

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.

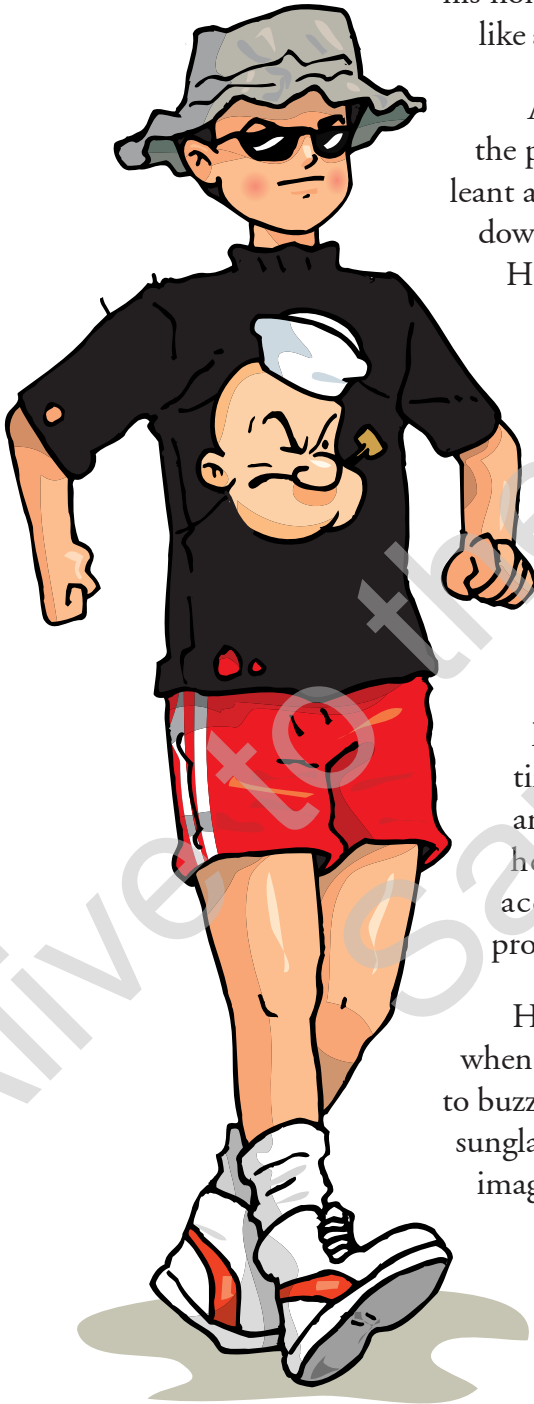
"I don't feel like playing right now," said Charlie.

"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.