

THE SHMATOV FAMILY STORY LIBRARY

The Old Lighthouse

by Elena Tereshchenkova-Durandina
(An English re-telling for the quietly demanding reader)



Dear Reader,

We are pleased to present the first publication in the series 'Magical Stories for the Soul' from the Shmatov Foundation. These stories are special. They were created with love by our friends, talented authors from around the world.

'The Old Lighthouse' is a wonderful example of children's literature by Elena Tereshchenkova-Durandina, a friend of our foundation. The story of how a simple child's impulse and belief in miracles can overcome any difficulties is especially relevant in today's world.

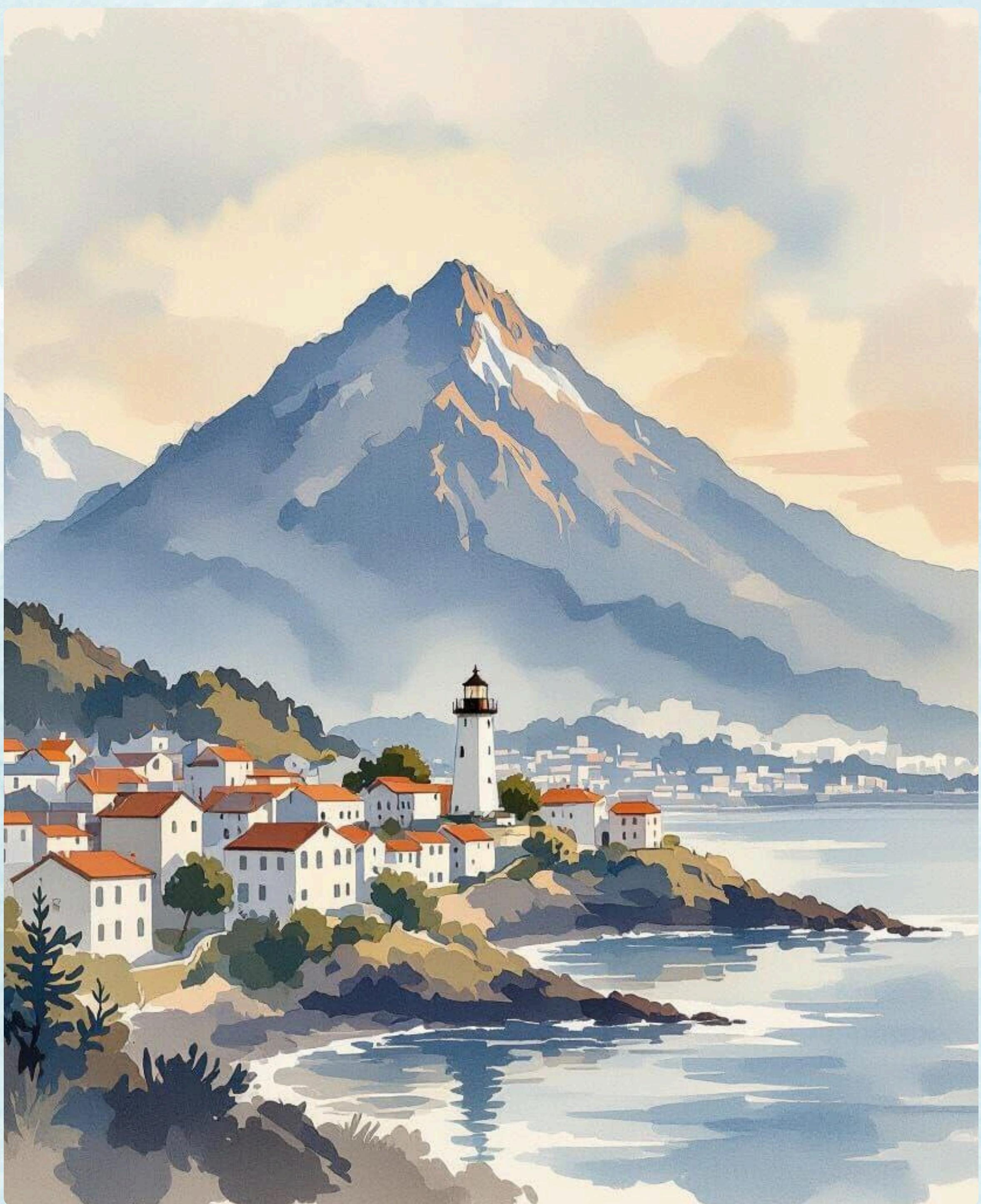
These books are being donated to the Shmatov family library and Nika Safi's school so that the magic can be shared with all of you.

