

Replacement Parts

Fred Word

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CHAPTER 1

The parents of Nicholas Vaughn and Timothy Lawrence were neighbors long before the boys were born. They lived in an impressive neighborhood, their huge backyards separated by a greenway. When the boys became old enough to venture beyond the confines of their homes, they found each other. For awhile, they stood in their own yard staring across the greenway at one another, not daring to leave their yard as their parents had instructed. That lasted only a few hours as they tentatively ventured further into the greenway. Soon, they were playing as only small children can, oblivious to everything and exploring every inch of their new world.

In an upstairs room, in the house next door to Timothy Lawrence, a young girl was busy playing with her dolls. She happened to glance out the window, watched for a while and then hurried downstairs, found her mother and begged to be allowed to go outdoors. Only if she stayed near the back door, her mother warned. Deborah Warren was out the door and ran all the way to the greenway before she slowed to a walk and approached the boys. In a few minutes, the three of them were playing and continued to explore the greenway. The children were not yet of school age but a bond had just been formed.

The boys walked side by side. The girl followed closely behind. They had a few hours head start and considered themselves knowledgeable explorers of the greenway. It was still new to Deborah and she was studying every inch.

"She's still a girl," Timothy said. "Girls are tattle tales."

"We haven't done anything yet," Nicholas countered.

"When we do, she'll tattle tale."

"Hey!" Deborah called out. They didn't stop nor answer. "My mother told me to stay by the back door. You won't tell on me, will you?" The boys looked at each other and grinned. They had just learned a valuable lesson.

Later, Timothy found a rock and after taking careful aim, flung it at a tree trunk. He missed. Nicholas took up the unspoken challenge and flung a rock at the same tree. He missed. Soon, a barrage of rock throwing was underway. Occasionally, one of the throws came close. Mostly, they were watching to see that the other did not gain an advantage by moving one step closer. They had thrown so many the rocks were becoming scarce. It was taking longer to find one. While they searched in a widening circle, their eyes were glued to the ground, Deborah stepped up, took careful aim and trying her best to mimic a baseball pitcher, made a direct hit on the tree trunk. She was as surprised as the boys. She looked at them, waiting for the accolades she was sure would come.

"She had a perfect rock for throwing," Timothy said scornfully. "If I had that rock, I would have hit it, too."

Nicholas and Deborah looked at the tree. For an instant, they considered trying to find the rock but not aware of what the other was thinking, they said nothing.

They wandered further into the greenway, found a log and the boys sat on it, taking up just the right amount of space so no room was left for Deborah. She found a bare spot on the ground and sat, eyeing them suspiciously.

Timothy spoke, "We could sure use a drink."

"Yeah," Nicholas added.

Deborah looked from one to the other. They looked at her. She sighed dejectedly and stood. "I'll get something." She walked away in the direction of her house.

They watched until she was out of earshot. "Let's hide from her," Timothy said.

"What if she brings something to drink?" Nicholas asked.

"I guess we'll have to wait and see."

Deborah slipped into the kitchen, took three large can drinks from the refrigerator, paused to hear her mother talking on the phone and hurried out the door. She approached the place where the boys were waiting and was surprised to find them there. She walked up and held out the drinks. They took one and made room for her on the log.

The hours of that first day passed. Deborah was the first to go home. She seemed to sense when her mother's phone conversation would end and she would be missed. Sure enough, the back door opened and her mother peered out.

"Now that's a good girl. You stayed by the porch," her mother said. Deborah had been sitting on the porch about thirty seconds.

The boys watched her walk away. When she was out of sight, they started toward their own houses.

"What do you think?" Nicholas asked.

"I say, no girls."

"But she did get those drinks. What if we try for cookies and drinks?" Nicholas smiled broadly.

Timothy kicked at sticks and rocks and finally said, "Okay, for drinks and cookies, she can stay."

Nicholas' mother greeted him when he went inside.

"Did you have fun, Dear?"

"Yes".

"What did you do?"

"Nothing".

She sat a plate of food for him at the table. "The sitter will be here shortly. Your father and I are going to a party." She tousled his hair and hurried from the room.

