

The Cad
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Greg, a handsome star athlete at Rock High School was playing one-on-one basketball after school with his friend, Barry Goody in the driveway of Barry's large corner house.

Oh, I forgot. Please forgive this interruption. A new rule for modern story writers is that they must show, and not tell their readers. I don't understand this rule – movies show, stories tell. This new rule would seem to eliminate all of history's great story *tellers*. But I'll go along with it as much as I can. So, permit me to begin again.

“Holy cow, Greg! You just dunked the ball with both hands. You must have been three feet off the ground.”

“Keep your eyes in your head, Barry! I don't want to have to pick them up and clean them again when they roll in the dirt like they did last week.” Then looking up the street as if to find Barry's fallen eyes, Greg noticed a girl walking toward them. “Who is that hobbling towards us?”

“That's Deena Shekett. She's got cerebral palsy.”

As Deena approached something nasty got into Greg and he imitated her hobble so that she couldn't miss it. Deena stumbled just a bit but then continued walking, turned the corner and proceeded down the block.

Barry glared at Greg and walked right up close to him. “Greg, that was mean – real nasty. Why in the hell did you do that?”

“Barry, I don't know what got into me.”

“Greg, you're damned smart, you're a handsome guy – one of the best-looking guys in the high school. You're a star athlete. There're only one or two other guys who can dunk the ball like you and they're both taller than you and they're Black. And you're a baseball player and a swimmer, not a basketball player. You've got everything going for you. Why the hell did you do that to her?”

“Oh, I doubt she saw it.”

“Bull. She saw it all right, and you know it. You're too smart to play dumb. That had to hurt double coming from a Romeo like you who she would never dream would ever consider dating the likes of her. She has feelings like everyone else. Go after her and apologize. Beg her for her forgiveness.”

Greg hesitated with a look on his face that showed guilt, so Barry said, “Get going!”

“You're a real good guy, Barry Goody. I don't know why you're friends with a jerk like me.”

Greg raced around the corner in pursuit of Deena and caught up to her in about a block. Deena averted her face and kept her head down but Greg could see the tear stains down her cheek. He apologized and when she said nothing and continued on her way, he repeated the apology. "I am really sorry. I don't know what got into me. I was an ass but I'm never like that." Deena remained silent, never broke her hobbling stride, nor looked at Greg.

Greg let her go, returned to Barry and said, "I'm going home."

"You look terrible, Greg. Did you apologize to her?"

"Twice. She looked away from me but I could see she had been crying. Now I feel like shit."

"Don't worry about it. If you really apologized, she'll forgive you. She is one of the nicest kids in the class and one of the smartest too. You know, she has a 93 average! And you ain't the first asshole that's picked on her."

Greg felt unfinished. Somehow, he knew that he felt even more rotten than he had made Deena feel. He was mortified. That was a new, terrible feeling for him. He excused himself from Barry, trudged home and, feeling exhausted went straight to his bedroom, flopped down on the bed and fell asleep for an uncharacteristic nap.

Greg woke up at dinner time feeling paralyzed, as often happens after afternoon naps. After perhaps 20 minutes he finally had the energy to get up from the bed, climbed down the stairs and entered the kitchen where the family was finishing dessert and his father's smoking had filled the room. Greg cringed and blurted out, "That cigarette smell is so sour and foul. Dad, why don't you stop stinking up the house? Smoke outside and let the air and our lungs stay clear indoors."

Greg had never complained out loud to his father about his father's obnoxious smoking habit before and was surprised at his brashness. His dad, mom, and two younger brothers remained silent. Overwrought, Greg fled the kitchen and returned to his room. After about half an hour he went back downstairs, entered the den, and apologized to his father for his outburst. It was a day of apologies for Greg.

"It's fine Greg. Don't worry. You're right. Mom also hates that I smoke indoors. So, from now on, I'll smoke outdoors, well, except for the bathroom. But when I do smoke there, I'll open the window to clear things out."

Greg was shocked. His apology actually worked. He was now doubly resolved to make it up to Deena.

Over the next few weeks he played basketball more often with Barry, hoping to have the chance to see Deena again and apologize once again so that she would accept it and absolve him of some of his guilt. Finally, about three weeks later Greg saw Deena walking down the street again toward the driveway. This time she was not alone but was walking arm in arm with another girl.

Greg walked to the sidewalk and blocked their way. At first, he focused so intently on Deena that he didn't even see the other girl, close as she was. Looking straight at Deena, he apologized once again. "Deena, I really am sorry. I have felt so bad about what I did that I can't cleanse it from my mind."

