

CLOTHES ENCOUNTERS

Lisa felt a tap on her shoulder and turned around. It was Donnie Phillips, one of the coolest guys in the class, holding out a slip of paper.

"Pass it to Judy," he said. But the smirk on his face said, "Boy, what happened to you over the summer? You used to be okay, but now you're tall and ugly."

Lisa reached out and grabbed the slip of paper.

Suddenly a voice snapped, "Lisa! Donnie! What's going on there?"

Lisa twisted her arm in a big circle and plunked her hand down on the social studies quiz in front of her. Then she continued writing as if she'd just been getting a kink out of her arm. "Nothing, Mrs. Sikorsky," she said in a weary-sounding voice. "Tired arm."

Mrs. Sikorsky didn't look convinced. "You had better get back to work. You have only ten minutes left."

Lisa finished her quiz early, but she didn't dare look at the note. Only when the bell rang and she filed out of class with the other kids did she get up the nerve to open it. The note said:

*Judy—
She's wearing purple eye shadow. And a
purple skirt. And purple shoes. Gross!*

—Lynn

From the hallway, Lisa turned around to look back at Mrs. Sikorsky. It was true. Purple, purple, purple. She wasn't sure it was all that gross, though. She liked Mrs. Sikorsky, who was fairly young for a teacher and kind of pretty. Then Lisa noticed that even Mrs. Sikorsky was shorter than she was now—like most people in the world!

Lisa sighed and looked at the note in her hand. A little voice in the back of her mind whispered, "Last year Lynn passed notes to you. This year she passes them to Judy. But you and Lynn are supposed to be best friends. So much for best friends!"

"Oh, just shut up!" Lisa muttered. All at once she could feel her face getting as hot as if she were sun-burned. She had actually said that aloud! She couldn't believe it—she was talking to herself!

Just at that moment, two girls had passed her in the hall going the opposite way. They were only a few steps behind her when she heard their giggles. Her face felt even hotter.



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"You're so big," said the obnoxious little voice inside her head. "You could probably pick up both of them and knock their silly heads together. Of course, that would make you look even more stupid than you look already."

The rest of the day dragged by. Lisa headed for the front door of the school as soon as the last bell rang.

"Lisa! Over here!" her mom called.

Lisa hurried across the front lawn of the school toward her mother's car, opened the door, and flung herself inside. Then she realized that Jimmy, her little brother (half-brother, actually), had moved the seat forward again and she was all scrunched up. She groped for the handle and slid the seat back as far as it would go.

"How was school?" Lisa's mother asked as they drove off.

"Fine."

"Everything okay? Ready to do some shopping?"

"Uh huh."

"It's wonderful to hear so much news about school," her mother said, half-joking. Lisa pretended she hadn't heard this, and for a while they drove to the mall in silence.

"Can I get some of those jeans with buttons instead of a zipper?" Lisa finally asked. "They're so neat. But there's only one kind that's really good. Lynn's mom says the other brand falls apart."

"Sure, if they're not too expensive," her mother answered. "By the way, how is Lynn? I haven't seen her for a while. Did she have a good summer?"

"She's okay. She went to the camp that Judy and Phyllis went to. The one where you get to ride horses every day. And she went to her grandmother's house. But that was boring."

"Uh huh."

Lisa wondered if her mother could tell she'd picked up this information by overhearing Lynn and Judy in the hall. She wondered if her mother knew Lynn wasn't her best friend any more, that something terrible had happened over the summer. Mainly, she'd turned into this giant that everybody laughed at and nobody liked.

Lisa was relieved to see that the mall was almost empty. Lots of kids came to the mall after school, but they weren't here yet.

"How about the department store?" her mother asked. "They'd probably have those jeans."

"No, the store next to the place with all the running and tennis clothes has them. I heard . . . some of the kids told me about it."

The real question, she thought, was whether they would have the jeans she wanted in her size. Her great big colossal gigantic huge size, whatever it was.

She'd had a dream a few days ago. In the dream she and her mom went into a department store, and the clerk took out a huge ruler to measure her with. Then the clerk practically yelled, "This girl is so tall that we don't have anything to fit her. She'll have to go to the giants' department."

