

## A Young Girl's Dilemma

It happened overnight. Or so it seemed. Angela was 13 and in the eighth grade. Yesterday she and her best friends Charlotte and Amy were children. They thought like children, they talked like children, they played games like children. Barbie and Ken and doll houses were big. Hop scotch and jump ropes brought squeals and laughter and endless chatter. The cool way to get from one place to another, whether in school, on the playground, or on the sidewalk, was to link arms and walk or skip along three abreast. As they grew older, they rode bikes to one another's houses and they talked endlessly about movies or school assignments or the Beatles or Elvis or hair styles or dresses, and how impossible it is to understand parents and little brothers. And, sometimes, how crazy boys are.

Bingo! Overnight, nothing remained to talk about but boys.

They did not "date" yet. But they discussed boys incessantly. The way a boy wore his blue jeans so long that he walked on them. Their long hair. Which ones were cute, which were cool, and which were nerds. Until, one day, Amy and Angela saw Charlotte walking down the hall before class with Kelly Sullivan. Then Charlotte and Kelly were together between classes. And they held hands. So Charlotte was the first in Angela's threesome to "go" with a boy, although they did not actually go anywhere. Charlotte and Kelly sat together at lunch in the cafeteria and at the next assembly program.

Telling themselves they weren't into that sort of thing, yet dying of envy, Amy and Angela had to find a way to get Charlotte alone and learn all about it. They caught her just before boarding the buses after school.

"Hey, Char," Amy said, "we're gonna study at my house. You gonna join us?"

Charlotte smiled sweetly. "I think Mom wants me to watch Andrew while she goes grocery shopping. But I'll call you if I can. Oops! Gotta go now." And she stepped onto the bus.

That was on Tuesday. Charlotte did not call. The next morning, Amy accosted her after second period English class.

“So, Char, you didn’t call last night.”

“Like, I had to keep Andrew while Mom went shopping.”

“So that’s all you did? You could have called.”

“Well, I spent some time on the phone.”

“Who with?”

“Someone.”

“C’mon. Who with?”

“You know who.”

“Kelly?”

“Uh, huh.”

“So, what’d you talk about?”

“Just things.”

“I’d tell you.”

“No, you wouldn’t.” The bell rang for third period. “See ya.”

At the end of the next period, Amy reported to Angela that Charlotte was not their friend anymore. And all the rest of the week, Charlotte spent her between-class time and lunch periods with Kelly. They held hands, but they did nothing more to show affection, at least nothing Angela or Amy could see.

Without acknowledging it even to themselves, Angela and Amy sensed that their lives were about to change. Charlotte did not call them, and they made a pact that they would not call Charlotte. This was a significant loss, because the three girls had been close for years. Angela and Amy lived only two blocks apart, and Charlotte was just half a mile away in a more upscale neighborhood, although she rode a different school bus. The three rode bikes together every Saturday morning, weather permitting, and sometimes they went to a movie on Saturday afternoons, or they watched TV on Saturday nights at Charlotte’s house because she had her own TV set in her bedroom. Sometimes they had Friday-night sleepovers at Charlotte’s or Amy’s, and they went to Sunday school and Baptist Young People’s Union together.

Then they were three, now they were only two, and the two were envious, and they were disappointed, but they were not upset with Charlotte. Somehow they understood that this was now the path their lives would take, and Charlotte had led the way. They were, in fact, a year later than some of their friends in moving from the all-girl relationships of childhood to the girl-boy relationships of adolescence. They would continue to see one another, and they would be together in their all-girl Sunday school classes at the Baptist church. But their friendship would no longer be the primary focus of their social lives. They were in the preparatory stage for that ultimate time when, as the Bible told them, “for this purpose shall a man leave his father and mother.” They were stretching, expanding, almost breaking the ties that bound them together as friends; later they would for the same purpose break ties with their parents. That purpose: Boys.

