

Music Box

by Marcy Dermansky

It was so pretty, the music box. It looked like a present that had not yet been opened: a big pink bow on top, sides covered in wrapping paper patterned with delicate daisies, a pretty silver butterfly pendant attached to the bow. Katie loved butterflies. Katie loved daisies. Mainly, Katie loved presents.

Gillian had gotten so many presents for her birthday. So many that she had grown bored opening them, stopped unwrapping her pile of gifts to eat a second piece of birthday cake.

Katie had not known she was going to steal it. She had recently promised Gillian's mother that she wouldn't steal one more thing from her best friend's room. She had not only promised, she had signed a written contract. It was binding, that's what Gillian's mother had said, a word Katie had never heard before. It had never come up on vocabulary tests. Katie had to look it up in the dictionary. If she broke this contract, Katie would not be welcome back. Katie understood this. She did. In the past three months, she had stolen from Gillian's room: a stuffed kangaroo, two Swiss chocolate almond candy bars, a five dollar bill, and a red mini iPod.

Still, Katie had to have the music box. She tucked it under her arm, like she had learned playing touch football with her older brother, and she ran. She ran past Gillian's mother who screamed her name, cried, "Don't you do it, Katie, don't you do it." Past Gillian, who was mid-sentence, mouth full, asking Katie if she wanted another piece of cake. Katie was out the door before she knew what she had done. She had forsaken that second slice of birthday cake, which was delicious, real butter cream roses on top, moist chocolate filling.

Katie was already down the block.

She could run fast. She was the fastest.

She would no longer be friends with Gillian. Miss-I-Have-Straight-Hair-And-Yours-Is-Curly-And-Tangled. The girl who always got better presents. Even when it wasn't her birthday, because her parents were forever buying her nice things, all the time.

"Ha," Katie said.

She would no longer be friends with Gillian.

It was such a relief.

Katie stopped running and looked at her new music box. It was stupid. It was dumb. It was a present that had nothing in it. It was a stupid, empty box. Katie held the music box in front of her, took a deep breath and she kicked it, as if it was her brother's Nerf football, hard, towards an imaginary goal. Touchdown. Hooray. Katie watched the music box sail high into the air and drop back down into the street. She watched as the UPS truck turned the corner and crushed it beneath its heavy wheels.

