

Stock Exchange

There was a wooden box that sat on a high shelf in a dark room of an old house on a forgotten corner. In the old house lived an old man, also forgotten, but also happy in his own forgetting. He eschewed contact with his own family and spent his days scowling out of windows at whoever passed by. In the evenings, in order to keep his bile up, he would stalk through the rooms and corridors of the labyrinthine manse cursing the shadows.

If the phone rang, he ignored it. He received letters, but threw them away unopened. Whenever children or beggars came to the door, he threw cans of peas at them.

The day he found the box was a day that changed everything. He had for the first time in many years ventured into his late wife's bedroom. He found her personal things spread across the bureau and one particularly vile brooch that he had always detested. The sight of it so repelled him that he reached up for the box and tossed the offending item inside.

The next day, he let his repulsion draw him back to it. When he opened the box, however, instead of the brooch he found a pomegranate. He was much amazed and wondered who might have broken into the house playing tricks. He took out the pomegranate (he loathed them, although his wife had adored them) and replaced it with a powder puff. He closed the lid and then reopened it. In its stead was a scented candle. He sat down and began to ponder. Next he tried an old shoe and the box answered with was a moldy fox wrap. The old man began to get ideas.

When next a stray cat mewed at the window, he put it in the box. It gave him an onyx in return. Apparently, it liked cats. Whenever he wanted to rid himself of nits, he put them in the box and in return retrieved chunks of honeycomb, which he ate with his tea. The box certainly had queer ideas of exchange.

The old man's thoughts became more twisted and dark. He put in spoiled fish and got back a moldy, stuffed rabbit. He slid in a dog turd and got a pap smear. He cut off a finger and it gave him a tin whistle.

Finally the old man reached into his chest and pulled out his heart and put it in the box. When he looked inside, he found nothing.

The old man was enraged. He went to the medicine cabinet and found a bottle of castor oil. He poured it into the box and waited. After many hours, he fell asleep in his chair. He didn't hear the strange noises that began to fill the room. A conglomerate creature slid out of the box, mewling and leaving a slimy rail. It crept up the old man and smothered him to death. From then on the box only played music.