

"BIG SISTER"

by

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EXT. SUZANNE'S HOUSE - DAY

Somewhere in the San Fernando Valley, a ranch house that had its last paint job twenty years ago stares back at us. The front lawn needs to be mowed. Desperately.

A silver Infiniti coupe suddenly zooms into an empty space across from the ranch house.

Out emerges LYNN CONNORS. Just shy of 40, but not shy of anything else: gym-toned, Fifth Avenue-fashioned, and a don't-fuck-with-me attitude. Two colorful gift bags dangle from her arms.

She stares at the ranch house. At its pathetic lawn.

LYNN

Shit.

INT. SUZANNE'S HOUSE - KITCHEN

SUZANNE TRENT, 35, Lynn's sister, sweet and shy, dips a spatula into a plastic mixing bowl of frosting and applies perfect swirls to a homemade birthday cake.

Her friends, TANYA and CARMEN, 30s, admire her. Tanya has tats; Carmen has too many earrings. They share a joint.

CARMEN

(to Suzanne)

... and remember when Lynn sent you that really cool fondue set for your birthday?

Suzanne nods. A good memory.

TANYA

If I want fondue, I have to nuke Cheez Whiz in the jar.

CARMEN

Ewww!

A DOORBELL interrupts the moment.

EXT./INT. SUZANNE'S HOUSE - ENTRANCE WAY

Suzanne dashes for the front door, flings it open.

Lynn stands, smiling.

LYNN

Let me guess. Thirty years old for the fifth-year straight.

SUZANNE

You're here! You're really here!

They embrace; it's emotional and long overdue.

LIVING ROOM

Suzanne leads Lynn past garage-sale furniture, landscape prints, fake flowers in cheap vases, and a flat screen TV. Scattered about are wedding photos of a YOUNG SUZANNE and her roughly handsome young husband, CARL TRENT.

Dollar-store birthday decorations are everywhere.

KITCHEN

Lynn and Suzanne enter to find Tanya and Carmen just finishing their joint. They rush to hug Lynn.

TANYA

Lynn!

CARMEN

Lynn!

LYNN

Hey, girls.

Lynn sets her gift bags on the counter. Their sparkle makes everything else in the room seem dull.

SUZANNE

You didn't have to get me anything.

LYNN

Of course I did. It's your birthday.

(to Tanya and Carmen)

And just so you guys don't feel left out...

She digs two paperback books out of one of the bags, hands them to Tanya and Carmen.

LYNN

Autographed by the man himself.

ON BOOK COVER: "Baggage-Free: Let Go of the Past, Get On With the Future!" Below the title: the mesmerizing face of the author, OLIVER KING, 42.

Tanya and Carmen stare at the cover, in love with Oliver.

TANYA
 (to Carmen)
 She gets to work for this guy.
 (to Lynn)
 Is he this hot in person?

LYNN
 Basically.

CARMEN
 We hate you.

They all laugh.

SUZANNE
 (to Lynn)
 So, where'd you fly in from this time?

LYNN
 Denver. And tomorrow, it's Seattle for
 Oliver's last seminar before his
 interview on *Good Morning America*.

TANYA
 Wow!

LYNN
 Then we're off to the U.K. for his first
 overseas tour. Oh. And his publishers
 have been hounding him for his next book.

SUZANNE
 But what about your book?

Lynn pats a small blue notebook, slightly worn, poking
 out of her purse.

LYNN
 Still working on it.

Suzanne smiles, masking her disappointment. Then...

SUZANNE
 Where are my manners?

She grabs a glass from the cupboard.

SUZANNE
 I've got iced tea, Red Bull, Coke --

LYNN
 Maybe a glass of red wine?

SUZANNE

I did ask Carl to buy some wine. But he said "a keg of beer was easier to serve and everybody likes beer."

Lynn blinks back her disapproval.

LYNN

You know what? I'm good. So... where is Carl? I should say hello.

SUZANNE

He's in the garage with the guys. Still messing with that bike of his. Could you tell them lunch is almost ready?

LYNN

Sure. I'll just freshen up first.

Lynn's eyes gravitate to the perfectly frosted cake.

