

The Tale of the Round Box on a Square Table

By Casey Robert Swanson

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The Round Box sat on a square table. No-one knew why it was there; it just was. The round box just looked like it belonged on the square table.

The Round Box had sat on the square table for a long time. People walked by the table all the time, they even sat at the table, but the box remained undisturbed.

Nobody knew who had put the box on the table, not that it mattered anymore, because the person who had put the Round Box on the square table had forgotten about the box a long time ago.

Day passed, and night-time went its way, and the Round Box sat contently on the square table. Waiting, just waiting, for somebody to pick it up, but nobody did.

And the Round Box began to worry, as boxes have been known to do, about why nobody had picked it up, or lifted its oversized lid to see what was inside. But the people just walked by, ignoring the Round Box on the square table.

The Round Box wanted to cry out, "Please will somebody pick me up and look inside me." But nobody heard, because as everybody knows, people can't hear what a box is saying.

The square table was used all of the time. People sat around the table talking, with their books piled high around the box. But nobody picked up the box, and nobody looked inside to see what lay inside the box.

And the Round Box thought to itself, "Am I not a pretty box, blue as the sky through the windows."

“And,” the box continued, “Don’t I have a magnificent green lid, though slightly oversized, as green as the trees under the sky.”

“Am I not large, big enough to carry anything the people might want to put into me.”

But the people still ignored the Round Box on the square table, and the box felt lonely. And the box would have cried if it was possible for a box to cry.

More days passed and still the Round Box sat on the square table. And though people continued to gather around the table upon which the box lay, they refused to pick it up, to look inside of the lonely, lonely box.

The sky outside of the window that the box looked through turned gray. And the ground became covered with snow.

The Round Box felt cold and wet, like it had never felt before. And the box was sad. “Will nobody ever pick me up, such a pretty box am I.” And still nobody picked up the box, and fewer people gathered by the square table every day.

It remained this way for several more days, until, one day, a little boy, walking with his mother and father, saw the pretty Round Box sitting on the square table and he picked it up.

“Mommy, Daddy,” the little boy yelled in delight, “A box for the present to my sister. It’s perfect.” And the little boy held the Round Box close to himself and hugged it. And the Round Box was very happy.

“Is there anything in the box?”, the little boy’s father asked him.

And the little boy carefully put the Round Box on the square table, lifted its oversized lid, and, as nobody had done before, he peeked inside of the box.

“It’s empty!” the little boy joyfully called out, once again picking up the box, after setting the oversized lid carefully back in its place.

For the Round Box was indeed empty, as everybody who had seen it sitting on the square table had known. And this is why nobody had bothered to pick up the lid and look inside. After all, who would leave a Round Box on a square table if there was something inside of the box.

The little boy carried the box home. There he filled it with his love and presents for his sister. And the Round Box, which had sat for a very long time on the square table was no longer empty. And the Round Box was very happy.

Finally the little boy put the round box under a tree, a tree like the box had seen through the window. There the Round Box joined other pretty boxes.

And if a box could smile, and maybe they can, this box would have the biggest smile in the world.

About the story

This story is based in part on a true incident. It was approaching Christmas in 1976, and I stopped by the cafeteria under the Undergraduate Library at the University of Washington in Seattle for a bite to eat.

When I sat down to eat and write, (I always carried my notepad with me) I saw a box sitting on a table, all by itself (the colors have been changed to protect the innocent).

I sat there several hours, and many stopped briefly at the boxes table but it lay undisturbed.

Until a little boy with his mother picked it up and walked away with it.

That inspired this story which I wrote at the time for my nephew Elliot.