

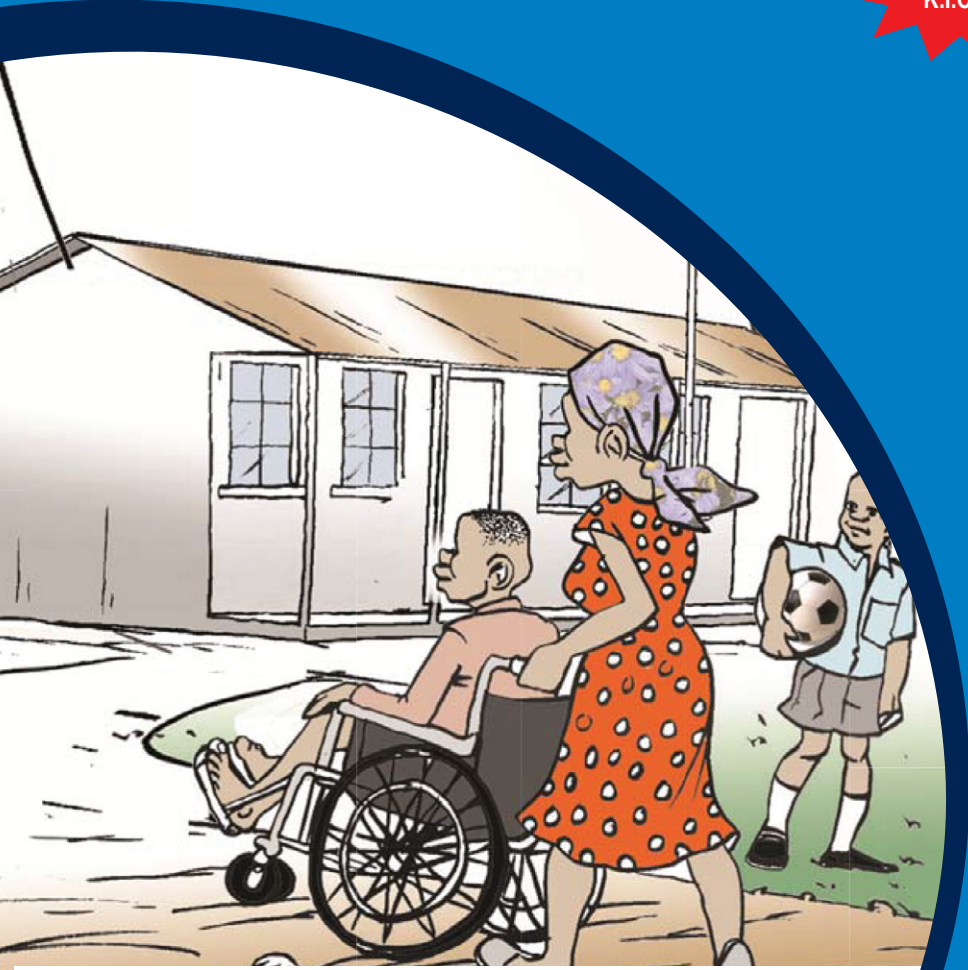


Ministry of Education

Turning Inside Out

10 - 12
YEARS

Approved
By
K.I.C.D



United Nations
Educational, Scientific and
Cultural Organization



Government of
Azerbaijan

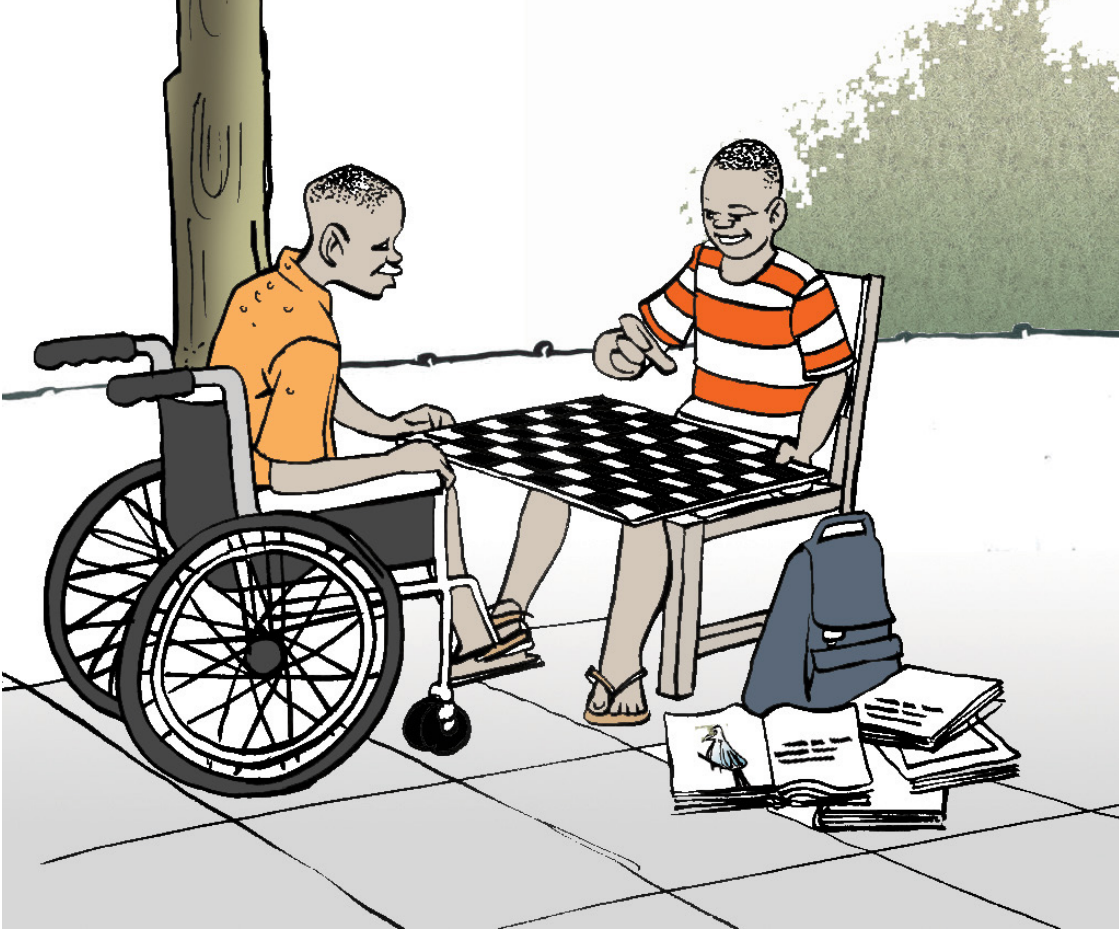
Turning Inside Out

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The new kid

Mark, why don't you go and play with the new boy next door?. He'll be coming to your school next week and he'll need someone to show him around' my mother said. Of course, what my mother did not tell me was that 'the boy next door' had legs that did not work. He was in a wheelchair! But no one in his home seemed to notice. I was shocked when I knocked on the door and he answered.

