



Love is..



To Nina,  Olga,  Kasia

If I could speak all the languages of earth and of angels, but didn't love others, I would only be a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. If I had the gift of prophecy, and if I understood all of God's secret plans and possessed all knowledge, and if I had such faith that I could move mountains, but didn't love others, I would be nothing. If I gave everything I have to the poor and even sacrificed my body, I could boast about it; but if I didn't love others, I would have gained nothing.

Love is patient
and kind.

Love is not jealous
or boastful
or proud
or rude.

It does not demand its own way.

It is not irritable,
and it keeps no record of being wronged.

It does not rejoice about injustice
but rejoices whenever the truth wins out.

Love never gives up,
never loses faith,
is always hopeful,
and endures through every circumstance.

Love will last forever!

1 Corinthians 13:1-7, 8b



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LOVE IS...

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Love is patient...

An intergalactic spaceship was wading through the thick, green clouds of the atmosphere. Lowering slowly, it soon sat down in a princely way on a totally unknown planet. A ladder jutted out from inside so that the pilot could come down to the ground. Jake double-checked the air-tightness of his pressure suit and wiped the glass in his helmet. He grabbed his laser gun and started climbing down. There was a purple desert underneath, he was to be the first human to stand on it. He was descending slowly. There was just one step left between him and the purple dune... one little step for the human race.

*

“Will you play with me?” the words reached him from behind his back.

Alas, it was not the voice of a dweller of another planet nor of a monster equipped with tentacles and antennas. It was something much worse! Jake sighed, jumped down



from the ladder and turned around in anger. Right in front of him stood his little 5-year-old brother. His face was smeared with chocolate sauce, hay stuck out of his hair, and his knees were scratched all over. He had managed to get through the hedge, and the smell around him would suggest he had waded through the mound of compost.

“Will you play with me?” he repeated a bit louder. “Will you play aliens from outer space with me in your tree hut? Will you?”

Jake looked at his brother, and then at his hut in the tree, the only place he could get some peace and have a really good time. It was a place where he could be the conqueror of planets. The only conqueror.

“No, I will not let you into my hut,” he answered. “You are too young to enter it. Besides, you spoil everything. You take my things and destroy them.”

“It’s just not true!” his little brother said with irritation. “No! It is not true! You never let me do anything. If you don’t let me play with you, I’ll tell Mom that you teased me. And she’ll get angry.. you’ll see! And she’ll punish you!”

“No! I will not play with you!” Jake shouted. “Go ahead! Go to Mom and tell tales, you nasty alien!”

His little brother opened his mouth and started crying and sobbing.

It serves him right, Jake thought to himself. It serves him right, indeed. He always destroys everything – like my favorite robot, the one I got from Grandpa for my birthday. The robot lost his hand pretty fast. Mark really made a scene bursting with tears, and everybody was comforting him saying it was not a problem at all.

But of course it was a problem, pondered Jake. If I spoiled some of these rattle-boxes of his, I’m positive I would be punished. It’s always like that. This boy will damage whatever he grabs. He has an exceptional talent. He’s become so bold recently that he goes right into my room and takes whatever toy he wants.

And who lost my toy soldiers? Mark, who else! And he always comes and spoils everything when I’m having a really good time.

That is why Jake took his best toys and placed them in his tree hut. He made up his mind he would play all alone. There, among the branches, he constructed a real space station, and no pesty destroyer could have access to it.

Now Jake realized that if his little brother complained to Mom, the rest of the day would not be that nice. He wouldn’t be allowed to watch bedtime cartoons, or maybe

something even worse awaited him. Silently, he entered the house. Mom was sitting at the table in the kitchen.

“Jake, I would have a request of you,” she spoke. “Your school friend Pete’s mother asked me to lend her a cake-pan. Would you take it to her?”

“Yes, Mom,” Jake said. “And may I play with Pete for a while? I’ve never been to his place.”

“Yes, you may,” Mom said. “Oh, wait, one more thing. Mark was here a moment ago, crying. He said you didn’t want to play with him. Couldn’t you devote some time to him?”

“Oh Mom,” the boy sighed. “He’s a bore, you know and cries for no reason. I really can’t stand him anymore”.

Mom looked at Jake quizzically and decided it was not the best moment to talk about important matters. I’ll talk to him later, she thought, perhaps tonight. “Lord God, please give me wisdom in this situation”, she sighed.

