

## Reckless Parking

*Last week I lent a friend a car while her husband was away on a fishing trip. Coincidentally, a neighbor's wife was away that week. My car was seen in the neighbor's driveway overnight, easily recognizable because of my kid's college decals plastered on it. A few people have inquired about my car's being there overnight. How do I explain without ratting out my friend?*

—C.W., Atlanta

You don't explain. You sneak out at night, plaster similar college decals on every car in town and deny everything. (You'd think your friend would know to park in the garage or around the corner if she's trying to be stealthy.)

O.K. This tactic is impractical in a town the size of Atlanta and morally dubious in any town—the deliberate deception, the flagrant college boosterism. The best way to protect your own reputation without either lying or betraying your friend is to say nothing. Just mumble vaguely and change the subject; these things have a way of blowing over. It's impressive how quickly most of us return to thinking only about ourselves.

Next time your friend borrows your car, tell her not to use it for anything that would put you in an awkward position—sloppily conducted illicit liaisons, liquor-store robberies. It is not your obligation to demand that she end her affair, nor is it in your power to enforce such a ukase, but you can decline to abet actions that offend your principles (if indeed hers do). You would not feel compelled to offer her your apartment as a trysting place; you need not lend her your car to drive to one.

While it is not within the purview of my column to suggest better tactics for assisting adultery, here's how the Adulterer's Adviser might reply to people curious about your parking: tell them you lent your car not to the friend but to the neighbor in whose driveway it sat overnight. You would need to enlist him as a conspirator, and you would be telling a lie, but a clever lie, an effective lie and one that impugned nobody's conduct—questionable ethics, but fine craftsmanship.

Randy Cohen, "Reckless Parking," *The Ethicist*, *New York Times Magazine*, Nov. 13, 2005, p. 42.