

Separation

by John Wentworth Chapin

He sniffed the air. “*Somebody’s* been smoking in my car,” he said. The increasingly furrowed lines on his forehead made her stomach clench. He shook his head in disbelief. “I am going to try to keep it together, but...*damnit!* In one move you...you lie to me, you disrespect me, you disobey me, you make me look *stupid.*” He slammed his fist against the steering wheel for emphasis. “You just gonna sit there?”

“Daddy... I—” She faltered. She wanted to tell him he was wrong, but he wasn’t. Allen had been in the car last night indeed, smoking even though she asked him not to, running his fingers up her skirt even though she asked him not to. “It was me. I... sometimes I have a cigarette.”

He pulled over onto the soft shoulder of the road and brought it to a stop. “Don’t lie to me. Get out,” he barked. She flinched when he reached across her and opened her door. “You think I’d hit you?” he said, dumbfounded. She was silent.

He clenched the wheel with both hands and closed his eyes. “Don’t you lie to me,” he whispered. He took a long, deep breath and then opened his own door and hopped out, leaving her there with the engine running and both doors wide open. He walked ahead on to church, alone, his shoulders shaking. As she watched him go, she thought of Allen.