Jake, the cake-pan in his hand, ran down the street towards his friend’s house. After some time the row of white houses with green gardens ended, and he entered a neighborhood of old, unattended-to brick houses. The road was full of holes and muddy. So this is where Pete lives! Jake had never been here before. Strangely enough, Pete, one of the friendliest boys at school, was reluctant to invite anybody to his home. Now Jake understood why.

He found the house with the right number and knocked on the door. The door opened with a squeak and a little, maybe four-year-old girl stood at the doorway, skinny, snub-nosed and with lots of freckles. Her eyes were unusual: huge and emerald green.

“Yes sir, may I help you?” she asked.

For a moment, Jake stood dumbfounded, but quickly regained his composure. “I’ve brought the cake-pan and... I would like to play with Pete,” he said.

“Please, come in,” said the little snub nosed girl. It seemed even more snubbed now, and the freckles even more conspicuous.



The room Jake entered was neat although very small. Varnished shelves ran along one of the walls. An old table and two ugly green armchairs stood nearby. He also noticed a dilapidated desk. Pete was sitting behind the desk, and beside him, much to Jake’s surprise, was another girl looking exactly like the one who had let Jake in.

“Hi, Pete, I’ve brought this for your mom,” Jake said, holding out his hand with the cake-pan, as if to apologize.

“Hi, Jake,” Pete seemed a little embarrassed.

“So this is where you live,” Jake said. “How many rooms do you have?”

“This one and one more, and the kitchen,” Pete answered. “But the other one is occupied by our Grandma.”

“So how many of you live here?” Jake’s eyes went big.

“Mom, Grandma, young Vince, little Keith, but he’s just two months old, the twins you already met, and me of course.”

“And only two rooms?” Jake could not believe his ears.

“Well, somehow we get along,” Pete shrugged.

“So... maybe we can play a bit,” Jake quickly changed the subject.

“Can you wait a minute? I’ll just help Sue with the coloring book,” Pete answered.

Jake was so astonished that he could not utter a word. He sat in one of the armchairs, watching Pete help his little sister.

Suddenly, desperate crying reached their ears and a little boy stormed into the room, clutching his hurt knee.

“What happened, Vince?”

“I fell down!” cried the lad bursting into tears.

“We need to dress the wound,” Pete said.

The “surgery”, though not really painful, took some time, because the patient would by no means agree to let the wound be rinsed with hydrogen peroxide. When Pete was finished Vince was sitting in an armchair, proud of his heroism. Pete continued helping his sister.

“Ok, so let’s go and play,” he said after he finished.

“Do you have some nice toys?” Jake asked.

“Not really,” answered Pete in a quiet voice. “We better go outside. Let’s play soccer”.

They went out to the yard which was dirty. The only green thing growing was nettles. Nettles always seem to grow where you don’t want them to. The game was just about to start when crying sounded again. This time it was

the youngest of the siblings. Pete looked at Jake, apologetically.

“Well, I’ll be back in a moment, I’ve got to change the baby’s diaper.”

“What?!” Jake said surprised. “Where’s you mom? Can’t she do this?”

“Mom’s at work,” Pete replied. “Sometimes she does the housework for a certain couple. And Grandma is too ill to lift the baby.”

“So you do it all by yourself?” Jake was really at a loss what to think.

“Sure I do. Want to try?”

“Oh no!” Jake was terrified. “I’m not sure I could stand it.”

Diapering took a while, so a bored Jake played with the ball by the clothes closet. Pete came back, and at last



they could play, but not too long, for soon the twins showed up.

“Pete... we’re bored. Could we play princesses together?” they asked.

“All right,” Pete said.

“Hey, you! You’ll play with us, too?” Two pairs of green eyes were looking at Jake expectantly.

“They can’t be serious,” Jake said in earnest.

“Man, of course they’re serious, they’re crazy about this game,” Pete replied.

“What if someone sees us?” Jake said as he felt goose bumps on his back.

“So what!” Pete sounded a bit offended. “You mean I’m not allowed to play with my own sisters? Besides, I like this game, too.”

Jake was so astonished that he did not say a word and the game turned out to be not that bad. He and Pete were knights and had to liberate the princesses imprisoned in a tall tower, which was the clothes closet. No one even noticed when Pete’s mom came back.

It was quite late and Jake had to go home. Pete walked with him and neither of them spoke.

Finally, Jake could not stand it any more. He stopped and asked a question he had been struggling with for some time.

