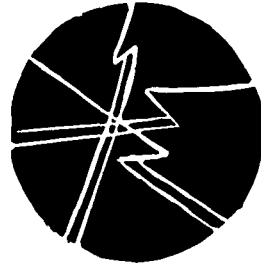


# Incident of Youth



By Carol Brueck

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## *Romance in Summer and Surprise*

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"MAY I have this dance?" Eileen looked up into smiling gray eyes, and, in a manner that was just a little hesitating, replied, "Yes."

Immediately she became occupied with following the intricate steps of her newly acquired partner, and then when the music stopped, the gray eyes were smiling at her again.

"You're a good dancer," said the man. His voice was a low tenor, but there were no overtones to reveal anything of himself.

"Thank you," Eileen replied.

"Got a date for tonight?"

With a start Eileen recalled the unusual situation, and with one slow glance she took an inventory. Tall, blond, neat gray suit, nice teeth, kind eyes, and clear complexion.

"Would you like to be my date?"

In order to confirm her first estimate, Eileen looked again.

"I guess so." Then she remembered her manners. She smiled. "I'd like to."

"That's swell. By the way, what's your name?"

"Eileen Winton."

"Mine's Bob McLaughlin. I'm from Des Moines. Where's your home?"

"Jonesville. It's about sixty miles from here."

"Um. How big?"

"About five hundred, I think."

"Not a city, I take it."

"Well, no."

"I guess we know each other now. Come on, Eileen. Let's dance."

THIS piece was slow. and Eileen had time to review the situation. He was certainly good looking—a good dancer—and he had a pleasant voice. She liked his smile, too. But she had taken the date on such short notice. What if he weren't as nice as he looked? Margaret had said she should take the first "decent" one that asked her. It was queer the way Margaret's mother let her go places and "pick up" an escort. Anyway, she was having a good time. Why worry now? She would be here at the lake for only a week.

The orchestra gave the signal for intermission. The evening was going fast. Eileen felt herself being led toward the crowded exit. She looked up questioningly.

"Kinda' crowded, isn't it?"

Eileen nodded. Looking around her, she asked, "Where are we going?"

"We can take a little walk around the lake if you would like to." He looked at her as though she might refuse.

"All right." Eileen was surprised when she heard her own voice. Might she be taking a chance?

IN SILENCE they made their way down to the water's edge.

Soon they were stepping carefully on the unstable pebbles.

"Why doesn't he say something?" Eileen wondered. Was it up to her to start the conversation?

"You in school?"

Eileen started. "I just graduated from high school. I'm going to college this fall."

"You are? Where?"

"M———, I think."

"You know, I thought you must already be in college."

"He thinks I'm dumb or something, and he wants to cover it up," Eileen thought. Her first impulse was to say, "You did not." Instead, she kept silent.

"I think you ought to go to ——— U. I'll be there again next year. We could have some swell times together."

"I wanted to go there, but Mother things a small school is better for the first year."

"Oh, it really doesn't make any difference as far as I can see. Here's a bench. Let's sit down."

WHEN they were settled, Bob resumed, "Does your mother know some of your credits will be cut when you transfer to a bigger place?"

"I don't know. But everything's settled now. Mother would never consider it."

"Your mother takes pretty good care of her little girl, doesn't she?"

Suddenly his arm was around her shoulders, and he had bent his head down to her.

"You're an obedient little kid, aren't you? Always think Mother's right?"

Eileen heard her heart start pounding, and her mouth felt dry. Involuntarily, she wiggled her shoulder. But the arm tightened, and, with gentle, but irresistible force, she was drawn into the man's arms. She could feel his breath moving her hair. She stiffened and tried to draw away. Then her voice came back, and she sobbed, "Don't."

The hold relaxed, and Eileen moved away.

"Leave me alone," she blurted.

"Don't act so scared." The wave of amusement in his tone angered her. "I wasn't going to hurt you."

EILEEN didn't reply. What must he be thinking? She was acting like a baby and he was laughing at her.

"How old are you, Eileen?" The man's voice broke into her excited thoughts.

"Seventeen."

"Well, I guess I had your age guessed right. How old do you think I am?"

"He's talking to me as though I were an infant," she thought. If this would be his second year in college, he must be nineteen, but he seemed a little older.

"Twenty," she said.

"Right," he replied.

Eileen heard a sigh that was a little like a yawn.

"Well, shall we go now?" His voiced sounded light and high, as though his mind were somewhere else. He offered his hand, but Eileen jumped up without any assistance and skipped a little ahead.

Now she felt more at ease. "Isn't the moon pretty?" She tried to appear gay.

"It's perfect," was the answer. Again there was silence.

Presently he said, "So you're going to college this fall. Well, I hope you like it."

"Oh, I know I shall."

"Maybe small schools are better at first. I have some pals there at M——. We went to high school together. We certainly had some good times those days." He started telling a prank about the physics professor and a box of matches, most of which Eileen didn't hear. She thought he must be making a sorry attempt at filling in the time until he could take her home. She felt very much out of place. Before the narrative had reached its climax, they were back at the dance floor, and it was never finished.

THEY danced in silence. Eileen was self-conscious, and she found it hard to follow her absent-minded partner's steps. She felt that she was being treated with a good deal of deference, and when she noticed the other couples laughing and teasing at each other, she was tempted to jerk away and run home.

At last the evening was over, but he had still made no effort to be entertaining. As they walked home, the events of the evening passed in quick succession over and over through Eileen's mind. She knew he was wishing he hadn't been thrown

with a child who didn't know how to show him a good time. Well, he would forget about her and she'd never see him again. She was surprised to find herself a little sad. Maybe she would be different next time.

"That's our cottage over there," Eileen said, and pointed to a small brick one.

"Oh, I didn't suppose you lived so close. Gee, I'll have to tell you good-bye now."

They were standing in front of the gate. For a long minute neither said a word. "This is the last time I shall ever see him," Eileen thought. Then she was conscious that the silence was becoming embarrassing.

"Good night," she said.

"May I see you again?"

What was that he was saying? Surely she wasn't hearing correctly.

"May I call you tomorrow? I would like to see you again."

"Why, yes. You may call."

"That's swell." He took her hand for just an instant. "I think we're gong to have some good times together, Eileen. Good night."

He was walking swiftly down the walk. Eileen leaned on the steps and wondered.

## My Creed

By LeRoy F. Harlow

I believe:

That health is Life's most solid base,  
That work brings Life's greatest rewards,  
That friendship is Life's greatest gift,  
That giving is Life's most perfect joy,  
That, above all, Life is a privilege, not a burden . . . !