In the dream they'd gone home without buying any clothes. Then her mother had made some horrible tacky pants and tops on her sewing machine, out of old rags. And when she wore the rags to school and walked down the hallway, all of her classmates lined up on either side, laughing as she passed by.

But, to her surprise, shopping turned out a lot better than her dream. Not only did the store have the jeans she wanted in a size that fit, but her mother helped her pick out three brightly colored tops that were on sale. For the first time that day she felt almost happy.

Then the clerk spoiled it. As he was putting the clothes in a bag, he smiled at Lisa's mother and said, "They sure are growing them bigger these days, aren't they?"

"Her father's tall," said Lisa's petite mother. "Very tall."

The afternoon was ruined. The year was ruined. Lisa felt like crying, but she pretended everything was normal as they headed back to the car.

"I have to stop at the grocery store," her mother said. "Do you want to come along?"

Lisa shook her head. "I have to do some homework."

"Okay. I'll just take you home first."

After her mother dropped her off, Lisa was relieved to find that she had the house to herself, at least for the time being. Her older brother Allen must have had a meeting or something after school. And she knew her younger brother Jimmy was at soccer practice.

She ran up to her room and threw herself on the bed. After lying there for several minutes and trying to make her mind a blank, she reached for the bag of clothes and dumped it on her bed. There they were. Giant's clothes. Clothes for the towering geek.

She shoved the clothes onto the floor. "I hate you! I hate you!"

This time her tears really flowed. After a while her pillow was wet, and she felt something fluffy brushing against her.

"Hi, Amanda," Lisa said to the orange cat. "You're so lucky you're small. Me, I'm like Alice in Wonderland when she grows so tall that she fills up a whole room." The cat rubbed against her, purring like an outboard motor. Lisa smiled through her tears. "I'm suffering and you demand to be petted. You're incredibly, unbelievably selfish. But I love you anyway."

Lisa was startled by a soft knock at her door. Then the door opened, and her half-brother Allen stuck his head in.

"This girl is so tall that we don't have anything to fit her. She'll have to go to the giants' department."

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"I couldn't help overhearing." His smile revealed a mouthful of straight white teeth, now that his braces were off. "You love me even though I'm unbelievably selfish. Thank you, thank you, thank you!"

Lisa picked up the pillow and hurled it at him. "Ooh, you weren't supposed to be listening!" He ducked to avoid the pillow. Then, picking it up, he came into the room and bowed.

"Excuse me, ma'am, but I believe you dropped your pillow."

Lisa grabbed the pillow and hit him over the head with it several times.

"Murder! The great pillow massacre!" Allen shouted. Then, with a sudden lunge, he grabbed the pillow from her and began to pound her with it.

"I give up! I give up!" Lisa shouted through her laughter.

Breathing hard, she grinned at him. He looked back at her through his tousled brown hair. With his turned-up smile, dimpled cheeks, and slightly oversized ears, he looked like a jaunty elf. He was 17 and had a great sense of humor. All in all, he was pretty fun to have around. Lisa had concluded earlier that he was the main benefit of her mother's second marriage.

Allen's smile disappeared as he examined the pillow he was still holding. "Someone," he said in an exaggeratedly serious voice, "has been crying on your pillow." He picked up one of the blouses from the floor. "And someone has been throwing clothes around." He sniffed the air like a comic detective. "I sink somesing iss wrong here." He smiled his great big toothy grin and stood there waiting for her to speak.

Lisa concentrated on picking invisible specks of lint from her jeans. There were lots of them.

"If you don't want to talk about it, I bet I can guess," Allen finally said.

"I bet you can't. Nobody understands what I'm going through, not even you."

"Well, officially I, too, am still a teenager. Even though I look and act like a dashing young man."

"You're a boy!"

"Sometimes. But I am especially sensitive. That means girls think I'm cute and like to talk to me. Being short and cute and sensitive has its advantages."

Lisa still didn't look at him, but she mumbled, "Well, being tall and . . . taller than anybody else in the class when you happen to be a girl has no advantages that I can see. Starting with your short friends not liking you anymore."

For a while there was more silence. She looked up, and Allen's bright blue eyes held hers in a lock.

"Remember last year," he asked, "when I had that physical before I went to be a counselor at that camp?"