“How can you put up with all those kids?” he asked.

“How can I put up with them?” There was surprise in his friend’s voice.

“Well, you know. You have four younger siblings, and I have only one brother,” Jake said. “Still I have a hard time putting up with him, like he’s always destroying things and being a nuisance. You don’t even have time for yourself. You are always asked to play games, fix scratched knees, or diapering. Aren’t you fed up with it?”

“No, I’m not,” Pete answered, “that’s how it is at our place. It’s always been so.”

“But don’t you ever run out of patience? Don’t you ever feel like running away and hiding in a tree?”

Pete looked at Jake as if he had arrived from another planet. And said just four words:

“They are my family.”

*

An intergalactic spaceship was wading through the thick, green clouds of an alien planet. It lowered slowly, and soon sat down in a princely way on a totally unknown globe. Two pilots, brothers, Jake and Mark, were just getting



ready to enter into the newly discovered world. The older of the two lifted the younger's helmet screen. He took out a tissue and wiped his nose. The younger smiled, revealing the gaps in place of his missing teeth. Down there, on the purple dune, the dwellers of an alien planet were already waiting for them. Two of them, exceptionally freckled and like two peas, were looking at the descending pilots with their huge green eyes.

Discussion questions:

1. As the story begins was it easy for Jake to be patient with his little brother?
2. Who was Jake thinking about when he was irritated (bothered) by his little brother?
3. Did it please God when Jake didn't want to play with his brother?
4. Why was Jake surprised with Pete's relationship with his brothers and sisters?
5. What lesson did Jake learn from Pete?
6. What motivated Jake to change?
7. How can you be more patient and with whom?
8. Why is it difficult to be patient with others?

Love is kind...

Some days should never take place. Maybe the best way out would be to sleep through them, and wake up the next day, having avoided the problems! At least that's what Sophie was thinking during her math class, watching the teacher distribute the tests, calling out the students one after another. Sophie took her sheet of paper and sat back at her table. She closed her eyes for a moment. Then she braced herself and looked at her test.

It was a long glance of disbelief. Sophie then felt grief and a sense of great defeat was growing inside her. Unintentionally, tears flowed down her cheeks. She was looking at her math paper which was covered with comments in red and a huge F.

"I am sorry, Sophie," the teacher said. "This is not your first F. It seems it will be your final grade for this semester."

So this was the end. A big and tragic end of a half-a-year sham, her telling her parents that everything's fine. Now it will all come to light...



Her trouble with math started at the beginning of the school year. Sophie could not understand the new problems. She used to look at all those commas, fractions and various symbols, and they were just swirling before her eyes. And then a huge, horrible emptiness filled her head. She showed her first F to her parents. They were worried and told her to improve her grade. She tried to improve it three times, and finally she got a D+. When she got another F she decided not to upset her parents so she didn't tell them. Her parents, somehow, were never able to go to the parent-teacher conferences. Perhaps it was because Sophie would remember about the meetings just a day before. She also managed to lose her report card. She blamed her friend for that. And so day after day passed. But now it was the end of the semester and the sham. The semester

grades were to be given in a few days, and she would have to show them to her parents. The truth would all come to light.

After the class, she was surrounded by her school-friends.

“Well, Sophie, what a drag!”

“Man, it surely is!”

“And your parents probably thought you would pass.”

Bursting into tears Sophie said, “My parents don’t know about it at all. I didn’t tell them anything, they don’t expect I might have even one D.”

“Ouch! What a bummer...”

“Well, girlfriend you’ll have a hard time now. You’d better stay away from home for awhile.”

“Yep, better scram to Macau, or someplace.”

“Yeah, that’s exactly what I’d do. My folks would ride me for such a thing!”

“Stop scaring me,” Sophie sobbed. “I’m scared enough without your advice.”

“Na... who’s scaring you. Just stating the facts.”

Sophie was going back home with a heavy burden in her heart. Her schoolfriends and their useless remarks did not help a bit. Worse, they made her fear even more. As she walked, her steps were getting slower and slower. Finally, she stopped at the entrance to the stairway to their apartment.

“Why aren’t you going home, Sophie?” This was Madge, a friend living nearby.

“Well... somehow I don’t feel like.”

“What do you mean you don’t feel like?”

“Well... I’ll got an F in math for this semester. Probably...”

“And you’re afraid to tell your parents?”

