

A music box ~~appears with~~ shows up in the mail.

You find it wedged in your letterbox. It's not packaged and it's not addressed. There's no letter. There's nothing attached to it ~~with your name or address to say~~ suggest it was posted-. You don't know who sent it, what you're meant to do with it, or if it was even intended for you.

You ~~decide you don't want to~~ throw it away. ~~If it belongs to someone, the owner may~~ Someone might come looking for it. Or maybe it really is for you and you'll find out its purpose in time. Whatever the case, you can't think of a reason to throw it away.

You take the box inside with the bills. You toss the envelopes on the kitchen table, where they lay disregarded while you sit down to inspect the box. ~~You find no messages or inscriptions when you turn it over in your hands.~~ Turning it over carefully in your hands, you re-examine it for any messages or inscriptions you may have overlooked at first. You find nothing.

The box is ~~both~~ simple, ~~and~~ but exquisite. Its construction is not sophisticated, but ~~elaborate~~ intricate symbols are carved around the border of the ~~deep brown~~ mahogany lid, reminiscent of characters in an archaic language. Apart from these ~~carvings~~ etchings, the box is unmarked.

Fixed into ~~the bottom of the box~~ its underside is a golden wind-up key. You ~~turn~~ wist it with anticipation, eager to discover how this box will transform its physical beauty into sound.

~~You wind the key of the box, then put it back on top of the table.~~ After winding the key you turn the box back over and place it on the tabletop. Your heartbeat accelerates and, though your excitement is rising as fast as your pulse, you move slowly and carefully as if approaching a wild animal. You're afraid of startling it. In your hands is something extraordinary and you cannot risk ~~not having~~ losing this opportunity ~~again~~.

~~Gently, you brush your fingertips softly against the sides of the beautiful lid.~~ Your fingertips brush gently against the sides of the lid. They linger for a moment before you push it upwards.

But it doesn't move.

You frown. You try again. The lid doesn't budge.

You become ~~furiously~~, unreasonably angry. After another ~~horrible~~ distressing minute or so trying to force the lid open without success, you stand up furiously, taking no notice of the chair that clatters to the floor behind you. You stamp over to the cutlery drawer to get a knife. ~~and w~~ When you return to the table you try to shove the blade into the crevice where the lid meets the body of the box.

The box doesn't like this.

You don't know how you know. You don't acknowledge ~~how absurd it is that you do know~~ the absurdity of knowing. ~~It doesn't matter to you that boxes don't have feelings. This music box does not like being prodded with knives.~~ You set the knife down and pick up the box gently, apologetically. You regret being so forceful. The box has done you no harm, and it will play for you when it is ready.

After a moment of staring at it longingly, you shake the stars out of your eyes. It's just a box. It has no thoughts or feelings. You decide to put it away, now regarding it with nothing more than a pleasant curiosity.

You walk into the living room with the box cradled in your hands and set it softly on the ~~shelf above the fireplace~~ mantelpiece. A photograph of your parents is in the way. You knock it to the floor. You admire the box for half a minute before leaving the room and all thoughts of the box behind.

To your ~~clandestine~~ secret pleasure, no-one comes looking for it. It stays where you put it weeks ago: on the ~~shelf above the fireplace~~ mantelpiece in the living room. The photograph of your parents, now returned to ~~the shelf~~ its place, is squeezed in behind the box.

You forget about the music box completely.

For a little while.

It starts with small things: lights being on when you thought you had turned them off, doors being open when you thought you had closed them, chairs being out when they should have been pushed in. ~~You even start hearing things dropping on the floor out in the kitchen when you're sure your cat is outside.~~ Things that are easily be brushed off with ignorance. After all, you hadn't witnessed any of these things happening of their own accord. so why should you suspect they did?-

Strange, but not malign. Annoying, but not disturbing.

~~Even though these things happen more often than they would have had they been caused by your forgetful self, you don't think of them being that far out of the ordinary.~~ No second thoughts are given.

Over time, so slowly it's hardly noticeable, a feeling that you are not alone in your house begins to develop. It's fleeting, and only seems to manifest when your house is dead silent.