

**Sarah Pett**

## **The Box**

The box arrived—  
Crumpled cardboard,  
Raw-edged—  
Wrapped within the glossy blackness  
Of Dad's funereal car.  
Later, unpacking,  
I find a history—  
My history—  
Of mothers and grandmothers:

Overcooked recipe books—  
Tough, stringy leather around crumbling  
Pages  
Tapering towards well-thumbed  
Edges—  
Their camouflage of grease spots  
Leopard-like  
Within the corrugated cage.

The petrified wood  
Of my great-grandmother's rolling pin,  
Solid as her steel-stern face—  
A battleship floating  
Above the diaphanous sea  
Of her Victorian dress.  
She sits still above the mantelpiece  
In my Nan's seaside semi.

Each item carefully labelled  
With owner and origin immortalized  
In scratchy biro ink.  
Each domestic heirloom bearing  
The curly script of a generation  
Framed by the dusty yellow  
Of that marvellous invention,  
The post-it note  
(The survivor of technological advance,  
Its virtual descendants grace  
The screen on my mother's PC).

I peel them slowly, smoothly  
From these relics.  
Slowly, smoothly  
I reapply to the inside face of the box to make  
An inventory of items,  
A register for each cracked piece  
Of souvenir china:

The white and yellow honey-pot  
With matching spoon;  
The miniature tea pot  
(Worth mending, Nan said, it's genuine Limoges);

The milk jug from bank holidays  
At Dungeness Lighthouse;

The rusty sweet tin of icing tips,  
Individually wrapped in kitchen towel.

One by one,  
I hold these things in my hands—  
The familiar blunt fingers and shallow nails  
Of proud practicality.  
We are already comfortable  
In each other's company:  
Ready to collaborate  
In the shaping of sugar petals,  
The rising of dough,  
The rolling of crusts.

The revival of lifeless hands.  
The utensils that outlive them.