

*Opal Palmer Adisa*



## Mommie, My Star Pupil

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**A**FTER MY MOTHER AND FATHER SEPARATED my sister and I moved with my mother to a small sugar estate that was about four miles from any major road. There was no public bus so we were dependent on friends. However, because of my mother's position as executive secretary and social manager, we often had access to one of the estate's vehicles and drivers.

We had a detached garage, but for many years after moving to the estate it was home to several boxes, endless cob-webs and many lizards. It also served as playground, the perfect hide-n-seek-spot, for my sister and I, as well as the other neighborhood children. Because of its large doors that were always shut, inside was dark and musky, and once, a neighbor's cat made it its home and had a litter of kittens in there; we had a difficult time evicting them. Otherwise, the garage was empty of any vehicle.

Then one afternoon, upon returning from school, the gates of the garage were flung wide open like a little girl, legs spread apart, not yet schooled in the art of lady-like habits. Inside the garage was a shiny, sea-blue, two-door Anglia. I dropped my bag and lunch box, and walked slowly inside the garage, my mouth agape, instantly falling in love with the car. I tramped round and round the car, convincing myself that it was real and that it belonged to us. I sniffed at it, then feeling more confident I used my middle finger to trace the silver chrome that ran along its sides. It was beautiful.

"Is our car?" I asked my sister who was standing beside me, surprise written on her face. She seemed afraid to conjure a guess.

"How me to know," she said, the bridge of her nose sweating, a tinge of annoyance in her voice.

I tried opening the doors of the car, but they were locked. My sister, being older, felt accountable for my behavior so cautioned me.

"You better leave de doors; you don't know is whose car. If you mash it up, you go get in trouble."

I stuck out my tongue at her, but allowed my hands to fall to my side. Then it occurred to me that I could find out what I wanted to know by going in the house and asking my mother, assuming she was home early from work. I took off, but my sister's responsible voice called me back.

"You better take up your bag and lunch-box," she said, sauntering ahead of me. In that moment I decided I didn't like her calm disposition. She obviously thought she was a cool evening breeze; she always drew a favorable comparison against my hurricane wind nature that blew recklessly, fre-

quently knocking over those in my path. I ran back, picked up my things and raced my way into the house, without shoving my sister out of the way.

“Is who car, Enid?” I turned to our maid, breathing through half-opened mouth.

“Aftanoon Miss Patsy,” Enid said, reaching to take my lunch box. I wanted to shout at her, but knew I would get no where.

“Yuh moda not learnin yuh no manners,” she said, looking me squarely in the face.

“Good afternoon, Enid,” I said, trying to keep the irritation out of my voice. “Is whose car?”

“Aftanoon, Pasty. Please to wash yuh hand an come ave yuh snack.” Enid was exasperating. I flounced out the kitchen, chucked one of the chairs as I passed through the pantry-breakfast-nook, tossed my bag on my bed, then went to the bathroom and washed my hands. However, I decided, just to spite Enid for her meanness, I wasn’t going to sit and have my snack. I took off my school uniform, put on a shorts and top, grabbed my snack and ran outside. I shouted for my friend Sheryl at the fence which separated her backyard from mine. I bellowed several times before the woman who worked for Sheryl’s family called back,

“She not home yet.”

I felt as if everyone was conspiring against me. Bingo, the oldest of our five dogs, sallied up to me and rubbed against my feet. I ruffled his fur between his ears as he liked and together we walked back to the garage. A bread-fruit tree where Bingo and I often sat when I was mad or needed time to think, partially sheltered the garage. As I walked under it, a leaf sailed down before me. I stretched out my hand and caught it. At the garage door, we both stood, Bingo breathing excitedly through his open mouth, tongue extended, me longing to go for a drive. I closed my eyes tight, lapped my middle finger over my index finger and smiled at the sound of the engine starting. However, I was yanked from my reverie when Enid’s rankling voice, sour like tamarind, called me.

“Patsy, come duh yuh homework; yuh know yuh moda seh fi duh yuh school work fore yuh play.” Sometimes I dreamed that Enid was steam that vanished after it evaporated. At that very moment, I wished I were a magician.

After an eternity of time, and not being able to figure out my long-division, my sister refusing to help me, and Enid telling me that she didn’t get that far in school and that I should try harder, my mother finally returned from work. I scattered my books getting up, sallied to my mother, kissed her then blurred out,

“MOMMIE! MOMMIE! Is our car in de garage?” She smiled and nodded her head. I jumped up and down, clapping my hands.

