the tower, disheartened, and returned to the place they were staying. They discussed what they could do to prove themselves worthy for several days, but could not decide on the best course. They began to argue and decided to each pursue their own idea.

The first brother hired a ship and began exploring the uncharted corners of the world, creating maps along the way and finding riches and treasures such as no man had ever found before, becoming one of the most well-known explorers of the age.

The second brother explored also, but he also researched, and studied, and found wonders and understanding as never found previously. "He has learnt more than any other," people would say, opening the newest book written by the brother.

The third brother worked also, and studied also, but dedicated himself to creating all that he could. He devised lights that never dimmed, clockwork steeds that never tired, furniture that never broke and more besides.

Years later, the brothers returned to the man's tower. Each had heard of the other's successes, but none had met since they had parted ways and still harboured animosity towards each other. They all met at the base of the tower, surprised to find the others there, and the stairs were climbed in silence.

The man met them at the top, exactly as he was before. The first brother said to the man "O, man in the tower, I have travelled the seas of the world and mapped them all that others might see. I have seen places of beauty no other has seen, and amassed a wealth such as no other possesses. Are these things worthy?" The man was silent for a moment, then answered:

"No."

The second brother said to the man "O, man in the tower, I have discovered many secrets of this world and the things in it. I have written ten times ten thousand books and educated all people who would wish to learn. Are these things worthy?" The man was silent for a moment, then answered:

"No."

The third brother said to the man "O, man in the tower, I have created a thousand creations that were not before. I have brought light to the dark, far places near, and help to those who could not be saved. Are these things worthy?" The man was silent for a moment, then answered:

"No."

"Why are these things not worthy?" The brothers cried.

"These things are not worthy," the man answered, "because in search of my gift, you have found what you truly wished for." And he would say no more.

The brothers were confused, but descended the tower in deep thought. At the base, they sat heavily on a bench, all lost in their own minds, and gazed out over the landscape. The sun had just begun to set, and the sky was in the process of turning a vivid red colour.

The first brother looked to the harbour. His ship was the same he had set out with all those years before, even if it had been patched and resailed and repaired countless times. There were near a hundred ships in the harbour from all the visitors to the tower. Tiny figures could just be made out among them all, trading, borrowing, admiring others' ships, and the thousand other little things that happened in a harbour. He saw a mapmakers' store bustling with customers, and felt a stab of pride on remembering he had drawn most of them.

The second brother looked to the university. Even as he watched, lights began to appear in the windows of the huge building. He couldn't see them, but all of those students and teachers and professors working away the evening was a comforting thought. The fact that his books alone took up one of the massive shelves in their library was comforting also.

The third looked out over the city, watching the streetlamps that he had made begin to light the roads and alleys. People were trickling into the city even now and he saw several of his gear powered creations among them. At this hour, people were beginning to head for their homes, and they moved with vigour at the thought of their families and beds. Those that had already accomplished the immense feat of walking home could be seen lounging on rooves or balconies, enjoying the night. He realised that they could do this thanks, in many ways, to him. That made the sight just a little more beautiful.

And slowly, each realised that the man in the tower was right. Immortality wasn't really what they had wanted. They had found what they truly wanted during the search. For the first time in years, they actually spoke to each other in friendship as they had before. They parted ways again, but this time with the promise they would meet again.

The man in the tower remained, and thought.