

Mei and the Blanket of Memories

Mei Cheng was ten years old when Grandmother died. Grandmother had lived in the attic in Mei's house. The attic had once been dark and dusty, but Grandmother had made it beautiful again, filling it with life and love.

Mei missed Grandmother. Now that Grandmother was gone, Mei had to brave the attic alone to clean it. As Mei trundled up the stairs, she could see Lee in the living room below, playing with his toy truck. Lee was four years old, too young to understand Grandmother's death.

Mei wandered into the attic, unsure of what she was supposed to do. Grandmother's bed sat in the corner next to her nightstand, near an armchair with a little basket of sewing supplies beneath it. Mei could almost imagine Grandmother sitting in the armchair, sewing a blanket.

Near the window was an easel. Grandmother had stacked her paintings against the wall: Mei playing in the garden, Lee on the swing, a garden bed filled with roses, a crow's nest high in the oak tree. Grandmother was an astounding painter, and Mei wanted to follow in her footsteps.

Grandmother had left her red blanket laying across the arms of her chair. Mei stared in awe at the intricate embroidery. When she looked closer, she began to see pictures: a baby in a blanket aboard a ship, a teenage girl holding a blanket, a young woman buying sewing supplies, a couple getting married, a beautiful baby in a cradle. Mei realized that the last memory was not complete: an old lady sitting in a rocking chair, sewing. The last corner was unfinished and beginning to unravel.

Mei bent her head closer to the first picture. Something was drawing her in. As she pushed her nose closer, the picture seemed to expand. Suddenly, it was the only thing she could see. The smell of brine filled her nose, and she heard shouts.

"Lower the sails!"

"Bail the deck!"

"Pull in the nets!"

"Get the women and children below deck!"

"Big wave coming! Turn toward starboard!"

No way, Mei thought. I must be dreaming.

She shook her head and pinched her arm, but the image was still clear as day. A young woman with a baby in a sling across her chest climbed down a small rope ladder below deck. A man followed her a moment later.

“Are you sure you’ll be alright, Feng?” The woman asked the man, her voice quivering.

“Of course, Ju,” Feng replied. “I’m the captain; the crew will look out for me. Besides, I can swim.”

Ju nodded, but she still looked worried. Feng climbed back up the ladder.

“Don’t worry, Meilin,” Ju said to the baby. “Everything will be fine.”

Meilin? Mei thought. *That’s Grandmother!*

Ju and her baby laid down in their berth, and Mei climbed up the ladder after Feng. She had never heard anything about Great-Grandfather, and she wanted to know more. The wind blew her hair into her face, and waves splashed her face. She struggled towards the tiller, where Great-Grandfather stood. Suddenly, a huge wave washed over the ship. Mei leaped back and darted down the ladder below deck.

She waited a few minutes for the sea to calm down, then picked herself up and climbed the ladder again. The wave had disappeared, but several crew members had gone with it, including Great-Grandfather. Mei thought she spotted someone thrashing in the waves, and the crew was frantically calling for their captain. They managed to drag a sodden body out of the water, but it was not Great-Grandfather.

“No!” Mei cried.

Grandmother had never spoken of her father because she had never known him. He had died when she was just a baby. Mei clutched the railing and stared out into the sea. Suddenly, the ship began to blur.

What is this? She wondered. *What is happening?*

The sea disappeared, along with the smell of brine. Mei found herself in a tiny bedroom filled with paintings and rich embroidery. There was an air of love and comfort, but the smell of sickness tainted it. A teenage girl knelt beside a small bed. A woman lay there, her eyes closed and her face pale.

“But what will I do while you’re gone?” The girl asked. “I’m scared!”

“Hush your squabbling, Meilin,” said the woman in a raspy voice. “You’re a strong girl.”

Meilin sighed sadly.

“Can I finish your blanket?” She asked.

“Yes, please do,” said the woman, her voice barely more than a whisper.

The woman handed the blanket to her daughter. Then her eyes closed, and she said nothing more.

“I love you, Mother,” Meilin said softly.

Then the scenery began to blur, and Mei left Grandmother once again.

The bedroom became a sitting room with an air of purpose. Mei watched as a young woman came into the room. She was holding several colorful sketches. The young woman opened the top drawer of a dusty cupboard and pulled out a blanket. Then she measured several squares around the edge of the blanket. Satisfied, she grabbed her wallet and left the room.

Mei followed her curiously. *She must be Grandmother*, Mei realized. *But what is she doing?*

The young woman walked down the street. Mei stopped among the stalls, staring at the beautiful fruits and little trinkets. *I can't lose sight of Grandmother!* She reminded herself. She hurried away from a stall selling oranges, catching up to Grandmother, who had stopped at a stall selling sewing supplies.

