

Guilt

A Flash Story

by Gil Gamesh

My friend, Phil, and I were in the Friday afternoon lab for all high-school students who were having difficulty with Algebra. We had to be there because we were two typical sixteen year-old idiots who were more interested in girls than in classes.

Phil was a little bit of a trouble-maker, usually not anything bad, just full of fun and disruption. He was also a warm friendly guy and probably my best friend. I encouraged his mischief and enjoyed it.

The instructor was Dr. Daniels, a new Ph.D., thirty years old, maybe best described by the words nerd or geek. He was married to a twenty-two year old ditsy blonde, a college senior until she dropped out. Rumor said he married her only because she was pregnant with his child. Anyway, the baby, a girl, was born six months after their marriage.

It was common knowledge that he loved the little girl, really loved her, or maybe adored her. He couldn't stop talking about what she had done and how beautiful she was. I'd never seen a picture of her but I'll bet all the other faculty and administration had.

The lab lasted for three long hours but it seemed like it would never end. We were all permitted to go to the bathroom if the need arose and about halfway through Dr. Daniels left the room.

I thought Phil had to go too because he followed Daniels a few seconds later. I didn't hear the door close a second time so I turned to see why. Phil was adjusting the big clock on the back wall, moving the hour hand forward for one hour. He turned to look back and I quickly turned my attention to my book. He came back to our desk, didn't say anything, and neither did I. It worked. Dr. Daniels dismissed us an hour early.

On the local evening news that night, the announcer reported a murder-suicide, a high-school teacher who had killed his wife, her lover, his baby girl, and then himself.

Over the next month, the details came out. Daniels had come home early and had walked in on his wife having sex with a high-school student, a football player. She was evidently on top of him because she was shot in the back of the head. The football player was shot in the face. The local news rag said they were joined even in death. I didn't know him but I'd heard stories about his sex life.

In the other bedroom, the baby girl was on her stomach in her crib, shot in the back of the head. The side of the crib was down and Dr. Daniels was kneeling there with his body still across the baby bed. He was also shot in the back of the head and his hand was still clutching the gun.

I tried to call Phil but his parents had no idea where he was. When the news came on the TV, he had gone to his room and then disappeared. I called again Saturday but his parents said he hadn't come home and they had no idea why or where he had gone. When I called on Sunday, he had come home. His story was that he had met some friends and they had all got drunk. My parents grilled me but I was able to convince them I knew nothing and had done nothing. I didn't really know anything. All I knew was that Phil had changed the clock.

Eventually, the results of four autopsies came out. Dr. Daniels' wife was the mother of the little girl but he wasn't the father. He had had a vasectomy at age twenty-five when he learned he was a carrier for a genetic disorder which caused early deaths in children. The football player also wasn't the father. Talk was that he wasn't the first one to score with her. There was some talk of testing all the other football players but it never happened.

Phil has changed. He seems miserable and unhappy all the time and is talking about dropping out of school. I haven't told him that I saw him change the clock. I don't know whether I should. What would it accomplish?

THE END