Timothy walked in as his mother appeared in the doorway. "Timothy, the sitter will feed you. We're late. We have tickets for the theater." She jabbed at her ear with a ring.

"Did you have fun playing?"

"Yeah".

She looked at him for a moment and hurried out of the room.

"Deborah! Come in!" her mother called. "The sitter is here. Your father's company is having a dinner. We have to attend." Deborah came inside. "Be sure to get your bath," her mother called back over her shoulder as she hurried to the door.

Late that night, the children were all in their beds, presumably asleep. Their sitters were downstairs in darkened rooms having been joined by their boyfriends as soon as the children were hustled off to bed. The boys had sat at the top of the stairs and listened to the strange sounds emitted by their sitters and their boyfriends. They did not have the nerve to venture down the stairs for a closer look. They knew they would be exposed by a creaking step on the stairs.

Deborah was not so inhibited. She had learned how to maneuver silently down the stairs and did so until she had a good view of her sitter and boyfriend in various stages of ecstasy on the couch. They were illuminated by a streetlight shining through a huge bay window. She watched a few minutes and climbed silently back up the stairs.

The children lay in their beds, thinking of the day's adventure. They decided they would go back tomorrow.

It was a nice spring afternoon. Nicholas sat on his back porch waiting for Timothy to come out. He did, they spotted each other and met in the greenway. Deborah was watching from her bedroom window. As soon as she saw them, she hurried out. They joined up and began another meandering stroll through the greenway.

"Do you have a sitter?" Deborah asked.

Reluctantly, they admitted they did. They said no more, not anxious to have a discussion about being watched over by a baby-sitter. Deborah thought about asking if their baby-sitters engaged in the same behavior as hers but not knowing exactly how to ask, said no more about it.

The greenway was proving not to be all that entertaining. A few hours of aimless wandering and they had covered every inch. The boys had sprung the drinks and

cookies trap on Deborah and she had immediately produced. Nicholas had lobbied to inform her she was not a permanent member of the group. Timothy had disagreed arguing that to do so would make her think she didn't have to supply drinks and cookies. Nicholas wasn't too sure but was hesitant to do anything to spoil the fringe benefits.

The boys were sitting on a log. Deborah was trying without success to duplicate her rock throwing feat. The boys were whispering, giggling and acting all around goofy. Deborah was sure they were mocking her and was trying to ignore them. She was casting glances at them between throwing rocks at the tree.

Timothy had a pained look on his face and said, "We need to pee."

"So, pee," she said.

"You'll look."

"Will not."

"Okay, then. We're going behind that tree. You better not look."

"You better not look at me either," she called out. Deborah had needed to pee for an hour but couldn't get up the nerve to say so.

A few minutes later, Nicholas and Timothy were stumbling along a path. Their eyes were as big as silver dollars. Timothy spoke first. "Did you see...Did you know...Girls...Are like that!"

"No," was all Nicholas could say.

Deborah followed several yards behind. "You looked! Both of you looked! I'll never come back!" She sounded on the verge of tears.

The boys tried every persuasion they could think of. Deborah sat, her bottom lip extended, an occasional tear trickling down her cheek and she rejected every offer they made. Finally, they had stumbled upon the right one. Nicholas would bring candy, chocolate candy. Timothy would bring the drinks. She no longer had to furnish cookies or drinks. And one last thing.....the boys had to pee while she watched.

The spring turned to summer and almost without fail, they met every day in the greenway. Spring rains created a few water holes. These had spawned frogs, minnows and turtles and they had gleefully examined every one, usually to the detriment of Deborah. They stuffed a frog in her pants. They tried to get her to stick her finger in the turtle's mouth. They dared her to swallow a minnow. She was so glad when the summer heat evaporated the pools and all the creatures disappeared.

She sat on the bare dirt under the huge tree waiting for them. It was the designated waiting place, at least, for her. The boys went wherever they wanted and she had to find them or she had to wait for them. To her horror she had learned they would not look for her, instead going in the opposite direction. She had wandered throughout the greenway all afternoon, calling to them. Only when she burst into tears did they come out from hiding. Then she learned, they had been in a tree, barely able to stifle giggles as she passed under their hiding place, again and again.