“Can we go for a ride, MOMMIE?” I implored.

“Can we please, MOMMIE?” my normally cucumber-mannered sister joined turning into corn popping.

“After dinner, now go wash up,” My mother said, turning into her bed-room.

I heaped my fork and swallowed mouthfuls of minced-meat, spaghetti, rice, tomatoes and shredded carrot, determined not to be left behind. Finally we pushed back our chairs, excused from the table. I darted outside, heading for the garage, in my flight calling to Enid who was clearing the table,

"You want to come for a drive?" I did not hear her reply. I stood anxiously by the car, waiting for my mother and sister, engaged in conversation, as they walked towards me standing by the car. 'Hurry up! Hurry-up!' I shouted in my head, hopping from one leg to the next. Finally my mother was by the car, the shiny silver keys jingling in her hand. She opened the doors, and I raced around to get in the front, but my mother said, since my sister was older, she got to sit up front. Normally, I would have complained about the unfairness of my sister always getting first because she was older, but I was so excited, I merely slipped in the seat behind my mother.

Before my mother started the car, she turned to my sister and I and said, "We're only going to the church because I don't have any Ls yet."

My mother did not have her driver's license, in fact she didn't even have her learner's permit, or the large red, "L" letters that were to be affixed to the fender and bumper of a car to warn other motorists that the person driving was not yet a real driver. My mother took a long time backing out the garage, having difficulty locating the reverse gear, then she made several awkward jerks, changing gears. I encouraged her to drive faster, and suggested that she pushed the gear stick, gently but firmly the way I had observed my father and other men do. I mean, what could be so difficult, it was like a cane held stiffly in packed-mud. My mother followed my suggestion and my sister and I had our drive to the church, about half mile from our house, and which was the point of intersection, leading to three more miles of road that was trafficked by many cars and trucks.

The next afternoon, Harrison, a man in our small insular community who taught people to drive, came over and showed my mother how to change gears smoothly. But he merely echoed my advice and when he sat in the driver's seat to demonstrate to my mother, I sat forward in the middle of the back seat, peering between the driver and passenger seat up front, and kept saying, "See MOMMIE! See, didn't I tell you," until she told me to be quiet. A few days later, my mother got her "Ls" and affixed them to the car. From then on, every evening, my mother and I went practicing. I was very happy that my sister did not accompany us as she had lots of home-work, studying for the common entrance, although she was only going to be nine years old in June.

My mother resolved to teach herself to drive on her own and I decided I would coach her. Once we agreed on our plan, we established a practice schedule. Every evening my mother and I ventured further with my coaching. After a week we drove to the main road, leading to Kingston in one direction, and Spanish Town in the other, and not once did the gear scrape or the car seem to jerk and cough when my mother changed gear. Still, my mother decided that she should stop at the main road, and turn back into our community. I concurred with her wise decision after we parked for a while by the main road, an endless stream of cars, trucks and buses zooming by like a run-away-train.

The fact that we now had a car, a shiny blue Anglia, caused different people in the community to speculate. All of a sudden, people who weren't in the habit of stopping by would drop by just about the time when my mother returned from work.

"Mrs. Plumber," smacked Miss McFarlane, the spinster who lived and kept house for her father, "You're prosperous. Dat's a good looking car you have there."

My mother smiled agreement, but no words passed her lips. I wanted to tell that Miss McFarlane to go and smack somewhere else. She always seemed to have something in her mouth that she smacked on. Mrs. Reed, the plump pastor's wife whom everyone called roll-poly behind her back, was more straightforward. "Mrs. Plumber how you can afford such a car?"

"I understand that's the question of the day," my mother said laughing, in her customary manner to dismiss most things. "Well all people need to know is that I didn't steal it and I didn't lay down to get it either."

Mrs. Reed giggled nervously and I wondered what my mother meant that she didn't lie down to get it. How does one lay down to get a car I pondered, but not for too long because my mother excused herself saying our dinner was getting cold, and then she had to practice her driving before it got dark.

After several weeks of practicing driving on the straight narrow road, stopping and starting without stalling, signaling to turn left or right, reversing to talk to a friend by their gate without swerving in a zig-zag manner, I told my mother I thought we were ready for the next level, driving through and around several barrels. So she had the gardener place three barrels strategically on the huge lawn in front of our house, and we began the next phase. Several times my mother knocked one or more of the barrels down when reversing. Often, I would stand outside, holding up my hand to indicate to her when she needed to stop or gesturing when she needed to turn more one way or the other. Sometimes my mother was so confused that my signals were of little help. At those times she would leave the engine running while she stepped from the car to better gage the distance. This was another occasion for some of the men, in the community, including several with wives, to gather and offer their service to teach my mother who always smiled but declined.