“Wouldn’t you be afraid?”

“Sure I would!
For an F, I’d be
banned from every-
thing. They’d kill me
for this! I mean, no
butts about it. No
computer, no games,
no TV, no trips. No life
at all.

Yes, Sophie thought
to herself. *No trips...
So probably no chance
of going with auntie
to the mountains for
the winter break. No
chance for anything.
I’d better not go back
home at all.*

She sat on a
bench, but soon
it became too
chilly. She stood
up and started
walking around the
neighborhood, slowly
passing one condomi-
nium after another.

*What shall I do?
There’s no way out.
I should have told them
everything right in the beginning. Now it’s too late.*

Sophie was not sure what frightened her more, The F she was going to get for the semester, or the fact that she had been lying, claiming she had no problems with





math. Her Dad would always assert in a solemn voice that even the worst truth was better than the nicest lie. And it was this solemn matter that worried Sophie the most.

They will not believe me anymore, she thought. They won't think much of me, at all. Mom will say I've disappointed her, like she told aunt Kathy when she'd left uncle Jack. That's what she'll say, for sure! And Dad? Dad will look at me IN HIS special way. It will be a disgrace for them. Maybe I should really escape? I'll run away, and become someone famous and esteemed – a celebrity or a movie star. And then I'll come back home...

As Sophie was roaming around her neighborhood, snowflakes were falling on her purple cap. It was getting dark. Christmas tree lights were glowing in many windows. This year, the winter break was to begin right after New Year's Day.

"Nice lights, aren't they?"

"What?" Sophie turned around, startled.

"I mean the lights in the windows. Nice, aren't they?" she heard again.

There was a little girl, maybe five years old, sitting on a bench between two hawthorn bushes. Her huge sky-blue eyes were looking at Sophie. She was dressed in a pale-colored coat, a woolen cap and large green boots.

"They enjoy Christmas there, at their homes, you know."

"Sure I know," Sophie answered, at the same time thinking that there was something strange about the girl. Was she lost or something? Why was she sitting there alone?

"There's Dad, Mom, and the kids," the girl was chattering. "It's cold here, but it is warm inside. And lots of toys, you know. Do you like toys? I like 'em a lot. And the gifts. Like birds and flowers. And other things..."

"Did you get lost?" Sophie interrupted her. "It's late, why are you sitting here alone?"

"Of course I'm not lost," the girl announced. "I'm waiting for my brothers. They went to that big house in front

of us, to help this ailing lady. She asked for help, so my brothers went.”

“And you stayed here?”

“Yes, I did. But I love helping, too,” the girl added proudly.

“I believe you do. So how many brothers do you have?” Sophie asked the question nonchalantly.

“Oh, many, I tell you. Lots of them – as many as the stars in the sky,” said the girl as she started to laugh.

Amusing little one, Sophie thought.

“And later we’ll be going back home,” the owner of the green boots added and looked at Sophie again. “Are you going back home, too?”

“Well, I...” Sophie stuttered out.

“It’s always good to go back home,” the girl said, and nodded as if she wanted to add weight to her words.

*

At that moment her cell rang. Sophie looked at the display. “*Oh my! My parents!*”

“They’re probably looking for me now,” she whispered, “they must be very angry because they don’t like it when I am late. They say something bad could happen to me. So now I’m really in trouble. I’ve got to go right away.”

She turned around to say goodbye to the girl in the green boots, but the bench was empty.

“She’s probably run to her brothers,” Sophie concluded. “If I am to have any chance with my parents, I’ve got to run too, no matter what happens to me. One can hardly get oneself in bigger trouble than I did. It’s better to go back home and confess. The worst truth is better...”

Like in a frenzy, she ran up to their condominium and pressed the button of the entry phone.



“Mom, I’m back,” she shouted.

“I say!” she heard in the loud-speaker. “The lost has been found! Run up here, quickly!”

Sophie was running up the stairs, leaping several steps at a time. She entered the hall and closed the door behind her.

“I’m here. I’m back.”

“Didn’t we tell you not to come back late?” Dad spoke. “That’s why we gave you a cell phone.”

“Sit down, the dinner is waiting,” Mom said. “We’ll talk afterwards about being late.”

Sophie sat at the kitchen table. She looked at the bowl of the delicious steaming chicken soup, her favorite. However she did not feel like eating.

“I...” she mumbled, “I’d like to talk with you. I’ve got something very important to tell you.”