On Friday of this watershed week in the spring nearing her 14<sup>th</sup> birthday, Angela spent the night with Amy. In Amy’s room, with the door closed, both of them sitting cross-legged atop the white chenille spread on Amy’s double bed, each in short pajamas, they talked about Charlotte and Kelly and about the other romances they could see waxing and waning every day among their friends. They sensed this great, new, frightening adventure for which their bodies, their minds, and, yes, their hearts had long been preparing them. And the mystery of it all, they merely accepted.

Angela’s bodily changes, in process since she was eleven, were so gradual that she could find no easily measurable way to mark their progress. The reddish blonde hair that appeared in places where no hair had been before was at first so delicate as to be almost unnoticeable; and by the time it *became* noticeable it was almost taken for granted, except for the one or two occasions when the three of them—Angela, Amy, and Charlotte—had been so bold and daring as to compare.

The last of those occasions had been just a few months previous, during a Friday night sleepover at Charlotte’s house. In the bath room together, laughing and giggling as usual, one bit of silliness led to another until Charlotte said, with faked irritation in her voice to disguise her pride, “Don’t you think it’s just icky how we’re getting all that hair down there?”

With that opening they became daring to a degree that surpassed any limit that Angela could have imagined. Before they went to bed that night they had thoroughly compared their bodies, assigned nicknames to their variously developed breasts and buttocks, and even paraded about the bedroom in a totally naked “just girls” style show.

For which Angela had felt only a little ashamed the next day. But all that had been months ago.

Alone now with Amy in Amy’s bedroom and very aware of the absence of Charlotte, Angela was no longer concerned about the changes taking place in her body, but about the changes taking place in her life, her social life. Was there any way she could make those changes happen the way she wanted them to, and *when* she wanted them to? It had become apparent that for the remainder of her life, in order to be an acceptable person—definitely in order to be popular—she would need a boyfriend. The loss of Charlotte—the intrusion of Kelly

that broke up Angela's happy threesome—demonstrated that boys were no longer an option. Soon, a girl would be nobody if she did not have a boyfriend.

With Amy, she talked about the joy other girls exhibited when they acquired boyfriends. Charlotte was only the most recent example. They discussed the hurts and the bitter complaints expressed by the girls they knew when boyfriends deserted almost as quickly as they had been acquired. Yet the hurts somehow did not register strong among their concerns. What did register was the pride of “belonging,” and they wanted to make that pride their own.

They did not directly express their desire to find boyfriends. For both of them, the desire hovered somewhere just below the level of deliberate discussion, a level at which it could not be admitted nor could it be denied. They did, however, tell one another what they liked and did not like about boys. They speculated on what it must be like to hold hands, to kiss, to have a boy say he liked you. But as to how to go about acquiring a boyfriend they had not a clue. So they explored the observable evidence at hand, the pairings and un-pairings of their classmates.

“Did you see Bill holding hands with that goofy Patsy? With her silly ‘hee, hee, hee?’ What could he see in her?”

“Didn't you know? He's already broken up with her. He told her he likes Ida now.”

“Does Ida like him?”

“She did for about three days. But Marge told me that Rodney told Ida that Pete likes her. So she's going with him now.”

“Really? Ida and Pete? He's such a sissy.”

“Yeah, but Ida thinks he's cute.”

“Cute? With his hair all layered like that? He looks like a fag.”

“Yeah, I know. Did you hear about Mrs. Lane catching Janelle and Harold kissing in the hall?”

“Oh, everybody heard about that. She threatened to send them to the principal's office.”

“If she knew about just half the kissing that goes on, she'd have a hissy.”

“It's the truth. You ever kissed a boy?”

“Have you?”

“I asked you first.”

“Promise you won't tell?”

“Promise.”

“Cross your heart?”

“Cross my heart.”

“Cross your heart and hope to die?”

“Tell me, already.”

“No. I’ve never kissed a boy.”

“Me neither.”

“You ever wonder what it’s like?”

“Of course.”

“Who do you want to give you your first kiss?”

