

Appeared in *The Conqueror*  
February 2002  
999 words

## **The Ticket**

by Michelle Isenhoff

She was late for work and had tried to make up some time so her pay would not be docked. Now the loss would be inevitable, plus she would have to pay a speeding ticket, not to mention the guaranteed rise in her insurance premiums.

She pulled into a parking lot and rummaged through her glovebox for the appropriate papers. The officer stepped up to her window just as she found them. “Good morning,” miss,” he said politely. He was young and good-looking, and under other circumstances she would have enjoyed talking to him. But not today. Not like this. She mumbled something unintelligible and handed him the required papers.

“Are you aware that you were doing sixteen over?” asked the officer sweetly as he checked the papers and arranged them in the order he would need them. Jenny was shocked. Had she been driving that fast? But she kept her face expressionless. “I’m going to have to issue you a ticket, miss. That’s a very dangerous speed, and I would hate to see something happen to you.”

“I’ll tell you what’s going to happen to me, sir,” Jenny mumbled as the officer walked back to his car. “I’m going to get kicked out of my apartment because I can’t make rent. Or maybe I just won’t eat this month so I can keep my place. I could get a second job, but then I would never have time to study. I’d fail my classes and really be out a lot of money. College isn’t cheap, sir.” She slumped in her seat, angry at the officer, but knowing she was at fault. She sighed deeply. “This is all I need, a little more stress in my life.”\

The officer soon returned and handed back her papers, which she threw carelessly onto the front seat. Then he handed her the ticket and in a cheerful voice said, “I only wrote this out for ten over. Here’s how much your fine will be. Here’s the number and address of the courthouse in case you have any questions. You can mail in your check or drop it off in person. Have a nice day!” He gave her another sugary smile.

Jenny grimaced and threw the ticket on the seat with the other papers. She didn’t even look at it. She was quite familiar with the procedure. she restarted her car and continued to work, slower this time.

What was she going to do? She simply had no money to spare. Her rent was due, her tuition was due, and she had to eat. She didn't want to ask her father for money again, and she certainly didn't want to move back home. She was eighteen years old and she wanted to prove to her parents that she could make it on her own! But it was hard.

Then a plan began to form in her mind. Perhaps she could get out of paying this ticket. A friend had once told her that he had challenged a ticket in court and won because the officer never showed up. Perhaps it would work for her. It seemed like the perfect solution, and the longer she thought about it, the more confident she became that it would work.

Jenny had been so busy that she forgot about her court date. Then suddenly, there it was on her day planner, wedged between her 1:00 class and her staff meeting for the college newspaper at 4:00. As she drove to the courthouse, she felt the muscles in her stomach begin to tighten. She talked out loud to calm herself down. "This is going to work out just fine. I'll probably get a lenient judge who will give me a break. After all, I'm a polite, well-dressed girl who's working hard to put herself through college. And the officer is probably so busy he won't have time for an inconvenient court hearing. I'll be just fine."

She managed to talk herself into some measure of confidence. She breezed through the courtroom door, the picture of class and self-assurance. She maintained her confident attitude even when she recognized the young police officer at the front of the room and took her place across from him. However, all hopes of success crashed around her when she recognized the judge entering the courtroom. He was reputedly the most strict, hard-nosed judge the county had.

The judge gave Jenny a long hard look. She felt sure he could see what she was thinking. "Why don't you tell me your version of what happened, young lady," he said.

Jenny never remembered exactly what she said to the judge. Probably something about following the speed of traffic around her, and that she couldn't possibly have been going as fast as the officer said. When the judge turned to the officer, Jenny let out a huge sigh of relief. She no longer cared what the outcome of the hearing was. She just wanted to get out of that courtroom.

The officer's statement was simple. "The young lady was traveling at sixteen miles per hour over the legal limit, your honor. I wrote her up for ten over." Simple and, Jenny knew, true.

The judge knew it, too. He looked at her and never hesitated. "Young lady, this court finds you guilty as charged," and he brought the gavel down with a loud thump.

Without looking at the young officer, Jenny made her way over to the clerk to pay her fine. If she would have met his eyes, she would have seen the astonishment plainly evident in them. And because her head was bowed, neither did she immediately see what he saw.

The judge, instead of retiring to his chambers, had removed his judicial black robe and descended to the floor of the courtroom. With his wallet in his hand, he gently moved Jenny aside and generously paid her fine.

At the questioning glance of the clerk, he replied simply and quietly, "She's my daughter."