



One Christmas Wish

Books Reviewed:

[One Christmas Wish](#) [1]

Issue:

[227](#) [2]

Reviewer:

[Clive Barnes](#) [3]

~~Editor's Choice:~~

off

Media type:

Book

BfK Rating:

4

I am not quite sure what to make of this. It's a handsomely produced story, with a striking gilded cover, of a magical Christmas adventure told as much by Emily Sutton's illustrations as Katherine Rundell's text. Theodore is an only child whom we find unpacking old decorations to hang on a bare tree whose lights don't work. His parents have such busy working lives that they have had no time to buy new decorations, mend the lights or buy a turkey. Theo is left in the charge of a babysitter who has fallen asleep over her mobile phone. Not an auspicious Christmas Eve. However, the old decorations - a tin soldier, a rocking horse, a robin and an angel - come to the rescue. As in a fairy tale, each decoration requires something to make them complete. Achieving these quests is so exhausting that Theo is fast asleep when his parents return, summoned from their office desks by visions of a flying rocking horse eating a windscreen wiper (the horse's voracious appetite is a very funny running joke). And what a pile of presents greets Theo under a dazzling tree on Christmas morning. Katherine Rundell's story is as both familiar and unfamiliar as Christmas stories should be. I am less certain about Emily Sutton's illustrations. These take their cue from the old Christmas decorations and place the story in a retro 1950s with Theo in striped pyjamas and a toyshop with bears and dolls on shelves and no Lego in sight. It's a lovingly created homage to an idea of Christmas but jars with the modern references to the babysitter's phone and parents so driven that neither can come home early on Christmas Eve (no fifties mum in the kitchen here). The ending, too, raises questions which readers may puzzle over. There is such a contrast between the Christmas Eve dearth and cold and the Christmas morning warmth and cornucopia. Can Theo's parents have been so neglectful to have given him no hope on Christmas Eve, only to shower him with presents the next day? Or, more worryingly, was the joy of the morning down to the decorations' restorative magic and the parents had no part in it at all? Is the story not for children after all, but a warning to modern parents who might have forgotten what Christmas should be about?

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Links:

[1] <http://w.booksforkeeps.co.uk/childrens-books/one-christmas-wish>

[2] <http://w.booksforkeeps.co.uk/issue/227>

[3] <http://w.booksforkeeps.co.uk/member/clive-barnes>