She saw them. What were they carrying? "Oh, no!" she thought. It had happened sooner than she expected. A ball and bat. She covered her eyes.

Timothy swung the bat at an imaginary ball. Nicholas held the ball and motioned for Deborah to move to her right. Then he motioned for her to stop. He turned and pitched the ball toward Timothy who swatted the ball into the area she had just vacated. She watched the ball roll seemingly forever, dropped her head and trudged after it.

"Hurry! Hurry! Run! Run!" the boys yelled at her. She walked slower.

Finally, she retrieved the ball and it was back in Nicholas' hand. He had waved her into another position and satisfied it was just right, he pitched the ball. Timothy hit it in the opposite direction. Nicholas and Deborah watched as the ball rolled out of sight.

Either she got to bat or she was playing no more, she had announced to them. That had backfired when they told her

they didn't care. She was never in the right place to stop the ball. Her argument that they were the ones that positioned her had fallen on deaf ears. She cried for a minute. They ignored her.

Then, she resorted to feminine wiles. With a crayon, she had drawn a tattoo on the right cheek of her butt. Let her bat and she would show them. The bat was thrust into her hand and Nicholas was ready to pitch before she could even move. Thirty minutes later, she had taken dozens of mighty swings and had yet to hit the ball. This was no fun at all but it was better than chasing the ball. Timothy was so confident she would never hit the ball he was throwing rocks at some invisible target. Finally, he strode up to Nicholas and they conferred, alternately casting glances at her. Then, they both approached her. "Show us the tattoo, now," they had said.

She went behind a tree, stood there for a minute, came out and announced her clothing must have worn off the tattoo. It was gone.

The boys had stared at her. They could not believe this was happening. How could they be denied?

Desperately, Nicholas said, "Show us where the tattoo was."

"That was not the agreement," she said defiantly.

They took the bat and ball and walked away dejectedly. She watched them go. She would pay for this. Instinctively, she knew she would.

She lay in bed that night, trying to think of some way to make amends. She sighed. There was only one way. She turned on the lamp, crawled out of bed and found a crayon. She pulled down her pajamas, backed up to a mirror and wondered how she would ever draw a tattoo upside down and backwards. Her dilemma was solved when she drew a lopsided star. Then she remembered what Nicholas had said. It didn't matter if there was a tattoo. It just mattered where the tattoo would have been.

The days of that first summer quickly passed and they were about to enter school. They were excited and even more

so when they learned they would be going to the same school, all the same classes, everything. Nicholas would walk across the greenway and join them at the front of their houses where they would catch the bus together.

During the first days of school, the teachers would learn they were an extremely gifted and intelligent trio. Their IQ's were off the scale and academics were so easy they did not seem to be paying attention. Accelerated classes were hardly a challenge. Occasionally, one would hit a snag but they retired to the solitude of the greenway and tutored each other.

So far, the weather was not too inclement. It had not occurred to them that a raging winter would end the greenway meetings. A blustery fall day brought home the message. They sat, shivering on a log. Their voices rose so they were heard above the wind. What could they do? Timothy was the first to have an idea. His father had built a workshop at the end of the garage. It had never been used, at least, not as a workshop. It was empty except for a few items that should have been thrown away. Would their parents allow them to convene in the workshop? Deborah was shivering even harder. She could stand it no longer. "Let's go. Everyone ask tonight. We'll talk in the morning," she said and was up and leaving. Timothy and Nicholas lingered a moment but knowing there was no other choice they were soon on their way home.

Timothy approached his father. He was engrossed in a newspaper and dressed in a suit, obviously waiting on Timothy's mother. They were going out. This was a good sign. He seldom paid any attention to Timothy at these times.

Timothy leaned on the chair arm and asked, "Dad, could I use the work shop for sort of a clubhouse this winter. My friends and I have no place to play since it's getting cold."

His father dropped his paper into his lap and looked at the boy. "Friends? I didn't know you were having friends over."

"We play out....," he waved his arm in the direction of the greenway.

"Who are your friends?" Someone from school?"

