

# The Pretty Box

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This poem only available on Lush Stories . If you are reading it elsewhere, it has been stolen. I hold in my hands a pretty box. This smooth, clean, white paper With the silver flecks, Like shining tears of joy, Glistens in the sunlight As I offer it to you. I tied this red ribbon myself. It was the best that I could buy, And I shaped the bow So that just one tug will open the knot And send the ribbon sliding to the floor. I hold out the pretty box in my open hands, Balancing it on my palms As I gaze into your eyes Over the white and silver landscape With the red ribbon sun Waiting for your fingers to grasp it. You gaze back into my eyes, And look at my pretty box With the shining white paper And the red ribbon bow. You look at it from angles And above And below. You pull me to the mirror And scrutinise its reflection. And still, I hold out the pretty box. My arms are growing tired, And I begin to fear you do not like my pretty box. Is it too white? Does the glitter look too cheap? Is the ribbon too red? Did I tie it too fat? And then you take the pretty box from my hands, Turn it over in your own, large, meaty hands, Sneer a laugh, And drop it, Catching it with the steel toe of your boot And you send it soaring, High into the bright sunlight, A glittering white-breasted bird, With wings of scarlet, A flight of crimson sunset In the noon-day glare. I run to catch my pretty box, For it is all I have. And I hear garlands of your scornful laughter Wend their rushing way behind me, Playing tag with my ears And pulling me backwards Even as I run for the descending bird. And my fat little legs are too late. I see my pretty white shining box With the red ribbon bow Splatt and turn cartwheel corners Into the estuary mud, The receding waves not even deigning to give it a sorrowful glance. I drop knee-deep into the sulphuric mud, Crying for the mess that is my pretty box. I look back, but you have gone. Your words slam me with airless grace, Shadowed whispers in the glaring sun. And I cannot clean my pretty box or Plump the bedraggled bow, Now stained and torn and covered in stinking filth. My box was so pretty, And I was almost proud to hand it to you. And you drop-kicked the only gift I had to offer you Into the estuary slime. The turning tides are all I have left, And all they will do is smear the slime Into the fibres. Who will want my once-pretty box with the bedraggled bow now? Not even I can bear to look at it. I want to open it, And see what precious gift it was That I held out to you so trustingly, But I fear what I shall find. Will the river mud have filled it? Was it white glass with silver flecks, So pretty

and shining, Now broken into tears of pain? Was it deep red velvet, So rich and luxurious, Now torn into shreds of fear? Or was it a box of Nothing, A whisp of Something that fell out In drop-kicked flight of a hunted bird? Who would dare to open this slime-covered box now? "Not I, not I, not I," the bird calls. "Not you, not you, not you," the box seeps. And kneeling here in the sulphurous mud, With the shadow of joy Intersecting my own hunched form, I have to hide my ugly box In case the eyes of a new delight Try to look past the ugly outside, And find nothing inside But empty, stinking space. Scornful disappointment is the future That this drop-kicked box predicts. I wish that he would take my hand And help me up, And pull me away from this misery shore, Whispering into my ear that I never needed a pretty box With shining white paper And a red ribbon bow At all. This poem only available on Lush Stories . If you are reading it elsewhere, it has been stolen.