

There was once a little girl who owned a magic box. All the town would remark what a pretty little box the pretty little girl would carry with her wherever she went. Nobody among the townsfolk knew where the little box had come from, for she had no immediate family that were known to be generous enough or of enough means to afford such a proud artifact.

The little girl would go merrily on her way with the little box, dancing down the street in her own little way, and those that watched her felt a warmth of the heart that only such a sight can grant. All felt a bond with the young maiden and could see their own youth in her joyful exploit.

Each morning she could be found bounding down the paving stones with gay glee and such infectious charm that even those reluctant to have stirred felt a pleasure from the cold mornings of the alpine town that no bitter chill could damp. She sung soft notes on her way, and each heard the noise of their youth in her steps.

She would merrily skip to the square among the bright flowers in unique arrangement, and when she would find a bud that had lost its way and tumbled to the floor, she would without a second thought retrieve it and place it within her box. None of the townspeople knew of what became of these buds, but on seeing her every day they had to assume that the box could not hold every bud, yet there was never a hint of lost space within as one by one she collected each and laid it gently inside.

Next she would be seen skipping to the riverside, to the riverside, where could be found all manner of life in bloom, far from the order of the square's arrangement, each with a life and pattern of their own in patches across the dampened ground. Though granted her privacy to be as youth should be, she was observed by chance encounter wandering these banks, and placing within her box the smoothest stones of the riverbed washed ashore.

She would collect them, examine each with a unique care as if pondering unseen features, then with a smile and nod as if to affirm them deposit each within her little wooden box. The box was scarcely larger than a case of fine biscuit, and those who saw the unusual ritual after seeing her at the buds of flowers had oft to wonder how such a small box could fit so much. Yet fit it did, and with no sign of strain she would once fill was had of the scene gather her things and make on her way.

On leaving waters edge she made her way down towards the woodland on the outskirts of the town, where to most she disappeared, even those unscrupulous enough to attempt follow. Indeed of all those who saw the next steps she made, only those who had no intention were able, where they would see the young girl walk with tender care over fallen branches, enveloped by a bushwork as defensive of her as she was in return.

Those who did see her movements saw her weave between untouched ground, deep in meditation until she would lean, retrieving each time a pinecone, the largest ones to sight which she would gently brush within her hands and admire, giving thanks with her eyes it seemed to those who saw for the offering of the forest. Then this would be deposited within

the box, and though the box was of some size it appeared too short to close on any, yet always did.

The girl could be seen after a while of these travels making a path towards the exit to the marshes, yet those who attempted chase soon found too many trees for such a small forest. Though some still pushed forwards, the undergrowth would never allow for their passage to the girl on her way.

She came to a marshy land of the muck and grime that gave cradle to early life yet those civilized townspeople would never dare venture to. She wandered this swamp as of native to its husk and mess, giving no sense of repugnance to its odours. Those who saw her here were themselves the outsiders to a world that did not accept them, and forged a new path among the edges of tolerance. They did not however see the young girl as one of their own.

They watched with for some fascination, others a deep displeasure as she roamed their realm as a walker of all worlds, and took in its splendor as if it were her own home. She would reach for those lily pads that's blooms had fallen foul to nature's blight, and from their sinking remains salvage the striking plumage, a purple against the musk, and somehow find space for it within her little box so sure of overflowing yet giving no signs of doing so.

They would hone in on the little girl, but it was clear to even them that she knew of their presence, and have it as much regard as could be expected. She made her way onwards in no care of their spiteful gaze, and soon though they lurked just throws from her she eclipsed the distance as if protected by an unseen hand up the exposed alpine rock towards the mountainous realms few others would tread. Try as they might the beings of this swamp could not follow her.

She would at last make it to the very top of one such peak, and there she would with her rock, flowers and seed find herself in search of the toughest stone, the once that countered the smoothness of the river with its course and almost fiery arches and ridges. On settling on a victor, she would as with all her other trinkets place it within her little wooden box. Then she would disappear over the peak. Though few would venture so far, the one who did and saw her spoke of reaching the peak to see of where she ventured next.

What he saw was a nothing, an absence of girl and box to the mist. And thus she would vanish from a world forever, until seen the next day, skipping merrily, clutching her little box.

For generations the townspeople saw this young girl's pilgrimage. So ingrained in life and yet background to their changing world was she, that only the most observant noted the same girl made this passage as their youth, not a daughter or successor. The little girl with her little box would only change in clothes over time, adding to her hidden nature among the growing crowds of a larger town.