"No. Well, yes. Both. They live here." Again he pointed in two directions to indicate the location of their houses. "We're in the same grade. We ride the bus together, also."

"Well, that's great. In the neighborhood, I mean. Your friends live in the neighborhood."

That seemed to have been the magic word. Timothy smiled. "Of course. We've been playing in the greenway. Just out there," he said and pointed.

"We'll just have to do something about that. Of course, you need a place to meet your friends. That workshop has a stove. Just the place on a winter's day. You don't have to worry about soiling the carpet and furniture either." He patted Timothy on the head.

Timothy went to the window and looked out. Nicholas was already in the house. He went to a room facing Deborah's house. Her curtains were drawn. He waited, looking at her room. Finally, the lights came on but the curtains remained drawn. He heard his parents preparing to leave and giving last minute instructions to the sitter. When the door closed, he went to the telephone. He would call Nicholas. The sitter was already on the phone. Timothy said he wanted to use the phone.

"Get the hell out of here and shut up, Butthead!" the sitter admonished him.

Timothy checked again but her curtains were still drawn. He went to his room. The news would have to wait until the morning.

Deborah almost waited too long. Her parents were at the front door. She approached, holding a textbook in her hands, her finger obviously marking a place. "My friend has a place to play.....in the garage. It's too cold for outdoors. May I go there after school?"

"Your friend.....where.....?" her mother looked at her reflection in the mirror as she made a last second check on her makeup.

"Next door," Deborah replied. "We're in the same class and ride the bus together," she said happily.

"Same class...that's nice...our neighborhood...of course, Dear. They should be nice people...our neighborhood, perhaps I will meet them soon." Deborah's father opened the door. Her mother bent over and squeezed Deborah's shoulders. "See you in the morning," and they hurried out. Their car was barely out of the driveway when the sitter's boyfriend drove in. The sitter watched through the window and met him at the door before he had time to knock. Deborah went up the stairs then came back down in the darkness. The sitter and her boyfriend had wasted no time. She watched for a while before going silently to her room. She flopped on the bed and thought about tomorrow. She hoped Timothy had obtained permission to use the room. Without it, it would be a long winter.

Nicholas' family was having their evening meal. He waited for an opening and after his parents had reviewed their itinerary for the week he spoke, "My friend...across the greenway.....we played all summer but now it's too cold. May I go to his house, he has a playroom, sort of." Nicholas' parents were looking at him. This was something new. He didn't know what to say.

"A friend. That's nice, Nicholas. Where does he live?" his mother asked.

"Across the greenway. He's in my class. We ride the bus everyday."

"A neighborhood friend?" Nicholas' father asked.

"He lives right over there," Nicholas pointed in the direction.

"Of course, you can play with your friends, Nicholas. Remember you mustn't soil his mother's carpet."

"The playroom is in the garage," Nicholas said.

"What a good idea," his father chimed in. "We must meet your new friend, soon," he added.

Nicholas resumed eating. Now, if only Timothy had been so lucky.

The next morning, they waited for the bus, bubbling with excitement. Nicholas and Deborah could tell by the look on Timothy's face that he had succeeded. Their broad smiles

told Timothy all he needed to know. As they rode to school, they made plans for the evening. Already, the room had become their clubhouse.

They piled off the bus and rushed across Timothy's yard. The stiff north wind reminded them of the importance of their accomplishment. Inside the room, they surveyed it. It looked exactly like what it was. A little used storeroom. Timothy lit the stove and they huddled around it.

Finally, they were warm. Deborah spoke first, "If this is to be our place for the winter, let's clean it up." Nicholas and Timothy were satisfied with it, as is. Deborah fell to the cleaning task alone and soon they reluctantly joined in.

There was not that much they could do. They found chairs and a rickety table among the stored items. The rest, they stacked in a corner. They sweep the floor clean and in no time were sitting in the chairs next to the stove and surveying their new kingdom.

Over the years, the decor of the room would change to reflect their maturity or lack of it. On the last day of their senior year, something remained of each of their school years. A scribble on the wall, a banner or some other memento. The walls were covered in graffiti, some of it a mystery known only to one but most was a shared experience.