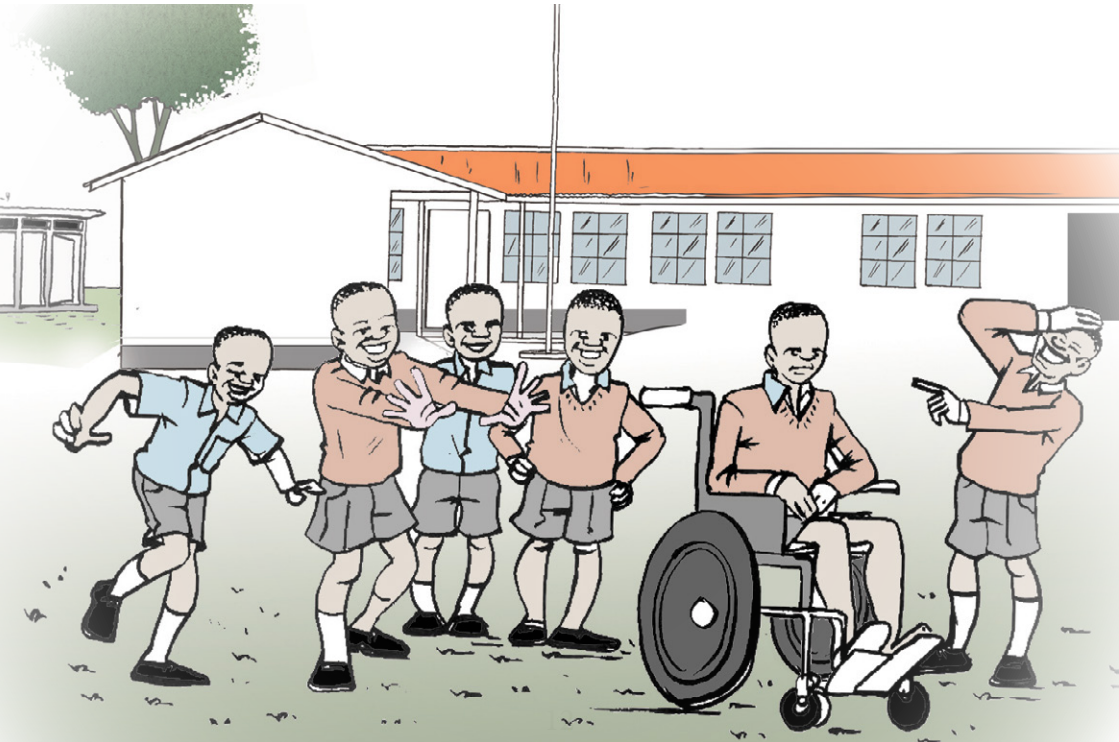
‘How am I going to play with him?’ I thought, ‘he can't kick a ball. Can he even talk?’ Well, he soon showed that he could. His name was David and he could not kick a ball, but he knew how to sling a shot and get a mango down from the trees. In fact, he seemed to know a lot of things. About space, about stars, about the Mau Mau revolt.



Even though David knew a lot and was good at many things, but at school I knew other students looked at him differently. My mother made me walk with him into the class. Can you imagine? Everyone stared. Some people laughed. I was embarrassed. Especially when the teacher made David sit next to me. I mean, it was okay when we were in the neighbourhood, but in school to sit next to a disabled kid it felt different! By the way, that is the wrong word to use, David told me. 'I am a person with a disability, not lame, not a cripple, not a disabled person' he said, looking serious. 'Please remember that. It makes a difference.' I nodded, but I didn't really understand. What difference did it make? He was disabled and he was going to be bullied.

It was going to be rough for David believe me, I knew about 'rough'. I had been bullied but that was for a different reason. They called me a 'baby' because I had not slept with a girl yet, or had what they called a 'proper' girl. 'It's no good being just friends', they said, 'you need to show you are a man and you have no experience'. They laughed at me as they walked away, with their arms around the girls who looked at me with pity.

Well, now it was David's turn. They forgot to bully me, but they made life really hard for him. They put stones in the way of his wheelchair, they picked up anything he dropped and then held it too high for him to reach it. 'Can you jump? Oh we forgot! You can't even stand can you? You are disabled.' They knew how much David hated being called that, so they did it all the more. He never responded though. He just turned away. That annoyed them.



Big boys bully

They teased me about being ‘his friend’. ‘I am not his friend!’ I shouted. One day when they were really making it bad for me. ‘I can’t help it if teacher makes him sit next to me.’

I did not know that David was behind me. I don’t know which was worse. The look that David gave me or the teasing laughter of the other boys. David did not say anything and the next day he sat at a desk all by himself. After school, he went home alone. I felt bad. He was a nice boy really and I did learn a lot from him. But I had to be like the others now. The big boys no longer teased me. Finally, I was a part of the gang. The ‘big boys’ gang. I liked that feeling of belonging and ‘fitting in’.

