

The Confrontation

By Georgine Natelli DeAngelis

People came by bus, car, van and motorcycle. Most of them brought children. But some couples came – him with his fingers in her back pocket, her with her hand in his. They waited to pay their money for the water slides, the merry-go-round, the roller coaster and the concerts.

Josephine Angelo shifted her weight from one foot to the other. Sweat trickled down between her breasts. She pressed a clammy palm against her three year old's chubby hand. "What time do you have?" – she asked. "My watch says 8:30," – her husband, Mark, said. "Will this line ever start moving?" – she sighed.

Her son, Willie, sat on her sneaker. As the backs of his thighs brushed the asphalt, he cried and jumped up. "That girl just cut the line," – Josephine said.

"Where?" "See that guy in the yellow shirt? Right in front of him."

The girl was blonde with her hair tied back in a pony tail. She had the thin flat figure of an eleven-year old. But the black roots of her hair and thick eye makeup aged her. Josephine thought the girl could pass for twenty.

"Should I say something?" – Josephine said. "She's just a kid," – Mark said.

"We've been waiting here 45 minutes." "What's one more person?" – Mark said. "You're right."

The line started to move forward. As it did, Josephine noticed a group of people a few feet from the line. "He feels better now that he went to the bathroom." One older woman in the group called to the blonde girl. "I guess the heat got to him."

As the older woman talked, she pushed a young boy ahead of her towards the blonde girl. Another woman and two children followed. When the line moved again, the group blended in.

"Why doesn't that man say something," Josephine said. "Would you relax?" Mark said. "You're going to ruin the entire day."

The man in the yellow shirt urgently shook his daughter's rattles and squeezed her tiger toy until they reached the ticket booth.

Josephine sat on the metal bench. She squeezed the moisture from the green carpet with the toe of her sneaker and watched the carpet absorb it again. Children shrieked around her as they splashed into the pool. She watched Willie and Mark come down the slide. They were sliding fast. Halfway down, Mark fell onto his back and they swished sloppily from side to side. When they got to the bottom of the slide, Mark forced himself back into a sitting position so he could lift Willie. Willie was afraid to get his face wet. They waved to Josephine and headed up the steep stairway for more.

While she waited for Mark and Willie, her thoughts returned to the scene at the ticket line. The heat within her felt hotter than the scorching sun. She was mad at herself for not saying anything to the girl. She was mad at Mark for saying that she would spoil the day. "I am so damned polite," she thought. "And Willie is growing up just like me."

It was parent's day at Willie's toddler gym class.. She sat and observed while kids walked balance beams and played on the slide. She watched Willie get pushed aside repeatedly. He stood there and let the other children in front of him. When the class was over, he hadn't gone down the slide once. She was angry that the instructor hadn't helped Willie protect his place in line. But that wasn't the real problem. How many times had she told Willie to be a good boy and give up a toy to another child just out of politeness. How many times had Willie seen other people push her aside at the bank, the grocery store, the bakery and the department store. And she politely said nothing.

"Mark didn't stop me," she thought, "I just didn't have the guts."

Willie ran up to her. "I'm cold." She wrapped a towel around his shoulders.

"Saw your friend at the top of the stairs," Mark grinned. "She cut in front of a bunch of little kids." "Didn't you say something?" "Nah," he said. "Don't you get angry when you follow the rules and other people don't?" "Well, I'm a little annoyed about it," he said, "but I'm not going to let it ruin my day." "I would have said something." "We have a long day ahead of us. Maybe you'll get your chance yet."

As they walked past the roller coaster, Josephine's eyes darted through the crowd. Her embarrassment was still hot within her. and she needed to say something to the girl immediately. But at the same time, her throat dried up and her stomach ached when she visualized the confrontation.

"You want to take Willie on the merry-go-round?" Mark asked.

While Willie's horse went full circle again and again. Josephine scanned the crowd for the girl. Several times Willie spoke to her and she had to ask him to repeat himself.

She and Willie waded through the pit of plastic balls. Mark had to rescue her from the water mat when she couldn't keep her balance long enough to walk off with Willie. They waded in the fountain pool to cool off and then headed to the burger place for lunch.

By that time Josephine felt confident that she would have said something if she had seen the girl. It wasn't her fault that she hadn't.

"Getting tired?" Mark said. Willie hung on Josephine's legs. "Willie, it's too hot. Please don't hang on me." She looked at Mark. "This is a nice park" – she said, "but the lines are just too long." "Why don't you stay on line. I'll take Willie and find us a table," – Mark said. "Fine. Cheeseburger with fries and milk?" – she said to Willie.

She stared at the wall clock over the counter and followed its movement second by second. She'd watched that clock before. In eighth grade history class, ten minutes to the bell, she'd gotten caught watching that clock. It was the longest ten minutes of her life as she stumbled over a summary of the day's lesson.

"I'd like two cheeseburgers, two large fries ... " The woman in front of her ordered. Josephine rummaged through her bag for her wallet. When she looked up, she saw the girl. She must have walked up the exit lane. The girl had positioned herself partially behind the woman now ordering at the counter. Josephine's scalp tingled between every hair. Her feet stuck to the insides of her sneakers. Her mouth went dry. A lump rose in her throat. Sweat streamed down between her breasts. Her crotch began to itch. Josephine slowed her breathing and stretched her neck. She swallowed hard

and wished away an urgent need to scratch. She jockeyed forward a little. The girl did too. The woman in front of her was paying for her order. In a few seconds, the woman would walk away. "I will very calmly say to the kid at the counter that I am next and that the girl cut the line." The woman moved away with her order. The kid behind the counter stood ready for the next order. Josephine's lips parted.

"Hey, that girl cut the line. Get off the line and wait your turn," the man behind Josephine yelled. He looked at Josephine. "You blind? Didn't you see that girl cut in front of you?" Other people joined in. "You too good to wait on line like the rest of us?" The girl walked away.

Josephine's legs trembled as she searched for Mark and Willie. She spotted Mark waving. Willie was draped over his shoulder sound asleep. "How about we eat fast and get this little guy home?" Mark said. "Fine with me," Josephine said. "You're looking pretty beat yourself," Mark said. "I am."

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