



Ririro

READ ANYWHERE, ANYTIME

A Doll's Christmas Party

Faith Wynne

"How's this one? It's for Imogene — Lois's doll, you know." And Elizabeth held up, for her big sister Marjorie to inspect, a tiny card with a picture of a rather stiff-legged little kitten on it.

"That's lovely! They all are," said Marjorie encouragingly, glancing over the row of cards, each with a different design. Then, with a sigh of relief, she added, "There — I'm all done," and sealed the last envelope. Inside was an invitation to a dolls' party the very next afternoon: *Christmas afternoon, at 2:00 prezactly*. She meant *precisely*, of course, but she was in such a happy flutter over the season and the party that she never noticed the slip. Nor did anyone else — the only thing that impressed the dolls' "mothers" was that there was to be a party at all!

Each little mother was invited to bring a gift for her own doll, securely wrapped and addressed — and to bring the doll's high chair too. That the *chairs* were invited pleased the girls enormously. When Grace found hers lying on its back on the floor, she declared it was "completely upset with the honour."

Matilda, the family's helper, delivered the invitations and brought back a joyful acceptance from every doll — except Violet, Katherine's doll, who declined for fear of running into Trixie, Marjorie and Elizabeth's little dog. Trixie had recently barked at Violet, and when he got the chance had carried her off under the table and chewed her foot right off. But Teddy Bear agreed to come in her place. *He* didn't mind an encounter with dogs.

"Trixie, you must be punished for that," Elizabeth said, leading him to a corner and making him stand on his hind legs with his face to the wall until he promised not to do it again. Three barks counted as a promise. (Though he didn't keep it — and a promise should always be kept.)

Trixie took the keenest interest in the preparations, the way pets always seem to know when something exciting is in the air. More than once Marjorie had to scold him for being too nosy. "And too *tail-y*," added Elizabeth, when he wagged the whole pile of place-cards she'd decorated right off the table.

Because Christmas morning would be so busy, the girls decided to set the dolls' table a day early. Mamma's sewing table was covered with pretty paper bordered in holly, a beaming Santa in each corner, with napkins to match. Elizabeth's cards sat at each little plate. A toy Christmas tree made the centrepiece, gaily hung with dolls' stockings of every colour, all filled with candy. Some boards from an old table up in the attic were brought down to build a platform, so the dolls' chairs could be raised to just the right height. A second table was set for the dolls' mothers.



When everything was ready at last, Marjorie and Elizabeth turned to thinking about Santa's own visit to *them* — and the house was hardly big enough to hold their excitement. Among many other things, each had asked him for a new doll. They didn't mind at all what the dolls looked like; they knew they would love them dearly whatever their hair or eyes, simply because they'd be theirs.

The only thing still missing to complete their happiness was snow — which always seemed to make for a faster, safer trip for the reindeer.

But even that came. It was announced by Matilda calling out, "The old woman up in the sky is plucking her geese — and they're big ones today!"

The girls ran pell-mell to the door and saw great feathery flakes tumbling over one another, each seeming to race to touch the ground first. The rooftops turned white in no time. Lifting the curtain for one last look just before they hopped into bed, two little girls in their nighties laughed and sang:

*"On Comet! On Dancer!
On Vixen! On Prancer!"*

Then, heads on their pillows, they whispered a solemn plan to each other: to stay awake all night and catch Santa in the act. But — as always happens, and always will — the Sandman filled his bag with sand down by the Slumber Sea, and ran on ahead of Santa to help him keep his secret.

And lo! When their eyes next opened, there was just enough daylight in the room to see a beautiful new doll sitting beside each pillow. The stockings were explored next — and before they had scarcely noticed the time passing, the afternoon had arrived. In fact, well before the appointed hour, the little mothers all turned up in a bunch, dolls and chairs in their arms. Their names were Renoldine, Grace, Margaret, Helen, Lois, Isabella, Betty, and Katherine.

Elizabeth met them at the door and accepted their apologies for coming so early. The reason given? "The dolls were simply too impatient to wait for their grand coming-out party." Marjorie greeted them upstairs, helped them off with their wraps in her pretty blue room, and handed the little chairs to Matilda. Such a chattering there was as they all skipped back downstairs — with Teddy Bear the most dignified guest of all.

In the middle of their games, Marjorie slipped away to the dining room and piled the gifts around the base of the tree. Then the guests were called in — Trixie tagging and wagging along behind — and each little mother stood behind her doll's chair to make the proper replies on the doll's behalf, while Marjorie, playing Santa, handed out the presents. (Teddy squeezed his own tiny doll so hard that she squeaked, and Trixie kept a wary eye on him after that.)

By and by the little mothers were led to another prettily decorated table, where ice cream and cake and candy filled a long-felt need.

Afterward, back in the cosy den the girls grandly called "the drawing-room," they seated all the dolls in a row on the sofa — fifteen in all, for Marjorie and Elizabeth had brought out their whole doll family, not wanting to show any favouritism to the new arrivals. Teddy Bear sat right in the middle.

Trixie went down the row, pressing his curious nose to each doll in turn, then plopped down in front of Teddy and stared him nearly out of countenance. He even gave Teddy a friendly little laugh — but Teddy felt far too grand to laugh back. Whether that offended Trixie, or whether he simply decided Teddy wasn't a trustworthy fellow to have in charge, we shall never know. But while the doll mothers were all at the windows watching the merry sleighing parties jingle past, Trixie seized his chance — took Teddy by the leg, dragged him under the sofa, and settled down with the bear safe between his paws, his bright eyes peeping out, waiting to see what would happen next.

When Teddy's "mother" turned round and saw the empty place on the sofa, her shriek brought all the excited little mothers running.

"Teddy's walked off! I always knew he would!" said Katherine — with an air of pride at such a remarkable feat, mixed with real worry.

"Where's Trixie, I wonder?" Marjorie said pointedly to Elizabeth. Just then a thumping of a dog's tail on the floor under the sofa sent every little mother to her knees, and with a great bumping of heads they all peered underneath, several hands grabbing for Teddy at once. Trixie only laughed and thumped his tail harder still.

"The dear little fellow! He thought Teddy Bear looked lonesome up there on the sofa with fifteen girls, so he went to keep him company," said Marjorie.

The explanation was happily accepted, and Trixie was the hero of the hour.

A little later, with his paws up on the window ledge, he watched the little mothers troop off home with their dolls and chairs bundled in their arms. And when Teddy Bear peeped back over Katherine's shoulder, Trixie whined and wagged a fond goodbye.

Stories help us explore cultures, learn moral lessons, connect with nature — or simply have fun. That's why ririro.com offers 3,000+ free stories — fairy tales, fables, bedtime stories, myths and more — for every age, in 13 languages, with free printable PDFs and often audio. Reading should be a right, not a privilege. Share ririro.com and spread the joy of reading.

Instagram: @ririro_reading · Pinterest: pinterest.com/ririrocom