

JUKE JONES' SISTER

By John S. Halbert

One Friday night in the twelfth-grade, I rode on the return trip from an out-of town football game on the school bus sitting next to a small, dark-haired, un-remarkable-looking freshman girl. At first I tried to ignore her, as I figured she was from the wrong side of the tracks, and I didn't want any of my friends to see me sitting next to her or talking with her.

But it was a long way home, and as we rode along in the darkened bus we fell into a conversation. The girl said she was in the school's concert band and also took private music lessons. She told me how much she liked classical music, and as we compared opinions and sentiments of various musical works and composers, I began to realize she had a lot more on the ball than I had originally thought. The girl was a passionate lover of classical music and opera, and said she wished to someday attend a music conservatory, but, as her father was sick, she was afraid the whole idea was beyond her reach. Without a doubt, her musical ambitions were a huge financial strain on her parents, but I could tell she was determined to somehow succeed at her ambitions.

As our late-night conversation went on in the flickering half-light of the jouncing, jostling school bus, I began to notice that the obscure little freshman was not really all that bad looking---kind of pretty, actually---and furthermore, she was making a terrific impression on me. I soon forgot about the differences I had imagined came between us and concentrated instead on the animated, intelligent girl sitting next to me who had hopes of making something of herself as a musician. The school bus trip that had started out so boring for me had instead been transformed into a ride of revelation.

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The following Monday, at school, a friend cornered me in the hallway between classes. "What's the big idea?" he demanded, ignoring my puzzled expression. "Are you trying to ruin your reputation?" he went on, red-faced, "you better watch it, buddy!"

"What on earth are you talking about?"

"That girl!" he hissed between clenched teeth, "the girl you sat with on the band bus the other night after the game---*do you know who she is?*"

I shook my head. "What about her? What's wrong?"

"I'll tell you what's wrong---she's Juke Jones' sister!" He spat out the words. My friend glared at me for a second, then spun away into the surging student crowd, shaking his head.

In a daze I made my way to my third-period class, stunned by the disclosure. Everyone in town knew about Juke Jones---the most notorious delinquent around; a deadbeat drop-out with a ne'er-do-well reputation as a cheap crook and no telling what else. How could I have been so foolish as to sit on the bus next to his *sister*? As the class started, I paid no attention to what was going on; instead I slumped at my desk, groaning; mortified over my monumental mistake. I had actually sat next to and had talked with Juke Jones' sister. What a blunder!

But as the teacher droned on, I remembered the girl's intense, beaming face, her passionate love of opera and classical music and the determined toss of her head as she vowed to make something of herself as a musician. In her own way, she had a tremendous amount of style and class, and as I thought more about her, I felt ashamed for ever having considered badly of her because of her brother.

I knew that she attended school in the ninth-grade building several blocks away. But when I tried to find her, I learned that she had moved away to where her father could get his medical treatments, and I never again saw Juke Jones' sister.