

Fashion Plate

Charlie was telling Alice about Alan and the camping trip.

The night before the class outing, Charlie had announced that he couldn't wear any of his home shorts.



"Why not?" his mother wanted to know.

"They're not long enough," he said.

"Not long enough?"

He told his mother that guys wore their shorts long these days. This year, shorts were even longer than they had been last year, so his old shorts were no good.

His mother laboriously unpicked the hems and made the legs as long as possible. When she had finished, she handed the shorts back to Charlie to try on.

"They're still too short!" he said.

"Well, there's no material left to let down," said Mum. "You'll have to make do."

He told his mother that guys wore their shorts long these days. This year, shorts were even longer than they had been last year, so his old shorts were no good.

She refused to take him out shopping for new ones, even though he begged her. These were perfectly good shorts, she said—what did an inch or two of length matter?

Great! Now he would be the only one with too-short-shorts. Maybe some of the class idiots would wear too-short-shorts, but nobody else. Charlie thought of being sick to get out of going on the field trip.

But his mother was adamant. "From a few feet away they'll look the same as everyone else's," she said firmly.

The next day, Charlie met Ben on the way to school. Ben's shorts were the fashionable length. Charlie walked on, trying to keep his knees bent so that his hems would look lower.

Soon Ron joined them. He, too, had proper length shorts. Charlie was starting to bend his knees in earnest now.

He was dying of embarrassment. Why hadn't his mother taken him to get new

shorts—she would if he needed something for his homework! It was her fault that he looked like a fool, Charlie thought resentfully.

After school, everyone walked through the playground to catch their buses. Charlie leant against a wall. That brought the shorts down a few inches—he decided to stay there. He would sacrifice running and having fun if it meant he could look cool.

Ben and Ron wanted him to play.

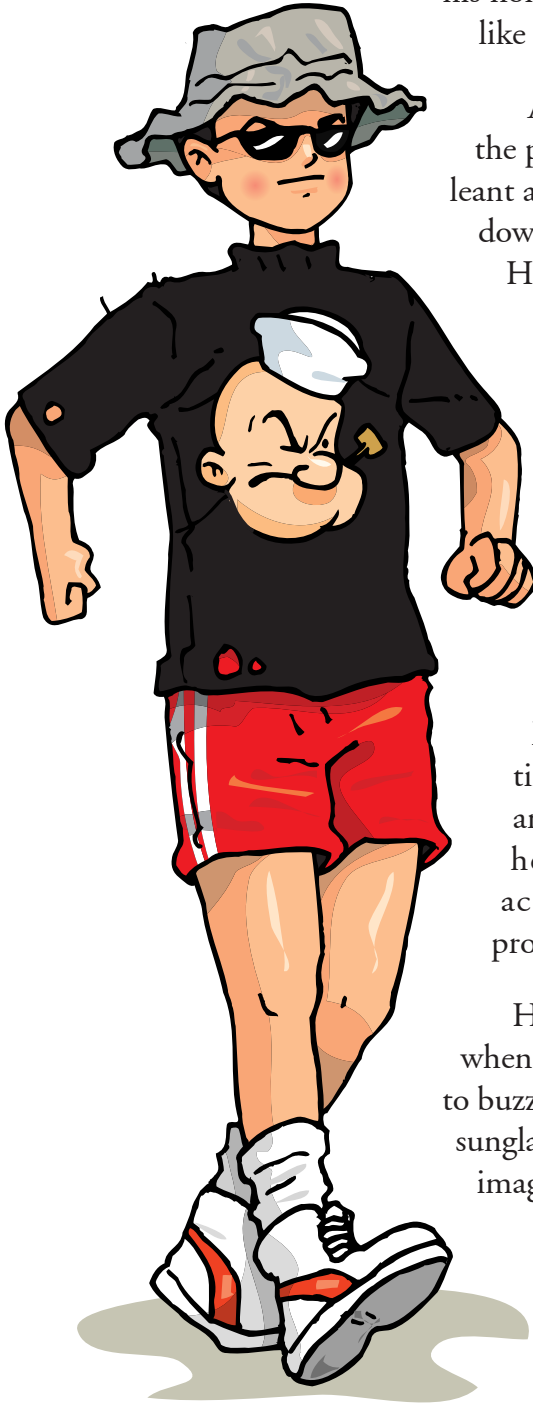
"I don't feel like playing right now," said Charlie.

"You sick?" Ben asked him, concerned.

As Charlie watched his friends having fun, he remembered all the good times they'd had together in the park. Ben and Ron had never seemed to notice what he was wearing—they'd always just accepted him. Charlie thought they probably would now.

He was about to run out and join them when the other end of the playground began to buzz. Alan had arrived! He had a sunhat on, sunglasses, the biggest and most sloppy T-shirt imaginable (Charlie saw the teacher wince), and—short shorts!

"Look at those legs!" some of the guys teased. But Alan wasn't bothered. Alan was Alan and



anybody who didn't like it could just go away! He was a natural leader and he wasn't going to be fazed by anyone's opinion.

"I'm getting a tan," was his offhand explanation.

In fact, by the end of the outing, most of the other boys had rolled their shorts up—to get more sun, they said, but really it was to look more like Alan.

Charlie's mother asked him that evening, "Were your shorts all right?"

Charlie remembered all the time she had spent hemming them—and he rolled them back down. "Yeah," he said. "Sure. They were just right, Mum. Thanks!"