In the summer between their third and fourth years of school, Nicholas' inventive abilities first surfaced. They were playing in the greenway. It was a searing day, one of the hottest of the year. Timothy had pulled a garden hose to the maximum extent of its length and was using the spray of water to keep Nicholas and Deborah at bay. Deborah, in particular, had not fared well. Her hair was plastered to her head and her shorts were dripping. She had attempted to divert Timothy's attention while Nicholas flanked him. Timothy had stuck the hose in her pants and then sprayed her down while she fled. She never learned that Nicholas had conspired with him and they had set her up for the trap.

But Timothy became power mad and hosed Nicholas as well. The next day, the battle continued but unknown to them,

Nicholas had found some odd parts in his father's garage. Some pipe and old pieces of a lawn sprinkler system. He studied the pieces and it became apparent to him. By carefully assembling them in a certain order, the water flow was narrowed resulting in a more forceful blast. When attached to a hose in Nicholas' yard he was able to direct a spray much further than Timothy. As a result, he hosed Timothy from the safety of his yard. Deborah quickly affiliated with him but he hosed her as well. In the water spraying department there were no alliances.

In their seventeenth year and in a moment of boredom, they resurrected the water hose fight. Nicholas' valve contraption was still in the clubhouse and it still worked. As so many years ago, Deborah lost again. This time a wet T-shirt caused the boys to try to schedule a daily water hose fight. Deborah agreed to getting hosed now and then but certainly not every day. The boys also had to agree that she could hose them. As Timothy so aptly put it, "She could stick it up my nose if I get to see her in a wet T-shirt."

Each year their reputations for academic achievement grew. Their grades were so nearly the same that they were spoken of as one person. Early in their schooling, Nicholas gained a slight edge, measured in decimal points. Deborah was second and Timothy third. The difference was infinitesimal but it was a difference that did not change throughout their schooling. If it ever mattered to Deborah and Timothy that they could not overtake Nicholas, they never mentioned it nor showed any jealousy.

Their academic standings tended to further isolate them from their classmates. Their residences were not near another classmate and as the years passed they depended on one another for support and friendship. Oddly enough, they were all popular with their classmates but relationships did not extend beyond the classroom. By the time they were old enough to drive and could go anywhere, anytime, they had established such a pattern of togetherness they did not try to change it.

Nicholas and Timothy had participated briefly in sports but that changed nothing when Deborah tried for and became a cheerleader. They were still together.

The first serious threat to their relationship came when Deborah blossomed into a beauty. She was always a beautiful child but as a teenager all the parts developed just right. She got more than her share of attention but she never broke away from the boys.

The same thing happened to the boys. They were handsome young men, from well to do families and intelligent. Girls were available but they had a shy streak and it was a non-threatening world in the clubhouse with each other.

They were in the fourth grade when Deborah's future talents first manifested themselves. She was waiting in the clubhouse. The boys came in. One had made a detour to his house and grabbed a bag of cookies. Deborah pointed to a pallet of blankets she had carefully spread on the floor.

"Lay down," she instructed.

The boys looked at the blanket, at her, and finally, at each other. Timothy's cheeks bulged with cookies so Nicholas shrugged and did as he was told. Deborah knelt beside him and opened a plastic case she held. She took out a toy stethoscope, placed it in her ears and said, "Take off your clothes."

"What!....Why?" Nicholas asked.

"We're playing doctor," Deborah said, "And I'm the doctor."

Nicholas looked at Timothy. Timothy spoke through the mouthful of cookies. "Do it! Then, we'll get to be the doctor!" Nicholas peeled off his clothes.

Deborah had not considered that she might have to become the patient but once Nicholas complied, she had no choice. Timothy was so anxious for his turn, he took off his clothes before she had completed her examination of Nicholas. As it turned out, he was trying to hurry it along so they would have their turn at being the doctor. It was an experience they would never forget.

It also had more long lasting effects than they would ever have imagined. Deborah would eventually go to medical school. It came as no surprise to the boys.

"Hell," Timothy would say, "You knew more about anatomy when you were ten years old than doctors know when they finish medical school."

"You sure had a lot of fun while I was learning," she countered.

