

Christmas

It was almost Christmas Day, about 1954. The little girl's parents were divorced, and she lived with her little sister and baby brother in a boarding house. Some nights, her mother would come home. Some nights, her mother stayed at her office, a set of rooms in an office building where her mom had her own business. Running her own small business was how the little girl's mother helped support the three children that she and her ex-husband were trying to raise.

When Christmastime came, the little girl and her 4-year-old sister became very excited, because there were special lights, and presents, and desserts, and celebrations. One of these celebrations was at the church that the landlords of the boarding house attended.

There was a whole Christmas program, about two days before Christmas. In the church basement there was a Christmas tree, with presents under it, and colored lights everywhere, and Christmas carols, and a potluck dinner! One of the Sunday-school teachers had asked the little girl if she would be willing to sing, "I'll Be a Sunshine for Jesus", and the little girl said, "Of course", because she already knew the words. It did not occur to her to be shy about singing a song she already knew, to a bunch of people she was having a Christmas celebration with.

She helped set up the stand that would hold the music on the little elevated stage that the church had for special occasions. People were milling about, getting ready for the "program" to begin. Wires were lying across the stage, they led to the microphone. When the time came, some grown-ups motioned to the little girl and she leaned up into the microphone and sang "I'll Be a Sunshine for Jesus". Everybody clapped and she hopped down, happy to be part of the festivities.

There were hours more fun, and then the Christmas program was over. All the church ladies were washing and drying serving bowls, and the microphone wires were put away. Then everyone went out into the parking lot, headlights casting haloes everywhere. There were "Good-byes" and "Good nights" and "Merry Christmases", and "See you tomorrow, Sandy", "Nice job with the program, congratulations!"

Everyone was getting into cars, wrapping scarves around their necks, pulling on mittens, it was cold, it was almost Christmas! It was so nice to be included in all the activity. She was packed into a car with a whole bunch of other people, all of whom were going home with their friends and family members. The doors slammed, the conversations inside the automobiles flew back and forth, it was all so much fun she couldn't believe it when the car pulled up across the street from

the boarding house where she lived. The front of the house was dark, no lights. But there had to be at least one grown-up inside, there was always a babysitter at night.

"Here you are!" they said cheerfully, as if it were a good thing to return to an unlighted house. The little girl thanked everybody and got wished "Merry Christmas" and ran across the quiet street and up the front steps. She rang the bell at her boarding house. After a minute she heard something and then the babysitter opened the door. The little girl turned around and waved good-bye to all the people in the car who had taken her to the wonderful party. Then she went inside to an almost-empty house. She closed the door on one world, and prepared herself for the next one, the world where everything was quiet and muted and full of directions to get ready for bed.

Someday she was going to have a world like the one she had just left behind at the Christmas party, where people liked to laugh and have conversations and hug each other and holler, "Merry Christmas". And someday she would go home to a house that had all the lights on, and a lit-up Christmas tree in the window. And in that house, people would LIKE to get ready for bed, because they would be around people they loved.

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