‘We want to get that David properly’, the boys said to me later that week. ‘You say you are not his friend and he now walks home alone. We want

you to help us. Tell him you will walk with him and then push him towards the river. We'll do the rest.'

'What's the matter with you?' they said, looking at my face. 'You are not a coward already are you? Or perhaps you are his friend after all 'fresh field?'

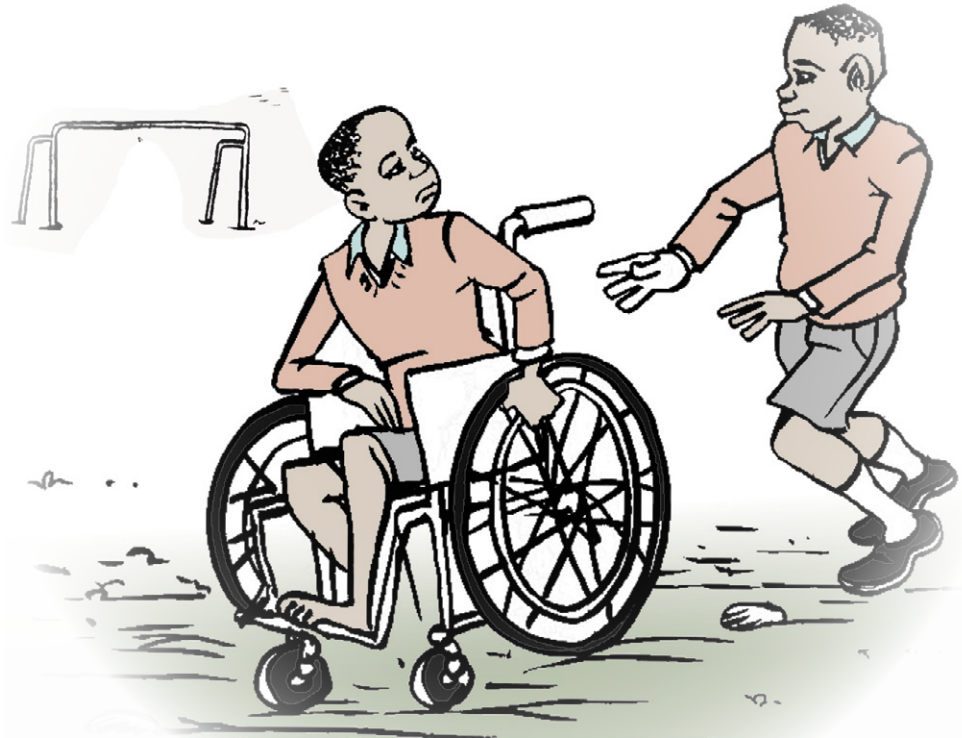
'I am NOT!' I shouted angrily. 'All right, I'll bring him to the river.' And then, trying to sound cool and unconcerned, I added, 'what are you planning to do to him anyway?' But they would not tell me. They did not trust me still. And they were right. I was okay with David being teased, but I did not want anything bad to happen to him.



‘Tomorrow after school,’ they said. ‘Make sure you make friends with him before that. Do you think you can manage that, little baby?’

I did not know what to do. If I did not do what they said, they would tease me or even beat me up. If I did, then.... I did not want to think about it.

The next day I waited for David. ‘I thought you did not want to be my friend,’ he said coldly. ‘I can get to school on my own.’ He wheeled his chair with some difficulty over the bumpy road. I walked alongside him in silence, and I helped him over the hardest parts in silence.



At school, David said ‘Thank you’ and went to his desk. I didn’t ask him to sit next to me. I was so miserable and unhappy, I could not concentrate on anything at all. I almost got into trouble for it. ‘Mark, are you deaf?’