"Yeah," the boys replied blissfully.

Nicholas' insight and mastery of intricate valves continued throughout their childhood. In the confines of the clubhouse, he would build one valve after another. Timothy and Deborah could hardly wait to learn what the next one would do. As they neared graduation and careers were being chosen, Nicholas would surprise them by choosing an MBA. He reasoned, "I know how to engineer things, design and build them. I already have some patents. What I need to know is how to run a business and more importantly, how to keep all the money I'm going to make."

It was a prophecy that he would accomplish beyond their, and his, wildest expectations.

Then his life would take the most unusual of turns when boredom, dissatisfaction and restlessness overcame him.

Timothy's choice was unexpected. "It looks like you two will always need a lawyer. I think I'll be one."

A few years out of law school and Timothy was the head of a prestigious law firm. Brilliant and ambitious young lawyers waited in line for the opportunity to join his firm. Timothy sat in his opulent office, only taking the highest profile cases. His mere presence in a courtroom was enough to cause his opponent to quake in fear, certain that defeat was eminent. He grew wealthy.

Deborah became a surgeon, specializing in organ transplants. She was the foremost authority in the field her

expertise was sought throughout the world. Fortune and fame followed her.

Nicholas founded his company and the valves he invented were a mainstay of the oil industry. He became a multi-millionaire, by far the richest of the three. He could never escape unhappiness. No matter how successful, he never achieved satisfaction. His life became the oddest of all.

Though, they were neighbors and their children were inseparable playmates, the parents never became more than acquaintances. Their lives and life styles had been set years before and they were not the type to change. Although, far from rich, their parents were financially secure and successful in their work. The exclusive neighborhood and its trappings took all of their resources. Their fathers worked long and hard to maintain their lifestyles and there was never time for neighborhood chats. Content that their children were happy and safe in the company of the others, the parents were most willing to leave well enough alone.

In the safe confines of the clubhouse, Timothy was the first to bring in cigarettes for their experimentation.

"Where did he get them?" they had asked.

"Some kid at school heisted them from his parents," he answered as he laid out the dozen cigarettes and a book of matches. Timothy lit one, puffed vigorously on it and passed it around. They didn't seem to be doing much except creating lots of smoke and were on the eighth cigarette when Nicholas inadvertently inhaled some smoke. After the coughing fit subsided, they all tried inhaling and with the same results. The next day, Timothy replenished the supply and with some instructions, they tried again. They coughed until they gagged. Years later, when tempted with marijuana, Deborah recalled the incident.

"It would have to make me feel awfully damn good to make up for coughing and gagging." The boys agreed and they never experimented with drugs. Their baby-sitters were never

without it and after smoking with their boyfriends, they put on some uninhibited performances on the couch.

Each could hardly wait to get to the clubhouse and share what they had seen! Deborah's sitter was the most experienced and the boys sat wide-eyed and spellbound as Deborah recounted the sitter's exploits of the night before. Playing doctor was becoming more and more meaningful.

Timothy was also the first to pilfer some liquor from his parent's supply. They tried that and with more disastrous results than with the cigarettes. Deborah got drunk. The boys were aghast. First, she was going to take off all her clothes and they would have a water hose fight. It did not matter that it was twenty degrees and the north wind was howling. The boys barred the door while trying to figure out how to coax her into taking off her clothes but without the water hose fight. She would not relent. It was both or none. They considered it at length, before reluctantly declining.

But Deborah was not done. She put on a seductive dance that the boys would recall for years. "Where did you learn that?" they asked in awe.

"The sitter," she replied and never missed a beat.

"Who is your sitter?" they asked in unison.

She would never tell but for another drink she would make a deal. Both of them held a bottle out to her. The very next time she would slip them into her house and they could see for themselves. Although she had been too drunk to remember her promise, she believed them when they reminded her and plans were made.

A few days later, the sitter was there. Deborah signaled to them by opening and closing the blinds in her room. The boys slipped out of their houses and rendezvoused at Deborah's door. She let them in and they took their places, hiding in the dark until the sitter and her boyfriend came in to the now familiar couch.

For years, the boys would remember it in wondrous awe.

