

Four-year Old

The little girl was about 4, and her parents were going out for the evening. Their live-in babysitter, who was about 15, was looking after the three children, the little girl and her 2-year-old sister and her baby brother. The babysitter's name was "Lynn". She was the nice babysitter.

At the time that the grown-ups were getting ready to go, the little girl was disconsolate. Her parents were going to be gone all evening, she wouldn't see them at all that night, they would be getting home after she was in bed and asleep. She felt so lonely. She sat on the couch in the living room and cried quietly to herself, she didn't want to get reprimanded for crying over her parent's going out for the evening.

Then came the final swish of adult clothes being readied for an exit out the front door and the door closed, and her parents were gone. She felt as if someone had scratched their fingernails through her on the inside, leaving big red streaks where her body was torn. Except it wasn't her body, it was her feelings. Big red streaks.

Tears splashed over her lashes and rolled down her cheeks. And then something happened.

Lynn, the babysitter, called to her. "Come look at this", she said. She had a small cardboard box in one hand and some scissors in the other. Both the little girl and her little sister came over to their babysitter's knee. Lynn was now seated on the couch and cutting little squares in the cardboard box. "We're making a house", she announced. And she proceeded to cut "windows" out of the sides of the cardboard box, and a "doorway", and she cut more cardboard and bent it and made it into beds for the "bedroom", and cut out another piece of cardboard and folded it to make a kitchen "table" and a "stove". Then she cut out some little cardboard people to live in the new cardboard house.

"Now YOU, and YOU", she said, pointing at the big sister and the little sister, have to walk these people through the door in their new house, and feed them dinner at their new table, and put them to bed in their new beds!" By this time, neither child was aware that they were sad about their parents leaving to go out that night. The girls both grabbed hold of the little cardboard people and began walking them through the new "house". They had been sad, and bereft; now they were happy and entertained with novelty.

But the older girl was surprised. Very surprised. Lynn had gone to all this trouble just to make her feel better. Lynn didn't have to do that. Why had she

taken so much trouble? A new recognition dawned for the little girl. It must be that Lynn thought that the little girl was worth it. So maybe she was worth it! She contemplated this thought as unwaveringly as she contemplated how much fun she was having with the new cardboard dollhouse.

Lynn

The babysitter who made the cardboard house and comforted the little girls' feelings so deftly and so kindly, was named "Lynn Schmoke". She replied to my parent's ads in the classified portion of the Seattle Times. They were hoping to get a live-in nanny, because there were times that my mom, with the new business she was running, would not be home, and my dad of course had his own job. My parents thought that maybe Lynn was a runaway, she seemed so young. But all their searching of her background and identification did not turn up any person with her name being sought as a runaway, and she said she was sixteen. It was legal back then for a sixteen-year-old to leave home. And, she was ready to move in right away. My parents hired her.

She was the nicest, kindest babysitter we ever had.

It is so strange that years later, when I was sixteen, my mother asked if I would be willing to do some babysitting. Of course! I was studious, always had my nose in my schoolbooks, never had a chance to earn money the way that regular teen-agers did. I was crazy to get some experience babysitting!

The person who needed me as a babysitter was Lynn Schmoke, who was now about 28 years old! She wanted me to babysit her two little boys, aged two and four. I was supposed to babysit them on a Friday afternoon and evening, between about 4 PM and 10 PM. At some point around 10 PM Lynn's husband would be coming home from work, and then I could call my parents and they would come pick me up. I felt very, very grown-up to be babysitting my former babysitter's little children.

I showed up about 10 minutes before 4 o' clock on Friday and was amazed that Lynn looked almost exactly as I had remembered, only with more lipstick. And she was just as nice as ever. We worked all the babysitting logistics out, her husband should be home about 10 PM, my parents would come get me, etc. I hugged her, hugging that core of kindness that had caused Lynn to distract me with her love when I was little and bereft. Then my old babysitter was gone, off to her appointment, and I started talking with the little boys, getting acquainted. The younger one was almost mute, just staring at me and standing close to his older brother.

The older brother spoke up. He was a little nervous, addressing a "grown-up" as if we were equals, but when he spoke, I realized that he had important things impelling him onward.

In his childish voice, he asked me for a favor. The favor was, that when bedtime came, if he and his little brother went to sleep without any fuss, would I be willing to say to his dad, later that night, that both boys had behaved really well and hadn't caused any trouble? "Cause sometimes", the little boy said, "my dad gets really mad if we don't obey."

"Of course I will tell him that you behaved", I said. "I'll tell him how good you were."

And they were. Those two little boys were the easiest children I have ever taken care of. They were so nice! They went to bed right on time, they never fussed or acted up, they were the sweetest kids I have ever known. "Remember," the older little boy said to me, "to tell my dad that we were good." "I will tell him," I promised.

About 10 PM an irritable man who badly needed to wash his hair walked in through the front door and muttered his name and that he was Lynn's husband. He headed through the living room, past the boys' bedroom door and into the kitchen in search of a beer from the fridge. He popped the beer and then walked back into the dining room, where I stood, next to the boys' bedroom door. I didn't even give him a chance to start.

"Your kids sure are well-behaved", I said, acting almost perplexed. "I expected a little more rowdiness." "They give you any trouble?" he asked belligerently. "No." I shook my head in wonderment. "They went to bed right at 8 o' clock. You know, if they had a full day today, they might have been pooped by bedtime."

The horrible, no-good, bullying, greasy and dishonorable ass that was her husband simply grunted and walked off into another room. Thank god!

Why had Lynn Schmoke, a kind, pretty girl, married an abusive lout? Why do these sad embroideries emerge in people's lives? What ever happened to those two little boys.

Cynthia Vautier
July 10, 2017