"Sonia," Mr. Griffith whom we called drum-stick as his legs were embarrassingly skinny, as if he was malnourished my mother said, was on a first name basis with my mother, and who often took it upon himself to visit us around dinner time and invite himself to join us, wet his lips as he stood watching my mother maneuver the barrel. "Sonia, why you so independent. Mek me teach you, nuh. No charge, consider it a neighborly gesture." He ended holding on to the driver's door as my mother took a break.

"Mommie," I squealed, "You really driving well," and I jumped in the passenger seat and stared boldly at Mr. Griffith smiling into my mother's face.

In record time, my mother mastered this phase with only four small scratches on our shiny sea-

blue Anglia. She was finally ready for the last stage of her practice: driving up hill, stopping, then proceeding without the car jerking or rolling back. Several men had failed their driving test the first time because of this task, but my mother was determined to pass the first time. Again the men came with their advice to which my mother and I listened to politely.

"You know Mrs. Plumber," said one, "an experienced driver like me could teach you a thing or two to make sure you pass de test."

"Driving is not only mastering de skills," offered another, "You're state of mind is just as important."

"Why you think there are so few women drivers?"

"Why?" I blurted since my mother didn't seem curious.

"Because," our pot-bellied neighbor continued not even scolding me for interfering in big-people conversation, "Because woman easy loose dem head cause accident," he declared self-righteously.

"It appears too that many men loose their heads, since weekly men are involved in accidents," my mother said, pulling my hand and turning into our gate. Once she closed the gate behind us, she scolded me, "Missy," she began in a tone that told be I had out-stepped my boundaries, "I don't want to have to remind you to watch your mouth and not put in your pence worth in adult conversation."

"Yes, mommie," I mumbled, my lips pouting.

My mother and I continued our driving lesson and it was the talk all over the community. Daily the other children would quiz me on the school-bus about our car, and how much we paid for it, and where my mother got the money, and where was my father, and why did my mother feel she have to learn to drive anyway since all their mothers were driven wherever they needed to go by their fathers, or had to take the bus. However, one evening a visitor offered my mother praise instead. As I sat, pretending to be engrossed in studying my spelling words, a neighbor, whose husband had gotten two of their maids pregnant, or at least so the gossiped was rumored, came over after my mother and I had returned from practicing and whispered to my mother how lucky she was not having a husband, and how brave she was to buy a car with her own money and be teaching herself to drive, when so very few women drove. On the entire estate, only two other women drove, one, the owner's wife, and the other, the horse-trainer, but they didn't count as they were English and often went about in unwomanly ways, as far as the community was concerned, inappropriate for any respectable lady, which is what my mother was, even though she was divorced. Our neighbors' visits emboldened my mother's determination and I became a more exacting teacher.

My mother and I began to venture up the hill where the owner and a few other English families, the husbands occupying important positions in the running of the estate, lived. Similar to our other ventures, we started out doing the basic, merely driving up the hill, finding a wide space to turn around, then driving down slowly on the road which ran straight into the big wrought-iron gate beyond which was our house and two others, as well as the elegant club of the estate that was reserved for the executive staff, of which we were members. After about a week of this routine dri-

ving, my mother decided it was time to practice stopping at a certain point, then proceeding forward without stalling. This proved more difficult than both of us had anticipated, and it took several tries, but my mother was determined to master this last task as she was planning to take her driving test in three weeks. We spent longer time practicing, me always in the front with my mother, offering advice, making suggestions, and feeling proud to be a car owner.

One evening, with only two weeks to go, my mother came home late from a meeting. I was disappointed as I had grown accustomed to her daily practice.

"Mommie, you not gwane practice?" I asked hopeful.

She paused for a moment, as if deciding. As I was bent on us having our daily practice, I decided to influence my mother's decision.

"Is only two weeks left, Mommie, and you really need to practice reversing widout rollin back."

"You're right," she said. "Go get de keys, let's go," my mother announced, walking to the kitchen to get some juice.

I got the keys, rushed outside, opened the car doors and waited for my mother. We drove up the hill slowly, and at the point where the road forked at the top, rather than going right, my mother decided to take the road leading to the golf-course, a route we had never taken before.

