



Ingrid lived with her parents in the biggest and prettiest house on the block. It was such a pristine white it looked like it always had a brand new coat of paint.

The pink roses that climbed the front of the house always seemed to be in bloom, looking like polka dots lining the windows.

“What a beautiful house!” exclaimed their neighbors.
“What a beautiful family!” they cried.

And indeed it was, and indeed they were.

Ingrid’s house had a large wooden staircase that you could see right as you opened the door. The wood was so shiny, it looked like it had been waxed. The rugs in the living room were so rich in color, they looked as if they would never fade. The dining room’s chandelier always shone in the light and none of the doors and windows squeaked when opened or closed.

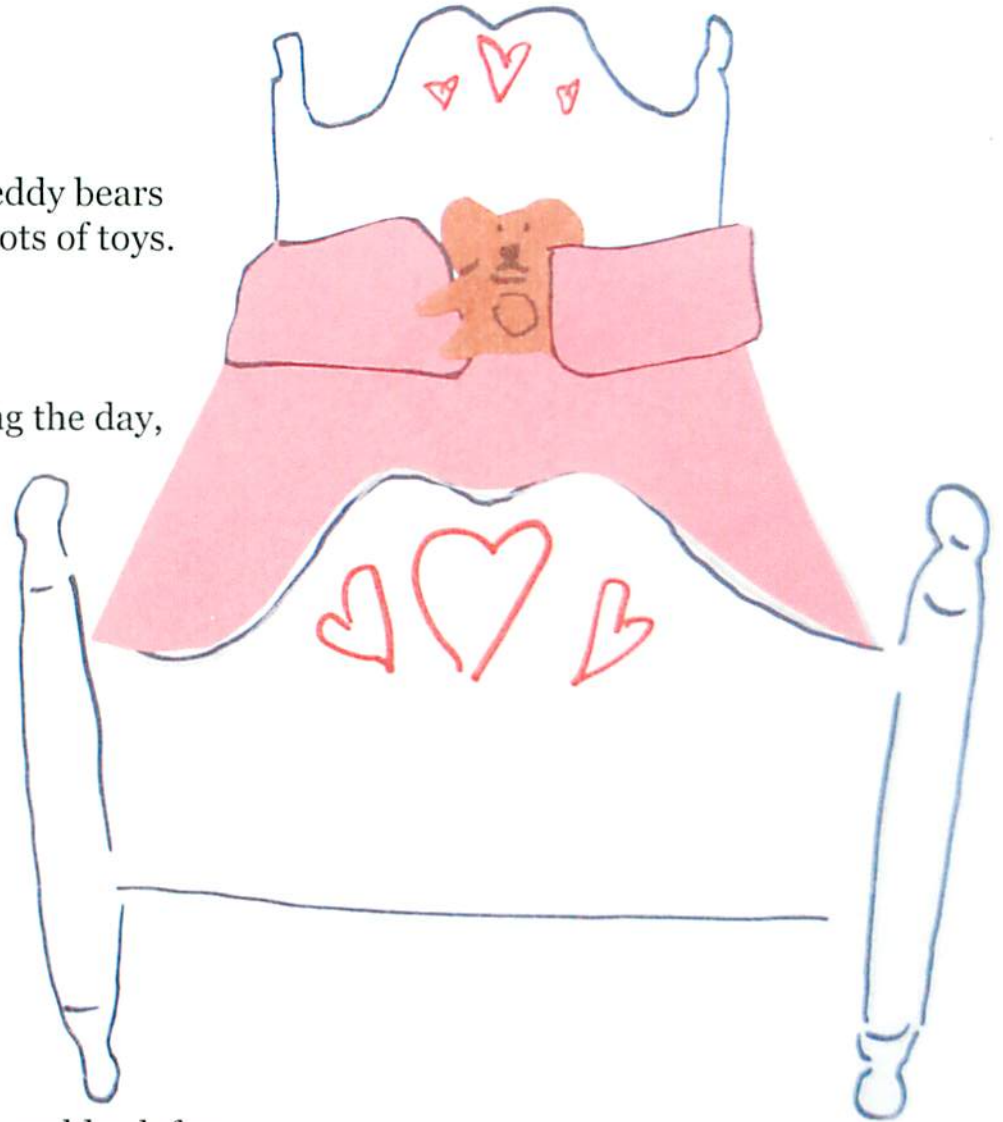
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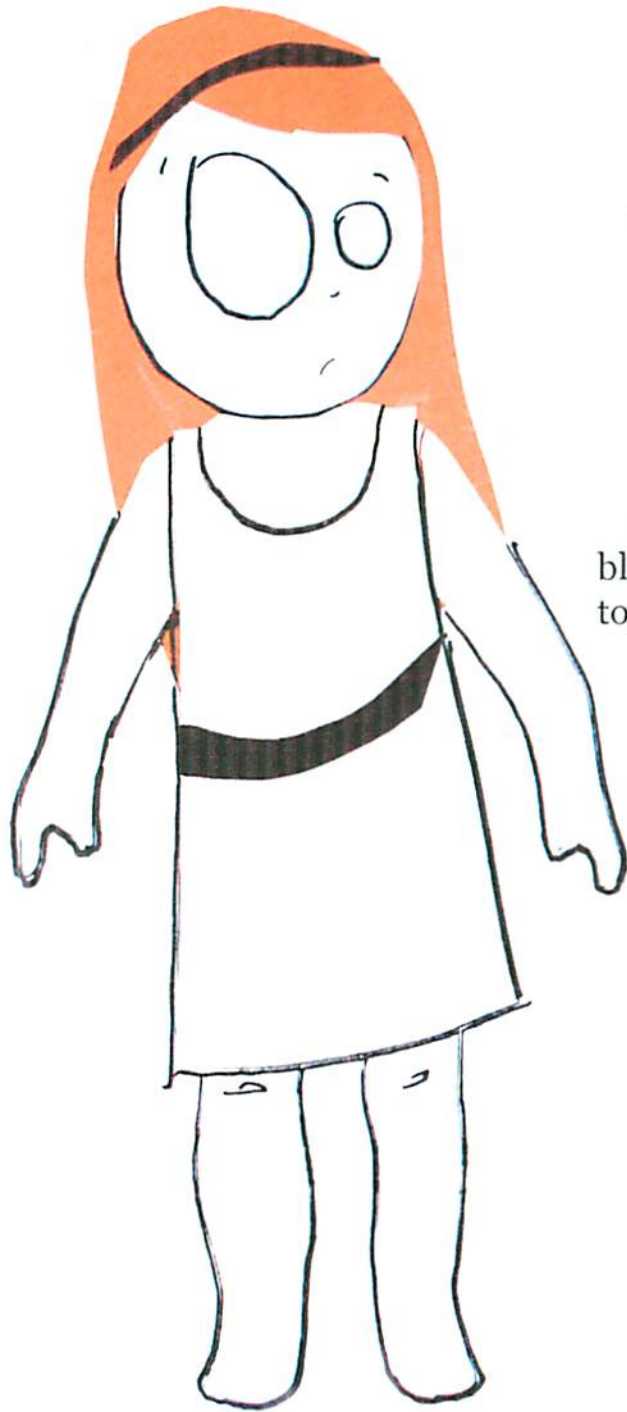
And indeed it was, and indeed they were.

Ingrid's bed had a soft pink blanket, and her teddy bears and dolls lay among the fluffy pillows. Ingrid had lots of toys. She even had a whole room for keeping them!

Ingrid's mother and father were very busy during the day, but they wanted their little girl to be happy.



They gave her all the toys in the world, more than she could ask for.



“What a happy little girl!” neighbors said excitedly.

But Ingrid wasn't happy.