Sophie’s parents looked at each other. Mom turned off the tap over the sink, Dad put away his newspaper. Even the dog came and sat at the kitchen door.

“I lied to you,” Sophie stammered. “I lied to you concerning math. It wasn’t all right For the whole semester. I wasn’t doing well at all. I got one F after another. And now... and now... I didn’t pass the final test. I’ll get an F for the semester.”

There was silence, Dead silence. Sophie crouched, waiting for what HER parents would say, waiting for the verdict: For the ban, for the restrictions, for the punishment, for the sermon about the being unreliable. Still there was only silence. tears were flowing down her cheeks, dripping into the bowl and mixing with the cold soup. The silence seemed to have no end. Sophie thought it must have lasted for hours.

“I am really sorry. Very sorry,” she managed to whisper.

“So you understand that you did wrong?” Dad spoke at last.

“Yes.”

Dad looked at Mom and nodded.

“Sophie, listen very carefully now,” he began. “Stop crying and hear what I have to say. A month ago your math teacher called us on the phone and told us about the situation. She told us you were to get an F. We knew all about it.”

“We knew about it,” Mom added, “but we waited for you to tell us. Sweetheart, it wasn’t wise to hide your problems from us.”

Thoughts were swirling in Sophie’s head. *So they knew all about it, about all the problems, about all the F’s. Why didn’t they say a word?*

“Why didn’t you say anything?” she asked.

“We waited until you told us yourself. We knew about your every F.”

“So when I got an F and told you everything was fine, you knew...”

“Yes. We knew you were lying.”

“And it was very painful to us.”

Sophie hung her head down. What she had just heard made her feel much, much worse than if she got a ban and all the possible punishments.

“But,” Dad spoke, “today you admitted your guilt. You had the courage to tell the truth. And that’s important. It was the right thing to do.”



Sophie could not believe her ears. How come she did right?! Yes, she admitted her guilt, but she expected punishment, not praise. She had been so afraid to go home. What about everything her friends said? So she decided to find out.

“What will be my punishment?”

“There will be no punishment, dear,” Mom said in a kind voice.

“But I deserve a punishment. I was getting bad grades at school and lied to you.”

“Yes, but you did it because of fear, a fear that was absurd. We don’t want to punish you, we want to help you. We love you. We are your parents.”

“And when you are back from your winter break...” Dad paused tellingly, “we’ll pay for private lessons for you, with someone who can help you with math. And concerning the punishment... Yes, you deserve it. But you have already punished yourself with long weeks of fear and uncertainty. And you punished yourself not for the Fs in math, but for not trusting us, and for believing your friends’ tales rather than in our love.”

Sophie hugged them both.

“I am so sorry! I will always tell you the truth! Thank you!” she whispered.

There are days that should never have happened, but this one ended happily. That night, Sophie was turning from side to side in her bed for a long time. And when she finally fell asleep, she dreamed about a girl in green boots. The girl was waving her hand and telling her it’s always good to go back home.

Discussion questions:

1. Why did Sophie lie to her parents?
2. How did her lies hurt her? Hurt others?
3. Was the advise of her friends kind or helpful? Why or why not?
4. Who sent the little girl to remind Sophie to go home?
5. Who showed Sophie kindness?
6. Why did the love of her parents surprise Sophie?
7. Do you agree with Sophie's dad's statement "It is always better to tell the worst truth than a nice lie"? Why or why not?
8. In what ways can you be kind to others – showing them your love?

Love is not jealous...

Jackie always seemed a bit different than the rest of the class. She had come to the school in the middle of the second year, and immediately stirred up curiosity with her appearance: a flowery dress, an old leather jacket and huge boots. Besides, she did none of the things other girls her age would do, many of which were school rituals for generations. She kept her distance. Other girls used to spend their time chatting about boys and fashions. Jackie did not even wear makeup. Although she was a very good student, she would often seem tired, as if she had not slept at night. In short, Jackie stirred widespread interest. She was not, however, willing to talk about herself. Attempts to get any information from her were useless.

This mysteriousness was at first intriguing, but after some time it became unwelcome. Those who are different are rarely liked, especially when they don't even try to be likeable. They do not participate in parties, gossiping, and jokes. They are not into things that everyone else is into. Soon such a person is labeled as an eccentric. After a couple

of months Jackie became known as Whackie-Jackie. This nickname, invented during a lunch break, soon became popular in the whole school. It stuck well, like old chewing gum to the sole of a shoe. Once the nickname caught on, all the rest was only too easy. All the rest? Well, ridicule, sarcasm, disdain...

