

honorable mention, fiction

Special Delivery

by Eileen Clark

I'm Kelly Jean, and this is my little sister, Katie. Lots of girls have baby sisters, but they're not as special as mine.

Last year when I was four, Katie was born the day after Christmas. Mommy brought her home from the hospital in a red stocking. She was a very special package.

Her black hair stuck straight up on her head even when Mommy tried to brush it down. I thought she looked cute.

Katie fussed and cried a lot. Mommy said she had colic.

"It's a tummy ache from the milk," Daddy told me.

She made so much noise that I had to talk louder and cover my ears.

My sister was very tiny. I kissed her cheek and rocked her in Daddy's big chair. When Katie cried, Mommy carried her and hummed my favorite song. Sometimes I felt mad when Mommy and Daddy hugged and kissed Katie so much.

"Who wants to play Barbie dolls with me?" I asked. But they were always too busy with the baby. They looked sad and whispered about Katie in the kitchen.

One time I said, "I hate that baby!" But I didn't really mean it.

Katie wasn't much fun and didn't like to play. She couldn't hold a rattle or smile. She didn't coo or gurgle like my friend's baby brother did.

One day Mommy and Daddy took Katie to a special doctor. Dr. Harris laid Katie on the table and pressed on her tummy. He tickled her feet and pushed her legs up and down. Then he listened to her heart shined a light in her eyes. He talked to my parents for a long time. My mom even cried. I felt terrible.

Finally, the doctor said, "You have a special little sister, Kelly Jean. She's going to need lots of love and attention."

When we got home, Daddy told me that Katie has cerebral palsy.

"What's that?" I asked.

"She has a little trouble holding her head up or grabbing toys because she make her muscles work," he said.

"I had the same problem when I learned to roller skate," I said. "I kept falling down and skinned both of my knees."

"Katie is going to need help from all of us," said Daddy. "She might learn to sit and crawl, or maybe even walk, but it will take her a long, long time."

Dr. Harris told my parents about some exercises to make Katie stronger. Each day, Mommy tipped the round foot stool on its side. Then we put Katie on her tummy and rolled her back and forth. Sometimes she looked like an airplane with her arms stretched out wide.

Katie and I did sit-ups together. Daddy pulled her arms up and down to help, but I hooked my toes under the couch and tried to do them alone. It was hard for both of us.

Later, when Katie got stronger, we held her legs so she could sit on the floor. Daddy put pillows behind her in case she tipped over. After a while, Katie could sit by herself for a few minutes, so we played in the sandbox together. I poured sand on Katie's toes. She looked at me and smiled.

In fall, Daddy and I raked leaves into the ditch. Then Katie and I rolled down the little hill. We landed in a big heap at the bottom. Katie crunched leaves in her fist and giggled.

Every day, Katie and I pretended to ride bicycles. We lay on our backs and kicked our feet in the air. Mommy tied jingle bells on Katie's shoes. When she jerked her feet, it sounded like Santa Claus was dancing on the roof. One day, Katie even laughed.

After it snowed, Daddy and I went to cut down a Christmas tree. When we got home, he mounted it in the stand, and Mommy hung lights on the branches. We decorated it with shiny red balls and candy canes. Then Daddy helped me put our special star on top.

Katie stared at the bright lights and sparkly things.

"It's almost Christmas, Katie," I said. "Soon it will be your birthday, too."

Mommy made a white angel cake with pink frosting for Katie's first birthday. If Katie could talk, I know that's what she would ask for. And maybe someday, she will!

But for now, she's happy smooching cake in her hair and licking frosting from her fingers just like I did when I turned one.

"Happy Birthday to my special sister, Katie!"