Even though Ingrid lived in the biggest and prettiest house on the block with the pinkest flowers and the shiniest chandelier and more toys than any child could dream of, she was lonely.

She had no one to play with.

But Ingrid didn't know she was lonely. All she knew was that she was bored.

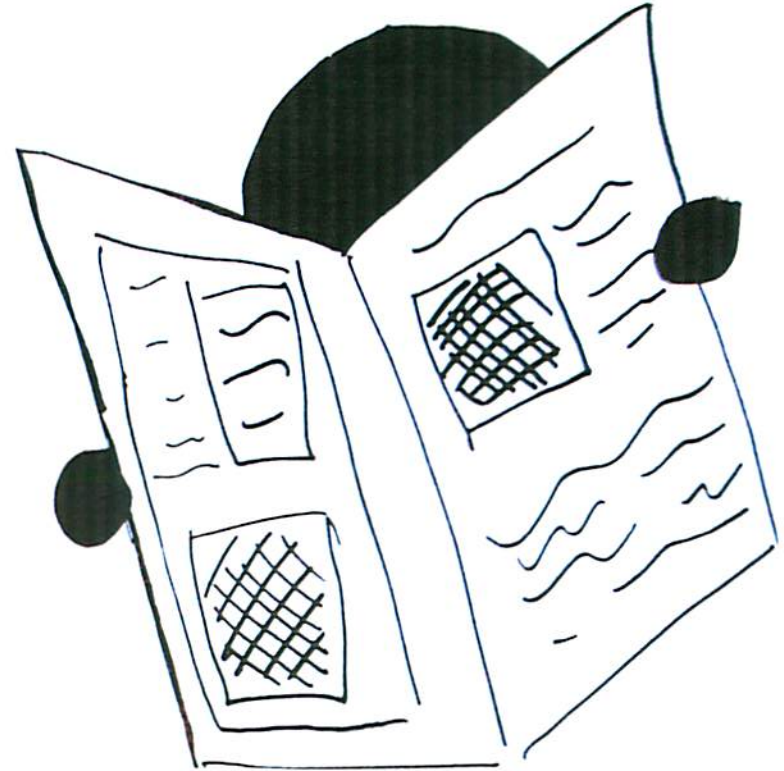
And not happy at all.

“Mommy,” she said one morning at breakfast. “I don’t know what to do today.”

“Ingrid, we just got you that wonderful new dollhouse,” said her mother from behind her newspaper.

“Yes, I know,” Ingrid agreed, looking down at her cereal. “It’s a very pretty dollhouse.”

“Oh Ingrid!” Ingrid’s father said while turning the page of his newspaper. “We got you a dollhouse, but no dolls to go inside!”



Ingrid sighed.

The dolls came that afternoon. Ingrid took them carefully out of their box. First, the mother and father dolls. Then the little girl doll. She had long red hair with a black ribbon, just like Ingrid.

But there was one more doll in the box. A little boy with black hair.



Ingrid ran downstairs to her father's office, the boy doll in hand.

"Daddy!" she cried. "Who is this?"

Her father glanced up from the papers on his desk.

"It's one of your new dolls sweetheart," he said slowly.

"Yes, but there's a mommy doll and a daddy doll and an Ingrid doll, but then there's this doll, too. Who is he?"

"I don't know, Ingrid. He's the Ingrid doll's friend. Please go back to playing now, I've got a lot of work to do."

So Ingrid went back upstairs to her room of toys.



“Friend?” Ingrid had never had one of those before. So she named him Sam, and set him down next to the Ingrid doll in the Ingrid doll’s room of toys.

Sam soon became her best friend. It didn’t matter that he was her first and only one.

The doll went with her everywhere.

He sat next to her at the table during meals, he went out into the garden with her when they went out to play, and at night he slept next to her on her pillow.

The only place he did not follow her was into the bathroom when Ingrid took a bath. Sam waited patiently outside the door until Ingrid was squeaky clean.

Soon, Ingrid’s new dollhouse was forgotten.

