

The Thief

As I was bustling about in the back of the toyshop, I heard the faint sounds of footsteps approaching me. Turning around, I spied a boy, the irritating scoundrel that had stolen from me in the past, who was snatching a windup toy from the edge of the counter.

Dashing forward, I grabbed his arm with an iron-like grip: he wasn't getting away this time. He squirmed instantly. "I finally caught you!" I roared through gritted teeth. A deep, guttural growl was sent in my direction, his teeth barred and eyes wide. Despite the feral response, I held firm, dragging him closer towards me and shouting for the Station Inspector.

"You're hurting me!" the boy whined, attempting to wriggle his stick-like arms free.

"Empty your pockets!" I demanded, suspecting he had other items of contraband from his previous excursions. It was probably my fingertips digging into his upper arm, or maybe it was my fierce glare, but the boy reluctantly reached into each of his pockets in turn and laid the items out on the table. Amongst pieces of shredded newspaper and empty sweet wrappers, a treasure trove was revealed: screws, nails, bits of metal, gears and tiny pieces of clockwork lay on the countertop; they all belonged to me.

Suspicious of the relative willingness in which he eventually discarded his items, I noticed he'd failed to empty his left side trouser pocket. "You have one more pocket to go..." With my free hand, I motioned for him to empty the final compartment.

"There's nothing in it," he lied with ease then spent the next few minutes throwing pathetic excuses at me.

Again, I shouted for the Station Inspector: the threat of his presence made the boy more compliant. Slowly, cautiously, he

reached into his pocket and pulled out a tattered notebook. Furious that he had tried to hide it from me, I snatched it from his grasp and, still gripping tightly to him, I leafed through the pages.

At first, only primitive drawings of cogs and wheels greeted me and I began to lose interest. However, I was knocked breathless, and my grip on the boy loosened, when I turned one of the middle pages. I was speechless, dumb-founded, perplexed, concerned, all at the same time. What met my eyes was like a blast from the past and I lingered somewhere between fear, anger and sadness. With quivering hands, I traced the fine pencil lines of a figure. A figure I recognised. A figure I thought was long forgotten. Ghosts from the past had finally reached me, even after so long.

In my stupor, the boy was able to squirm free and demanded that I return *his* notebook. "It is mine now," I explained matter-of-factly, tucking it with quivering hands into the pocket of my jacket. Still shaken, I continued, "You are a thief! Get away!" My anger had overtaken any fear and I approached him threateningly. How could this *boy* have obtained that drawing? Why did he seem to treasure it so deeply?

Finally, with some reluctance, the boy turned away, casting a glance over his shoulder and hurling some new-found abuse at me. Unable to contemplate what I had just seen, I stumbled over to the counter and leaned heavily upon it. My breath was coming in fast and my hands began to shake again. Warily, I reached into my pocket and placed the notebook, open on *that* picture, in between my elbows. I glared at it. It glared back at me.