

Scorpio: Courage

"You know what happens to kids who get hooked," Leslie's voice was urgent. "You've been to the clinic and seen them going through withdrawal. Do you want that to happen to Monica?"

"Leslie, you have no right to tell her mother. What Monica is doing is her own thing. She's got as much right to live her life as you have, and what she wants to do with it is her business," Glen spoke angrily. "Telling Mrs. Parish means interfering in Monica's life. Would you like somebody tattling about every move you make? Besides, don't you know the kids will have it in for you if you tell? You'll be an outcast — or worse."

"I know that only too well," said Leslie. "But I just can't stand by and watch Monica kill herself. Believe me, it's going to take every ounce of nerve I've got to tell her mother, knowing it's going to make Monica and everyone else hate me. And I don't exactly relish breaking the joyful news to Mrs. Parish, either. But what can I do?"

"You can keep your nose out of it," retorted Glen.

"How can you say that?" Leslie implored. "I thought you were her friend."

"I *am* her friend," said Glen, "and that's why I say keep out of her business and leave her alone."

Leslie sighed. "I'll never make you understand, Glen. She's my friend, too, and just because she is, I feel I've got to try to do something to save her, even though it's going to turn everyone against me. I've already talked to her, and that did no good. This is the only other thing I know to do — I can't treat her professionally myself or I'd try to do that. Somebody's

got to help her, and I don't know anyone else close to her who will, except her mother. So I'm going to tell Mrs. Parish this afternoon. How the kids are going to feel about me after that isn't nearly as important as what happens to Monica."

Glen stalked angrily away, and Leslie continued, slowly and reluctantly, to the Parish home. Her talk with Monica's mother was as unpleasant as she had feared. At first Mrs. Parish refused to believe that her daughter was taking drugs — although she later admitted she had noticed symptoms in Monica that, not wanting to believe, she had simply pushed out of her mind. Finally, however, she agreed to see to it that Monica got professional care and guidance.

Monica was not in school the next day, and most of Leslie's classmates studiously ignored her, except for occasional taunts. Glen had obviously spread the news. For the next several weeks, Leslie was left to herself. When people saw her coming they pointedly discontinued their conversations and turned their backs. Former friends avoided her, and the fact that the teachers and principal seemed to be treating her with particular kindness only made her position among the students even more uncomfortable.

Leslie did not try to justify her deed — in fact, she was not called upon to do so, and the silent treatment accorded her was much worse than having to defend herself verbally would have been. She remained convinced that she had done the right thing, however, and, although undeniably unhappy, she was, deep inside, positive that she would be vindicated in the long run. The almost daily progress reports she received from Mrs. Parish did much to encourage her. Monica was in a private institution especially equipped to deal with drug addiction, and had come through the most difficult phase of the withdrawal period very well.

After several weeks, Monica unexpectedly returned to school, looking better than she had for a long time. At the end of the day, she asked to speak to the class.

“Kids, I don’t quite know how to say this,” she began, “but after talking to some of you I’m beginning to see what Leslie has been going through all this time. I admit that when I first found out it was she who told my mother, I hated her for interfering. I was afraid of going to that institution and I was scared to death of withdrawal. But deep down inside I wanted to go off acid. Nobody who’s hooked on it really wants to be. I needed help but I was scared to ask anybody for it so I was just getting in deeper and deeper. I’m not sure I’m completely cured even yet — but it was thanks to Leslie that I got another chance, and I only hope I can stay on the straight road this time. If it hadn’t been for Leslie, though, I’d be in worse shape than ever by now and probably wouldn’t be able to stay off acid no matter how much help I got. They say it doesn’t take much of that stuff to make you hopelessly hooked, and I can believe that now. Anyhow, I owe Leslie my whole life. I don’t think anyone else would have done what she did, and I wish you’d be friends with her again. I would have acted just like you if she had interfered with someone else — but now I see that sometimes it’s necessary to interfere. What she did took a lot of courage, and I’ll never be able to make it up to her.”

Monica sat down and there was a long silence. Then Glen stood up. “I think we all owe Leslie an apology — and more than that. There’s a lot of talk about ‘moral courage’ in this world, but it took somebody who really *has* it to show us what it is.”