

Ronald and Rose and the birthday surprise

By Amy N. Illustrated by Jacinta S.

done? Good. Ronald, you and Rose can clear the table. I'll come in later to load the dishwasher." Ronald exchanged a glance with Rose at this unusual request.

"Yes, Mom," they replied together.

"Let's go outside," Mom said to the guests, ushering them out. Ten minutes later, after the table had been cleared, it was present-opening time. The twins received many nice presents, and Rose discovered that Mr. Jameson's present was a tool kit. It was a small one, comprised of only a hammer, a few screwdrivers, a wrench, and a tape measure.

Her big surprise was when she found out that Ronald had gotten her present (a recipe book; Rose liked cooking) at Mr. Jameson's. And Mr. Jameson had given Ronald a tool kit, too!

When all the presents were gone, Ronald couldn't help but remember that Mom and Dad hadn't given them any presents. He didn't have much time to wonder, however, before Mom made an announcement.

"Attention, Ladies and Gentlemen," she said in an

over-exaggeration of an announcer's voice. "I thought that it might be too boring," - she paused and winked at Dad - "if we just gave our present to Ronald and Rose. So, we decided to make a mystery of it." She went on to explain that the twins were not going to be told what the present was, but they had to find out which of their friends had 'stolen' it, and where he or she hid it. "You get one clue," she added. When several moments had gone by and she had not said anything, Rose said:

"A clue?"

"Yes," Mom said, "this is where your present *used* to be." She pointed to a table.

Rose and Ronald surveyed the small table that Mom had pointed out. The only things that indicated anything had ever been there were a long strand of curled ribbon and a note. Mom gave each of the twins a pad of paper and a pencil. Rose looked at Ronald.

"The first thing that comes to my mind," she told him, "is that the clue must be pretty small." She gestured to the table, which was a bit flimsy. It came from the storeroom, and had only been able to hold

folded bedsheets. She picked up the note. It said:

"A friend took your present, and it's up to you to find out who.

Little is known about the theft, but I left a clue for you.

I wrote this note with some advice, so here it is right now: Catch the thief and your gift, before they Escape to the moon somehow."

"That's funny," she added, "Mom's usually so good at making up rhymes. This is definitely not one of her best."

"Let's take a look at the ribbon," Ronald said, after studying it for a bit. "I can't make heads or tails of the note." He looked up. Mom and Dad were nowhere to be seen, and all of their friends were standing by trees. Each tree had a sign on it, with an address. Rose saw it, too. They paid no attention and bent their heads together to examine the ribbon.

"This end is a bit frayed."

"Here's a small rip in it."

"What kind of ribbon do you think it is?"

"It's not the smooth plastic kind; it's got ridges." They wrote down all of these