

The Midnight Violin

“Home.”

That is where I wanted to go.

“Where is your home, lass?” the coachman asked softly, compassion glowing in his gentle eyes as he took in my ragged condition.

I barely managed a whisper, “I don’t know.”

A clocktower. A tabby cat. My name.

That was all that I could recall of home.

“I’m afraid I can’t help you if you don’t know where you’re going,” he started to turn away.

“Wait!” my desperation hung in the chilled air, “Does this town have a clocktower?”

“Why, yes,” the man touched a gloved hand to his top hat, “It’s down by Cherry Lane.”

“Please, take me to it.”

Once again, he scrutinized my shabby clothes and the bandage around my head. I scabbled around in my pockets for my coin pouch.

“I have money.”

“Alright,” the coachman held the carriage door open for me, “Watch your step, lass.”

Thanking him profusely, I placed two silver coins into his hand and stepped inside. Soon, we were rumbling along to Cherry Lane, the horses’ clopping setting a steady rhythm. As the minutes passed, I tried to recall what the clocktower in my hometown looked like. It was a clouded memory. How could I be sure I would recognize it when I saw it? The more clocktowers I looked at, the more unsure I was about the memory. What if I never found my way back home again?

The hot tears threatened to spill over as they had countless times before. I mentally pushed down the despair. I had to keep trying, even if I traveled to every town in the country with a clocktower. The carriage stopped, and before long, the coachman was at the door, letting me out.

“Forgive me,” he said, eyes twinkling, “I forgot to give you your change.”

He pressed a coin into my palm. I gasped as the glint of gold caught my eye.

“Get yourself something to eat,” with a tip of his top hat, he pulled his carriage around and left me to stare up at the magnificent clocktower.

Uncertainty washed over me. It looked similar to the one in my distant memory, but how could I be sure? Past the clocktower, a stationmaster called out the arrival of a passenger train. The rush of the engine and the sparks of the brakes sent shivers down my spine. An uncontrollable trembling overtook me.

Memories. A train. An awful screech.

The episode passed, and I stood there panting. *What was that?*

I was remembering. But remembering what? I shook myself and took a tentative step toward the clocktower. My resolve melted with another glance at the train. I turned away from the metal beast and started to look at the other buildings on Cherry Lane. Maybe I could find another hint of my past.

I walked along the streets for a long while before stopping at a bakery. I peeked through the glass front of the shop. It looked so warm inside.

“Are you going to buy some bread, miss?” a little boy grinned up at me with a crooked-tooth smile.

“Why, yes, I...” I realized the boy was holding a cat, a *tabby* cat, “Where did you get that?”

“Oh, this old fella?” the boy laughed, “He’s always hanging round mum’s shop.”

“I see,” my mind was whirling, but I still was not sure it was *the* cat.

“Well, what are you going to buy?”

I realized the boy was asking me a question, “What?”

“What are you going to get from my mum’s shop? The cheese rolls are my favorite.”

“Are you hungry?” I had more than enough for cheese rolls with the gold coin the coachman gave me.

The boy grinned even wider, “Always.”

I smiled back, and I bought us both the delicious, cheese-filled bread. It was the best thing I ever remembered eating. Although there were a lot of things I still could not remember. I bade farewell to the crooked-toothed boy and continued down Cherry Lane, hoping something would catch my eye and recover a memory.

It was dark by the time I finished my search. Nothing looked familiar. I shivered, pulling my tattered cloak tighter around me. I pulled a folded map from my pocket. Black x marks glared at me as I added another over the area this town was located. How many more black marks would it take to find home? Finding a bench, I curled up on it, turning my back to the biting wind. The illuminated face of the clock shone high above me, a sentinel of the night.

BONG!

The last stroke of midnight awoke me from my nightmare. I lifted my tear-stained face to look at the time.

The distinct keening of a violin reached my straining ears. It wafted on the wind like a beckoning call just out of reach. It was full of sorrow, yet it filled my heart with hope.

Music. A melody. Memories.

“Keil,” the name rose unbidden to my lips.

A sudden frenzy gripped me, and I shouted the name, searching desperately for the source of the melancholy music.

“Keil!”

The music stopped, and with it my hope. I sunk to my knees in familiar despair, sobs racking my frail body.

What is happening to me? Who was I calling for?

“Adele?”

That was *my name*.

I looked up into the anxious face of my brother, who still held the violin. I threw myself into his arms, tears of relief, confusion, and memory drenching his shirt.

“Keil.”

“How? Adele, you...” he choked, “You *died*.”

I shook my head, still trying to make sense of things myself. Keil gently pulled away to get a better look at me.

“We all thought you died when that train derailed. We were told that...that there were no survivors.”

The screech of metal. Pain. My memory.

“I forgot, Keil. I forgot *everything*.”

Everything except my name, a tabby cat, and a clocktower.

Keil wrapped me in another hug, “Let’s go home.”

“Home,” I repeated, the taste of it was finally familiar again.