

And when the lights came back on, the trophy was gone.

For a moment the hall was as quiet as a library. Everyone stared at the empty table. Just seconds ago the gold trophy had been sitting there, shiny and bright. Now there was nothing, only a dusty circle left behind. My heart thumped so hard I thought people could hear it.. I scanned the crowd. Then everyone started talking at once. Chairs screeched, kids whispered, and I even heard someone gasp, "It's stolen!" I felt my face grow hot. I looked around quickly, hoping to spot something the others didn't.

I scanned the room. Liam was standing closest to the stage. His fists were jammed tightly into his pockets, and his face was turned down to the floor. He wouldn't meet anyone's eyes. My chest tightened. Could it be him? Then I noticed Mia. She had swung her schoolbag onto her lap and was holding it firmly, like it was a precious treasure. Her eyes darted to the side whenever anyone looked her way. Ruby also seemed jittery. She twisted her braid so hard I thought it might snap, her foot tapping against the wooden floor in a nervous rhythm. Everywhere I looked, someone seemed guilty. A cold shiver ran down my back. My chest felt heavy, and my hands were getting sweaty. *One of them has to have it*, I thought.

I stepped closer to the stage, my ears straining. That's when I heard a faint *scrape, scrape*. My heart jumped. The sound was coming from the curtains. The red fabric shivered a little, like someone was hiding behind it. Then, *clang!* A sharp sound echoed from the corner. We all spun around. The curtain rippled. My pulse hammered in my ears. The curtain swayed again. I slowly pulled the curtains apart.

My jaw dropped. There was Sam, crouched low, the trophy clutched tightly in his arms. His face was bright red. "I wasn't trying to steal it!" he burst out before anyone could speak. His voice shook. "I just wanted to hold it. I wanted to know what it feels like to win something... for once." The whole hall went quiet. No more whispers, no more giggles. Everyone just stared at him. I stood there frozen, the truth sinking in. I'd been so sure it was Liam, or Mia, or even Ruby. But it wasn't them. It was Sam, quiet Sam, the one nobody noticed, hiding in the shadows with the trophy he wished was his.