

## Never Let Go

They were both in the bare bedroom, sitting on or standing near the two or three cardboard boxes that held their belongings. They had just arrived recently and been dropped off. The little girl was four and her younger sister was two. Their baby brother must be sleeping, they didn't hear him.

In the kitchen, a few rooms away, they could hear the grown-ups sitting around the table, talking. There were about four of them, maybe some friends or neighbors had come over during the day and all of them were talking and laughing, having a good time. Cigarette smoke hung in the air and coffee cups held cooling coffee.

The little girl heard them, so did her sister, but they both knew that these people were strangers, so it was a little scary talking to grown-ups you had never met. "Where's mommy?" the little sister asked. She was afraid, everything was so strange and she didn't know anyone in this new place. "Where's mommy?" she asked again. The 4-year-old tried to tell her, they didn't know where mommy was, but she would come home later, maybe that night.

The little sister started to cry. She was so forlorn, so lonely, scared of this new place. The big sister tried to comfort her. She went over to where her sister was sitting on a packing case and stood beside her and put her arms around her and said, "Don't cry, Christie, mommy will come home, it will be all right." But her little sister continued to cry.

"I'll go find out from the grown-ups when mommy is coming home," she told her sister. The four-year-old was going to do something, so that should help her little sister take some comfort. The truth is, the big sister was making it up as she went along. She didn't know how to get grown-ups who were strangers to her to give her information that it might be hard to find out. And there were three or four of them, and only one of her.

But she made herself walk into the kitchen as if she knew what she was doing, then hung around until everyone stopped talking to see why she was standing there in front of them. One of the ladies talked to her for a minute, explaining that she and her brother and sister would be staying with them. "Do you know when my mommy is coming home?" asked the little girl. No, it turned out that they did not, "probably tonight, later, after you're in bed".

The little girl had to go back into the bare room with the packing cases and tell her little sister that the grown-ups did not know when mommy was coming home, but probably tonight. It was hard to tell her this. Christie cried all the more, and

the older sister tried to rock her back and forth, even though her sister was hard to rock, because she was sitting, inert and miserable, tears streaming down her chubby cheeks, trying as a two-year-old to accept the unacceptable.

Years later, when the older sister had to let go of the younger sister when the younger sister had got sick, the older sister realized: you can never let go of someone you held in your arms when they were little and crying.

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