FINITE

a short story
by
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The pianist enters from stage right, respectfully acknowledging the audience's warm applause. Adjusting his coat tails, he sits down upon the bench. Hands at his sides, he closes his eyes and paces his breath while bringing his mind into focus for the opening selection. He is ready to begin his recital. The music commences. Grasses rhythmically sway in the breeze as the notes ring out across Mother Nature's beauty. Bonnies of color smile as the instrument's sympathetic vibrations arouse the stems to which they cling. The sun's radiance rises to enjoy and absorb this special performance. Then, from stage left, different sounds emerge – sounds of such clarity and beauty that even the pianist turns to admire the artists. The music from Nature's feathered children – the song birds – compliment the music from the performer.

With a flourish of the coda, the pianist finishes his composition. He rises from the bench, bows to an emotionally moving applause, and graciously walks from the stage towards a small cabin tucked amongst the towering pines. Through the open door, he enters where a different story unfolds.

The pianist removes his tuxedo from his now withered body and carefully places it into a satin bag. He proceeds to put on a pair of worn jeans and a patched flannel shirt. He ambles to his favorite rocking chair and sits upon the soft cushions. Here he is joined by his ever faithful companion, his dog Ben. Outside their encasement the sun of yesteryear turns into the clouds of today. The warm glow from the fireplace sends dancing shadows across the large room, displaying breaks of sunlit memories.

The room is sparsely furnished, except for a full-sized grand piano. The instrument stands as a monument to the times when the now-old- man spent his life on center stage. Next to the piano is a table spread with scrapbooks, their covers encasing a historical testimony to the man's life. Rave reviews followed him wherever he had performed. He was a renowned concert pianist. However, a few years back, an unknown affliction disabled his hands so he could no longer play his beloved instrument. When he walked off the stage after his final performance, he and Ben left behind the world they knew to enter a world of strangeness – one without the gratification of being emotionally rewarded for their accomplishments.

Music consumed the pianist's entire life, so he never allowed himself any extended time for human companionship, although many admirers tried to encroach upon his chosen lifestyle. He never really knew the trials and tribulations of human love or human jealously. Instead, his dogs had been his constant companions. Each traveled with him, each listened to his music, each remained at his side. Now, his latest dog, Ben, was his constant companion. Although old in dog years, Ben had within him a driving life force that kept the canine ever present for his guardian.

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The old man rises to stoke the fire for that needed spark of creativity, then ambles over to the piano. He sits down to play a composition, but his hands cannot strike the keys. Tears fill his eyes as he rises to take a bow. Ben stands up and wags his tail, then strolls to his guardian and licks the man's weathered hands. The old man's broken body hobbles back to his rocking chair. He sits down and converses with Ben, whose expressions show the dog tries to understand the man's words. They both fall asleep.

Early the next morning, the two awaken to golden rays of light streaming through the rain-streaked windows. Each smiles in his own way. Each knows what is about to occur. The old man brushes the dog's long hair, which radiates like jewels in the sunlit room. Then he steps to his closet and removes the tuxedo from the now dust-covered satin bag. He dresses, then walks over to Ben for approval. They both look at each other. They both reflect a youthful ambience.

The old man glides to the piano, adjusts his tails, and sits down on the bench. This time, music flows from the keyboard in a performance rarely heard before on any concert stage. His fingers dance across the keys as graceful as the wings of a hummingbird in flight. Mother Nature’s breath blows open the cabin door so all her children may hear and feel this beautiful music. Yes, this is the old man's finest achievement! As the flourish of final notes announce the end of the performance, he rises to a thunderous ovation as the clouds release their tears of joy. The tall pines gently sway in recognition of the music. The sounds of Nature's children fill the air with glee and Ben howls his own exuberance. The old man was pleased.

Then the renowned pianist, his companion at his side, steps out from behind the keyboard, and walks from the cabin into the forest. They stroll amongst the admiring audience. They smile at the never-ending applause. They walk into the fog of their finite existence.

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