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The Truth Is

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crowd gathered. Papa, speaking in French, paced back and forth swinging his arms, and Officer Beaulieu nodded gravely, trying to calm him.

From where I crouched, feeling helpless and guilty, I began to cry. I wanted to get on my knees and pray. But then a firm hand on my shoulder made me jump. It was Father Parenteau.

"Hallo, Jean. What is that all about over there? Why were they fighting?" he asked, squinting his eyes. "Isn't that your father?"

I nodded.

"What are you doing here?"

"My father hit Monsieur Gidoone."

"Oh?"

Officer Beaulieu shoved my benefactor into the police car and, after pattering Papa on the shoulder, drove off. Papa and M'Oncle Theophile hurried away from the shack, still shouting with their hands.

The priest put his arm around my shoulder and said, "Well, Jean, did your father hit Gidoone because of something Gidoone did?"

I did not answer.

"Hmm," he said slowly, "I know about Gidoone."

By now I had stopped crying.

"Do you want to talk to me about it, Jean?" he said, touching my arm lightly.

I shook my head.

"Are you sure?"

I swallowed hard. "I have to go home now, Father—" and started down Mechanic Street. After I crossed the street and looked sideways back to where I had come from, I saw his black robe move slowly toward the rectory. No one was about the shack now. The door, slightly ajar, creaked loudly in the wind. It would not matter now, I thought, to get closer and see what Papa had torn up.

In front of the door, scattered in the dirt were the bits of my dollar bill. I could hardly believe Papa had ripped it up. I got on my hands and knees and scooped up the pieces carefully, looking about, fearful that someone might spot me. Fading slowly into the twilight was the Bonford chimney, now a mere stump.

With all the dollar bits in my hand, I stood up, suddenly noticing Father Parenteau still in front of the rectory, hands behind his back, like a shadowy sentinel, peering at me. He made no motion, no sign, but I felt now that I should go to him. The shack door cried after me as I hurried away.

Once there Father Parenteau immediately stepped forward, and his hands reached toward me. "Yes, Jean?"

"Father?" I stopped to catch a breath.

"There's something I have to tell you." And I poured the dollar into his large cupped hands.

"Is this what Gidoone gave you?"

"And my father ripped it up," I said.

"He even hit him," Father's eyes were serious, solemn, as when he gives Holy Communion. "What will they do to Monsieur Gidoone now?"

"Don't worry, he won't be hurt," He paused, "Jean, your father did what he thought he should."

"But, Father, he hit him, he hurt him."

"I know, Jean, and wrapping his arm softly around my shoulder, he led me up the short steps and inside. We walked quietly down the narrow corridor. Father Parenteau said the dollar was still good and might go for the Missions. That relieved me. "And afterward," he said, "we'll pray together for Monsieur Gidoone."

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The Truth Is

by Joan Henson

I say
I love you
but I mean
I need

I say
I can share
but I mean
I covet

I say
I will give
But I mean
I want

I say
I love you
and I don't know
What I mean