

Changes Over Time

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Short Story Intensive

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“I’ve decided that each week one of us should prepare a summary of what we read in *To Kill a Mockingbird*,” Chase said. I sighed quietly to myself. When my 8th grade teacher started the book club, she didn’t say that Chase was the only one who could make decisions. I’ve made several suggestions about what to discuss and what books we should read, but Chase charges ahead with her own plan of action.

“Elizabeth, are you even listening?” Chase asked me.

“Yes, of course I am,” I said. My explanation seemed to satisfy her, so she kept on talking.

The classroom that we meet in is at the end of the hall, right next to the main doors. While we meet, several hundred kids race down the hall screaming and laughing, happy to be free of school for the rest of the day. To minimize distractions, we push our desks together in a far corner of the room. Melissa, one of the girls in our club, sneezes constantly, and I’m beginning to think that Chase’s perfume is the culprit.

As the clock turned five, Chase said: “We’ll meet at the same time next week.” While everyone collected their books and backpacks, I asked Chase to stay behind for a few minutes.

“Chase, I was wondering if I could choose the next book that we read.”

“Oh, well, I already have an idea,” Chase replied. Right when I was going to question her about it, her Mom pulled up in a Nissan Altima outside the window.

“Gotta go, Elizabeth! Wasn’t the discussion fun today?” Chase exclaimed.

“Yeah, sure,” I murmured. I waited on the front steps of the school for my Mom to pick me up. I looked down at my cell phone; it showed 5:30. Ever since my parents adopted a baby girl several years ago, it’s been difficult for my mom to keep up with all of my activities. Just last week she nearly forgot to pick me up from youth group.

My phone started vibrating – it was Chase. I wasn’t in the mood to talk with her. She probably wanted to plan a study day. We’ve known each other since we were young, but now that we’re getting older she’s starting to become controlling.

Just then I saw our champagne colored Toyota Camry pull into the parking lot. I prepared myself for all of the questions my parents would ask me at dinner. Eating meals together is very important to my parents. It’s when we share a small snapshot of our day with each other. In the back of my mind, I knew that my Dad would know something went wrong today. He is a counselor, and he is very perceptive of how others are truly feeling. Despite feeling frustrated, I forced a smile for my Mom and sister and got in the car.

As we pulled away from the school building, my mom exclaimed: “Hi, Lizzie! Sorry I’m late. How was your day?”

“It was fine,” I replied. “I have a lot of homework tonight, so I’m going to start it now.”

My mom looked disappointed, so I added: “I’ll tell you all about my day during dinner.”

“Okay, Lizzie. I won’t disturb you.”

Twenty minutes later, we pulled into our driveway. My mom carried my sleeping sister, and I lugged my heavy backpack into the house. As I stepped into the living room, the smell of lasagna was in the air. We sat down to dinner right as the grandfather clock chimed six o’clock. Even though there are only four of us, our table is large to accommodate all of our frequent guests.

“Did book club go well today, Elizabeth?” my dad queried.

“Yeah, we discussed the first few chapters,” I answered.

“Are you and Chase agreeing with each other on how to lead the club?” he asked.

I looked down and fumbled with the zipper on my hoodie. “I guess. I mean, she chose the book, and it’s been interesting so far. Today she suggested that someone prepare a summary of what we read.”

“Well, it sounds like she has had some great ideas for the club. What have you contributed?”

“I’ve made some suggestions, but Chase seems to have her own plan. It’s getting frustrating. I feel like she always needs to be in control of everything.”

“Maybe you should talk with her, and let her know how you feel. I know both of you would regret it if you let your friendship fade. Be honest with her, and see how she responds.”

“Thanks, Dad. I have the whole weekend to think about what I’ll say on Monday.”

I got up from my chair and brought my plate to the kitchen sink. Walking down the hall to my room, I thought about Chase, the book club, and all of the years we’ve been friends. It would be difficult to be honest with her, especially since I dislike conflict, but it would be the right thing to do.

Three months after I talked with my Dad about the book club, Chase invited me to sleep over. She said she had something important to tell me. After we watched a movie, she said hesitatingly that she'd be moving to Michigan in February.

“Chase is moving, and I never told her how I really feel,” I thought. “Now it's too late. I won't see her.”

