

The Present Thief by William Langridge (secondary school age group winner)

Snow was falling outside as I sat by the fire and looked out the window at the dark. The stockings had been hung up, and all of presents were piled up in a small heap in the corner. Money was tight this year due to lockdown. Alfie came bounding into the room, toy cars in his hands and making engine impressions. I heard Caroline successfully shooting her older brother Tom with a Nerf gun, who was looking at his phone, presumably researching more obscure dinosaurs.

Time grew on, and all the children went to bed. I did all I needed to do and went to sleep myself. I woke up to Alfie screaming. Wearily, I half stumbled down the stairs and into the living room, and to my horror, every single present was gone. At Alfie's feet there was an empty Christmas decorations box. A mess of strips of coloured paper was covering the floor. It looked like he had been making paper chains.

"Where are all the presents Alfie?" I asked him. He stuttered a bit before finally shouting, "Caroline, she must have stealed them!" I took it with a grain of salt and went to check it wasn't Caroline.

"But Mum, I have no clue," she stated, "I swear it was Tom who was sneaking about the house last night." This sounded possible. I went in her room and checked all the nooks and crannies, just in case, but no presents were to be found.

Next I went to see if it was Tom. He was standing by the back door, his nose and cheeks were bright red and his hands freezing cold.

"Did you steal the presents?" I asked him.

"Come," he replied, taking my hand and pulling me towards the door to the garden, "Grab a coat."

The glistening, white snow was at least an inch thick and coated the ground. He led me to the solitary pine tree at the back of the garden. He picked something up and pressed a button. The tree burst into colourful life as I realised what he had done – he had found us a Christmas tree! Tinsel and fairy lights were wrapped around it and baubles made rainbow stripes. Paper chains were draped across the

branches and at the base of the tree were the presents, arranged in a ring around the trunk.

I went back inside to get Alfie and Caroline to come so that we could share out the presents. I grabbed some chairs from the kitchen, and out we went, all wrapped up in our warm coats. I put the chairs around the tree and Tom handed us all a present each. We really enjoyed that Christmas, even if it was not like any other, because Christmas is all about kindness and happiness, not just the presents.