Christmas on Maple Street

Left Right Game

Everyone sits in a circle holding a wrapped gift. Each time you hear **LEFT**, pass the gift you are holding one seat to the left; each time you hear **RIGHT**, pass it one seat to the right. When the story ends, keep the gift in your hands.

Reader: go slowly and pause after every LEFT and RIGHT so the gifts can move. About 4 minutes · LEFT 10 times · RIGHT 12 times. Every gift ends up two seats to the right of where it started, so each player goes home with the gift from the person on their left.

Every December on Maple Street, Christmas began the same way: with the big holiday catalog. We children spread it out on the living room rug and turned the pages **LEFT** and **RIGHT**, circling everything we wanted. My sister always circled the doll on the **LEFT** page. I always circled the red wagon on the **RIGHT**.

On the first Saturday of the month, Dad drove us downtown to see the store windows. In the window on the **LEFT**, a toy train went round and round a little snowy village. In the window on the **RIGHT**, an elf in a rocking chair waved at everyone who walked by.

Then came the tree. Dad tied it to the roof of the car and drove home very slowly, with Mom saying, "**LEFT** a little, now **RIGHT**," every time it slipped. Inside, the tree leaned to the **LEFT**, so Dad turned it to the **RIGHT**. Then it leaned to the **RIGHT**, so he turned it back to the **LEFT**. Mom said it looked just **RIGHT**.

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The bubble lights went on first. Then the glass ornaments, the paper chains we made at school and, last of all, the tinsel, one strand at a time, because Mom said throwing it was not the **RIGHT** way to do it. When we were done, there was not one strand **LEFT** in the box.

On Christmas Eve, carolers came up the walk. We opened the door, and they sang “Silent Night” **RIGHT** there on our front step while the snow came down. Mom gave them cocoa, and they **LEFT** singing all the way to the corner.

That night I lay awake, listening for sleigh bells. Was that a noise on the roof? I looked **LEFT** at the window and **RIGHT** at the door, but I fell asleep before I could find out.

In the morning, there it was by the tree: the red wagon, just like the one on the **RIGHT** page of the catalog. And for my sister, the doll from the **LEFT** page, with a pink bonnet and real curls.

The houses on Maple Street have changed, and the store windows are long gone. But every December I think of that catalog, the bubble lights and the carolers on our step, and I know the best part of Christmas was **RIGHT** there all along.

Bonus line: read it only if someone is holding their own gift

One last time, for old times’ sake: pass your gift to the **RIGHT**. Merry Christmas!