

Noelle Rose

The shoe box was heavy as I dragged it out from underneath the work bench in the garage. It was dusty, old and chewed by a mouse. Written on one side, faded by time, was elegantly printed "New York Shoe Emporium and Millenary, Size 9 Black Work Boots. 3 Shillings. 2 pence for shoe laces." The box was tied up with fraying string. It rattled as I picked it up. Unfortunately, a rattling shoebox was not getting any work done. I put it to one side and continued on. Hours later, sore and dirty, I carried the box upstairs. It would have to wait a little longer as I pulled cobwebs from my hair. I placed it on the kitchen table and went for a shower and clean clothes. I made myself a cup of tea and cut myself some date loaf. This was a date loaf box.

I wanted to work my way steadily through its mysterious contents savouring every little discovery. I prepared myself for a history lesson. I looked furtively around. For whatever reason, it felt inappropriate opening the box. Its weight could mean money or gold or possibly jewellery. I sat back and thought. Should I contact the previous owners of the house? Maybe it was something that they owned and forgot about? I didn't want to steal or pry into another person's life, particularly if they were still alive. Damn my morals and ethics. The box beckoned though, like freshly baked biscuits to a hungry husband. It did look like it had been there for a long time, undisturbed under the work bench, in the darkness, hiding, and waiting. The previous owners may not have even known about it. A peaked curiosity overtook any ethical dilemma and moral objection I may have had.

I researched the New York shoe Emporium where the box came from. It was a shop which was demolished when the World Trade Centre was built in lower Manhattan. They imported sturdy work boots to Australia in the early 20th century. It was then, just a shoe box repurposed as a time capsule. I undid the string. It fell apart in my hands. Taking the lid off, I inspected the lid for any hidden spaces but found nothing. I put it to one side. I drank my tea and munched my date loaf as I peered into the box. I was secretly enjoying being a voyeur.

On top of the box there was a dried rose and rosehips. It was faded, possibly red, a bunch of letters tied up with a ribbon, some Odin stones, a christening gown with a dried daisy pinned to it which was chewed in one place who also made a nest out of the tissue paper

and other flotsam in the box, and a rusted knife. I was slightly disappointed that it didn't contain jewellery or coins or something priceless that might have paid off the mortgage and given me my fifteen minutes of fame. Well at least the previous owners wouldn't be interested in this.

The dried rose and rosehips I put to one side. I had an interest in rare plants and maybe the seeds were still viable. The Christening gown was yellowing with age, it was homemade and the lace was lovingly tatted with daisies. The daisy that was pinned to the gown was incredibly fragile. The pin was rusted with age and had stained the little dress. The gown was very pretty but it missed the central bow until I realised that this was what was holding the letters together. I carefully laid the little dress down after inspecting it, undid the letters and put the ribbon with the dress. While tattered, it was still beautiful. Something to keep and possibly repair if I could find the right material. The pale blue ribbon suited the dress perfectly. I smiled.

The Odin stones were mostly polished granite from a beach somewhere long ago. They were mysterious and surprisingly warm to the touch. I put them to one side. The other odds and sods in the box were picked out placed with my sewing paraphernalia, I could reuse them in a later project. The rest of the flotsam I binned.

The knife was a rusted bowie knife. Its folding mechanism was damaged and unusable. The handle was inlaid with ivory and it was stained brown on one side. It had crude scrimshaw on it but it was worn with time and use. I could barely make out a house and a letter "D" on it. The rust was not distributed evenly across the blade. I put it aside, it made me feel ill as the knife blade was as sharp as though it was just recently sharpened. The letters were 10 in all, 9 opened but the last one was not. There were no names or addresses on the envelopes. There was no recognisable postal mark either. I opened the top letter. It was faded but written in beautiful copperplate.

Dear Daisy,

I am sorry that the war took us to the far corners of the world. I am sorry I didn't get to say goodbye. I will see you in a year.

Yours,

D.