But back to the night of their introduction to drinking too much. They had been too agreeable. Anything Deborah wanted, she got, which for this night was too much to drink. After the dance and the promise, they kept on giving her drinks, hoping that delights they could only imagine were in store. Deborah got sick. She puked all over them, herself and the clubhouse.

It took all the wiles their young minds could muster to slip her into her house, to her room, into her bed, hide her clothes and slip into their own houses in their liquor and puke drenched clothes without being caught. They did it but it was an ordeal they never again attempted. Afterwards, the only drinking they did was a few beers that Nicholas slipped from his father's supply. He was careful not to take so much his father would miss it and that was the limiting factor in their drinking.

One morning, Deborah and Nicholas were waiting for the school bus. Timothy rushed up breathlessly. He was so excited he could not wait for them to meet in the clubhouse. They must hear about his adventure. Last night, his parents had gone to the theater. His sitter was on the phone to her boyfriend for so long the phone may as well have been growing out of her ear. Bored and restless, he made his way to the garage where he eyed his father's car. Getting in, he found the keys in the ignition so he listened to the radio. Turning it louder and louder and pretending he was racing down the highway, Deborah....er....a girl at his side. He had cast a look at them but neither seemed to have noticed he had called her name. They were spellbound by his story. In an unprecedented moment, he had pushed the garage door opener and as the radio blared and the door opened, he turned the key and the engine started. He sat there unsure of what to do next. The open door beckoned so he pulled the gearshift and the car eased out of the garage. The car idled down the driveway and he was in the street before he mashed the accelerator and the car surged forward. He drove it completely around the block and back into the garage. He had never been so exhilarated. He put down the garage door and

slipped back into the house, checking to verify that the sitter was still on the phone. She was. He was so excited he could not fall asleep for hours. Deborah and Nicholas were envious. When could they do it? They must be allowed to share his exuberance. Timothy was taken aback. He assumed this was a once in a lifetime event. It had not occurred to him that he would have to do it again. But he knew he would. They could not be denied. Plans were set in motion.

Actually, all they had to do was wait. The first time all sets of parents were gone at the same time would do it. The house could burn down and the sitters wouldn't know it until the phone melted out of their hand or the couch burned out from under them. So, they waited a few days and everything fell into place.

Nicholas and Deborah simply walked out and waited at the garage door. Soon, the door opened and Timothy was already in the driver's seat. They walked inside and Nicholas opened and held the back door for Deborah. Then for reasons that he would never know, he slid in beside her. Timothy was so engrossed he did not seem to notice that neither had taken the front seat. He started the engine and let the car idle out of the garage. Nicholas and Deborah smiled at each other and Nicholas reached over and took her hand.

Timothy pressed the accelerator and they drove down the street. He was careful to duplicate every maneuver of his first trip. Already, he knew not to mess with success.

Nicholas and Deborah were a bit apprehensive but as the minutes passed and everything was going well, they relaxed. So far, no one had said a word. They passed under a streetlight and Nicholas saw she was looking at him. He felt a slight pressure on his hand as she gently squeezed it. He leaned across the seat. She duplicated his action. Their faces were inches apart. She closed her eyes. Nicholas took one last look so he would not miss, closed his eyes and kissed her.

The car bumped. They jerked their lips apart and looked out. They were back in the driveway and Timothy had tapped the brake. They looked straight ahead as they entered the

garage. Inside, the garage door down and all secure, Timothy looked back at them. He smiled, proud and relieved that they were back. "What did you think?" he asked with an air of boastfulness in his voice. Nicholas and Deborah were still holding hands.

"It was the greatest time of my entire life," Nicholas said.

"Mine too," Deborah added.

Timothy looked at them but could not make out their expressions in the semi-darkness. He could not see they were holding hands. It was one heck of a time but the greatest of all time.....he wasn't so sure of that.

They made their way back toward their houses. Nicholas was frantically trying to think of a way to initiate another kiss. They stood in the darkness at the edge of the greenway.

"Well, I better go," Deborah finally said.

"Okay," he said.

They walked toward their houses. Late that night, they lay awake far into the night, basking in the memory of their first kiss.