“Look! Whackie-Jackie’s coming in her boots borrowed from a cat, her thrift store dress, and orangutan jacket”.

Such remarks were not uncommon.

“Jackie, do you have a cell?”



“Sure she does! Made from an old telephone! Such cells were very popular in the times of the Alamo battle”.

“Yes, but only among the poorest soldiers.”

“Jackie, what are you reading?”

“Don’t you know you can watch a movie instead of reading?”

“Or listen to music?”

“Jackie, do you have an mp3? Or do you still use the tape recorder?”

“She still uses tapes, I’m positive.”

And so it went all the time. Every day. Until a certain homework assignment.

“Attention, please,” the teacher said. “Today’s homework is very interesting. You will write an essay on the following subject: ‘Another life’. The idea is to describe what you would do in someone else’s shoes.”

“Meaning?” someone asked.

“Meaning each of you will draw his or her pair. Let’s presume Kathy and Johnny make one pair. Johnny is going to describe what he would be doing if he were Kathy, and Kathy would write what she would be doing if she were Johnny.”

“Should I pretend being a girl?” Johnny moaned, and everybody burst into laughter.

“It’s not quite the idea,” the teacher smiled. “You should write about how you would feel if you were born in a totally different place and in a different moment. Drawing your pair is going to make things easier for you. There’s an old Indian saying that goes like this: ‘you won’t know a man until you walk a mile in his moccasins’.”

“But we all know one another very well, we’re thick as thieves.”

“Are you sure of that?”

“I’m positive!”

“Then it will make your work easier. You have one week for completing this task.”

After the class, a group of girls stood in the corridor. One of them, a tall blonde, was relating something to her friends in an excited voice.

“Imagine this! I have drawn Jackie!”

“So what! At least we’ll find out what’s her problem.”

“What’s her problem? She’s a bore, that’s her problem.”

“Eva, don’t be a bore yourself! You’ll find out everything, describe it, and provide us lots of fun.”

“Yes. But first she has to come to my place.”

“That’s just perfect! She’ll get flabbergasted when she sees your clothes.”

“She’ll burst with jealousy. You’ll see!”

“Yes, but don’t forget,” Eva lowered her voice, “that I have to go to her place, too.”

“Well, you know, you won’t find out anything until you walk a mile in her moccasins.”

“Are you nuts? In those huge boots of hers? I wouldn’t walk one yard!” They all laughed at the excellent joke.

When Jackie came to Eva’s door, she felt as if a whirlwind sucked her inside. Eva pulled her to her room, placed her in an armchair, and started telling about her happy life.

“You don’t need to ask any questions, Jackie, I’ll show you all!” Eva chattered. “See, this is my room, the sofa, the desk. Dad brought the desk from Sweden, you know? A special order. Here’s my stereo. And the mirror. And the clothes. Many of them not used, I don’t really like them. You know what I mean, you buy something and then it stops being fun anymore. Oh! This is the case I keep my cosmetics in. I have lots of cosmetics! Do you like it here? Isn’t it cute? Tell me.”



“That’s right,” Jackie nodded her head. “It’s really cute, your room is beautiful. And I like particularly the desk. It looks like an antique.”

“It’s not an antique, it’s made on a special order. I saw a similar one in an old mansion. I liked it very much, so I told Dad. And you know what he said?”

“What?”

“He said that his little princess would get a princely desk. And he got it for me! Isn’t it gorgeous? My parents always buy me whatever I want.”

“Can they afford it?” Jackie asked.

“I guess so. I mean, if they buy it, they probably can.”

“Yes. Probably. You know what,” Jackie stood up, “it’s really cute here, but I’ve got to go.”

“You’re kidding!”

“I’m sorry, but I don’t have much time. Thank you very much for showing me your house. I will surely write something.”

When Jackie left, Eva grabbed the telephone.

“Well? How did it go?” she heard in the receiver.

“I think she’s sick with jealousy! She couldn’t stand it and ran away!”

“She’ll describe you now, I tell you!”

