

The Christmas Mystery

by Rob Keeley

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Mia woke up. She felt happy, and for a moment she didn't know why. Then she remembered.

Christmas Day!

She sprang out of bed. Ever since she was little, Mia had always been the first one up on Christmas morning. And even though she was a bit older now, she still didn't like to disappoint. She knew Mum wouldn't be awake yet. Or Erica, her big sister.

What about Dad...?

She looked at the end of her bed. There were wrapped presents there, waiting for her. But it was the object on top of the pile that made her look twice.

A small, cuddly toy penguin sat there, smiling at her. And underneath his flipper was a square, white envelope marked *Mia*.

She opened the envelope and took out a Christmas card, with a picture of Santa delivering toys. Inside the card was a message, in Dad's large, messy handwriting.

Good morning, detective! And a Happy Christmas to you. How about a few clues, to start the day? A priceless reward awaits...

Mia didn't know whether to laugh or groan. That was Dad, all over. Ever since they'd solved the mystery of the china post box that autumn, Dad had been keen for them to find another case. And he was always in the mood for puzzles and games on Christmas Day.

Mia read on.

First, look around you. Then – discover the true meaning of Christmas...

Mia pulled her dressing gown on. She took a look around her bedroom.

If there was another clue hidden here, there weren't many places it could be. The chair alongside her bed. Her little desk, facing the window...

She went to the desk. There was some leftover wrapping paper from her Christmas gifts for the family... the holiday homework she would get around to doing, eventually... pens and pencils... drawing paper... an illustrated dictionary...

The dictionary!

She grabbed it and flicked through the C section until she found "Christmas".

Inside the dictionary at that page was another envelope. She ripped it open and found a second Christmas card.

Well done, detective! Now, time to go deeper. Why not ask one of Santa's friends? Oh deer oh deer oh deer.

Mia grinned. She wasn't fooled by that one, or the spelling. She knew exactly where to look.

She made her way quietly downstairs. It was still dark outside, and the curtains were drawn, but the Christmas lights were on in the hall. So was the reindeer at the bottom of the stairs.

Dad had bought the illuminated reindeer the year before. It stood five feet tall, wore a stripy scarf, and had lights inside it which lit up the whole staircase. It held an illuminated sign

which said: *I've been good, Santa. Honestly.*

Between its antlers was another envelope. Mia grabbed it and removed the card.

Oh, nice one! You're nearly at the end of the Christmas trail now. And I can see you're no turkey. Now, watch, listen and learn. Where's the clue? Give it some welly.

Mia looked around the hall. Dad's green wellington boots stood at the base of the coat-rack. She picked one up and shook it. Then the other. Nothing.

Where were her own wellies? She had worn them for school at the start of December, when it snowed, but since the thaw...

She opened the cupboard under the stairs and searched through shoes and boots. There were her wellingtons, right at the back. She gave a muffled yell as an overcoat fell on her. She freed herself.

She reached into the left boot. Then the right. And her hand closed on something. She picked it out.

It was Dad's phone.

On the screen she saw a picture of Dad's smiling face. He was wearing a Santa hat, with gold tinsel. He never seemed to mind looking silly.

She realised it wasn't a still photo, but a video clip, waiting to be played. She pressed the Play button.

"Hello."

Mia jumped as the face on the screen spoke to her.

"I'm not here at the moment. I am a recording. But I'm not far away. And your

Christmas reward's nearly ready. It's a piece of cake, really. Just follow your nose..."

The video ended.

Mia sniffed. She could smell something. Cakes baking...

She moved towards the kitchen. Slowly, she pushed open the door.

Dad was sitting at the kitchen table, still wearing the Santa hat. On the table was a round, metal drum that was giving off the lovely baking smell.

A grin spread across his face.

"Happy Christmas."

"It's the cupcake-maker!" Mia went over and hugged her Dad. "The one I wanted. Thank you."

"I thought you might appreciate a little cake to start the day." Dad opened the lid carefully as a bell sounded. "Give them a minute to cool. Kettle's on, as well."

"Hang on." Mia ran into the living room, and returned with a large, flat parcel. "This was under the tree. But you might as well have it now." She handed it to Dad. "I was thinking about the detective thing, as well."

Dad removed the paper to reveal a plastic-fronted packet. It contained a large magnifying glass.

He opened the packet carefully, and held the magnifying glass in front of his face. His mouth looked huge as he said:

"Cheers."

Mia laughed.

"Happy Christmas, Dad."

If you'd like to read more about Mia and her Dad, read *The Dinner Club and Other Stories* by Rob Keeley. Details at www.robkeeley.co.uk

Happy Christmas!