The Guilty One

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Abstract

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HE LET ME out of the car and I started walking toward school. I don’t know why, but huge tears swelled within and my throat suddenly became sore. He turned his car past me and I tried through tearful eyes to see his license number.

I was trembling and started running — faster and faster toward school. Why had I gotten in with him? I shouldn’t have done it. I knew I shouldn’t have. Why?

I was late, so I headed for my seventh grade adviser’s office. I tried to tell the story calmly, but everything leaked.

“Do you want me to call your mother and father?” she asked.

“Oh no,” I said, wiping my eyes. “Don’t tell them. Daddy always told me not to get in cars with strange men. He’d . . . please don’t tell them.”

My adviser gave me a tardy slip and I went to class. I told one girl what had happened and swore her never to tell anyone else. I was afraid. Everyone knew you shouldn’t get into strange cars. Daddy had always told me that, particularly when he was reading the newspaper.

Two hours later that morning I was called to the school office. A policeman wanted to see me. He asked many ques-
tions about what had happened and said the police would try to find the man. My adviser told me she had called my mother. My heart burst. Now they knew. Why did I do it? Why did I do it?

In the afternoon I was called to the office again and was met by the policeman and my mother. We all went to the police station. At the station I was asked if I recognized a car that was in the parking lot. I said it looked like the man's car.

Inside the station I viewed a lineup, I couldn't see anyone that looked like the man I had ridden with. The men were questioned and mother and I listened. When the third man spoke I recognized his voice. It was the voice that had spoken the words that I knew were dirty—the words that decent people never said in public.

The police chief asked me if I could make a positive identification. "That's the voice. . . . but the face . . . ." I couldn't be "positive."

Mother took me home that afternoon and we talked about it. I tried so hard to tell her how I knew she and Daddy had always told me not to get into strange cars and that I was so so sorry. Mother said she had called Daddy as soon as my adviser had called her. "What will Daddy do?" I asked.

"I don't know," she replied. "He was pretty upset."

Late in the afternoon, I lay on the bed in my dark room and waited, thinking. "This is the worst thing I have ever done—the one thing that Daddy has told me not to do over and over. Daddy can get so mad and yell so loud and spank so hard."

I heard his car pull into the driveway and heard him enter the house. The door to my room opened slowly and the light from the living room crept in. Dad walked over toward me. Fear of what was coming next gripped my body. I felt like I was going to explode—I shook and my stomach ached. Suddenly I could hear myself loudly sobbing and crying, "I'm sorry Daddy, I'm sorry."

Daddy pulled me toward him and put his arms around me. "Oh, my God, you're all right." He held me tightly and let me cry.