You can download this book on our charity foundation's website.

www.shmatovfamily.com

On the rim of a dark-blue, thunderous ocean a small town lay cupped like a handful of pale shells in the grass at the foot of a mountain. Tile-roofed houses dozed among orchards; inside them lived sailors and fishermen with their wives and children.

Every dawn the men rowed out to sea, the older boys already strong enough to haul the nets. No-one here feared work, and no-one lived alone.



At the shaded end of the plum-lined lane stood the most enchanting of houses. There lived the town's sole sea captain—the only man who could navigate a ship through fog as easily as through a fairy tale—along with his gentle wife and their daughter, a laughing conspirator who could spark an adventure with nothing more than a glance. The town adored her and her parents alike.

The captain's wife always kept a kettle singing on the hob, ready for any neighbor who might drop by for counsel, a biscuit, and an unrushed hour of talk.



Above their home, on the top of the mountain, stood the Old Lighthouse. Once, its stones were cemented with salt and pride; once, its fire brought home, on arriving ships, various types of wood and iron, safe and sound. The years had replaced it with a younger, gleaming steel brother, further down the slope. The newcomer broadcast electrical greetings twenty times a minute, while its ancestor remained silent, allowing ivy and the wind to debate its future.



One summer afternoon—sun-white, storm-prone—the town was waiting. The captain's ship was due, and every kitchen announced it: cinnamon, coffee, and the slow, arrogant perfume of a plum tart cooling on the sill. By duck the sky has lowered its ceiling. Lightning stapled cloud to water; the new lighthouse died; the town went black.



Out beyond the surf the ship climbed and fell like a thrown toy. The captain kept her bow to the waves, trusting the pulse of the modern light—until the pulse stopped. In that absence the mountain itself seemed to have vanished. The helmsman's knuckles matched the white foam. Somewhere below, the hull kissed the first warning rocks.



In the captain's house his wife and daughter pressed their foreheads to the pane. When darkness swallowed the mountain they understood, without a word, what it meant. Boots, oilskins, then the sprint through rain that felt like gravel. Other mothers, other children, were already gathering in the square; lanterns swung, useless against the noise of the wind.



The girl—small, soaked, furious—looked up toward the invisible peak and remembered the Old Lighthouse. A relic, yes, but still a tower, still a place to put light if one had any to give. She whistled her band of co-conspirators—boys and girls who knew every shortcut through cliff-fern and goat-path—and they began to climb. Rain became hail; steps crumbled under them like stale bread. At the top they found the lantern room open to the sky, its mirrors cracked, its wick long gone. They had come to make fire and discovered they had no flint, no oil, no dry match. Despair is a luxury children rarely allow themselves; still, it pressed against their ribs.



Above the squall, a lone star gaped — small, curious, and slightly bored. For a moment, the clouds parted, and the star caught a glimpse of the tower, the children, the city, the ship gliding towards its final embrace with the granite. The star did what only stars can do: it fell, leaving a silver trail behind it. It landed, shook itself like a wet cat, and called to the children standing with their mouths open:

"Rub my back, quickly! I'm wet and angry. And then run — close your eyes tightly."

They obeyed, because children recognise a miracle before adults have time to name it. They ran down the spiral staircase, covering their eyes with their palms. Behind them, the star descended, shone and flashed. A hundred broken mirrors turned into a hundred moons.



On the deck the captain saw a spark—no, a bloom—no, a pillar of steady gold where no light should be. Memory supplied the rest: his grandfather's stories of the ancient tower. He shouted orders; the wheel spun; the ship answered like a horse hearing its rider's voice.

Wave after wave still clawed the hull, but the light held, gentle and absolute. Then, as suddenly as a curtain dropped, the storm ceased. Clouds tore open; the town glimmered; the Old Lighthouse burned like a second sunrise. The vessel slipped between the jaws of the reef and into the waiting arms of the harbour.

The star, meanwhile, realised it had broken several ordinances of celestial etiquette. It whisked home, expecting reprimand. Instead it found a slice of plum tart floating in a bowl of warm milk, and a mother-star who scolded only in whispers



The End