
The Strange Case

of

The Christmas Mystery?

A Fantasy

Written by

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THE SLEEPER

Allan Hunter ran from his home early on Christmas morning. The weather was seasonal with a chill in the air, clouds overhead and snow on the ground from two falls earlier. The ten year old sneaked downstairs to get an early view of the presents he was expecting. It was exciting to see a pile of mystery packages all colorfully wrapped under the brightly decorated, tree waiting for each of their contents to be revealed. He knew what he wanted and THE STRANGE CASE of THE CHRISTMAS MYSTERY depending on the size of the gift under the wrapping, Allan THE STRANGE CASE of THE CHRISTMAS MYSTERY could tell if Santa would be generous that year.

But that year the presents were at a bare minimum. There was only one present each for his father, mother, younger brother, and himself. For a moment Allan's heart went into his throat as he approached the wrapped package with his name on the tag. It wasn't very big and basically square in shape. When he picked it up it was very light. He assumed it contained a sweater or THE STRANGE CASE of THE CHRISTMAS MYSTERY shirt. Too large for socks and too small to fit a racing bike he'd been hinting about since his tenth birthday almost a year ago. He thought it would be less dangerous than a Red Ryder BB rifle, similar to the model at the forefront of the classic Christmas movie, *A Christmas Story*.

Naturally no explanations would satisfy Allan's disappointment. He could have slept another couple of hours, but then he'd have to face his parents, which would have made it difficult for

his get-a-way. It didn't affect him that his dad had lost his job as a wholesale costume jewelry salesman.

"Dad would get another job," he thought. "Everything would be as normal as before."

But Allan's father was having THE STRANGE CASE of THE CHRISTMAS MYSTERY difficulty finding employment. His mother was making her own handmade jewelry and selling some at swap meets. While his dad THE STRANGE CASE of THE CHRISTMAS MYSTERY was looking for work, he would promote his wife's efforts.

Allan felt his own responsibilities were going to school and doing his chores around the house. For this he THE STRANGE CASE of THE CHRISTMAS MYSTERY was rewarded a modest allowance to go to the movies and buy whatever goodies he might consume without considering sugar or fat content. Sometimes Allan had to save enough for lunch money at school. He felt it was his parents' responsibility to feed he and his younger brother, clothe them, THE STRANGE CASE of THE CHRISTMAS MYSTERY throw birthday parties and provide good cheer and presents for the holidays. Allan hadn't realized, at that time, the problems his parents were facing. THE STRANGE CASE of THE CHRISTMAS MYSTERY He knew it wasn't going to be a bountiful Christmas that year and he wasn't going to get his bike. He'll show them. He'll run away.

It was going THE STRANGE CASE of THE CHRISTMAS MYSTERY on 7 o'clock when the ten year old dashed out of the house bundled for the frigid morning air. Fortunately no one had gotten up yet. He thought his parents wanted to sleep late rather than explain why each of them would only receive one gift that year. Seeing the few treasures lying in a small pile under the medium sized, yet colorful, plastic tree made Allan think of the fictional elves that worked for Santa to limit his gifts for those on the naughty list. THE STRANGE CASE of THE CHRISTMAS MYSTERY He didn't think he was very naughty save for not taking out the garbage on few occasions or making his bed. Allan was only a kid. Santa, aside, Allan's parents and younger brother only had one gift each. Was there a lesson to be learned?

The brisk morning air of his rustic suburban neighborhood felt like a gentle slap beneath Allan's partially scarf covered, face. He'd run to the vacant cabin and stay well hidden where no one could find him. He'd show his parents he wouldn't put up with getting one present this year. Allan would think of Jack Frost nipping at his nose from *The Christmas Song*. Tears began to flow, as he felt sorry for himself. His usual Christmas bounty of presents would not complete the major holiday he waited all year for, short of his birthday, of course. What would he tell his friends? What special gift could he boast about when comparing what they received? THE STRANGE CASE of THE CHRISTMAS MYSTERY

Allan seemed to walk aimlessly into the wooded area down the street trying to walk off his depression when he saw three of his friends and classmates up ahead. Why would they THE STRANGE CASE of THE CHRISTMAS MYSTERY be out so early? How could he hide from everyone?

Roger was larger than the others and always boasting about getting a bigger allowance than the rest. Pinky was slender and kind of a nerd who wore glasses and usually got As and Bs on

his school work. Nina was bright, athletic, and mischievous. She liked playing with boys more than girls. All were dressed in appropriate winter garb.

“Hey! What are you guys doing out so early?” Allan opened.

“I called you last night and left a message that we were going to meet early this morning,” answered Nina.

“We were at my cousins for a Christmas Eve party,” he replied curiously. “My parents won’t let me have my cell phone when I’m home or with them. My bill was over the allotted minutes. Why?”

“We decided to get out before our parents woke up and talk about the presents we hope we’ll get,” stated Roger. “I hate waiting around until they wake up and then make breakfast before we can open them.”

“We got in kinda late and were told to go to bed so Santa could deliver his presents,” Allan THE STRANGE CASE of THE CHRISTMAS MYSTERY explained. “You know. They don’t want us to see them placing the gifts under the tree.”

“You mean your parents still expect you to believe in Santa Claus?” poked Pinky.

“What are ya gonna THE STRANGE CASE of THE CHRISTMAS MYSTERY do?” commented Roger. “It’s traditional.”

“I don’t think that’s the reason,” Allan added. “They want Santa to take the blame that we’re not getting much this year.”

“How do you know that?” Nina asked.
THE STRANGE CASE of THE CHRISTMAS MYSTERY

“There’s only four presents under our tree,” Allan answered in a THE STRANGE CASE of THE CHRISTMAS MYSTERY forlorn tone.

“There’s plenty under ours,” boasted Roger. “I counted at least six with my name on them. I just hope I THE STRANGE CASE of THE CHRISTMAS MYSTERY don’t get another sweater.”

“It’s not supposed to be the gift that counts,” added Nina. “but the thought behind it.”

The three stared at THE STRANGE CASE of THE CHRISTMAS MYSTERY Nina for a moment then shook their heads in disagreement. “Uh uhh,” they THE STRANGE CASE of THE CHRISTMAS MYSTERY responded.

“That’s adult thinking,” exclaimed Roger. “If I get THE STRANGE CASE of THE CHRISTMAS MYSTERY another sweater you can bet there wasn’t much thought behind that.”

Pinky looked at his watch. “This was a pretty nice gift from my folks last year.”

“And practical,” Nina commented further. “There’s no excuse for you being late when going somewhere.”

“I’d settle for that,” Allan responded.

“Maybe your folks can’t afford a big Christmas this year,” stated Nina. “What did you all get your parents for Christmas?”

At first there was silence all around. Then Allan spoke.

“What do they need presents from us for?” asked Allan. THE STRANGE CASE of THE CHRISTMAS MYSTERY “They’re our parents. They know we don’t have any money.”

“A gift doesn’t have to be bought,” responded Nina. “It could be made or be a gesture of good will like doing extra chores.”

“What kind of present is that?” asked Allan.

“I’ll bet one your parents would like,” answered Nina.

Allan shrugged his shoulders,

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