**The Stocking**

 I sing quietly to myself while I play with my manger set. It’s a perfect set, complete with a perfect Mary, a perfect Joseph and a perfect baby Jesus wrapped in his white blanket. A perfect family for me to play with. A perfect family for me to control.

 Mom quietly decorates the tree with the bulbs. She doesn’t like when I call her Mommy. She says I am seven years old and too big for that. I don’t think I am big at all, but she is Mom and she knows best. She always knows best.

 Daddy isn’t home. But he never is. He works a lot, Mom says. And that’s fine with me, she says. I don’t like when Daddy is gone. Daddy is a lot more fun than Mom. Especially around Christmas. Daddy smiles more than Mom. And his smile is bigger. And he doesn’t' cry. Mom will smile and cry at the same time. I don’t understand why she does that so I’m not sure if I should smile or be sad.

 I take a break from my manger family to look at the Christmas tree. When we go pick out the tree Mom and Daddy always try and find the prettiest one. This tree is the biggest. It barely fits in our living room. Mom keeps putting bulbs on the tree. She already let me put my home-made ornaments on the bottom branches of the tree. My turn is over. The top branches are for the special ones, Mom says. They all look the same to me, but I don’t say anything. Mom gets upset if she is bothered while she is putting the special ornaments on the tree.

 Mom pulls the last ornament out of the box. It is a small red stocking. It looks like it could fit a baby’s foot. On the top of the stocking are tiny gold letters. I am not a very good at spelling, but I can read the letters. “A-L-Y-S-S-A”. Mom starts crying a little when she pulls it out. She looks at it a bit longer. She cries harder now, a lot harder, and stops looking at the stocking.

 “What’s wrong, Mom?” I ask quietly. Mom won’t tell me anyways, which is fine because I think I already know why.

 “Nothing, honey, nothing.” She walks out of the living room, her hands covering her eyes. Mom cries every Christmas. And my birthdays, she cries then too. That is when she cries the most. That is when I get confused and don’t know if I should smile or be sad like her. I want to be sad because she is sad and that is what you’re supposed to do when someone is sad.

 I wish Daddy would come home. He always makes me feel better. Mom will cry but Daddy will just smile and pretend Mom isn’t crying. That’s what I like to do too. I look at the stocking. But then I stop looking. I don’t like it because it makes Mom sad. I like my manger family instead. A perfect Mom, a perfect Daddy, and a perfect little baby. A perfect, happy family.