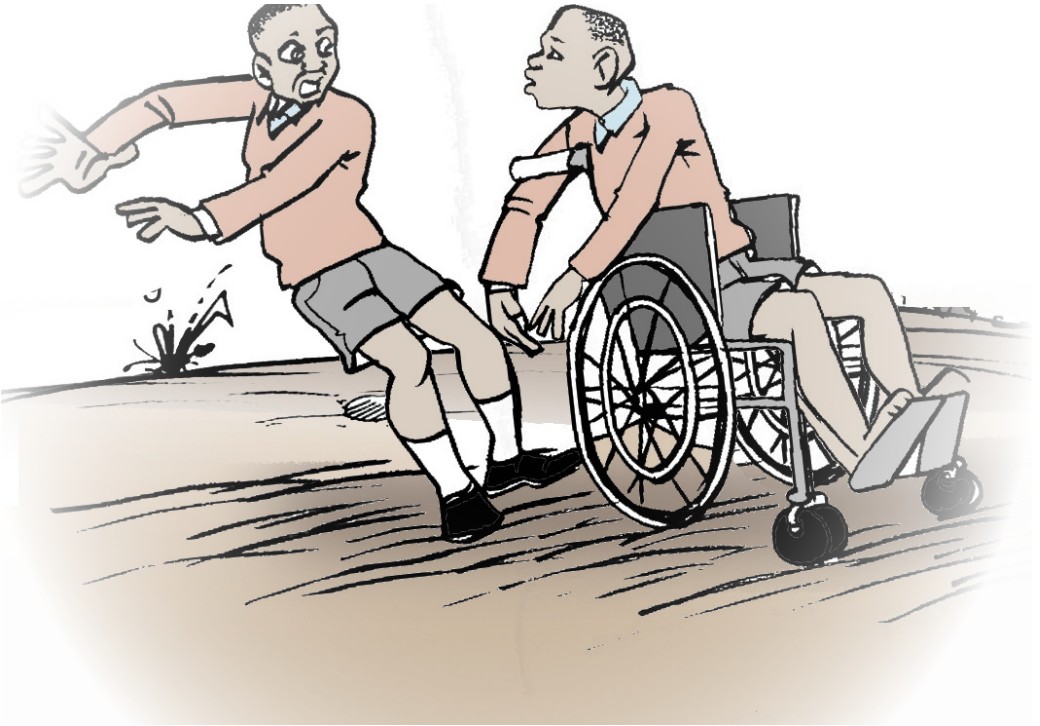
the teacher asked impatiently. 'I have asked you that question three times and you just stare into space!' 'I'm sorry teacher' was all I could say.

Finally, school ended. I went over to David. 'Let's go to the river, David' I said, my heart thumping. 'It rained last week so there are some good fish there, I'll wheel you over the rough parts.' 'All right,' he said smiling. My heart sank.



I wheeled him to the river. The boys were waiting. They looked mean. One of them pushed me aside and slapped David across the face. I looked away, but not before I caught David's look at me. It was the most sharp, hurt look I had ever seen. I could not look at him. I could not join in the beating they gave him. I could not move. I froze. Later when the boys left

I walked to David who was hurt, bleeding and he was about to fall off his chair. He looked up and spat at me. I was taken aback, but I guess I deserved it. I have never felt so miserable in my life! Ever!



Regret

At home my mother watched as I put down my books. ‘David was beaten up today,’ she said quietly. That quiet voice of hers was dangerous. ‘I wonder where you were at the time Mark.’

‘I didn’t beat him up mother,’ I said looking down at the floor.

‘But you did not stop it either did you Mark? I don’t see the signs of a fight on you. And I don’t hear you telling me how you both got beaten up. I am asking you again. Where were you?’

Why did she ask when she knew already? David must have told her everything, or told his mother, so what was the point of making up a story? I told her what had happened. She was very quiet.

‘I want you to know’ she said finally, ‘that David did not say any of this. He said he was angry with you and tried to come home on his own and fell down, the boys beat him up but you were not there to help.’



