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Moment of Protest

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It was nearly noon. The heat was intense, as it had been all day, but now the sun stood perpendicular to the earth. The fierce temperature had long since completely dried the soil, and the little grass that remained was a scorched dirty brown. The only sound was the rustling of brittle shrubs. It was as if the sun had drained each branch of all its moisture until, finally, the little twigs cracked and broke off.

Lisa began walking up the steep hill leading from the group of shacks where she lived. She wore a small, faded green hat with a rim big enough to shade her eyes from the sun. Looking down, she saw the powdery soil scatter with each of her steps. Every time she stopped, the dust would settle in a thin mist over her dark, bare feet. She reached the top of the hill and stopped to rest on a big rock by the side of the path. She bent over and watched the perspiration drop from her face onto her dusty feet. Lifting her head, she looked down the hill at the mass of old shacks. She picked out hers—the third

one in the first row. In her mind she could just hear some outsider saying: "But how can you tell which one is yours, girl? They all look so much alike."

"Well," she'd reply, "ours has a glass window in the front instead of just a door. And it's not all gray. It's got some white, too! It was painted once, you see." While sitting there, acting out this scene in her mind, she saw her mother come out and stand on the small porch. She was a big woman—not like Lisa, who was small and thin. Lisa took after her father who had also been small, or so her mother said. Lisa didn't remember her father well enough to recall what he looked like. He left after Lisa's fifth sister was born. He had not counted on such a large family.

Lisa looked down again and saw her mother turn in her direction, her hands resting on her hips.

"What you doin' just sittin' there?" Lisa could imagine her saying. "Girl, don't you know I'm waitin' for them things from the store?"

"Come on now, stupid. Get up," she told herself. "She's really gonna be mad if you don't get goin' quick!"

She walked on hurriedly, over the hill. The store was on the other side of town—past the big development of sturdy brick houses. The dirt path that she had been walking on there turned into a proper pavement with a sidewalk running along each side.

Every time Lisa walked through town she never knew whether she should walk in the road or on the sidewalk. She didn't want to be noticed. When walking down the clean, tree-shaded street she would always realize she had no shoes on and that she wore a faded dress and hat. Now she stopped and tried brushing some of the dust from her clothes. Seeing that this had no effect on the dull and dirty color of the dress, she gave a sigh and again started to walk. She glanced to her right

at a tall three-story house with a big screened-in porch. It didn't have just *one* glass window in the front, but eight or ten. Here the grass was not brown, but green and short, and it was being watered by the spray of a sprinkler. Looking around, she saw no one and decided to wash herself in the water. Slowly she left the hot sidewalk and walked into the cool grass. A chill rose through her as she felt the dampness on her sunbaked feet. She reached the sprinkler, but as her toes touched the spray of water she heard a dog barking behind the house. Lisa ran to the sidewalk and started down the street. Glancing back, she saw the trail of her wet footprints on the sidewalk.

She walked another ten minutes before she reached the store. Lisa stepped inside and felt the air-conditioning all around her.

"Wonder if they'd mind me spending the night here?" she thought, and then laughed. "Let's see—bread, sausage, lettuce. I guess that's all."

As she reached the cashier, she suddenly wondered, "Oh, no! Do I have enough money?"

"Seventy-two cents."

She sighed and handed the man three quarters.

"Seventy-two out of seventy-five. Here you go—three cents."

