

Lydia's Dollhouse

The hardest thing and the best thing for me to give away for Secret Elves was my dollhouse. I felt right proud of that dollhouse on account of I made it myself. Gran made me a big family of clothespin dolls for Christmas when I was eight, and they needed a house to live in. I asked Mr. Parsons at the Company store if I could have me some of his small cardboard boxes. He said sure on account of he just throwed them away after stacking the stuff packed in them. I covered the outside of the boxes with scraps of white muslin and glued them together so's I could have different rooms for my house. I cut a door that would open and close and holes for wax-paper windows. Then I used my school crayons to decorate it real fancy like a house rich folks live in.

I folded a rectangle of cardboard in half for the roof. That gave me a attic for my dolls. I asked Mama, Uncle William, and Mr. Parsons to save their old matchboxes for me. Mama asked the ladies at church to save them for me, too. I cut the striking strips off of them boxes and glued them on the roof for shingles. It took a long time to get the whole roof covered in shingles, but it was worth it!

For the fireplace, I glued four matchboxes end to end. I cut two holes for the fireplace openings in the house. I also cut holes in the upstairs room and the downstairs room for the fireplace openings. After I glued them matchboxes to the house, I glued tiny rocks all over them. Then I glued tiny sticks in my fireplaces. I made the flames by cutting up some cherry skins and lemon rind. I mixed them up together and glued them to the sticks.

I needed me some stairs in my house. So I cut holes in the floors of two of my upstairs boxes. I also cut a hole in one of the tops of an upstairs box that went up to the attic. Then I folded strips of cardboard like you fold a fan. I glued one end to the top floor and the other end to the bottom floor. I had me some good looking stairs when I finished.

I wanted the inside to be real fancy, too. Mama let me cut up a old crazy quilt made of sack material. Gran and Mama used to buy feed, flour, and sugar from different companies. That way, they had sacks of all different colors and prints for sewing. I had some material with little yellow daisies that I glued on bedroom walls. I used the solid colors for other walls. The cardboard made a good color for wood floors. I just added some lines and knot holes with brown and black crayons.

The most funnest part was whittling the furniture. Me and Mama used to sit out on the porch

and watch the sun go down, a-whittling just like her and Gramps used to do. We made beds and couches and tables and picture frames—just everthing a fancy house would need, even a inside toilet! We sewed tiny cushions and quilts for the furniture. I drew tiny pictures for the picture frames. I even whittled me a piano, just like the one I hope to have in my grown-up house someday.

I needed paint for my furniture, but we didn't have no money for that type of thing. That's when I learned about making dyes from Gran when I fixed up my dollhouse. She'd ask me what color I wanted a couch or bed and then she'd tell me what to collect from the woods. We'd dip the wood furniture in the dye until it picked up stain, just like material does. I also cut up pieces of an empty burlap sack for rugs. They looked right pretty after I dyed them.

It was a mighty fine looking house, iffен I do say so myself. Gran once told Mama, "Land sakes, that girl (meaning me) be the finest whittler and dye-maker for her age that I ever done seed! I wouldn't mind living in that house myself iffен it was a mite bit bigger or I was a mite bit smaller." She looked at me and said, "Pumpkin, you have more gumption than Carters has Little Liver Pills!" I felt all warm inside when she said that.

I knowed I was getting a little too big to play with the dollhouse when I was nine. But evertime I saw it, I felt proud that I had made it with my own two hands. One time when I looked at it, I thought about little Sylvia and how much she would love it. A gnawing feeling told me that God wanted me to let it go.

I tried not to think about it, but one Sunday in church, Pastor John talked about how when we give, we receive something deep and powerful from God—something so much better than our gift. I squirmed a little in my seat. It felt like he was a-talking to me. I decided then and there to wrap the dollhouse and the clothespin dolls in one of the quilts for a Christmas present. It felt good not to hide anymore from what I knowed God wanted me to do.

BJ felt too sick to be a secret elf that year, but Mama helped me carry it to Betsy's door. I told BJ all about it when I got back. He said he pictured it in his head when we went over there. So it was like he snuck over there with us, too.

I knowed now that I made that dollhouse not just for me, but also for Sylvia. Pastor John was right about that deep and powerful thing we receive being better than what we give. I still get the grins when I think about little Sylvia playing with that dollhouse. And them grins is way bigger than the grins I had when I played with it.