

A Matter of Luck

In our family, the brooch was always considered unlucky.

Edged with gold filigree lace, it had a rounded centre, enclosing a white daisy. It had supposedly belonged to our great grandmother and was featured in an old sepia-toned photo of her.

‘She died just after that,’ Aunt Lucinda said, when she came to visit. At ten years old, I found Aunt Lucinda, to be a person of great interest with her long, painted nails and her frequent changes in hair colour from fiery red to jet black.

‘She *was* eighty-five,’ Dad pointed out.

‘Still...’ My aunt rolled her eyes. ‘Goes to show.’+-

‘If the brooch is so unlucky, how come Aunt Lucinda wears it all the time?’ I asked Mum, a year later, when Aunt Lucinda sported it, on a few family occasions.

‘The thing is.’ My aunt confided, when I confronted her about it. ‘I’ve realised that the brooch might bring good or bad luck and, I think, in my case...’

She eyed herself in the hall mirror, with the brooch, glinting at her neckline. ‘It is *good* luck... *and* it looks amazing on me.’

As it turned out, Aunt Lucinda died, when I was fourteen. A nasty infection turned septic and she lasted only a few weeks after it took hold.

‘Hardly the brooch’s fault.’ Dad muttered, when we were all sipping tea and nibbling on jelly slice, after the funeral.

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Over the years, I wondered what became of the brooch. It wasn't in my aunt's things and no-one seemed to know, where it ended up.

That is why my eyes nearly popped out of my head, a decade later, when I was browsing Marketplace and a post caught my eye.

Gold filigree brooch. Domed centre enclosing delicate flower. POA.

I stared at the photo – fine, lacy setting; fragile white flower. A shiver ran through me. Was there more than one brooch like this? I suppose there had to be. Still...

I messaged.

I found the house in a back street. Narrow Victorian terrace.

Old doorbell. I heard it ring inside, then footsteps, slow, shuffling.

The door cracked open. A man peered out. Late seventies. Stooped, balding. Heavy framed glasses.

'Here about the brooch?'

I nodded and introduced myself.

'Edward Unwin,' he mumbled. 'Come in.'

That name...

I stepped forward and the smell hit me. Sweet. Some sort of flower.

We turned into a dark timbered room, an old lamp slanting light across a polished oval table.

Red satin sofa. Carved wooden chairs.

The man fiddled at a narrow cupboard. I glimpsed a tray of necklaces.

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I blinked at him. 'You're obviously a collector.'

He set a velvet bag on the table.

Slowly, he undid the bag's ties and slid out the brooch.

I leaned in, heart beating fast.

Fine, scalloped filigree, raised dome and the pale flower.

'It's beautiful.'

'Quite rare. I almost didn't put it up for sale.'

'May I?' I reached forward, my fingers outstretched.

'No!' His hand shot across the table. 'You'll break it.'

'Sorry, I...'

He glared, eyes glinting behind the heavy glasses.

'Well, do you want it or not?'

'You said price on application.'

'Five hundred dollars.' His lips set in a thin line.

'Five hundred? Why, that's...'

'Five hundred!' He glowered at me.

I gripped the table edge. 'Three hundred.'

'Ha!'

'Three fifty.'

'Pff!' He spat derision.

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I half stood. 'Thank you for your time.'

He raised a hand. 'My last offer. Four hundred.'

'Done.'

He watched as I extracted the notes.

'Your brooch.'

My hand shook slightly, as I felt the velvet bag in my hand.

The brooch was mine.

At the door, I stopped.

'You never said what your line of work was. Antiques?'

'No!'

I waited.

'Funeral Director.'

I rang Mum.

'Funeral director? What are you asking me that for? It's years since Lucinda's funeral. It was that fella on the corner. Underwood... something like that.'

'Unwin?'

'Yes, that's it.'

My heart beat fast. The funeral director had *stolen* the family brooch.

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I was blown away.

I turned to the bag and peeled back the tissue paper.

Yes, there it was. The brooch with its lacy edging, the flower, just as I remembered it.

My fingers fumbled at the back of the brooch.

The clasp sprang open.

Inside, I saw gold letters, finely etched.

I leaned in and chuckled to myself.

Lucinda Gibson

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Of course, my aunt had it engraved with her own name.

It was late afternoon when I headed to my car. I could not let Unwin get away with it. I was going to confront him.

The doorbell rang.

Again and again.

Maybe he knew I had worked him out and was lying low. Well, I was going to stay here until he came out.

A hand on my arm made me jump.

A short, curly-haired woman was at my elbow. 'Sorry to startle you. You're after Edwin?'

'Yes I am.'

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‘You don’t know then?’

‘Know...’

‘About Edwin... the accident?’

I froze, one foot on the step.

The woman rushed on.

‘It happened this afternoon. He saw off a visitor and had gone back inside. He slipped on the hall runner. You wouldn’t think a fall would cause ...’ She seemed lost for words.

‘Would cause...?’ I prompted.

‘Oh, he died.’

She blinked rapidly. ‘Broke his neck.’

Probably using the hammer was a bit of an over-reaction but after I had finished, the brooch was in tiny pieces.

I deposited the remains in a skip on a building site to make sure it was totally gone.

On the way home, I stopped and looked in a jeweller’s window. Lots of rings, necklaces, bracelets and brooches.

Lots of brooches.

Nothing like the one I had just pulverised.

For a moment, I wavered. What had I done? Really, it was probably just a terrible coincidence.

Back in the car, I shook my head.

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No, I had done the right thing.

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