Angela was not prepared for so direct a question, so personal a question, even from her best friend. And she did not know the answer. To one who had never really thought about what was involved in kissing a boy, a first kiss seemed on the same order of seriousness as a proposal of marriage. Wasn’t it a commitment, a statement that you were in love and wanted to be with that boy forever? She tried to evade, to change the subject, but Amy now pressed in relentlessly. “Who do you want to give you your first kiss? You tell me and I’ll tell you.”

Finally Angela said, “Not anyone I know. I don’t know any boy I’d want to kiss me.”

Amy said, “Not anyone? How about Allen? I think Allen’s cute.”

“Yeah, he’s cool, all right. But I can’t imagine kissing him.”

“Well, I can. He has a cute mouth.”

“So you’d like him to kiss you.”

“I think so.”

“Do you want me to tell him?”

“You do and I’ll kill you!”

“Okay. But if you ever decide you want me to tell him, I will.”

“That will never happen.”

Angela would never reveal to anyone that when she thought about someone kissing her, all she could think of was someone who looked and acted like their pastor, Brother John.

So, what would she have to do to get a boyfriend?

She had to wait only a few days to find out.

Juanita, a classmate whom Angela barely knew, came to her in the cafeteria with the news that Larry said that David said that he thinks Angela is cute, and he'd like to go out with her. David was a ninth grader, one year older than Angela.

“So, what do you think?” Juanita asked.

Although Juanita's revelation surprised her, Angela knew quite well how the game is played. Whenever a boy wants to “go out” with a girl, he asks someone else to find out whether the girl likes him. This way no one gets hurt, unless he *is* rejected and the go-between chooses to tell everyone that he got turned down. Which happened pretty often. But it still was safer than the direct approach.

“Well,” Angela said, “he's sort of cool, I guess.” The truth was, she had hardly even noticed David. If she had set out to name the boys she would most like to go out with, David would not have made the list, no matter how many names were on it. She simply had never thought about him. So why did she now say he was “sort of cool?” Because she wanted to be noticed, wanted to be accepted, wanted to do what nearly everyone else was doing. She had responded the way almost any other girl or boy of her age – or of any age – would respond *when the timing was right*. She was ready to have a boyfriend. She had no other offers, no prospects of any other offers. So she said the words to let it be known that she would accept if asked.

Angela thought she could feel the blood rising in her body and she became aware of a slight pounding at the sides of her head, which she supposed was pulse beats. She wondered if she were blushing.

The next day at lunch, David Stiles managed to join her in line.

“Hi,” he said. He did not smile.

“Hi.”

“Okay to join you?”

“Sure. It's okay.”

“Juanita spoke to you?”

“Right.” There was that pounding again. She wondered if David felt the same way. Probably not. Without looking straight at him, she sized him up: Right height for her, good build, some muscles, long hair, ragged blue jeans that were right in style, square face with no more than the average number of pimples. Not good looking but, at least, not ugly either.

“Wanna join me and the guys at a table?”

This was more than Angela was ready for. Sitting at a table full of guys could cause problems. She’d have no allies if they gave her a hard time. So she tried a counter offer.

“I promised Amy I’d sit with her and some of the girls. You could join us.”

“I dunno. Me and a bunch of girls?” Angela feared she had lost the opportunity. Maybe she should agree to join him. Maybe it wouldn’t be so bad.

But David spoke first. “Okay. No problem.”

When they had paid for their food, they took their trays to one end of a long table, where Amy was already seated. There was one other boy, down near the far end.

With David at the table, the usual girl talk never got started. Angela could think of nothing to say to David, and they ate in near-silence. But they walked together to take their trays back, just as the bell rang for the next period. And as they left the cafeteria, David touched her arm.

“You going to the basketball game tomorrow? We could sit together.”

The game was after school. Angela had not yet thought about going, but she quickly decided to see this thing through. Perhaps for the first time, she faced the eternal dilemma of the female: Who knows when another boy would ask her to do something?

“Sure,” she said.

“I’ll meet you at the ticket table before the game,” he said.