One morning Ingrid came running down the stairs to breakfast; her parents were already sitting at the table. She placed Sam in the chair next to hers, buttered her toast, and stuffed it into her mouth, taking the largest bites she could.

Her father looked up from his work. "Ingrid, slow down, please."

"Sam told me to hurry," she said with her mouth full of toast. "We're going to play hopscotch."

"Hopscotch?"

She swallowed. "Yeah, outside in the front yard."

Ingrid's mother heard this and paused from working on her crossword puzzle. "But what about that new dollhouse?"

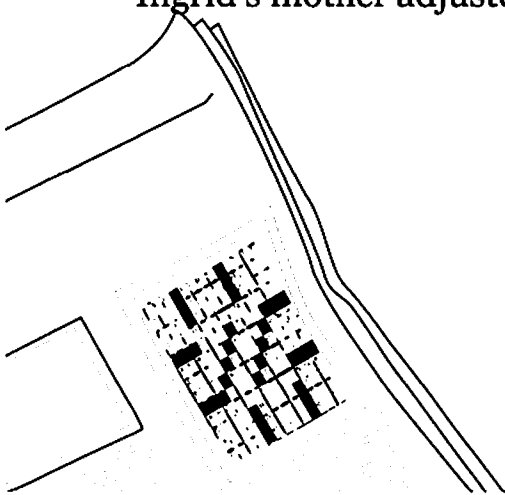
"Oh, it was a lot of fun," Ingrid smiled. "But I think I like playing with Sam more."

Her parents excused her from the table and she ran outside yelling to her friend Sam as she went.

"Who is Sam?" Ingrid's mother asked. "And why doesn't Ingrid want to play with her new dollhouse?"

"I haven't a clue," Ingrid's father muttered as he took a sip of coffee and bent his head down to his papers.

Ingrid's mother adjusted her glasses and went back to her crossword puzzle.



Outside, Ingrid and Sam were playing hopscotch.

“You hop around through the squares, and skip the one you threw the rock onto,” Sam instructed. She hopped in the first square, then the second and third. She put both feet in the 4th and 5th squares, hopped over the 6th and rock, and finally landed in the 7th square. What fun!

Just then, a bright red ball flew over the house’s fence.

“You get it!” Ingrid heard a voice yell.

“No, you threw it, you get it!” said another.

From behind the fence appeared a little boy with brown hair and freckles.

“Hi,” he said with a smile. “Can we have our ball back, please?”

Ingrid looked from the boy, to the ball, and back. She walked toward it, picked it up slowly, and threw it over the fence.

“Thanks!” he said, catching the ball gracefully, but instead of running back to his game, he hesitated. “I’m Jason.”

“I’m Ingrid,” she said shyly.

“Wanna play catch with us, Ingrid?” he asked just as a little girl with curly hair bounded up beside him.

“Oh, I don’t know...” Ingrid said nervously. She had only ever played with Sam before. What if she missed the ball and they laughed at her? What if she threw a bad pass and they didn’t want her to play anymore? What if they hated her?

“Come on!” cried the girl. “It’ll be fun!”

Glancing at the tiny doll lying on the pavement next to the hopscotch drawn in with chalk, she started walking toward the gate. She undid the latch and stepped out into the pavement, taking in a nervous breath.

“Let’s go!” Jason yelled.

Jason’s friend grabbed Ingrid’s hand, and the two girls skipped across the street. “Hi Ingrid,” she said. “I’m Katie.”

“Hi,” Ingrid blushed.

“Ready?” called Jason. He threw the ball to Katie, who tossed it to Ingrid. Ingrid carefully threw it to Jason, who swiftly flung the ball to Katie.



The children smiled and laughed until it was time for lunch. They all promised to meet up later on to play more games together.

Ingrid went back through her front gate, and skipped happily to her house, stopping to pick up her doll.

“Thank you, Sam!” she said, giving the doll a kiss.
“Thank you for introducing me to my new friends!”

