

The Keeper of Hours

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There are things in this world that exist in the spaces between moments, in the quiet corners where dust settles and memories sleep. I found one such thing in my grandmother's attic, though perhaps it would be more accurate to say it found me.

The box wasn't particularly remarkable - just old wood with carvings that seemed to shift when you weren't quite looking at them. Inside, nested in midnight-blue velvet that still held its sheen after all these years, lay a timepiece that had no business existing in our century.

My grandmother had died on a Thursday. The funeral was on a Monday. And here I was, on a Wednesday, holding something that hummed with the kind of power you feel in your teeth before lightning strikes.

"Oh, bollocks," I muttered, because that's what you say when you realize your perfectly normal life is about to become considerably less so.

The note I found beneath the watch was written in my grandmother's spidery handwriting, the kind that looked like it was trying to crawl off the page:

"Dear Sam,

There's a reason we're such an odd family. You've probably noticed how your Uncle Gerald sometimes knows things before they happen, or how your cousin May seems to be in two places at once. We're not what you'd call normal, love. Never have been. This watch has been in our family since before there were proper records of such things. It's ancient, yes, but that's not what makes it special. It shows you things - important things - but only if you're ready to see them. Don't be afraid of the dark it brings. Some shadows are kinder than the light.
-Gran"

I should have put it back. Should have closed the box, gone downstairs, and poured myself a very large glass of bourbon. Instead, I pressed the crown.

The world didn't end. It just... shifted. The attic's dust motes froze mid-dance, and the afternoon light took on the consistency of honey. Then the shadows began to move.

They peeled themselves from the corners and rafters, flowing like ink in water. They showed me things: a young woman in a Victorian dress running away from her wedding,

clutching this very watch (Great-great-grandmother Eleanor, I presumed); a man in a bowler hat using it to stop a train crash; a child - who looked suspiciously like my mother - finding lost things in impossible places.

The shadows danced and swirled, each story bleeding into the next. I saw love and loss, triumph and tragedy, all played out in this theater of darkness. Our family's history, written not in ink but in moments stolen from time itself.

When it ended, I sat in the growing dusk, the watch warm against my palm like a sleeping cat. The responsibility of it all should have felt heavy, overwhelming. Instead, it felt right, like finding the last piece of a puzzle you didn't know you were solving.

Later that night, as I lay in bed, I could have sworn I heard the watch ticking from its new home on my bedside table. Not the regular tick-tock of ordinary timepieces, but something more akin to a heartbeat. Or perhaps it was laughter.

That was three years ago. Since then, I've learned a few things: Time isn't the straight line everyone thinks it is. Family secrets are usually secret for a good reason. And sometimes, the most important moments in life happen in the spaces between seconds.

I still haven't figured out all the watch can do. Gran's note didn't come with an instruction manual, and the thing seems to have a mind of its own. But that's okay. After all, we're an odd family. Always have been.

And somewhere, in the darkness between tick and tock, I think Gran is smiling.