I did not know where to look for the shame and guilt that I felt. I had betrayed David and here he was protecting me.

‘You know,’ my mother said, ‘I have always been proud of you. Proud of how you took all that teasing when you would not misbehave with girls and focused on your studies instead.’ She smiled sadly at my shocked face. ‘Oh yes Mark, I know what goes on in schools and how people are teased and made to feel small and stupid and not cool when they do not indulge in all those behaviours. I know that when you are growing up and your body changes, you get certain feelings. Feelings that make you want to be with girls and perhaps do more than just hold hands. That happens to everyone, smart people know better than to give in to those urges. I



always thought my Mark was smart and that he was courageous. I was proud of you. But today...' her voice cracked and she stopped.

'Today I know that you acted weak. You can't stand on your own two legs, Mark, I am ashamed of you. David is better than you. In fact, he is better than you in so many ways. He is brave every day as gets out of bed, goes to school, even though he knows he will be bullied and teased. David is strong, brave and he does not let a friends down, he does not let himself down. Do you understand what that means?'

By now I was so ashamed I could not look at my mother or even nod. I wished I could just disappear into a hole in the ground, or into the river. Or the forest. 'I have said enough,' she said after a short pause. 'You need to think about what you have done. More importantly you need to think about who you are and who you want to be. Can you be brave and stand up for what is right? Or will you be like a sheep that always follows

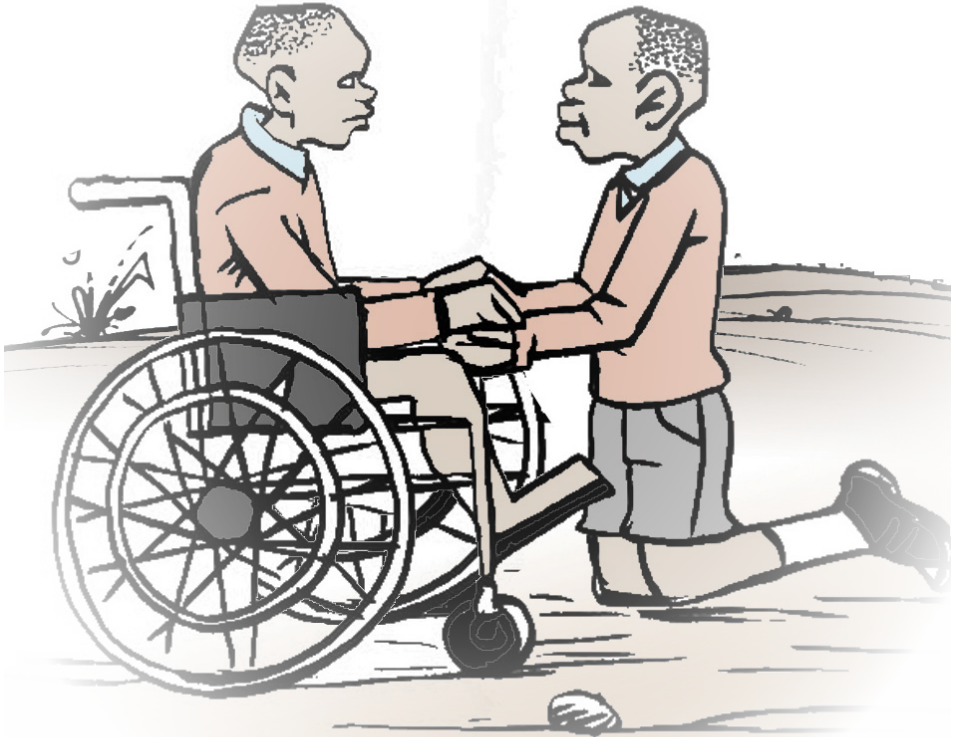


someone else? Was this a bad mistake on your part which you can learn from and put right, or is this who you are?’

