

She was being babysat, or maybe foster-cared, in a big house with lots of decorations and plush furniture. It was a nice house and a family with a number of children lived there. They were taking care of her and her little sister and maybe her baby brother, though she didn't remember him being at that house. She was four and her sister was two and her brother was just a baby.

She herself was the only one of her own family that she remembered seeing on this Sunday morning, where much bustle was going on. Since it was Sunday, people in the house were getting ready to go to church, and going to church in your Sunday best was taken seriously. And with pomp. You were showing off your best clothes!

Calls were made up and down stairs inquiring whether someone had seen so-and-so's pair of black patent leather shoes, while a dismayed child had to be comforted because a button on her favorite dress had come off, and this Sunday she would have to wear a different dress. The dad had finished shaving and there were calls to finish dressing, father was going to go get the car and drive it around to the front of the house.

The four-year-old girl was standing at the living room window, with one of the family's children, a girl who was a little older, waiting beside her. They were looking out at the street, where the father's car was soon to arrive. Then the whole family would pile into the car and off to church they would go.

As they were standing beside the window, a shaft of sunlight suddenly broke through the clouds and shone on the wet leaves lying all over the streets, some of them brown, some yellow, some red. Everything turned bright.

The older girl turned to the four-year-old. "You can't come with us, only the family can go to church. You're not our family. You're not in our church."

The younger girl felt bad. She could see that the two of them were dressed for far different activities. She herself was dressed in her usual playclothes, elastic-waist pull-on corduroy pants and a long-sleeved flannel shirt. The older girl was resplendent, wearing a dress that flared out like a big iridescent plaid flower below the waist. It was kind of like a party dress, but in subdued colors. She wore patent-leather shoes and white ankle socks, and a wool dress coat that also flared out a little below the waist.

The younger girl really had no rejoinder to what the older girl said to her. It was all true. She couldn't go with the family to church. She wasn't part of the family, even though she got to eat and sleep in their house. She didn't belong to the church. She was supposed to stay in her playclothes and stay home. And, maybe, play?

But there weren't any children to play with once the family had gone. And her little sister was nowhere in sight. Was her sister being babysat somewhere else? Maybe there was a grown-up somewhere, but the house was awfully quiet once the father had arrived in front of the house with the car, and everyone had gotten in and gone off to church.

Ahead of her she had a long morning, maybe afternoon, to figure out how to occupy herself. All the possibilities that she thought of left her indifferent. Looking through the other children's picture books that were on shelves in their bedrooms was a possibility, but it wasn't as much fun if you had to do it alone. And though she could recognize some of the letters, she couldn't read yet. So the stories couldn't speak to her.

In all that she puzzled on, she had to realize that there wasn't much to do until the family came home. She didn't know where her sister and brother were. But many years later she would think it strange, in retrospect, that she did not wonder where her mother and father were, or whether they might come to take her away with them.

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