

# The Red Shoebox

by Ruby

The lightbulb chain swung back and forth in a frenzy from the force she yanked it with. The small bedroom closet was an overstuffed display of brightly colored blouses, belts and skirts with shoes, and boxes with papers spilling out on top. Edie stood on tiptoe and rummaged. *"Please be there, please be there..."* she thought and her hands wrapped around a box the right size. She pulled out a dented red shoebox; it had held a pair of sandals once and now was full of photos.

She spilled them out on the bed, and past selves stared back up at her. A child shyly looking at the camera on a grandmother's knee. A young woman holding her diploma next to her beaming parents. Vacations...There it was.

It was when she was working at Shangri-La in Philadelphia. A health food restaurant that had attracted the city's hippie population and other outsiders. She held the photo up. She guessed the manager, Jill?, had taken it. She was smiling and standing next to a group of street kids that had become regulars. An Edie with a choker embroidered with daisies and a patchwork skirt had her arm thrown around a lanky dark-haired young man. You could barely make out the scars in the photo...

She was just past 18, and she guessed Pockets was too. That was the name she gave him, the name he'd gotten from the tumble of runaways he was with then. They'd hopped a train from New York City and gotten off in Philadelphia to see what the city held. Pockets wasn't the group's leader, he was too much of a long and lean lone wolf for that. Already, Edie knew she was going to be in trouble the first time she saw him. He got his name from his crazy patchwork clothes. Pockets stitched on with leather zig zags that made him look like a knight's squire in the old movies they played late at night on television.

He fished enough change out of his pockets for a carrot juice and a cashew sandwich, and left her a nice tip.

"Damn, this sure is good, Daisies," he said as he finished his meal. He called her that for the choker she wore. She hated "Edith" and didn't correct him. She liked being Daisies. Because Edith would never take a strange man home. But Daisies might.

And Daisies did, and they lost themselves in each other that spring turning into summer. He was tall and slim-hipped and danced with her in alleyways. They would sneak into movies and split a lemon poppyseed muffin from work and a beer Pockets had gotten from god knew where. And they would go to the art museum and he would look strange and sad. He would touch his scars then. Like he was remembering how he got them.

She asked him once, as he was looking at a painting, an Eakins, and his fingers went up to his scars. "How did you get those? I mean you don't have to tell me if you don't wanna."

He smiled, that sad-happy smile he had. "I got these fighting a lion."

Eddie laughed and said, "Okay." And they didn't talk about it again.

It was a hot night in July when he rested his head on her chest. Their lovemaking had been as sweet and lazy as the weather, and he told her he was going with one of his gang to Oregon, to work in a lumber camp. Eddie didn't ask if he'd be coming back. She just sighed and ran her fingers through his hair. *You can't make a wolf into a pet*, she reminded herself.

She walked with him to the bus station, they split an orange drink, and she stuffed a few cashew sandwiches into his pockets. He surprised her by looking out the window and waving goodbye as the bus drove away. She went back to her apartment and her job and the years filled in and Pockets became a figure in a photograph, yellowing at the edges.

Until he had appeared as a freshly-shaven lawyer named Jeff. She had seen him only in passing the few days he'd been in the D.A.'s office. But the nagging question of why he'd seemed so familiar had been answered, in the way of such questions, by her bolting out of bed at two in the morning and rushing for the closet.

She couldn't call Catherine at this hour. And for all she knew, Catherine wouldn't have any idea where he'd gone or that he was anything other than another yuppie trying to do some good. But she shot down that thought. Catherine knew something. Catherine knew a lot of things, Eddie was realizing. And she believed in everybody's right to mind their own business. But... but what? She wanted to know why and how Pockets had appeared out of thin air.

Had he been looking for her? She realized he didn't know her real name either. It was a mystery, and maybe one that should be let be. She looked at the photo again.

She tucked it in her purse and put the rest of the photos and the box away. She would show it to Catherine at lunch tomorrow and ask. Just ask. Just ask if she thought the person in the photo could be the same person as the man who'd been working with her the past few days. And did she have any idea how to reach him.

Eddie smiled a sad-happy smile herself. She wasn't looking to rekindle anything. She just... she just wanted to ask him how he'd been. If the redwoods were as big in real life as the pictures made them look. She turned off the lamp by the bed and went to sleep.

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