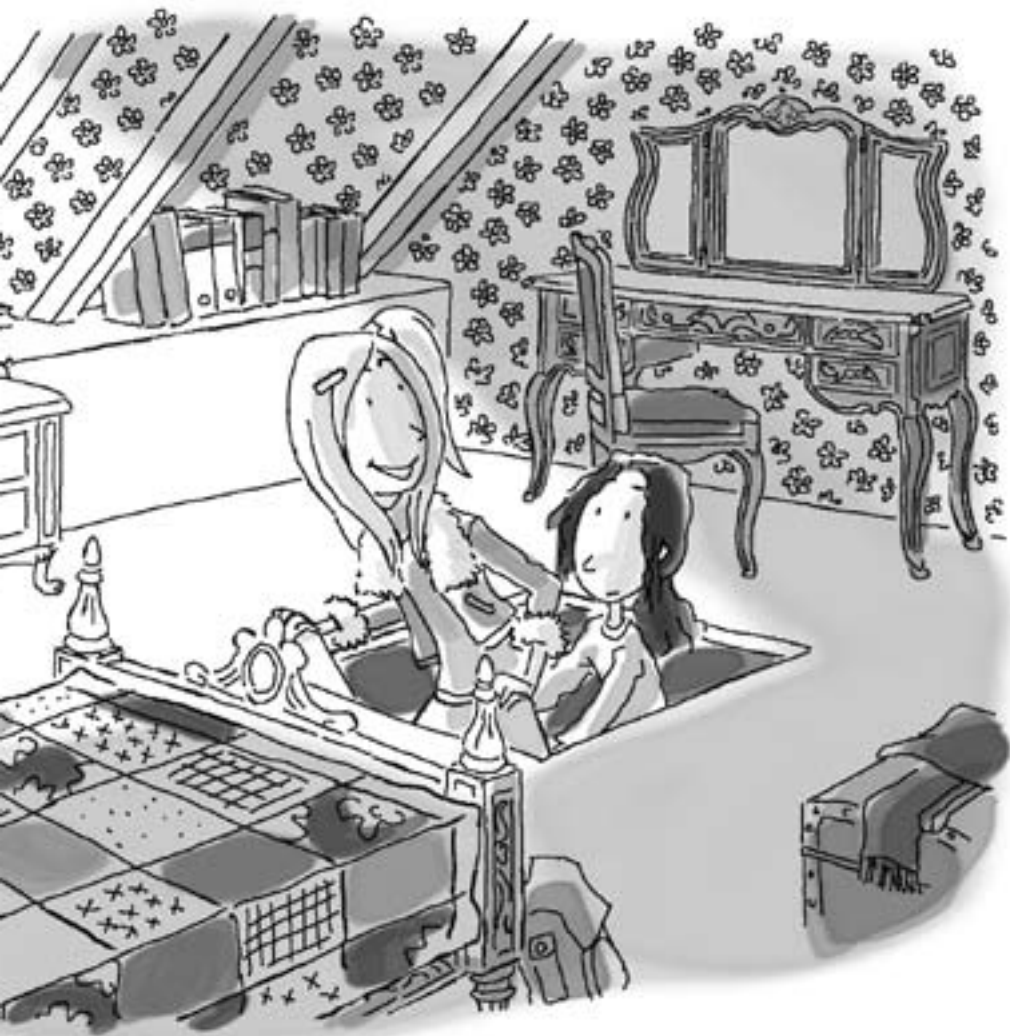
“She’d better not! Or I’ll teach her!”

During the next class the first group of the students started reading their essays aloud.

“If I were Kathy,” Johnny started, stirring up a storm of laughter from the class, “I would paint the room with another color. Pink is horrible. And I would place posters with basketball players everywhere. And my Dad would be happy to have such a wise daughter, one who understands the value of basketball.”

Kathy was gazing at the boy with infinite contempt in her eyes. “Post those posters on your forehead; you’re stupid,” she hissed.





“And now,” the teacher said, “Jackie, please.”

“But the break starts in a moment,” the girl noticed.

“Never mind. You will read as much as you can, and finish after the break.”

“Yesterday I visited Eva in her house,” Jackie started reading. “She has a huge room and fabulous furniture, like

a fairy-land, indeed. Eva has lots of things. If I were her...”

But the class did not learn what would happen if this exchange took place. The bell sounded, and all the class ran outside.

“Well, it doesn’t seem like she’s sick with jealousy,” Eva’s friends were commenting on the beginning of Jackie’s essay.

“But of course she’s jealous!” Eva sounded offended. “Didn’t she praise my room? It’s envy!”

