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The Blessed Harmonica

by Richard Rewell

She had a bad feeling about the contents of this parcel. It was from Uncle Wilfred. She had always thought that he had believed she was a boy. Last year she got a football from him. Before that a cricket bat.

It was Christmas 1905 and Florence sat crossed legged next to her older brother looking at the tree bedecked with presents and glowing candles. Father stood at the fireplace, took out his pocket watch and nodded to Mother who said

“Now open your presents”

The children, to the amusement of their parents, grabbed the big parcels distributed around the base of the tree.

“Thank you, Santa” squealed Florence as she opened her biggest parcel, a dolls house before unwrapping all the others until Uncle Wilfred’s. Tentatively she unwrapped it.

“It’s meant to bring you luck” said Ernest, Florence’s brother as he played with a platoon of red coated lead soldiers.

“It’s a harmonica Mother” said Florence, content it was not a football.

“Saved your uncle’s life. You see darling he claims to be the only survivor of the battle of the Little Big Horn. Where Custer and the US cavalry were wiped out. Pretended he was dead apparently.”

“So the Indians didn’t scalp him” said Ernest. “Indians do that.”

“That’s enough Ernest” said Mother.

The instrument did bring Florence luck. She won a raffle five years later. A hundred guineas. In 1917 while working as a nurse in northern France, a German shell destroyed the hospital she was working in, killing all except her.

Florence led a happy life, married, had children and died peacefully in Pevensey Bay aged 101.

In her thirties she gave the harmonica to Basil her son. During the second World War he joined the RAF.

“Got shot down three times and lived to tell the tale” said his son, Florence’s grandson.

Florence’s grandson was a personable young man I happened to sit next to at the Kent cricket ground in Canterbury. I’ll never forgotten that day in 1963. Kent smashed Sussex by 200 runs.

“It’s nothing special” said the young man “but I love playing it. Got a blues band. We might go pro. Dad’s not happy though as it means I won’t be going to LSE.

“Well be careful. LSE’s a top Uni.” I said.

“Yes, may be. Well nice meeting you Richard. Better go, meeting the band. We’re doing a gig at the local art college. Want a free ticket?

“No, I’ll pay” Afterall he looked as if he needed the money.

I’ve still got the ticket and I regret not seeing the young man and his band. The Rolling Stones.