The subsequent letters were mostly illegible, the writing too difficult to read as the stains on the letters made the ink run. The final letter before the unopened one was readable. The writing was plain, not beautifully scripted like the first. It read;

Rose,

I do not doubt your sincerity but you will not be attending the wedding. Do not show your face here again. You have no idea the pain that you have caused my family. D--- died not knowing his daughter. Take comfort in the fact that at least he died knowing he had a son.

Daisy.

I sat back after reading the last letter. I had to find out who this Rose, Daisy, son of Rose and the mysterious D- was. I trawled through the local birth, deaths and marriages records and discovered a Daisy and Richard who were married. Richard died in the war. Daisy and then her daughter, Mary, lived locally for a time until her daughter married and moved away from the area. That solved one mystery. The second mystery involved Rose and her son. The only historical records I found of a Rose in the local area was a lady of questionable moral values who had a son to an unknown father called Harry. The contents intrigued me more. There must be more to this story though. The bowie knife, the christening dress in the box, the Odin stones and the as yet unopened letter.

I started to track down these historical figures in the local papers. The jigsaw was beginning to fall into place. While Richard and Daisy's story was relatively simple, it was Rose and Harry that really peaked my interest. Rose had been arrested numerous times for her questionable morals, she disappeared for a little while and then a tiny announcement about the birth of Harry. They lived locally. Harry had no birth father mentioned. I continued to read the newspapers, until I came across one with the headline, local girl stabbed by man and left for dead near Terrors Creek. I read the article, and was horrified to learn that it was Mary that was stabbed in the stomach by Harry, she was heavily pregnant. The baby was lost. I read further into the case. Harry's father was revealed to be Richard, and a knife was used as the murder weapon but was never found.

Mary suffered through the court proceedings telling the judge that she could no longer have children and didn't realise that Harry was her half-brother. The court files indicated that they were young lovers and it was his child. Mary didn't want to marry him as he was a man of violent disposition. In discussion with her mother, she intended to give the baby up for adoption. Mary informed Harry of her decision. He couldn't bear that thought and

decided to kill her and the baby. She met him at the bank of Terrors creek where they would hunt for Odin stones and he attacked her with a knife. Harry pleaded his innocence throughout the case.

Harry was sentenced to life in prison. Mary went on to marry an older man, understanding of her condition as the local newspaper delicately put it. Rose disappeared and Daisy, nothing was said about her. The whole saga was sad and harrowing. It explained the christening dress but it didn't explain why the Bowie knife was in the box. It didn't explain the final unopened letter. The murder weapon was not found. It rang in my head. I flinched as I touched the knife.

I decided to open the letter. I just had to find out what happened to Daisy. It read;

Dear Mary,

I blame myself for your loose ways. I should have been more strict on you. You were always so headstrong and wilful. It was hard raising you without a father. Harder still raising a child who thought that she could go to college and become something more. I can no longer live with that thought of you and your half-brother. Just remember this for the rest of your life Mary, I regret nothing, the blood on the knife is what is left of me and your accursed child, may the Gods have mercy on your vile soul.

Your mother,

Daisy.

I found Daisy's grave in the local cemetery, separate from the other graves as was the way of superstition and death. I had bought with me the box and the letters. It was a sad gravestone, the words were worn down and probably meaningless anyway. I decided to burn the box and the letters and scatter their ashes over Daisy's grave. I guess it was a symbolic gesture more than anything else. I went home and broke the knife in two. I threw the blade and handle away.

I took the christening dress for the unborn child and repaired it. I placed it lovingly in the archive box. I named the child Noelle. It seemed the right thing to do. I planted the rosehips and daisy flower and marked where I planted them with the Odin stones. I then cried. I cried for the lost child, I cried for Mary, I cried for Harry. I cried for my own past. I cried until I could cry no more. I walked tear stained back to the house.

Some months later, I noticed that daisies had started to sprout from the flower I had planted and a few weeks after that, a rose started to burst forth from the seeds. The Odin stones I swore I could hear an audible hum coming from them. They always remained warm. They protected the tiny plants and over time the rose bloomed. It was a magnificent bicolour Noelia rose. I smiled and thought it was a fitting tribute.

(Peta Culverhouse)