“No envy at all. She just liked it, that’s all.”

“We’ll see who’s right.”

In the evening Eva knocked on Jackie’s door, casting around curious glances. The house was quite big, and it stood in a really big garden. But it looked unattended-to and dilapidated. Still Eva noticed that years ago it must have looked beautiful. Jackie opened the door, as usual in her flowery dress and huge boots.

“Hi, come in. You don’t need to take off your shoes,” she said. “Besides, it’s too cold here to walk with no shoes on.”

“Well? So will you show me your room?” Eva could not wait.

“If you wish.”

The room was in the attic. It was small, but very nice. Old furniture looked as if someone had renovated it recently.

“Your furniture is cute, too. Did it cost much?”

“No! It cost nothing. Someone got rid of it, so I took it and restored it.”

“You? You mean all by yourself?”

“Yes.”

The room was decorated with wallpaper with lots of tiny flowers on it. Eva looked carefully and noticed to

her surprise that the pattern was not printed, but hand-painted.

“I painted it,” Jackie explained, anticipating her question. “I bought white wallpaper on sale, papered the room and created all the patterns.”

“Was it worth your time?”

“Of course! No one has wallpaper like this.”

“What about the computer, TV set, stereo? I don’t see them here!”

“I have a computer. But at the moment it’s in my brother’s room. As for the TV set, I don’t watch TV. In fact we don’t have a TV set in our house.”

“You don’t have a TV set?!”

“No, we don’t. TV consumes lots of your spare time. And we don’t have too much of it...”

“Now, listen to me, Jackie! I really don’t understand.” Eva looked as if she was about to explode. “You live in a huge house, but you use only this tiny room in the attic. And you have good taste, your wallpaper and your room are gorgeous. Still the way you dress... sorry... it’s like a scarecrow. So what’s it all about?”

“It’s about a choice.”

“A choice?”

“You’re sure you want to know?”

“You bet! I’m dying of curiosity!”

“Well, follow me, then,” Jackie sighed. “It would probably leak out sooner or later, anyway. So let’s make it sooner.”

They went down the stairs, and Jackie knocked lightly on a door.

“Mom,” she said, “this is my friend Eva. Eva, let me introduce you to my mom and my brother.”

*

The class began. Everybody was waiting for Eva's essay. Eva came to school that morning as if spell-bound. She did not utter a single word. The only answer she would give to her friends' questions was: "In the right time you'll find out."

"Can we ask you, Eva, to read your essay?" the teacher said.

"First of all, I could not be Jackie," Eva started. "I am not able to imagine myself in such a situation. I would not have strength enough to live like her. I used to think



Jackie was strange. But only yesterday, when I visited her at her home, I understood everything. I was introduced to her mother and her brother. Although in fact I cannot say I was introduced to him. For four years, Chris has been confined to bed. Around him there are lots of devices, tubes, cables and strange apparatuses, because Chris cannot breathe by himself. He cannot do anything. Four years ago he was in a car crash. He's been lying like this ever since. Jackie's dad was killed in that same crash. Jackie used to have it all, just as I have. Her parents would buy her all she wanted, for her brother, too. They bought him a motorcycle, because he had always dreamed of having one. And this was the last thing they spent their money on. Now all the money the family gets goes for making Chris live a normal life one day. For making him wake up..."

After a moment she added, "I wanted to make Jackie jealous. I thought I would impress her with my room, my clothes, my furniture. But there is no envy in her. It's a matter of choice, she says. She had it all, and she sold it all. Now I understand her. And I am sorry for the way I treated her. If she were in my place, she would sell it all again in order to help Chris. She's the bravest girl I know."

In a complete silence, Eva closed her exercise book and started walking back to her table. For a brief moment, she stopped by Jackie's table and squeezed her arm. Then she sat down at her table.

Soon the bell announced the break.

Discussion questions:

1. Why is it unfair to judge others by the way they look or dress?

2. What are your thoughts about people who are different? Are you willing to get to know them?
3. Would Eva ever have gotten to know Jackie if she wasn't given the assignment? Why or why not?
4. Why did the girls think Jackie would be jealous of Eva?
5. Eva had things, Jackie did not. What was their main difference?
6. What is the meaning of the statement; "You won't know a man until you walk a mile in his moccasins"?
7. What did Jackie mean when she said "It's a matter of choice"?
8. What choice did Jackie and her mother make?
9. What caused Eva to change?