LYNN

(to Tanya and Carmen)

You know, she makes her own cakes because they're better than anything store-bought.

TANYA

Oh, we know.

Suzanne fights a blush. Lynn continues to the

LIVING ROOM

... where she passes a La-Z-Boy recliner that looks like it was pilfered from the city dump. She glances back: a copy of Oliver's book props up the recliner on one side.

EXT./INT. SUZANNE'S HOUSE - GARAGE - MOMENTS LATER

The garage door is open, revealing shelves filled with tools, cans of half-used paint and god-knows-what. A keg chills in a plastic tub. In the midst of it all is

CARL. Now 38, he's a blue-collar hunk who gave up reining in his beer gut long ago. He's crouched over a vintage Harley-Davidson, fidgeting with an engine part.

Nearby are DAVE and CHUCK, 30s, clutching large plastic cups of beer and sloppily tossing darts at a dartboard.

LYNN (O.S.)

Hey, guys.

The men all turn to see Lynn, who approaches with a sexy confidence. She casually takes a dart from Dave's hand, tosses it like a pro and hits the bullseye dead center.

DAVE	CHUCK
(to Chuck)	(to Dave)
Whoa.	Whoa.

Carl stumbles over and gives her a bear hug. She tolerates it with a forced smile.

CARL
Well, if it isn't Ms. Manhattan.

LYNN
Hey, Mr. San Fernando Valley.

CHUCK
Don't ya mean "Mr. Beer Gut Valley"?

CARL
(to Chuck)
Shut up, asshole.
(to Lynn)
Remember Dave and Chuck?

LYNN
Of course.

She gives them a friendly nod. They suddenly get shy.

CARL
(off the keg)
How about a nice cold one?

LYNN
Thanks, but I just came to say hello and tell you that lunch is almost ready.

She looks at his motorcycle; it's obvious he'll never finish fixing it. She offers an encouraging smile.

LYNN
Still rebuilding that bike? Good for you, Carl.

Her phone BUZZES. She grabs it from a pocket, glances at the screen.

LYNN (CONT'D)
Excuse me, guys. Gotta take this.

Carl glares at her as she exits the garage side door...

EXT. SUZANNE'S HOUSE - BACK YARD

... and steps into a weed-filled yard. She taps her phone.

LYNN

Oliver? Everything okay?

INT. FOUR SEASONS - SUITE - BATHROOM (SEATTLE)

Oliver soaks in a grand tub. He's on his phone, gazing out at a sweeping view of the Seattle skyline. He's mesmerizing, yes, but if you look at him too deeply, you might see a paralyzing insecurity.

OLIVER

I'm at the hotel. Relaxing before tomorrow's seminar. The only thing missing... is you.

EXT. SUZANNE'S HOUSE - BACK YARD

Lynn smiles, charmed.

LYNN

Good things come to those who wait.

She senses something. Turns to see Carl, standing in the garage doorway, staring at her.

LYNN (CONT'D)

(on phone, to Oliver)

I better go. Yes, I'll give Suzanne your best. See you first thing tomorrow.

She clicks off. Carl gives her a knowing smile.

CARL

Still sleeping with your boss? The married one? Good for you, Lynn.

Lynn looks at him for an icy moment.

LYNN

You know, maybe next year you could take Suzanne out. So she doesn't have to cook for seven people on her birthday. And by the way, she doesn't like beer. And neither do I.

She walks off. Dave and Chuck join Carl and lustily watch Lynn as she returns to the house.

CHUCK
Jesus, she's smokin'.

CARL
I got the better sister.

CHUCK
How would you know unless you've banged both?

Dave laughs. Carl drunkenly shoves Chuck.

CARL
Didn't you hear me the first time, shit-head? I got the better sister.

Dave stops laughing. Chuck straightens up.

INT. SUZANNE'S HOUSE - LIVING/DINING ROOM - LATER

Everyone sits at the table, happily finishing the cake.

LYNN
Suzanne. Best birthday cake ever. You know you should have your own bakery.

CARL
That's my girl. Makin' everything sweet for everyone.

Suzanne blushes.

