

Flash Fiction, deadline 18th October 7pm

A Reward.

Barbara sat on the edge of her grandmother's bed and considered opening the large wooden chest on the floor in front of her. She had little time left as the removal people were due in an hour. She wondered why she had left this to the last minute. Maybe she was putting off the last farewell to grandma and the memorabilia. She was yearning to find one particular item that had intrigued her as a child and it was still a mystery. It was a wooden box that her grandmother always kept on her bedside table. She never knew what was in it and grandma never opened it.

When Barbara started work she travelled around the country for months on end. When she did visit there was so much to talk about and Barbara forgot about the mysterious box. Now it was too late, grandma died a few months ago. It was a vague memory now and she wasn't sure if she would recognize it but hoped she would.

There was one difficulty of course, the chest was locked and she didn't have the key! She looked around the bedroom for the umpteenth time but it was nowhere to be found.

Suddenly distracted by the rattling window, Barbara looked out at the March storm brewing and early spring blossom floating aimlessly outside like fine snowflakes, as she felt she was aimlessly searching for the key. She opened the dusty curtains wider and suddenly heard a 'ping'! It wasn't her phone this time! Something had fallen from the picture rail on the left hand side of the curtain rail and landed on the window sill. It was a small, sturdy looking gold coloured key.

"Wow" Barbara exclaimed. "That must be it!"

The key fitted the lock in the chest perfectly and she lifted the lid.

Kneeling on the floor beside the chest, she started to rummage through the top layer, removing old lace tablecloths; embroidered pillow cases and some delightful elaborately designed silk scarves. A heady lavender scent wafted out of the chest and into the room.

Suddenly from deep inside the chest a tiny grey-black mite flew out and made Barbara jump. She thought it must have been a pupa in autumn when grandma packed the chest. It had hibernated safely inside and now flew out to freedom. Fortunately it wasn't a moth!

The next layer revealed some gloves; old dance shoes, probably from the 1940's; and a few pretty petticoats with broderie anglaise frills. She found a glass trinket dish with a coloured design of flowers and butterflies on its lid. Then she saw it. It was the mother of pearl lid that she noticed first and knew then that she'd found the mystery box. She lifted it carefully and ran her hands over the shiny wooden base. It was long and narrow. Her heart was beating with excitement as she prised off the lid. Inside was a small glass bottle securely sealed with a gold cap. Inside the bottle was a tiny book which reminded Barbara of the Bronte children's miniature books she'd once seen, in Haworth. The book was open at the centre page on which were words too small to read. Barbara remembered that her grandmother kept a magnifying glass in a kitchen drawer and hurried downstairs. She ran back upstairs and tried to focus on the writing in the book but it was difficult as the glass was thick. Then she saw it - grandma's tiny neat writing :

Barbara. March 1st 1965

My first grandchild. God Bless Her.

A reward indeed!

522 words