

The Forgotten Magic

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"For the Record" by Sam Vanderwalke

They say an attic holds demons, but I knew the real demon was down stairs, watching Oprah. She sent me up here to the attic to clean a few hours ago, and I had barely made any progress. This place was just too big to clean in a day. I knew she was just setting me up to fail, giving herself a reason to punish me. Nevertheless, I will try to clean this trash dump. Stacks of boxes and crates that are decades old. Childhood relics and toys that are so broken they could only gather dust. Ugly armchairs and ripped sofas, broken keyboards and bell-bottom pants. Artifacts of my family's past that I couldn't care less about.

I push aside another crate with a grunt, squeezing into a corner near a windowsill. I trudge over to the window and yank it up, gasping for any air that isn't musty. It doesn't help much. With it being the middle of July, the air is still pretty hellish. The humidity threatens to choke me, but I leave it open, hoping it will clear away the stale air. Turning from the window, I lean against it and cast my eyes around the room.

Looking around idly for a few moments, my eyes catch a glare to my right. Something is hidden in the shadow of an old bookcase, and I can feel the mysterious music begin to play in my head. Shifting the empty shelf to the side, my gaze lands on a locked trunk. I kneel down next to it. The trunk itself is made of a dark oak, with a rusty metal lock holding the lid closed. I sit back on my haunches and frown. Well, now what?

I look around the attic. Where would a key be? Dragging myself off the ground, I shift boxes and look under rugs. I know it is stupid, but I can't help being curious. What is so important that my mother had to keep it under lock and key? I seriously doubt it's family photos.

A few more minutes of searching end in no key, but I do see an old toolbox that used to belong to my dad. Maybe something in there would be able to open the lock. After tossing away screwdrivers (the lock doesn't have screws), hammers (that would accomplish the exact opposite of what I want), and pliers (the lock is too rusted for that to be of any use), I finally find a hatchet. I let a malicious grin cross my face.

Is there anything more satisfying than breaking something that belongs to someone you hate? Hefting the ax in my left hand, I swing it toward the lock with all my strength. It rattles but doesn't break.

Well, I was never that strong.

It takes six more swings before the rusty piece of metal finally falls off. I stand there for a moment to catch my breath, but my curiosity soon drives me to toss the hatchet aside and flip the lid up.

I can't believe what I was seeing at first. All of that effort to get into this chest, only to find that inside, there is just ANOTHER BOX?

I let out a groan so loud I'm afraid my mom will hear me two stories below.

This box is good deal smaller and much fancier. The wood it is made of is really dark, almost black. It doesn't have a lock, but a latch is in its place. As I lift the latch, time almost slows down. "I really am in some sort of Disney movie," I say and chuckle to myself. I am going to make another joke before I see what is in the box.

It takes me a few minutes to find my voice. "How the *hell?*" Sitting on a plush cushion inside the box is a tiara. A perfectly smooth tiara that looks like it was made hours ago. A tiara that's *covered* is gleaming gemstones. Rubies, emeralds, and diamonds that dot a silver arch with a large jewel in the center. I don't recognize the stone; it is like nothing I've ever scene. Given I only have an eleventh grade education, and I really haven't seen many precious stones in my life, but this one just doesn't seem real.

It looks completely clear, and you can see the detailed silver carving behind it. Yet I can see it is faceted hundreds of times. Just the center stone looked like it was worth millions, and I was almost afraid to pick up the whole thing. What if I drop it? What if I break this and she finds out? She would skin me alive, I just know, but I can't walk away.

I gulped. With trembling hands, I move to gently lift the tiara. I almost drop it as soon as I pick it up. The metal is cold, like ice, when it should be warm. The detail on the crown glitters as I lift it up into the sunlight. I inhale sharply. When the sunlight hits the center stone, it breaks the light into a million pieces, each a different shade. Beams of light hit every corner of the room, creating a kaleidoscope of color - all of them reflecting off of the otherworldly gem. It is hypnotizing to watch.

I stand with the tiara in my hands, spotting a mirror across the room. I walk to it before I can think about what I am doing. I know I should put it back. I know I should hide it in the box and act like I never found it. But I just can't. How did my mom even have this? This thing must be priceless; if she ever had something worth this much, she would sell it, and never work another day. So why would this just sit up here?

Suddenly, I was in front of the grainy, dusty mirror, staring at my spotted reflection, the tiara still in my hands. I try to resist the temptation, but my gut fights against it. I don't want to try it on; I could break it. Knowing me, I *would* break it. But despite all the logic my head screaming at me, my hands lift up until the tiara is resting lightly on my brow.

The mirror shimmers and morphs, until an entirely new person is staring back at me.)