Mei stared at the wide array of colorful needles, threads, cloth, thimbles, buttons, beads, and pincushions. Grandmother scrutinized the brown and blue threads. She stared at them for a moment, then shook her head. Upon a closer look, Mei saw that the dye was darker in some places than others, and the ends of the threads were fraying.

“They are not of high quality,” Grandmother said disappointedly, pushing them back into place.

“Find something that you like,” the vendor snapped impatiently, looking out into the throng of people.

He was a short man with a shock of short, unevenly cut black hair, and he wore a bright green jacket.

As he turned to reorganize some spools of thread, something caught Grandmother's eye. A little basket filled with sewing supplies perched at the edge of the counter. Grandmother reached over and grabbed it, looking for a price tag. Mei peeked into the basket and gasped. It held every little sewing trinket imaginable, and they were all sparkling and shimmery. This sewing kit looked familiar. Mei thought it looked like the one Grandmother had used at home.

“I'll take this one,” Grandmother said, picking up the basket. “How about ten dollars?”

She slapped ten dollars onto the counter, not waiting for an answer. She grabbed the basket and hurried away. The vendor turned around.

“Hey!” He shouted. “Get back here!”

Mei wondered why. Perhaps that sewing kit had been meant for someone else? Or maybe Grandmother's offer was too low? She realized that her grandmother had left her behind. She hurried into the crowd, but she could not find her.

The scenery began to change again. Mei found herself inside a small church filled with hand-made decorations. The air smelled of incense and anticipation. Several people sat in the pews with their hands folded. They were wearing ornate and beautiful clothes; this was not an ordinary Sunday service. Mei realized she was watching her grandmother's wedding.

She sat down in one of the pews, but she was startled by a flash of green in the corner of her eye. *The vendor! Did he follow me here?* She wondered. *But how? I thought I was part of this blanket.* She walked toward him to investigate further, but then the people in the pews erupted in thunderous applause, and the memory ended.

The next memory unfolded in a little bedroom. A man and a woman stood at a little cradle, crooning at the baby inside. *Mother!* Mei thought. The baby began to cry, and the woman soothed it.

“Hush, Daiyu, don't cry.”

Suddenly, Mei saw movement by the window. She quietly walked over to it. A man crouched below the window. He had a green jacket and black hair.

How dare he try to intrude on this memory? She thought, outraged.

She stared at him, but he didn't seem to notice her. He was gazing at the basket of sewing supplies under a little armchair in the corner of the room. Mei realized it was the same sewing supplies she had seen at his stall.

Grandmother noticed the time on the clock. She muttered something about being late and left the room. Her husband walked over to the window, and the vendor ducked out of sight. Then, the room blurred, and the memory was over.

The next memory took place in Mei's attic.

I'm home! Mei thought.

She realized that this was the very last memory, the incomplete one. Her breath caught in her throat when she saw the vendor peering through the kitchen window, just below the attic.

Why is he here?! The words burned in Mei's head.

Suddenly, he peered up at the attic window. She tried to move in front of her grandmother, but it was too late. The vendor began to scale the downspout.

“Oh, no!” Mei gasped.

She shoved Grandmother out of the way, but Grandmother was oblivious to her surroundings. The vendor leaped through the window, a knife drawn. Grandmother let out a startled yelp.

“You took my sewing supplies!” He thundered. “I could have become rich off of those and their magical properties, but you stole them! Now you will pay!”

Mei grabbed the easel next to Grandmother’s armchair. She swung it over her head at the vendor.

A loud pop rang out through the air. The memory was shattering. Mei’s entire life flashed before her eyes. Then she hurtled through the air and smacked against the vendor. Their heads clashed violently, and the world went black.

Mei woke up in the attic a few hours later, splayed across Grandmother’s bed. Grandmother was embroidering a memory on the blanket. It depicted Mei saving Grandmother’s life. A thin smile played across Mei’s lips.

“You were so brave, Mei!” Her mother exclaimed, her voice filled with pride.

“That man has been taken to jail to await trial,” Her father reassured her. “Apparently, he was stalking your grandmother because he believed that she stole some magical sewing supplies from him. The ravings of a lunatic, if you ask me. But you stopped him!”

“Yay, Mei!” Lee exclaimed. “Yay, yay, yay, Mei!”

“Thanks, Lee,” Mei whispered, pulling her brother into a hug.

The bump on her head was sore, but she was happy that she had been able to save her grandmother. She just hoped she would never have to do anything like that again.