The frustrations with the book club several months ago seemed insignificant now that Chase wouldn't be at school. I felt relieved that I never even had to confront her. Even though in the fall I had told my Dad that I would talk with her, my courage disappeared, and I didn't say a word.

In the morning, light flooded in Chase's room from the full length windows overlooking the city. Her room is a tropical paradise containing flower lights, pictures of islands, and a blue sky with clouds painted on her ceiling.

“Elizabeth, are you awake yet?” Chase called from the bathroom.

I sat up and wrapped a blue fleece blanket around me.

“Yes, I'm up, Chase,” I called back.

“Good! My mom has waffles with powdered sugar waiting in the kitchen!” Chase exclaimed.

While Chase was getting ready, her mom told me about their decision to move.

“Mr. Adams has a great job opportunity in Michigan. We're sad to leave Chicago, especially since it's the middle of the school year, but we just found a house, and everything is falling into place,” Mrs. Adams said. “We have a couple of weeks to pack up our belongings.”

“Well, I'm pretty surprised about it,” I replied. “I'll really miss Chase. Let me know if I can help her pack.”

“I'm so glad she has you for a friend, Elizabeth. She talks about you all the time. We'll have to invite you over when we're settled in our new home.”

About a year had gone by since Chase had moved to Michigan. At first I was sad not to see her at school, but as the months flew by, it got easier. In the back of my mind, I couldn't forget how her take-charge personality had put a strain on our friendship.

One Thursday evening I walked into youth group. Every blue couch was occupied with teens. The lights were dim, and Christian music was playing softly in the background.

“Tonight,” my youth pastor announced, “We’ll be remembering Jesus’ sacrifice for us on the cross by having communion; but, before we do, think about how God has forgiven you. Take some time to reflect, and thank God for saving you.”

After several minutes had passed, he added: “Just as God has forgiven us, we should forgive those who have wronged us and extend grace to them. If there’s anyone in your life that you have been harboring bitterness towards, I encourage you to pray for a heart of forgiveness.”

At that moment, I felt uneasy. Immediately, Chase came to mind. I prayed that I would want the best for her, and that our friendship would grow. Afterwards, I felt relief and stood up to stand in the line for communion. I could smell the dripping wax from the candles lining the stage. Reaching for the juice and cracker, I felt peace from God, knowing that I took the first step to erase my bitterness.

Ever since the lesson on forgiveness in youth group, I made renewed efforts to keep up with Chase’s e-mails. She was adjusting well to her life in Michigan – writing me all about her new friends, church, and activities. She called me several weeks ago to let me know that she would be visiting the Art Institute in Chicago with her art class, and she wanted me to meet her there.

When the day finally came to see her, I felt apprehensive. Walking up the stairs on a sunny June day, I wondered what our meeting would be like.

“Elizabeth! I’m so happy to see you!” Chase called out.

“I’m very happy to see you as well,” I replied.

As soon as we received our tickets, we walked down the long hallways lined with medieval armor, weaponry, and sculptures. Once we reached the Impressionist section, our tour guide told a brief biography of Monet’s life. Serious looking workers paced to make sure we didn’t touch any of the masterpieces. Despite the business of the day, we managed to have tidbits of conversation.

Before Chase had to leave with her group, I noticed a change in her. She had asked me several times which section I would like to see, and she asked a lot about what was going on in my life. I really enjoyed spending time with her. When we parted, she suggested I visit her, and I thought that was a great idea.

Next summer I took a four hour train ride to visit Chase in Michigan. When the train came to a stop, I walked out, anxiously waiting to see Chase. She came right on time, and we talked nonstop all the way to her house. As I walked up the lane leading to her two-story farmhouse, a

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large husky ran up to greet me. Since I've never had a dog as a pet, I was pretty nervous, but Chase said: "Don't worry. Moe is very friendly."

I laughed and went into the house.

Chase's Mom led me into the kitchen. Its yellow walls are lined with family pictures. On top of the high granite counters, there was a plate of brownies and a shirt that said "best friends."

"I saw that shirt at the store the other week, Elizabeth, and it reminded me of you," Chase said.

When I heard what Chase said, I was so grateful that we had remained friends over the years. Even though I had been bitter towards her in Junior High, a lesson in youth group about God's grace motivated me to have a spirit of forgiveness. Just as God is working in my life, I see Him working in Chase's life as well.

I smiled and looked at Chase: "I am so glad that we're best friends, Chase." I really meant it, too.