All was desolation, huge boulders to my right, deep precipice to my mother's left. We drove in silence, my mother clutching the steering wheel, me sitting forward in my seat to see ahead. The sun was sinking, and the air felt cool through the window. I was thinking about how I was going to buy my own car, just like my mother, when I was grown, so I didn't hear my mother the first time she spoke to me.

"You think this is a good place to stop?" she repeated.

"Yes," I replied confidently.

My mother stopped the car in the middle of the road. I kneeled on the seat, looking all around. The huge rocks didn't worry me, but the great cliffs to my mother's left, caused me to hold my breath. I sat back in my seat and watched my mother maneuver the car, one foot on the breaks, the other on the clutch, she glanced behind to make sure no car was coming. Then she attempted to put the car in first gear to move forward, but somehow the gear was stuck as if held by cement. My mother's foot eased off the breaks and immediately the car started to roll back. I glanced behind me and was convinced the car was going to roll over the banking.

"Mommie! Mommie!" I shouted still staring behind. "We go roll down de hill." I felt like fat red ants were biting me all over. My mother turned the steering wheel in the opposite direction, still unable to find first gear; she applied the breaks, pressing and pumping the pedal, but the car kept rolling. "Turn the other way mommie, turn!" I screamed, my heart pushing hard against my chest. I held on tightly to my seat as we kept rolling, now heading towards the boulder. Finally, with a great thud the car landed in a crevice. For well over five minutes, or at least so it seemed, my mother and I sat dumb-

founded. Eventually, my mother who was never short on words, touched my arms and asked,

“Are you okay?”

I nodded, still unable to speak. Then we discovered we were stuck. The passenger door where I sat was smashed completely into the side of the rock, so that I was unable to open the door and my mother’s door was equally stuck. Discovering this, my mother suggested that we crawl through the window.

“Come climb over me and crawl out first,” my mother said, shifting herself in the tight space. Being skinny, I scrambled out without any difficulty, although I scraped my hands and knees on the jagged edges of the rock once I crawled out. My mother, however, had much more difficulty trudging through the window. She clambered on her seat, but could not position herself correctly to climb through the window. I stood trembling on the rock on which I had crawled, urging my mother to climb through. I could see her position and repositioning herself. The sun sunk completely, taking its pink-sleepy eye with it. Night was on its way. I focused all my attention on my mother, and leaning on the car, directed her exit through the window. Once she was safely out, we jumped off the rock and surveyed the car. The evening had suddenly gone grey. My mother and I simultaneously leaned against the rock and laughter erupted from our mouths, spilled from our throats, until we were bent over, tears streaming down both our faces. Then just as suddenly my mother pulled me to her, and wrapped her arms around me, my hands clutching her waist. How long we stood thus, I don’t remember, but the darkness that seem to suddenly encircle us quieted our tremor. Grabbing hold of my hand, my mother and I started to walk down the road, the only sounds were our shoes against the pavement, and the dirge-like chatter of the crickets. Not a house, shed or human life was in sight. No car passed us by as we walked the mile and a half home. Luckily it was all down hill.

My mother walked pass our house, going directly to the club where she was certain to find several men gathered, drinking, talking, playing billiards and ping-pong. Once there, she related our escapade; the men looked at her incredulously. Several men decided that they had to see for themselves the position of my mother’s car. Regretfully, I was sent home while my mother climbed into one of the men’s jeep, and several others piled in a land-rover and both vehicles sped off through the large wrought-iron gate heading towards the hill. My sister and Enid were my only audience, but I took full opportunity to embellish the details, having recovered my voice and my spirit for adventure.

It was completely dark when my mother returned, but sadly, our car that we had named Betsy was not with her. It was too deeply wedged in the rock for the men to free, she stated. They would have to wait until the next day to get a crane to free the car.

Several times during the night I woke up screaming, clutching the bed-spread. I kept dreaming that I was falling, falling, falling, into an endless hole. I was only saved from falling to my death by waking. My mother came and got me, allowing me to sleep with her. I nestled close to her body and threw my leg over her.

All the next day in school my mind worried about Betsy, our car. Consequently, I was scolded by the teacher and even received two slaps with the ruler, one in each palm, for not paying attention. When I arrived home that afternoon and saw Betsy, tears rolled down my cheeks. The passenger door, where I had been sitting, was crashed in and streaked with the white filament of the rock; the rear fender was hanging and the entire car looked as if it had been put through the machines which crushed the canes, sapping the juice. Such an ordeal! When Enid called me to come in for my snack, I refused, insisting on sitting outside under the bread-fruit tree, mourning my loss.