In fact, by the end of the outing, most of the other boys had rolled their shorts up—to get more sun, they said, but really it was to look more like Alan.

The Big Deal

Alice asked Sandra why she hadn't come to the community centre.

"My sister had free tickets to the bowling alley and I wanted to go," Sandra replied.



"Oh," said Alice.

Sandra turned to her. "What's wrong? You sound like I committed a crime!"

"Well, you promised to come."

"So?" said Sandra. "What's the big deal?"

Alice felt miserable. Sandra wasn't even sorry! Didn't it matter that you did what you said you would do? Alice felt betrayed—she decided to talk to Tiffany about it.

"I don't want to say bad things about Sandra," said Alice, "or make you say them. I just want to understand why I feel so hurt and that I can't trust her any more."

"Well," said Tiffany. "She went back on her word. It wasn't good. But, if she usually keeps her word, maybe forgive her this time?"

Alice sighed. "Well, she does. But... "

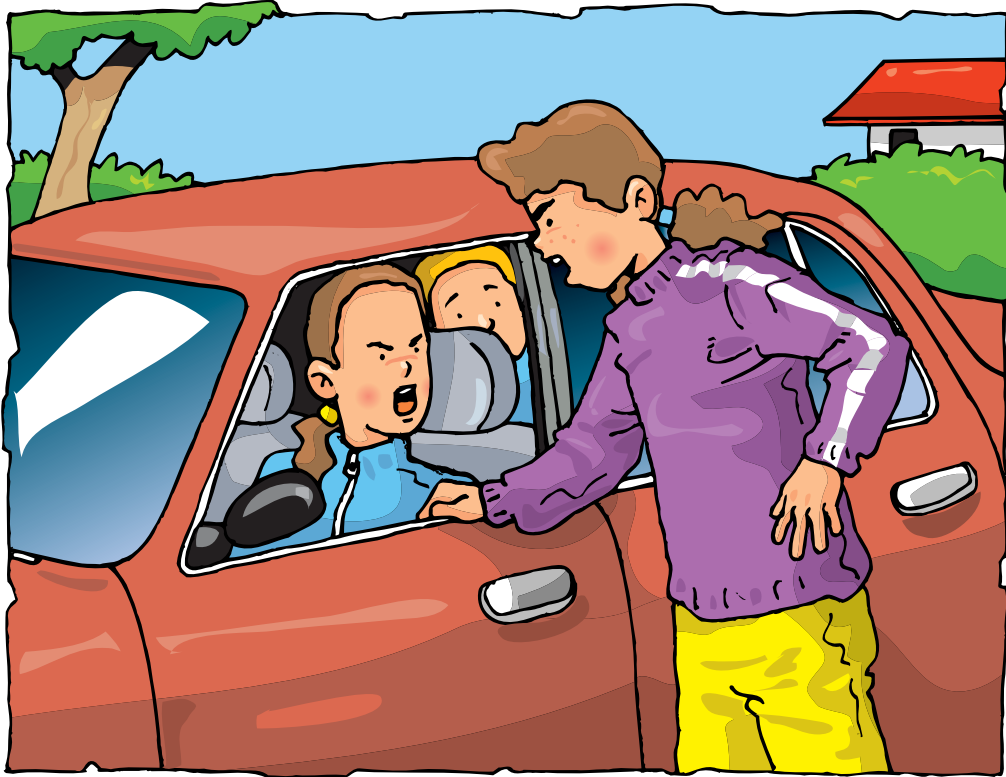
It wasn't just that, she thought. Sandra had a way of elbowing in on things. The three of them were good friends, but sometimes when Tiffany and Alice were talking, Sandra would barge in and demand to know what they were talking about. Not that they hid anything from her—but Alice felt that she and Tiffany had a right to talk together without sharing every single detail. And, even though Sandra was always welcome to come with them if they went somewhere, she never waited for them to ask her. Sometimes she even made them change their plans. Alice felt a little trampled on.

She heard herself saying many of the things Tiffany and Alice had said to her. Suddenly, she understood how her friends had felt.

Tiffany tried to explain all this to Sandra.

But Sandra became angry. Why shouldn't she go to the bowling alley?

"Well," said Tiffany gently. "At least admit that once you'd volunteered, you should have shown up."



"Was I the only one who didn't show up?"

"No," said Tiffany. "But—"

"So go and talk to them about it!"

Tiffany had to confess to Alice that she had not got through to Sandra.

"She just thinks she can do whatever she wants!" said Alice. "I could forgive all the other stuff, but I do want her to admit she shouldn't have given her word if she wasn't going to come to the community centre."

Fortunately, something happened that evening. Sandra's sister had asked Sandra to come to bowling next week—then she told her that a friend was coming instead.

Sandra hit the roof. "But you asked me! Now you're going back on your word!" And she heard herself saying all the things Tiffany and Alice had said to her. Suddenly, she understood how her friends had felt. Then her sister said, "Well, I really wanted to ask her, but you elbowed in. I asked you just to get you off my back!"

"Once I'd said I'd come, I should have stuck to it. There's no excuse. It was selfish of me."

Sandra was crushed. Now she felt truly sorry. She called Alice and said, "Alice, you're right. I'm sorry. Once I'd said I'd come, I should have stuck to it. There's no excuse. It was selfish of me. And—and I'll try to be considerate in other ways, too." She realised she had been slightly jealous of Alice's and Tiffany's close friendship.

"That's all any friend could ask," said Alice warmly.