

In Small Packages

by Sabra Wineteer

Linus had it right with the security blanket he held like a beloved pet swan. Geneva had it all wrong with a pastel-colored music box, painted with impressionist-styled daisies and tied up in gold-ribbed pink bow. But it had come from her grandmother. Her paternal grandmother, a woman who existed for Geneva in the abstract, the vessel who had carried her father into being. That she was real had been beyond her until the music box arrived in the mail for Geneva's 15th birthday. What lengths the old woman must have gone through to get the music box to her? How much and long she must have saved to purchase this box in Castro's Cuba.

That it was a present that couldn't be opened did not diminish its preciousness—

Geneva still petted the painted box and flattened ribbon, turned the golden crank until music poured forth. She brought it to camp, to college, to her adult life in New York, and stored it on a shelf of honor next to the Weeble she and her on again/off again boyfriend, Sergei, gifted back and forth and her acceptance letter from Yale— she could have gone if her parents had been poorer or richer and not the capitalist runts they were, the lower middle class. Through the music box and the inquiries it provoked, Geneva could reveal her significance to the philistines who didn't know better— she was Geneva del Lobos, the only child of Teo del Lobos, winner of a Pulitzer for Drama— and the music box's significance, a gift from the grandmother still in Cuba.

Then Sergei decided to push their relationship toward off again by contemplating the box. “Have you never wondered what else is inside? There could be family heirlooms or a secret message” He picked the box off the shelf and spun it around in his hands like a baseball. “And why didn't your father ever try to retrieve his mother from Cuba?” He gave the box a light shake.

“Don't,” Geneva said, her hand out as if to stop his shaking. “You'll break it!”

Sergei wound the t-crank and Geneva gasped. She'd never let anyone listen to it before. She'd kept the music box's tune a secret, a coveted song from grandmother to granddaughter, for her ears only.

"Why doesn't this song sound even remotely Cuban?" Sergei asked. He shrugged and placed the box back on its honored shelf.

When Geneva made her dutiful, every Sunday morning call home, she described the box until her mother finally replied, "The one from your grandmother?"

"Is it Cuban? Daddy said it came from *his* mother?"

"No, *my* mother."

"Why would Daddy tell me that?"

"Haven't you figured it out already? Your father—" Geneva's mom hesitated, "—he lies."

Geneva chucked the box in the trash, but Sergei found it there and pulled it out.

"Don't you want to know what secrets it contains?" He asked her.

Geneva shook her head. "I only want to know what secrets it reveals."