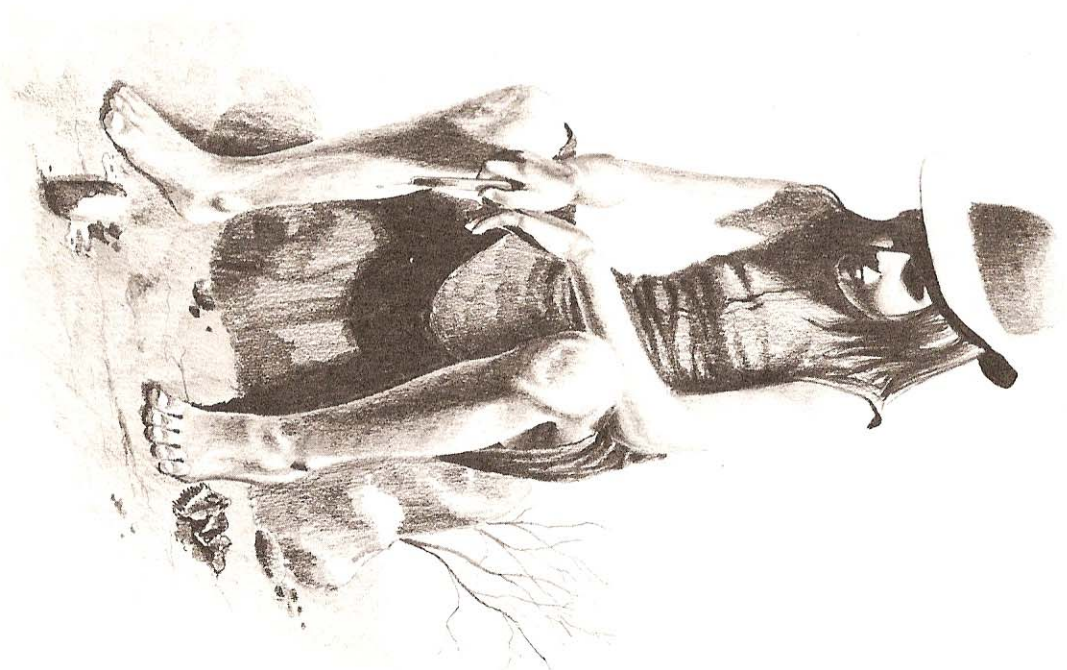
"Thank you."

As she turned to leave the store, a bright poster drew her attention. It read: "Has the heat got you down? Try an ice-cream bar. Only 15¢."

Lisa walked over to the display and stared at the frozen chocolate and vanilla bars. Her smudged hand held only three cents. She looked up at the sign again, then down at the wrapped ice cream. Suddenly, she thrust her hand into the freezer and pulled one out, just as another customer walked around the corner. Lisa looked up and saw him watching her. She

hurried down the aisle, glancing back to see if he was following. He continued walking up the aisle. She ran to the door and pushed it open just as the man called out: "Wait! Hey, wait! You didn't pay for that!" He turned to the cashier. "Hey, that girl—she didn't pay."

The cashier turned and looked out at Lisa who was now running down the road. "Huh? Ah—they come in here and



do that all the time. Never been taught any better, I suppose. Oh, leave her go."

Lisa ran fast down the black pavement. Her feet burned as they slapped the hard road. She held on tightly to the groceries and to her ice cream and kept running. The houses with eight or ten windows rushed past her. She kept running until finally her feet felt the hot rough dirt again. She stopped when she reached the rock and sat on it. Her lungs ached from the run, and the perspiration ran down her chin. The groceries slid through her arm onto the ground, but she continued to hold the ice cream. With her free hand she slowly removed the wrapper. The ice-cream bar, soft from the heat, fell off the stick and onto the ground. The dust scattered and settled instantly like a film over the chocolate coating. Lisa looked down at the soft melting mass. She sat very still and stared at the dry ground.

From below a voice called to her.

"Lisa? Come over here! I been waitin' for ya. Come on, girl!" But Lisa didn't move.

I

PLAIN SENSE

Trapped by Poverty

All people at one time or another have suffered the torments of wanting something that they cannot afford. Lisa, in her grubby shack, lives with this frustration day in and day out. No wonder she experiences a "moment of protest."

1. Describe Lisa's home.
2. What happened to Lisa's father? What kind of a relationship does she have with her mother?

3. How does Lisa feel during her walk through the rich section of town?

4. What does Lisa do in the grocery store?
5. What happens to the stolen ice-cream bar?

II

IMPLICATIONS

Do you agree or disagree with the following statements? Why or why not?

1. Poverty justifies theft.
2. Everyone experiences moments of rebellion.
3. The poor are more likely to steal.
4. Thieves often do not get the opportunity to enjoy what they have stolen.

III

READING LITERATURE

What Makes a Story Go

1. The moment when Lisa grabs the ice-cream bar from the grocer's freezer is the turning point of the story. Why do you continue to read after this point? What questions do you want answered?
2. How does the ending focus your attention on Lisa?
3. How does the title help explain the basic problem explored in this story?

IV

WORDS

Find words and phrases in the dialogue of this story, both real and imagined, which are grammatically incorrect. What do these errors reveal about the characters?