Deena again said nothing and kept her head turned down. Greg backed up a step and glanced at Deena's companion as if to get some validation for his apology. Looking at her, he involuntarily sucked in a great breath and almost fell over. She was the most beautiful, stunning girl he had ever seen in his life. And while he stayed as if nailed in place they walked around him. He watched in place as they turned the corner and could have sworn he heard the beautiful girl whisper to Deena, "Cad!"

"Barry, who is that with Deena?"

"That's her sister."

"She's gorgeous. Did you hear what she called me?"

"No! I didn't hear anything."

"What's her name?"

"I don't know. I've only seen her once or twice before. She was in private school for a couple of years but returned to Rock High a few weeks ago to join Deena."

After that the two girls appeared almost the exact same time every day on their walk home from school. And each day, Greg always stopped playing to smile at them and say hello, but each time they ignored him and walked on. Greg's sense of remorse eased due to Deena's rejection but his desire for Deena's sister only strengthened. After almost two weeks of this Greg decided to walk the girls all the way home, apologize to Deena and ask her sister out on a date. He realized that this was a bit crass and that it would just add insult to the injury for Deena. But he was determined. On the way to their home he made several attempts at striking up a conversation. They were like trying to light wet matches. Feeling ever more awkward, he finally blurted out his request for a date. As Deena's eyes teared over her sister turned to Greg and hissed, "Once a cad always a cad." Greg felt humiliated and like a complete fool. Henceforth he vowed to ignore the sisters.

That evening his father got home late from a long, hard day at work. Immediately after his late dinner he plopped down in his easy chair at the TV and, forgetting his promise, lit up a cigarette and resumed his smoking in the den. Greg didn't bother to remind him of his promise and went directly upstairs, slamming his bedroom door shut to avoid the foul smell and to let his father know how displeased he was.

That night Greg woke to screams in the house, and a room filled with thick, black smoke. Greg realized that his father must have fallen asleep in his easy chair, dropped a lit cigarette and started a fire. Greg jumped up, headed toward his bedroom door and opened it only to be struck by the flames. He tripped over something and became disoriented in the opaque smoke. Several burning

objects fell on him and his clothes began to catch on fire. He tried to tear off his burning shirt and felt his face burning. He finally got to the window, smashed it open and jumped to the yard below with cuts and burns but no further injury.

Over the next few months Greg received skin grafts and excruciating procedures to help the new skin knit and heal without infection. He couldn't help screaming at some of the most painful times, such as when bandages had to be ripped off, and he felt humiliated at his cowardice and weakness even though everyone in the hospital was kind to him and extremely understanding. When Greg was finally released and returned home the mirror showed the once handsome boy was ugly with gnarled skin that would follow him for the rest of his life.

Everyone encouraged Greg to resume his life. What made it especially difficult for him was that he hated the way people looked at him now. His friend, Barry finally convinced him to play some basketball. Of course, right away the thing he dreaded happened. Deena and her sister passed by. All Greg could do was to turn away so that they would not see his face. This time Deena's sister was silent, but Greg's disfigurement was the key that gave mute Deena her voice. "Maybe now you finally understand."

Greg began to cry with great, heaving sobs. Barry came over, put his arm around Greg's shoulder and repeated several times, "It's all right, Greg."

Greg awoke in a great sweat, to hear his mother saying, "It's all right, Greg". His mother was kneeling by the side of the bed with her arm over his shoulder.

Greg popped up, in the process throwing his mother's arm back. He jumped out of the other side of the bed and raced to the bathroom mirror. His skin was unblemished. What a nightmare he had had.

When Greg returned from the bathroom his mother was still there. "Is everything OK, son? You missed dinner and slept longer than you ever have. You must have slept 15 hours. It's time to go to school if you're all right."

Greg was OK. He went to school, and as far as his classmates could tell it was as if nothing had happened. But his mind was focused on Deena. He longed to face her and tell her that he understood. He played basketball with Barry every day until Deena finally showed up several weeks later. When she did, she was alone without her beautiful sister and she crossed the street two blocks before reaching Barry's driveway in the attempt to pass by unnoticed. But Greg was on the lookout and spotted her. He left Barry holding the basketball on his hip and crossed the street.

When he reached Deena he insisted on walking her home and carrying her books. He wouldn't accept her refusal and seeing that, she relented. After talking and listening to her he surprised himself by asking her out on a date. As his words left his mouth he questioned himself. Why in the world was he asking Deena out and not her beautiful sister?

Deena looked up at Greg radiant.

There was no sister. Deena was the beauty.