Imagine then my surprise when my mother returned from work, smiling. She told Enid how Mr. McLeish, her boss, said they should give her the license as he has never seen anyone park so perfectly in such a tight space. I did not see the joke. My mother said it took several men over three hours, chipping away at sections of the rock to free Betsy; poor, poor Betsy. Later, several men came over, offering to give my mother lessons. She thanked them graciously, but declined their offer, saying she thought she could manage on her own. I reminded her that she needed my help, and together we would master stopping on a hill, then preceding forward without rolling back, but saying so, a great lump rose in my throat, and I did not speak with too much conviction.

Betsy was towed away for repairs, and once again our garage stood empty, except for Bingo and I who daily sat in there for long periods. To heighten my sadness my mother decided to continue with her lesson, but since she no longer had a car, had to resort to taking lesson with Mr. Harrison who did not allow passengers with his trainees. I stomped my feet, I pouted, I refused to eat dinner. I wished that Mr. Harrison would break his leg. But nothing happened and for three long everlasting evenings my mother went practicing her driving without me. I would not be outdone. I called down disaster on Mr. Harrison and wrote his name on a piece of paper and put it under a heavy rock. The following Monday as my mother sat waiting for Mr. Harrison on the veranda with me leaning on her, begging her to take me, his son came and said, Harrison, his father, had a migraine headache and would not be able to give her lessons. A smile broke over my face, but I made my voice say how sorry I was. Somehow Mr. Harrison was unable to come and take my mother practicing all that week, and with my suggestion my mother decided her original plan was best, to teach herself to drive with my help. The only problem was, we had no car, and when I asked my mother when we would get Betsy back, she said it would cost too much to repair and she could not afford it right now. I didn't know what to do or who to turn to, but when I received a letter with a \$5 bill from my grandfather who was living in America, I decided straight way to write him and tell him what happened. My mother was very pleased that I was so willing to write my grandfather, and took the letter with her the next day to post. Daily I waited for a reply but none came. Every evening various men from the community visited our home, sat on the veranda drinking large glasses of my mother's delicious fruit juice concoction while offering her their service to teach her to drive. I always made it a point to be close by the veranda where I was seen, but not heard, and therefore heard all they said.



Three weeks after I wrote my grandfather, my mother received a letter from him, her father with lots of American dollars and declared she was going to have Betsy repair. I hugged her and we danced around, but we still had to wait another two weeks before Betsy came home. Mr. Harrison took my mother and I to collect Betsy, who looked just as new and shiny as before. We had a celebration, and Enid helped my sister and I make crepe flowers which we used to decorate Betsy, and my mother said since we hadn't christened Betsy, now was as good a time as ever. So she went into the cabinet of her buffet where she kept rum and wines for parties and special occasion, took out one of the fruit wines she made, and carrying the wine, my mother and I leading the way, my sister and Enid up the rear, we walked to the garage where my mother poured us all wines in her special glasses that Enid had carried in a tray and we all raised our glasses to Betsy. Enid poured a little wine on the ground for the ancestors, she said, but Bingo licked at it and barked when we raised our glasses and toasted Betsy.

The first week after Betsy returned my mother and I merely drove around the community, practicing going fast and slow, reversing, turning, and driving around barrels, all of which she maneuvered successful. I told her she passed with flying colors. We avoided going up the hill and never even mentioned it, but it was on both our minds. The Sunday of the following week my mother announced that she was going out, but I could not come with her. Instantly fear seized me. I knew she was going to go up the hill to practice and she didn't want to take me in case something happened. As she went to the door, I grabbed her arm. "Mommie, please don't go up the hill without me, please Mommie, please." I felt the tears streaming down my cheeks, and buried my face in her clothes. My sister, hearing me came to enquire, leaning against the bed-room door, a book in her hand. She said nothing, but when I looked at her face I knew she was about to cry too.

