

## The Babysitter

My name is Jen. I am a 20-year-old girl who is spending the summer babysitting a 9-year-old girl. I have had three jobs before; a cashier at a grocery store, lifeguarding, and teaching swim lessons. Babysitting was not something I had done outside babysitting family members. But it is something I am glad I broadened my horizons into.

It is the summer before my third year in college, and I need a job. Next summer I will have an internship, so a job is necessary now. I downloaded all sorts of apps to get different kinds of jobs. Nothing seemed to pique my interest, and after about a week of looking, my mom gave me a suggestion. I took her advice and downloaded a babysitting app and started applying there. Nothing was working, until some young-looking woman named Allie reached out to me. I took the job as the hours were not too crazy and the pay was good.

April 13th, 2013. A young girl, barely a woman, is rushed to the hospital. She, supported by her mother, brought a baby girl into this world. This baby became Leila. Leila and her mother, Allie, live a simple life in New York. Her mother worked long hours to compensate for a lack of a college degree and lack of a helping father. Leila never mentioned her dad. She has not seen him in about two months and father's day was two days ago.

The first day I met Leila (in an interview sort of environment) she was quiet and avoided eye contact and conversation with me. Allie had hired babysitters before and gave them free rein to take Leila places. Leila's past babysitters did not get Leila to open up and there have been some questionable events. I always knew kids loved me. I come from a good home with lots of family. I knew that I could get this girl to open up and have the best summer.

The first day that I babysat, I got Leila off the bus and tried to get her to tell me about her day at school. She was silent. She got on her scooter, which was in the driveway, and rode to her

apartment. She had locked me out, but her mom had shown me where the spare key was, so I got in eventually. It was a quick shift, about 4 hours. By the end of the day, I think Leila had said 5 words to me in total. All five words about her dinner that I had to make.

The second day came along, and I had a bit more determination. I had always loved arts and crafts, so I decided to bring a giant bag filled with canvases and paint supplies. I also decided to bring over 2 board games, (that I noticed Leila did not have already). I was so excited to get to know Leila. To no avail, however. She stayed silent until the last 30 minutes which is when she wanted to play one of the board games. But I guess that is progress.

Day 3 came, and I decided to take a different route. I told her to get in a bathing suit because I was going to take her to my house. She lives in a 1-bedroom apartment and her mom sleeps on the pull-out couch. I figured she would like my house because I have 2 sisters, 3 dogs, 2 ferrets, and a turtle. I also have a pool, a hot tub, a couch, and a television in my backyard. I was at least correct this time. She lost her mind over everything and had so much fun. She even commented on how much food we have because I live with my mom and two sisters; I and my sisters are all athletes so we eat a decent amount.

Such a small success but I could feel the ice thawing. I introduced Leila to video games on my Xbox and she was hooked. She began asking to go to my house every day. I did not mind taking her to my house. I was just glad she was talking to me and having fun. Her mom says she has not been this happy in a while. Her last babysitter was the worst allegedly. That made me feel really good. This stopped feeling like a job and a way of making money. I feel like I have always focused too much on the monetary aspect. Meanwhile, this became about making a little friend and sharing my blessed life with someone who appreciated it. Embarrassingly enough, I

have not appreciated where I grew up and all the things my parents worked hard to provide for me for a very long time. Too long.

Within a month of that summer job, Leila would begin to facetime me during my off-hours. She would ask what I was doing or ask me to play video games with her. She started asking where my sisters were when they were not home and having dinner with my family. She was like another little sister at that point. It felt like it happened so fast, yet the beginning days felt long and awkward. I am glad it progressed that way.

One of the most memorable times I had with Leila was when I took her to get her first manicure. I needed to get my nails done and remembered Leila has never gotten her nails done at a salon, so I dragged her along. She was excited, even though she refused to show it. I could just tell. She picked out her color from the hundreds, and we sat down next to each other. I have NEVER seen this patient. She did not smudge anything. This was genuinely shocking. She usually is antsy and impatient. She was so excited that I could not even see the final result until they were completely dry. She had me wait to look. She had gotten a pastel lime green with a white smiley face on both of her pointer fingers. She was very proud. So proud that she made me tell everyone to ask her about her nails. Just so that she could show them off. To my mom, both my sisters individually, and even my friend Jess. Such a simple activity that took about 30 minutes in total, made her so happy and brought her so much joy.

The rest of the summer was picture-perfect. Leila would count down the days until she could see me, even though I only have 2 days off a week. She would always be at my house and playing with me and my sisters. I found myself making sacrifices like a parental figure, as my dad called it. For example, Leila already had breakfast by the time she came to my house. I was running late so I had not gotten to eat yet. My mom had gotten me a bagel and when Leila heard

that she asked to have one. Unfortunate. There was only 1. So I made myself eggs while I watched her eat the bagel. The bagel I really wanted. Even though I wanted it and she had already eaten breakfast. I honestly did not even mind it. As long as it made her happy. That is all I ever really wanted. Now I know for sure. I was a bit self-absorbed and too into social media. This was until I started getting yelled at by a 9-year-old every time I touched my phone. I also did not appreciate the things I had until I saw Leila who was content with very little. I felt like meeting her was a sign from a greater power, to help me find meaning in life.