So, now she had made her first date, a date that entailed nothing more than meeting a boy at the gym following last period, sitting with him among friends, and arranging for some other friend’s parent to take her home.

But it was a “first,” and it carried all the thrill of the many “firsts” that lay ahead—first real date, first kiss, first “I love you.” And there her imaginings stopped. She was not ready even to contemplate anything beyond those boundaries.

Immediately she told Amy, and Amy used the class breaks the rest of the day to inquire about David. Angela went home with Amy, from where she called her mother to tell her she'd be at Amy's studying math. The two girls went into Amy's room and lay across the bed.

"All right, so what did you learn?" Angela asked.

"First, tell me everything David said," Amy demanded.

"That'll take about half a minute." She giggled. "He hasn't learned to talk yet. He just asked me to meet him at the ticket table for the basketball game."

"Did he say he likes you?"

"No, he just asked if Juanita talked to me. He didn't even smile."

"He used to like Phyllis," Amy said. "She said she stopped seeing him because he was too handy."

"Handy? What does that mean?"

"It means he kept putting his hands on her."

"Yeah. Well, he put his hand on my arm. So what's wrong with that?"

"On her butt, you ninny. On her butt."

"Ooh. Gross."

"Yeah, gross. So watch it."

At home, Angela decided not to tell her mother yet. She'd wait and see how things went. If she decided she liked David, there would be plenty of time to tell her mother about it.

After school the next day, when she arrived at the inside entrance to the gym, David was horsing around with two of his buddies. Angela thought one of them was named Charlie, but she had no idea about the other. David must have assumed they all knew one another, for he did not introduce her. She bought her own ticket and the four of them climbed to the top row of bleachers on the left, where they could lean against the wall. The gym was about half full. Junior High School games were mostly played in the afternoons, once a week, unless the opposing team was from more than 30 miles away. Today they played Rogers Junior High, from across town, and the Rogers Rangers were ahead by 15 points at half time.

David said, "Let's go get a coke." He had hardly spoken to her, talking instead with Charlie and No Name. Except, he made a point of letting her know when the boys were

commenting on the size of the “boobs” on a visiting cheerleader. Angela understood that this was a negative comment about her own chest. And then he told her she had pretty legs and ought to be a cheerleader so she could twirl and show them off.

They walked down the hall to the soft drink machine, and Angela put her own money in for a Dr. Pepper. David said, “They won’t let us take the cokes in the gym. Let’s go sit on the steps outside.” He led her out a side door, toward the recreation area. It was too cool to be outside without a coat, but they sat on the steps scrunched close together for warmth.

Then he said, “Wanna see how many times I can chin myself?” He must not have meant it as a question, because he didn’t wait for a reply but trotted over to the chinning bar. He was already on number 7 by the time Angela joined him. After number 15 he dropped to the ground. “Now you do it,” he challenged.

This was not Angela’s idea of a fun thing to do, but she reached up to the bar. “No, no. Turn your palms facing you,” he instructed. So she reversed her hands, lifted her feet and pulled up most of the way to the bar before dropping back to the ground. She started to tuck in her sweater, which had pulled away from her skirt. But he said, “Try again. You can do it. I’ll show you how.”

This time, David stood in front of her and, as soon as she was hanging with her feet off the ground, he put his hands on her waist and boosted her up. As he did, she felt his hands on her bare skin under the sweater. With his boost, she managed to get her chin above the bar one time, then dropped back to the ground. Except, David’s arms were holding her so that she slid down against his chest, pulling her sweater so high that it exposed her bra. And he quickly moved his hand so that it touched her right breast, outside the bra. As her feet touched the ground, his other hand dropped onto her buttock.

“Stop it,” she said, stepping away from him and tucking her sweater into her skirt.

“I’m sorry, okay?” he said. “I didn’t mean to do that.”

“You certainly did,” she said, walking away from him toward the steps.

He was beside her. “Honest. It was an accident. It won’t happen again, okay?”

They had climbed the steps and she put her hand on the door to open it. He put his hand on hers and held the door shut. “Don’t be mad. It was just an accident,” he pleaded.