"It's going to be okay," my mother said, ending in a chuckle that was not fully formed. I clutched to her more firmly as she tried to pry me lose. Softened by my sister's sorrowful probing stare and my firm grasp and loud pleading, my mother finally decided I could go with her. I quickly pulled on my shoes and walked outside to the garage with my mother whose palms were sweaty. Once inside Betsy, she patted the steering wheel and took a few deep breaths before starting the engine. I sat on both my hands, middle fingers of both hands crossed over index fingers. Slowly we reversed through our gate, turned at the large lawns that fronted our house, made a left and drove down the short road and came to a full stop at the large iron-wrought gates. My mother and I took deep breaths as we looked at the road leading to the hill that faced us. "Mommie, you're the best driver in the world," I said. Then my mother placed her foot on the gas pedal, eased gently off the clutch and we moved forward smoothly. I felt a lump in my throat and I tried to swallow. Goose-bumps covered my arms. My eyes darted from the road ahead, to my mother's hands and feet. I focused on the sound of Betsy's whirring engine. My mother began to hum and before long I joined her. We inched close by the spot where Betsy had gotten stuck. I shoved my hands that were cramping fur-

ther under my thighs and pressed my entire weight into them. My mother turned to me and asked, "Are you ready?" still driving, but slowly as if preparing to stop. I looked at the large rocks, and glanced down at the precipice to her left and said, "No, not here," a little louder than I had intended.

"Okay, we'll go a little further," my mother said, not remarking about me raising my voice at her. We drove until the road dead-ended, then my mother turned around on the narrow road, very carefully, taking her time, then she stopped the car at a clearing and we came out, walked to the edge and looked down at the view. We could see the two cities between which our community was nestled. I spread wide my arms and breathed in the cool air. The sun was a streak of gold, pink and green just beyond the valley. My mother's face was calm and happy and in that instant I knew she could do it.

"Let's go Mommie. You have to stop on the hill then start again before it gets dark." I commanded, taking her hand.

"Alright, teacher," she replied and we hastened back to the car.

We drove by where the accident had occurred, drove down that hill, then made a right turn further down where the road forked and took that road leading to a residential section. My mother and I soon agreed on a spot where she stopped, this time the precipice to my right. I swallowed and gulped for air my fingers cramped from clutching the dash-board. Very carefully, my mother moved forward without any difficulty. I was suddenly able to breathe easily and the lump slipped down my throat.

"I did it!" my mother shouted as if she had doubted herself.

"Of course you did," I said, proud at the calm and assurance in my voice. "but you need to try it once more. And she did, three times in fact, and each time successfully without so much as rolling back a fraction. My mother and I laughed and sang out loud all the way home, and found my sister sitting by the gate, her book at her side.

My mother and I decided she was ready to take her driving test, but when she made that announcement Mr. Harrison and others suggested that she should wait a while. Mr. Harrison was still having a migraine, and I remembered that his name was still under the heavy rock. The first opportunity I got I went and pushed away the large rock and took out the almost disintegrated paper on which I had written Mr. Harrison's name.

Determined to go ahead and take her license, my mother sought the assistance of someone else but strangely enough, Mr. Harrison came forward and agreed to take her. So the following Saturday morning, Mr. Harrison picked up my mother and off they went. All morning long I paced back and forth on the round-about that enclosed the large silk-cotton tree that was like a sentinel in front of our house. I tossed twigs and stones at lizards. I spread my arms like the humming-bird I spied. I picked barks from the tree. I pulled at weeds. I declined invitations by Sheryl and others to play. I ignored Enid when she called me to come in, claiming I was going to go mad sitting all day in the

hot sun. I could not be budged. I kept a constant prayer going inside my head 'Please make mommie pass her driving test; please make mommie pass her driving test.' I kept both my middle fingers crossed over my index fingers; I even tried with my toes. Nothing could entice me away from my vigilance. 'If only mommie had taken me with her, I could tell her when she was too close,' I kept thinking, trying to imagine her every move.

I must have dozed, because I came promptly awake by the blowing of a horn, and when I got my bearing there was my mother waving to me; she was driving shinny deep-blue Betsy, all alone. Could it be what I suspected? Was I dreaming? I ran over to my mother whose face was all smiles. Her eyes twinkled.

"I passed!" she shouted, laughter spilling from her. I hugged her through the window and jumped for joy. She said I should go inside and get my sister and Enid so she could take us all for a drive. I skipped towards the house, my voice racing ahead of me:

"Mommie pass! Mommie pass her driving exam." I blared over and over, even after I was inside the house. "Come, she go take us for a ride," I said rushing back out.

I dashed to the car, beautiful Betsy, way ahead of my sister and Enid. My mother said I could ride up front since I helped her pass the driving test. I felt like she had given me a basket full of paradise-plums as I held back the front seat for my sister and Enid to enter.

"Le we go," I said as my mother pulled off smoothly. She drove confidently, blaring the horn and waving to everyone we saw. I was so proud of her. 🐾