MABEL'S CHRISTMAS MINI-MYSTERY

The Case of the Borrowed Star

My name is Mabel Pike. I ran the Tern Harbor post office for forty years. My first Christmas behind the counter, I cut a star out of an old cocoa tin and punched a pattern in it with a nail, and it has topped the little tree in the post office window every December since. One point has been bent ever since a nor'easter tipped the tree over last winter. Pearl, who runs the counter now, loves it anyway.

On the Saturday before Christmas, Pearl spent the whole morning shut in the back room with the Christmas parcels. From eight o'clock on, the lobby bell jingled four times, once every quarter hour: Peg Dufresne, Thomas Pell, Hollis Greaves and Birdie Quill, each in for the mail. Each one left Pearl a present on the counter: a wreath, a poinsettia, a tin of molasses cookies or a bayberry candle.

When I came in for my nine o'clock coffee, there were four presents on the counter, four signed Christmas cards in a heap beside the scale, and nothing at all on top of the tree.

My basset hound, Biscuit, believes every tin on earth holds cookies meant for him. He nosed the lid off this one, and under the wax paper, beneath two dozen cookies, lay a note in square capital letters: **I BORROWED YOUR STAR. IT WILL BE HOME BY CHRISTMAS EVE.**

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Capitals. Forty years of reading this town's handwriting, and somebody had taken the trouble to give me nothing to read. But nobody tucks a note under two dozen cookies in a hurry. **Whoever brought the cookie tin borrowed the star.**

Not one of those cards said which present it came with. By lunchtime I had talked with all four, and each remembered a little. Their memories are on the next page. Can you work out who brought the cookie tin?

MABEL'S NOTEBOOK

Peg Dufresne, town clerk, retired schoolteacher

Thomas Pell, harbor master, does not drive

Hollis Greaves, retired lobsterman, builds ice shanties

Birdie Quill, owns the Blue Heron Diner

The presents: a balsam wreath, a red poinsettia, a tin of molasses cookies, a bayberry candle.

Mabel's 24-day Christmas case starts December 1. One short chapter and one large print puzzle a day, the culprit named on Christmas Eve: the **Large Print Murder Mystery Advent Calendar**, at Barnes & Noble and Amazon.

SOLVE THE CASE

Who Brought the Cookie Tin?

Fill in the chart: an **X** where something is impossible, a **dot** where it must be true. Each neighbor came in at one time and left one present.

1. Peg Dufresne was first through the door, at 8:00.
2. Thomas Pell came in before Hollis Greaves.
3. Birdie Quill came in some time after Hollis Greaves.
4. The bayberry candle arrived at 8:45.
5. The poinsettia came fifteen minutes before Hollis.
6. Hollis Greaves did not bring the wreath.

	8:00	8:15	8:30	8:45	Wreath	Poinsettia	Cookie Tin	Candle
Peg Dufresne								
Thomas Pell								
Hollis Greaves								
Birdie Quill								

The cookie tin (and the star) came from: _____

SOLUTION

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How the clues fit together

Peg came first, at 8:00. Thomas came before Hollis, and Birdie came after him, so Thomas came at 8:15, Hollis at 8:30 and Birdie at 8:45. The candle arrived at 8:45, so it was Birdie's. The poinsettia came fifteen minutes before Hollis, at 8:15, so it was Thomas's. Hollis did not bring the wreath, so he brought the **cookie tin**, and Peg brought the wreath. **Hollis Greaves borrowed the star.**

The answer

8:00	Peg Dufresne	wreath
8:15	Thomas Pell	poinsettia
8:30	**Hollis Greaves**	**cookie tin**
8:45	Birdie Quill	candle

And the star?

That bent point had bothered Hollis every time he came in for his mail. A man who builds ice shanties cannot abide a thing that is crooked. He carried the star to his shed on Cabin Road, tapped the point straight and rubbed the tin bright with steel wool. On Christmas Eve it was back on top of Pearl's tree, shining like new. When I thanked him, Hollis said he had no idea what I was talking about, and he would thank me not to spread it around. So I have only told you. Biscuit sneezed at the star, which Pearl decided was a blessing.