

A CHRISTMAS STORY

1912

At the time of this episode in our family, I was nine years old. I would be ten the following February. Breta was seven and Marie four and a half. We had the usual ward Christmas party on Christmas Eve, with a program and decorated Christmas tree, with candy and nuts for the children.

Marie had an important part in the program. She was seated in a child's rocking chair on the pulpit of the old Iona rock church, with a doll wrapped in a shawl in her arms, and she sang "Away in a Manger." Marie had a soft pretty voice and she was such a beautiful child, that the number made a big hit with everyone.

Dad carried her home in his arms very proudly, and we were promptly tucked into bed, so "Santa Claus could come." I remember the sound of sleigh bells along our street on the bob-sleigh teams, for a long time that night, as people went home from the party. Each time I heard a different sleigh go by, I was sure that one belonged to Santa Claus. But I could hear my parents talking in the living-dining room, so I knew that it wasn't time for Santa.

In the morning we awoke to the sound of Dad building a fire in the coal heater, and when the room was warm enough Mother let us get up, get dressed and look at our presents. Each of us girls got a doll. Breta and I got lady dolls, with extra clothes and Marie got a beautiful baby doll, with shawls, diapers and the lot. We also got a little table with four chairs so we really could play house. For a couple of hours, things went smoothly. Breta and I dressed and undressed our dolls, and had a really good time. But Marie wasn't happy with her baby doll. She wanted a lady doll like we had. She bothered Mother so much, that Mother got really cross with her. So Marie proceeded to throw a real tantrum. She threw her doll on the floor, stomped on it, took some cream from the table and poured on its head, especially in its eyes, screamed and kicked. Mother lost her patience and gave Marie a spanking, which made her scream louder and kick her doll violently. So Dad got up out of his rocking chair by the heater, took Breta's doll from her, and gave it to Marie. Marie magically became very happy, and ran around the room, laughing and hugging the doll.

As you can imagine, Breta began to cry, and ran and hid behind the couch. She cried so hard that she began to vomit. Mother, mean while, had been scolding Dad very violently, for doing such an unfair thing. He reacted angrily, and finally put on his coat and hat and went out, heading for his sanctuary, the "Store."

About this time I felt that I couldn't stand any more noise and confusion, so I asked Mother if I could go over to my best friends place -Lilly Pearson- to see her Christmas presents. Mother, busy with Breta said impatiently "Yes, Yes, go on, get out." So I carefully tucked my doll inside my coat, put on my cap and mittens, and thankfully headed for Pearson's house. Lilly was a year older than me, and she had got a doll, but such a doll. An elegant French lady doll, with silk clothes and leather slippers, long curls and eyes that opened and shut. It made my doll with its home made clothes look like nothing. But Lilly let me hold her doll and she seemed to enjoy putting on the night gown that came with my doll, so we had a good time. It was warm and quiet, and the house was full of good smells, because Sister Pearson was preparing Christmas dinner for a few of their Swedish friends. Brother Pearson hitched up his team to his bob-sleigh to go and get these friends, and invited Lilly and me to with him. We were delighted to go, and I didn't even think to go home and ask permission. Mother had told me to get out, so I got. These friends lived on a farm near Idaho Falls, so it took a couple of hours to bring them back to Iona, and then Sister Pearson had dinner all ready, and she invited me to stay. I did, because I loved the good Swedish food she always prepared. After dinner I helped Lilly and sister Pearson do the dishes, and then I decided that I'd better go home. It was late in the afternoon. When I opened the door of our house and walked into the dining room, Mother pounced on me, and shook me so hard my ears popped and my teeth rattled. "Where have you been?" "I went over to Lilly's you said I could go. You told me to get out." "I did no such thing, besides you have been gone all day."

I looked around. Breta was asleep on the old couch. Marie was playing with Breta's doll and her own, which had been cleaned up. There was no dinner, or warm feeling in our house. I silently went to hang up my coat, and returned to stand by the heater. Dad's chair was still empty. Mother said, "well since you have been gone all day without letting me know where you have been, you can go to bed without your supper. You must be taught a lesson." I picked up my doll, and started for the bedroom. "No, leave your doll here. You don't deserve to have such a nice one. You go to bed by yourself." So I went to bed at six o'clock. Thankfully I had had such a good dinner at Pearson's, that I wasn't hungry. But I felt rejected, alone, and unhappy, so I cried myself to sleep. That was my ninth Christmas - as I remember it.

-By Ruby H. Sorenson