

The Box – Mother’s Urn

By Deirdre Mason

My mother died in the Isle of Man and I went over for her funeral. She had lived there for over 40 years and in her Will she asked to be cremated and her ashes spread at a local beauty spot known as Scarlett’s Point.

After the funeral the undertaker contacted me and told me that her ashes would be delivered to my hotel the following day, and that morning I got a phone call from reception to say that someone had arrived with a box for me. I went down to the lobby and although there were several people there I had no difficulty in identifying the man from the undertakers. He was wearing a long black overcoat and a black bowler hat, and he was carrying a large box. I was a bit surprised at the size of the box as I had never actually seen an ‘urn’ or ‘ashes’ for that matter, apart from in films or TV, and I had always assumed that it would be a small item, a token in fact, of the person who had died. However the box he was carrying was big and I assumed that the urn had been well wrapped to protect it; so I wasn’t prepared for the weight and when he handed it to me I dropped it. It hit the floor with a thud, but thankfully, no sound of breaking glass.

When I got the box back to my room I opened it and was again surprised. The urn was actually a large, a very large, plastic bottle containing perhaps 3-4 litres of what I presumed were my mother’s ashes, but it could equally have been 3-4 litres of washing powder. It weighed about 2 kilos and the ashes were blindingly white. It looked like a jumbo size lemonade bottle full with Daz.

My next task was to locate Scarlett’s Point and when I saw my mother’s solicitor later that morning I reminded him of the request in her Will and told him that I planned to go there the next day and scatter her ashes as requested. He was appalled! “You can’t do that” he said. “You would need permission from the Council and that would take at least a month, if indeed they permitted you to do it at all. It’s against the law to go and scatter ashes without permission” Somewhat disconcerted I said no more. BUT, I was leaving for Australia in three days, no way was I going to write to the Council and ask for permission. I was just going to do it.

I got a map and located Scarlett’s Point and decided to go there and check it out. It was a small rocky promontory jutting out into the Irish Sea; bleak on that November day and while not a place I’d have chosen, it was nevertheless my mother’s choice and I was determined to carry out her wishes. It was obviously a popular local walk because there were several people there walking dogs and enjoying the view, so I decided to scatter Mother’s ashes when it was getting dark and there would be fewer people about.

So just on dusk, wearing a black coat, gloves and slacks, I took mother’s urn out of the box and went to Scarlett’s Point. It was quite windy and it was difficult to manage the bottle inconspicuously. The best way was to hold it upside down underneath my coat. It was heavy but I managed. The next problem was the size of the opening at the top of the bottle. It wasn’t very big and while the ashes were coming out, it was a very slow process.

The third problem was that the ashes were so very very white – luminously white in fact and even though it was windy and the wind was getting stronger I left a trail behind me which was extremely visible and in spite of being early evening and almost dark the pathway was

evidently used as a route home for the people who worked in the next village. I noticed that I was criss-crossing my trail and even though it was now almost pitch dark, those ashes lit up the ground.

I was getting some very strange looks from passers by and aware that what I was doing was illegal, I decided to call it a day. I went back to my car and checked the urn but at least half the ashes were still inside.

When I got to my car: a little black mini (The Isle of Man is a small place and the car hire people knew why I needed it and had given me one they thought suitable for the occasion) I discovered that the white ash was all over me – the wind had blown it onto my coat and being black it showed up. My slacks had turnups: big mistake!, and it showed up inside the car too!

The following day, dusted down, I took what remained of the ashes and we went for a drive. I put the box with mother's urn on the passenger seat and together we had a last trip around the Isle of Man. We went to all our favourite places (though I gave Scarlett's Point a miss) then I packed my suitcase, made room for the box and got ready for the journey.

Mother and I had a nice little stopover in Hong Kong – she had always liked it there and I took the box with me on a ferry trip around the harbour and up to The Peak for lunch with a view, and then headed for Australia and home. The trip was uneventful. I didn't declare what was inside the box and no one asked.

I actually thought it quite appropriate. My mother loved Australia and half of her is now here, still in the box, and the other half in her favourite place in the Isle of Man. She'd have been pleased.

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