As a town became a city, and the landscape itself that she traversed became compacted by a developing world, the little girl began to act, strange. She would be seen bounding in merry skip down the streets, avoiding carriages and in time engines and wheels. She would bound

between strangers who felt no shared warmth or ownership of their realm, and saw no ancient boundary between the rivers and trees, the swamps and hills, for each in turn became consumed.

She would reach a square now long since devoid of flourishment, and her demeanor would shift. Youthful features that once spoke of the joy of rescuing a long serving bud for safe passage met the grime of a sewer, the endless cobble with no gap for life, and the clinical ground that lest it burst forth a new cradle of flowers be trampled or ejected with no warning. No buds remained, and her face would shift a pale darker. Then she would turn and skip on her way.

The river ran still within a green space that allowed for life. However though flowers had been brought here by man's artifice, she paid no heed to buds. Crouching at the water's side, she reached for rocks, and came up with the horrors and detritus that innovation brought the meditative world. More waste, more clutter, more cans and litter, and any rock between them tainted by their presence. None were suitable, and again the face would darken, an alien expression to the carefree of youth. Then she would gather herself, reclaim the box and move upon her way.

The trees, were gone. Bricks stole their land and tore them down with no respect for coexisting, and leaving in their wake the 'luster twigs of infant offerings to the mighty green. She gazed at a sky not meant to be seen, and a floor not in offering of so much as a seed, with not a pinecone in sight. The eyes darkened and within them a flame, but she straightened her view, put foot forward and skipped on her way.

Streets running insanitary left little hope for those first three crucial needs, but she ventured on it seemed in surity that ahead lay swamp, if for nothing else than all else had fallen to man's swamp, so what improvement could be made in his sickened eyes. Before her lay an answer, a lack of natural smell, a sprawl of order in ornate structure crossing and joining at what had lain beyond their grasp, which now in mockery they made the jewel in their world.

This land writhed with no life, but with suited shadows who paid no heed to the little girl, in what glance she got a sense that they alone belonged here, in a space she knew they had no right to stand. The floor lay hard and ornate stone, with even more unnecessary structure defying what should have stayed untouchable. A tear strikes the floor, but it is not sorrow that darkens that face anew. Hope is gone now, for she knows what cruel penta they have constructed for her. Such rock can only have come from one source.

The hill was devastated, carved like a leg of beast, dug out like a worm in fruit and as selfishly exposed and damaged. Man stole her mighty peak and left her to look upon a wasteland, and one they still carved before her. The face turned to a shadow, more literal than those of the swamp. For above all, she knew that any who would follow her, as all could now, would be led to the source of her box, and her sacred duty. She had to betray her life to protect any hope for this renewal, and there was but one thing she could do.

She made not over the hill, that gateway too precious to expose, and walked instead across the strip mine, across the burden of arrogant bureaucracy, across the empty forest, past the ruins of tranquility and made it to the square, devoid of the buds of life that held such promise. The tears now stood of regret, for she knew men walked elsewhere upon this world, and they would have to save these lands themselves if they were to reclaim the natural order she gave her life to maintain.

Not a soul looked upon her as she stood clutching her box, eyes set in darkness. The box that she threw to the ground made a crackle as ornate beautiful wood splintered. Around her, the men died. Hundreds of the corrupt she considered as beautiful a part of their shared land as buds and cones were torn to bone, collapsed and splintered upon the floor with her box. Their monuments to decadence dusted and aged a millennia as their bones turned to dust. An eon could have passed, but it only took a blink for their erasure, leaving only damaged land.

She walked away and faded, sobbing gently. This was all she could do, and hope that when man anew discovered her homeland, that they would renew, not reconquer it. Would all the men of Earth be like they, and drain the generosity of nature dry. She could not be sure, but as she faded to dust, carried on the wind, she had done all she could. The rest was up to them, with one last chance at redemption.

For many moons the ancient city has lain abandoned, undiscovered. Should man discover it before ready to restore it, they are doomed to make the same mistakes again. But man does not have forever, for though the ritual the little girl performed was of power beyond imagination, each passing year seeds it fade a little more. The elements she combined brought life to the world, but if none find and take on her immense task, life will vanish from the world for good.

At the heart of the ruins, and immaculate wooden box sits. Unsplintered and renewed, it waits to see the choice that man will make.