

Pandora's Box

Ripe with age, the wooden box seemed to glow brighter each day within her mother's office desk cabinet, yet neither of Beth's parents ever felt the need to open it. To Beth, the little container was her own Pandora's Box: with each passing day, her curiosity swelled.

And so, it became the source of Beth's intrigue, an obsession sealed away by the golden lock that kept its lid shut. When Beth sat in her mother's office chair, peered into the cabinet, and stared at the wooden container, she felt as if the golden clasp bound its mouth shut, silencing its secrets.

For as long as she could remember, the box's function had been nothing more than to sit—an ornament, like the centerpieces her mother displayed on their tables or the decorative candles scattered around the house. But a box with a lock is a box with a story to tell. That, Beth knew. It set this box apart from the open tales visible in framed pictures and carefully stacked books. The one time she had asked her mother about its contents, she had only received a cryptic response:

"If it was meant for you to see, you would have seen it."

So Beth resigned herself to studying its exterior. The closest she had come to peering inside was running her fingers along the grain of the wood, scratching at the surface, pressing her thumb against the golden clasp. Once—as if the box had punished her for such audacity—she had gotten a deep splinter. It had taken her four and a half agonizing hours to remove the sliver of wood. She knew that if she asked her mother for help, she'd be forced to admit how she had gotten it. And Beth had never been a good liar.

But today, after years of speculation, she decided she was going to open that box.

She moved as she had many times before: stepping into her mother's office, opening the sacred cabinet, and pulling out the chest. But this time, she did not put it back. Instead, she held it tightly, as if it might vanish from her grasp, and carried it upstairs. The wooden chest had become glass in her mind—fragile, precious—as she set it carefully on her desk. She pulled out her chair and sat.

Beth must have spent at least twenty minutes staring at it.

Again, her mind returned to *Pandora's Box*. Surely, this little wooden chest couldn't be responsible for the destruction of mankind. Pandora had already taken care of that. And besides, what was the world without a little conflict? In Beth's opinion, Pandora had done humanity a favor by gifting it the art of drama.

That thought was enough to steady her resolve.

She opened her desk drawer and pulled out the pair of wrenches she had bought for this exact moment. She had scoured her mother's office for the key, hoping for a clean break-in, but had come up empty. How would she return the lock to its original state afterward? She hadn't thought that far ahead. But then again, neither had Pandora.

Beth hooked the open ends of the wrenches over the shackle and forced them together until the metal snapped. The broken lock clattered softly against the desk. She unhooked the shattered pieces and set them aside.

It wasn't as if a spider would jump out of the box, but the reveal felt just as dangerous. This was something that had remained hidden for too long.

Beth slowly lifted the lid.

The wooden box exhaled its secret.

Inside, there was only one thing: a folded piece of paper.

She hesitated, then reached in and pulled it out. The page was creased, worn with age. Turning it over, she saw faint pencil markings—some words crossed out, others smudged by a weak eraser. But the visible ones remained clear.

Her breath hitched.

The handwriting was familiar.

Suddenly, Beth was nine again.

She could almost feel the warmth of the blanket draped over her as she finished her book—a children's retelling of *Pandora's Box*. She could feel the thrill of discovery as she tossed off the covers and padded barefoot to her brother's room, eager to tell him about her latest literary adventure.

She remembered smiling as she twisted the golden doorknob, pushing open the door to share her excitement.

And then—

Her smile faltered.

Her brother Henry was lying in bed, utterly still.

At first, she thought he was asleep. But something made her pause. Maybe it was the unnatural stillness of his body. Maybe it was the way his skin looked a little too pale. Or maybe it was the small, folded note on his bedside table, resting beside a cluster of pill bottles.

A note.

A note with words written sloppily in pencil—some crossed out, others smudged by a weak eraser. But the visible ones remained clear:

"Mom, I'm going away now. I want you to know that—"

Beth's eyes filled with tears, blurring the paper in her hands.

She pleaded with herself—*don't read further.*

But it was too late.

She had opened the box.

And just like that, the memories came rushing back.

Memories that her mind had sealed away.

The doctors had called it dissociative amnesia. A self-preservation instinct.

She remembered now.

She remembered her mother's words: *"If it was meant for you to see, you would have seen it."*

Her mother was wrong.

She *had* seen it. And it was never meant for her.

A sister who adored her brother shouldn't have to see his last words. His final thoughts. His kiss goodbye to life.

She remembered.

She remembered the way her nine-year-old voice had cracked into a scream when she first read that note on Henry's table. She remembered the way her parents came running—the way her mother pulled her out of the room, shielding her eyes, while her father fumbled to dial 911.

She remembered the wail of sirens.

She remembered crying in her mother's arms while her mother held the note tightly, reading it over and over again, as if trying to will different words onto the page.

She remembered the paramedics' solemn expressions as they covered her brother's lifeless body with a white tarp. The way they carried him away. The way her house became quieter than ever.

She remembered the day after Henry's funeral.

She remembered watching as her mother carefully folded that note—the one Beth was now holding—and locked it inside a wooden box. Sealing it away. Hiding it from sight.

Lastly, she remembered thinking:

That box could be *Pandora's Box*.

A container holding the remnants of something terrible. Something unspeakable.

That thought soon became the *only* thing she did remember.

Until today.

Until she broke the lock.

Until she let the memories spill out, uncontained.

Until *Pandora's Box*—her box—finally opened.