

## The Gift in the Cedar Box

Carol held tightly to the chain that was attached to the crystal chandelier. It was one of the biggest ones she had ever delt with. It needed to be lowered into a large container filled with vinegar water. Once cleaned it would be modified to use electricity. But the chain bit into her gloves and the crystal wonder waited to plunge and it would shatter if it did,

Joel and Lisa joined her. It swung like a wild bronco trying to free itself but slowly lost momentum as it settled into the wheeled container. At least two feet of it remained above the liquid. Breathing hard Carol made her way out of the room, around the scaffolding erected to clean the elaborate tin ceiling.

Her foot kicked something, nothing unusual in a renovation. Looking down she saw a kerchief, tied into a bundle. Picking it up she noted it was heavy. Carol carried it across the marble hall with its compass rose, to sit on one of the double staircases.

Her eyes sought the mural painted on the hall wall. It depicted a ball. The women wore a rainbow of elaborate gowns. Their partners wore dress Confederate uniforms. The mural had been hidden by seven layers of wallpaper. She had restored it, coating it with a preservative. The mural was approximately twelve foot high, and twelve foot wide. Fancifully she could hear a Viennese waltz, and the murmur of voices. Taking off her gloves she untied the intricate knot.

There inside was a vintage pearl handled derringer, and two shell casings. There were stains on the pearl grip. Beneath it was a cedar box carved to resemble a gift box. It even boasted a bow. A gold knob protruded out of the side.

She pressed and the lid rose. Inside was an oval opal ring. Surrounding the opal were diamonds. She took it from its white satin bed and slipped it on her finger. It felt warm, the scent of cedar rose to tickle her nose. The music grew louder, the tinkle of glasses was added, and giggles drifted in waves.

“I loved her, crazy as it sounds, I did love her. I tried to ignore the way she flirted with every man that crossed her path. Ralph, he was rich and spoiled. He saw her as an amusement. He already planned to marry, and the formal announcement would soon be made. That night we were leaving for Newtonia, it would be a big fight. I felt a premonition that all would not be well, that battle would be my last.”

The music rose in volume, the scent of candle wax wove through the room. A sad smile lit the major’s face.

“One night, that is all I wanted. I had her gift in my pocket. I knew we would not stand in front of the clergy. But she would have the gift to remember me by. I would always be a part of her.”

*They were under the portico. A woman in a white ball gown stood in front of a tall blonde man. “Must you leave? I will miss you so much.”*

*“Carol Ann, I intend to ride out with them but slip away and circle back. I have no intention of fighting.” He kissed her.*

“I shot them both. I felt nothing. Ralph was a coward and my beloved a cheat. I took the shell casings, the gun and that ring and tied them in a bundle. Nobody was watching and I threw it into the chandelier. Love is best not wasted. Your man has a ring for you, but he hesitates. One should not waste precious time.”

The major melted into the painting, in his arms the woman danced. Frozen in time.

“You sure are making progress.” Her police officer boyfriend stood in the double doors, his crooked smile and shaggy brown hair tugged at her heart.

“Are you ever going to give me the ring in your pocket?”

He crossed to her. He pulled her to her feet. “You will marry me?”

“Yes.”

He smiled, “do you hear the music?”

The music filled the air, he took her into his arms, and they waltzed. It was a bubble in time. It was a merging of the past, the present and all eternity. They waltzed into the painting, becoming one of the figures tapped within.

The cedar gift box lay on the stair step, the ring glittering and beckoning.

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