For a moment, Lynn is charmed by Carl's compliment to Suzanne.

TANYA
Okay, time for presents!

Tanya gathers Lynn's gift bags and two small boxes wrapped in girly fashion from a sideboard, sets them on the table. Lynn holds up her hand, as if to say, "Wait."

LYNN
Let's go with the guys first this time.
Carl, where's your present?

Carl quaffs from a tacky beer stein. Puts it down. Belches.

CARL
Between my legs.

Dave and Chuck laugh.

CARL

Suzanne knows I got her somethin' nice. It just... it couldn't be delivered today.

SUZANNE

You don't need to get me anything. I've got you.

She reaches for his hand; an undeniable moment of love.

CARMEN

Okay. Well. Mine first.

Carmen grabs a box from Tanya, hands it to Suzanne.

Suzanne unwraps it, revealing a cheap bath set.

SUZANNE

(reading off a label)

"Grape-berry bath salts and bubble bath."

(to Carmen)

I... I'm sure I'll love them. Thank you.

Tanya slides her gift down to Suzanne. Suzanne unwraps it to reveal a "Make Your Own S'mores Set."

TANYA

Carmen and I were thinking of it like a kind of theme, like, you know, a "s'mores and spa" night. Just for us girls.

Suzanne and Lynn exchange a quick smile.

SUZANNE

(to Tanya)

Oh. I... can't wait. Thank you.

Carmen places Lynn's fancy gift bags in front of Suzanne.

CARMEN

Lynn's turn!

From the larger bag Suzanne removes a box of classic nested mixing bowls in vibrant colors. She opens the box and sets out the bowls. The colors brighten the room.

LYNN

With all the cooking you do, you deserve a proper set of mixing bowls.

SUZANNE

Lynn. They're really beautiful.

Lynn gently nudges the second bag towards Suzanne.

Suzanne removes a small pink box. She opens it to reveal a bracelet with crystal-topped cupcake charms.

Suzanne puts it on; Tanya and Carmen "ooh" and "ahh."

Carl instinctively moves to his recliner, plops down, takes a noisy swig of beer.

LYNN

(off the charms)

They're custom-made. Just something to remind you of how talented you are.

SUZANNE

Lynn. You're the best. Thank you.

They have a tender moment, interrupted by a loud BELCH.

CARL

Hey, Lynnster. What's it like livin' in Manhattan, eatin' hundred dollar lunches every day, shoppin' in overpriced "boo-teeks" where they won't let you in unless you look "right"? Must be nice.

LYNN

It is, Carl. What's it like being unemployed and having a bad haircut? Tell me what that's like.

Dave and Chuck stifle guffaws. Carl pushes himself up from his recliner, stands, unsteadily, ready to lunge.

CARL

I've been looking for work everyday, you rich bitch!

SUZANNE

Carl!

LYNN

If that chair is the only mode of transportation you have, it might explain why you can't get to your job interviews.

CARL

Get out of my house!

Lynn stands up, ready to leave -- but not defeated.

LYNN

This isn't your house just because you chipped in fifty cents toward the down payment.

CARL

You goddamn --

LYNN

Here's an idea for a birthday present, Carl: Why don't you grow the hell up and be the husband my sister deserves?

Carl's jaw drops. Suzanne stands in shock.

LYNN

Suze. Guys. Forgive me. I hope to see you soon. Under better circumstances.

EXT. SUZANNE'S HOUSE - STREET

Lynn is halfway to her rental car, Suzanne right behind her.

SUZANNE

Please don't go. I'm sorry.

LYNN

For what? Carl and I get under each other's skin. Everybody knows that.

Suzanne grabs Lynn's hand. Lynn keeps walking.

SUZANNE

You said you'd stay the night. I'm going to make blueberry pancakes for breakfast.

LYNN

I love your blueberry pancakes. But I've already booked a room near the airport.

SUZANNE

Because you knew it would be like this?

LYNN

I always hope it won't be.

They reach Lynn's rental car. They stand. An awkward moment.

LYNN

I was thinking. After Oliver and I come back from London, he has a seminar in San Francisco. I'll fly you up for the weekend.