She nodded.

"That's when I finally asked Dr. Grant a question I'd been worried about for years," Allen went on. "'Doc,' I said, 'I'm one of the shortest guys in my class, and I feel lousy about it. Am I going to grow any more?'"

Lisa almost stopped breathing as she waited for him to continue.

Allen smiled at the memory. "It was hard to ask him that, believe me. I was so nervous I thought maybe I was going to throw up or something. But I figured he'd know."

"What did he say?"

"He took me over to this chart on the wall that showed growth patterns. Then he told me I was in about the tenth percentile. That means 90 percent of the guys my age would be taller than me. And he told me I'd passed my growth spurt, so I probably wouldn't grow a lot taller. He said he wouldn't recommend a career in basketball!"

Lisa was horrified. "What a terrible thing to say!"

"Not at all," Allen said. "He was being honest. He didn't want me kidding myself. Of course, I was kind of upset at first. I mean, I want to be normal. I want to be like the other guys my age, so I was pretty shook up."

"Then he put both hands on my shoulders and stood there looking me in the eye. 'The world is made up of tall people, short people, white people, black people—all kinds of people,' he said. 'You are what you are. You can spend the rest of your life wanting to be something else. Or you can accept who you are and be a happy person who will bring love and happiness to others. You can choose for yourself.'"

For a while Lisa couldn't say anything. Then all she said was "Wow!"

"Yeah," said Allen. "Wow. I'll never forget it. Never." He jumped up and stood there smiling. "That's why you see me as I am. On the small side, but otherwise perfect." He beckoned to her. "Stand up."

"No!"

"Stand up!" he ordered. She stood.

"Look at you, you little twerp," he said. "You aren't as tall as I am. You're a shrimp."

Lisa didn't know whether to laugh or cry. "I'm . . . I'm gigantic. The other girls think I'm a freak."

"They're probably jealous because they're even shrimpier than you are," Allen said with a mischievous chuckle. "They know that the basketball types—people who are even taller than I am—will prefer you to them."

"Oh, sure!"

"It's true." He smiled as he headed for the door. "We older people know these things!"

"Doc,' I said, 'I'm one of the shortest guys in my class, and I feel lousy about it. Am I going to grow any more?'"

After Allen closed the bedroom door behind him, Lisa picked the pink blouse up off the floor and changed into it.

Slowly she turned to look at herself in the mirror.

"This really doesn't look that bad," she admitted. "Maybe there's hope for me after all. I bet I could do something new with my hair, too."

She grinned at her reflection as she reached for her brush.



FACTUAL QUESTIONS:

1. What are some things Lisa feels self-conscious about? Why are these things so important to her?

2. What do Lisa and Allen talk about?

3. What did Allen's doctor tell him about accepting his height? What was Allen's reaction?

4. What effect does this conversation have on Lisa?



INTERPRETIVE QUESTIONS:

5. What emotions has Lisa experienced during this one day? Why do you think such mood swings are typical of early adolescence?

6. What solutions to the changes and challenges of adolescence are offered in the story?

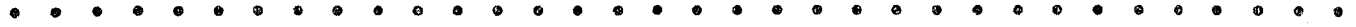
TIPS: *So you're going through a lot of changes, right? Well, you can make changes into challenges and challenges into successes. Here are some points to keep in mind during this time of changes in your life:*

- *Believe in yourself.*
- *Try to do the best you can—always.*
- *Don't forget that developing your potential in life means making healthy decisions right now.*
- *Take care of your health and hygiene—they're an important part of who you are.*
- *Remember that your image is more than the way you look—it has a lot to do with the way you think.*
- *Remember that there are caring adults to help you during these years!*
- *Give yourself the chance to become the best you can be. Stay drug-free!*



LOOKING BACK

NAME: _____ DATE: _____



Use what you've learned during this unit to write a letter to someone in grade five. Explain at least four changes he or she can expect during early adolescence. Then name at least one "skill for adolescence" that will help this younger person handle each change successfully. Before starting your letter, list the changes and skills you've chosen.

1. Change: _____

Skill: _____

2. Change: _____

Skill: _____

3. Change: _____

Skill: _____

4. Change: _____

Skill: _____
