

The Letters Never Sent

He met her only once.

At a music gathering in the old city. She was standing in the crowd, sunlight rippling through a violet scarf draped over her shoulders. They spoke for only a few minutes. She had heard his performance, a piece he hadn't expected anyone to understand. But she did. Her eyes were quiet, knowing.

She said only, "You played like someone who has been carrying the Longing for a long time." Then the crowd shifted, and she was gone.

He never caught her name. In the rush of that moment, he had forgotten to ask.

He returned home to his small stone cottage and resumed his quiet routines. But something had changed. In the evenings, after tending his garden and feeding the birds, he began to write her letters. His tenderest thoughts shaped into ink. He didn't know why. He told himself they were pointless — letters to an unknown woman.

He never sent them. He had no idea where to send them. But that didn't matter.

They filled a drawer. Then two. Eventually, he bought a fine wooden box to hold them all — cedar-lined, with a brass clasp. It sat on the corner of his desk like a private altar.

In them, he spoke of music, and story, and Longing. Of the ache that never left him, and the fire that still blazed. He told her of dreams he hadn't dared speak aloud, not even to himself. He thanked her for listening.

The unsent letters became a ritual. A hearth. A place where he could be fully alive, once a day, even if only in silence.

Years passed. The letters continued.

One day, a box arrived. With a note.

"I don't know if you remember my mother. She passed last week. Among her things was this box, addressed to you. I thought you should have it."

He held the box in both hands. Sat with it for an hour before opening it.

Inside was a bundle of letters, bound with a faded green ribbon.

He placed his hand on the bundle, not ready to untie it. The ribbon was slightly frayed. The pages smelled faintly of lavender.

He took a breath. Opened the first.

"I remembered you, of course. And your music even more. You played like someone who had already lived through the ending, and came back for the rest of us."

"I never forgot how quiet you were in that moment — like the silence after the last note of a true song. At the time I didn't know what to say. It has taken me years, and all these letters, to begin to find the words."

He closed his eyes.

Around him, the room was utterly still.

He lit a candle. And in the flickering light, he reached for his pen and a blank page.

— *William Zeitler*

2025 July 23

© 2025 William Zeitler. Originally published at: GrailHeart.com