“Well, maybe,” she said, to her instant regret because he quickly put both arms around her and pulled her close against him.

“What’s the matter? I know you like me,” he said.

“What makes you think I like you?”

“People told me.”

“Who told you? I haven’t told anyone that.” She was pushing against him, but he had clasped his hands around her.

“Juanita, for one, she told me.”

“If she said that, she lied.”

“Come on. I’ve been noticing you for a long time. I like you a lot. I want you to be my girl, okay?”

“I’m not going to be your girl.” She pushed hard and he released his grip, but as he did he dropped both hands to her buttocks and tried to pull her skirt up. She shoved him again, hard, and he lost his balance and almost fell off the stoop. As he did, she opened the door and ran inside.

David followed as she hurried back to the gym. The second half of the game had started, and she walked conspicuously in front of the bleachers to a spot well away from where she had been sitting, afraid that all the people she knew were watching her and wondering what she had been doing with David. Furious and humiliated, she found a spot among students she barely knew and sat there for the rest of the game, hardly aware of what was going on. As the final buzzer sounded and the teams left the floor, she had the foresight to look at the scoreboard so she could at least tell her parents how the game ended. Rogers won, 47 to 38.

Angela was thankful that at least Amy and Charlotte were not there to demand to know what had happened. She met her prearranged ride home and rode almost in silence.

When she entered her house, her father was watching the news on TV and her mother was preparing supper. Her father asked, “So, how was the game?”

“Not very good,” she said. “We lost, 38 to 47.”

“Too bad,” he said, still concentrating on the TV.

“Call me when supper’s ready,” she said, heading for her room.

She plopped onto the bed on her stomach and stared at the carpet while she worried about whether she should tell her mother what had happened. She shared most things with her mother, but she was so upset that she decided against it, at least for the present. She wanted to call Amy, but she wouldn’t have time before supper.

After supper, she phoned Amy. But Amy had gone to the store with her mother. Angela tried to do her homework but couldn’t concentrate. “Why did he do that? Why did he do that?” The question wouldn’t leave her mind. Was this what a girl had to expect from all boys?

In her bedtime prayers, she asked God why this had happened to her. She got no answer. Finally, she asked forgiveness for whatever she had done wrong that allowed it, or caused it, to happen.

The next morning she walked to Amy's house to catch the school bus, finding only a few minutes to tell Amy what had happened. To her surprise, instead of sharing her anger, Amy asked, "How did it feel?"

"That's all you can do? Ask how it felt?"

"Well, it's not like he raped you or something."

"It *feels* like I've been raped, that's how it feels."

"Don't get hysterical. It's not as bad as being pantsed."

"Pantsed? What's pantsed?"

"That's when the boys pull up your dress and jerk down your pants to see what you look like."

"I never heard of anyone being pantsed."

"You have now."

"It happened to you?"

"When I was eight. At the bus stop. Tommy Jones and two or three other boys. I don't even remember who they were."

"I'd have killed them."

"No you wouldn't. One of them held my arms while Tommy pulled down my pants."

"Didn't you scream?"

"I would have, but they let me go. They just wanted to look."

"You sound like you didn't care."

"See? You're doing it, too. Because I didn't scream, you think I didn't care. Did you scream with David?"

"No. Sorry. What did your mother do?"

"I didn't tell her. She'd have bawled me out and maybe spanked me."

“I know. I’m scared to tell Mom, too. I don’t think she’d blame me, but she might tell Dad. And I don’t know what he’d say.”

Their conversation ended as the school bus arrived. She saw David only once that day, from a distance. He was about half way down the hall, talking with Larry and Charlie, and all of them looked her way. Later, Charlie passed her in the hall between classes. In a voice just loud enough to be heard by half a dozen others, he said, “Woo woo. Hot stuff.” Then he passed on by.

She went to her class shaking, and hiding tears. It was Friday. She would have the weekend to decide what to do. She shuddered. The weekend, and the rest of her life?

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