I could not sleep all night. I knew what I should do, but I was afraid to do it. In the morning I went over to David’s house. I was so ashamed and afraid that he would not let me see him; but he did. My mother was right. He was strong, brave and generous on the inside. We talked for a long time, about what I had done, about how he felt about having a disability. About girls. I told him what went on at school. How you were supposed to have a girlfriend sleep with her to be a man, to be cool. Otherwise you got teased.

‘I get teased all the time,’ I said, ‘when they started teasing you I was relieved for a bit, and that is why I agreed to..’ I continued in a rush.

‘It’s over now Mark,’ David interrupted. ‘You have apologised, you are sorry you let me and yourself down. Now let it go.’ ‘You are the best friend ever!’ I said.



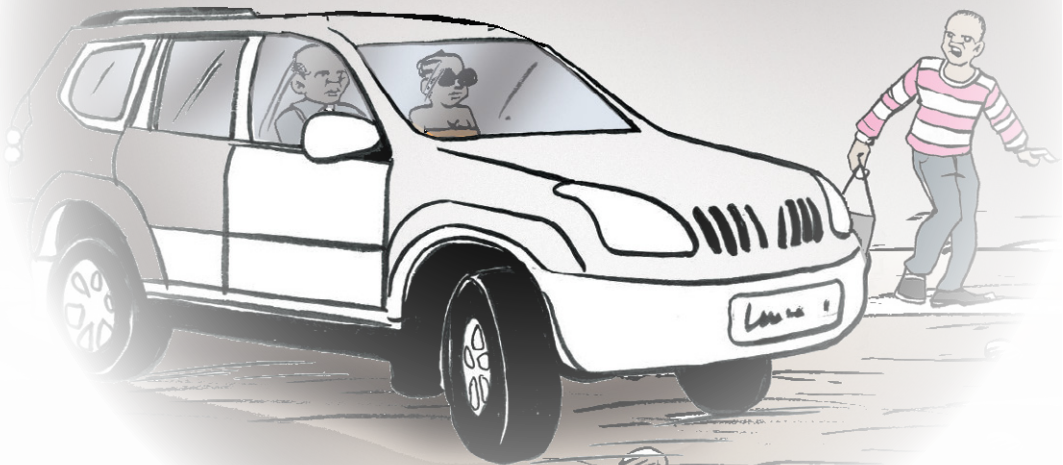
David was too ill to come to school for a while. Each day after school I went to his house to tell him what I had done all day, so he did not miss out. I got teased but now I no longer cared. I simply walked away. I found that annoyed the big bully boys. They did not like to be ignored, but they left me alone, especially because they had got punished for what they did to David. After about three days the head teacher had gone to David’s house to find out why he was not at school. She saw how badly David had been beaten. That was the end of the bullying. The head teacher talked about it at assembly and told us she was making the anti-bullying policy

stronger. She said that bullying was not just beating up other people, but even teasing and calling people names. She was not going to allow this behaviour any more in the school. She got the church leaders to talk about it, and every parent now knew that if their children bullied we would be banned from coming to school if any bullying happened.

One day, my mother said she would be home late. The people she worked for had a party and they wanted her to stay until the end of the party. They would pay for a taxi to bring her home. I wish mother did not have to do cleaning and looking after the rich people's children. But we need the money, so she has to work until I am old enough to do it. After eating I decided to get some bread, so Mother would not have to rush for my breakfast in the morning. I saw a car drive up, with its windows down and loud music playing. There was a man driving the car and he was wearing dark glasses. Why do you need dark glasses at night? I suppose they think it's cool. What else I saw shocked me. I stopped and simply stared!

Robbing the youth

That was Lisa in the car! I was sure of it! Lisa was from my school, the brightest girl in the class. She was also wearing dark glasses, make-up and a low-cut dress. I wanted to call out to her, but I was too shocked to do or say anything. Why was she with that man? He looked familiar. The next day I tried to talk to Lisa, to ask her what was going on. 'Go away,'



she said. 'It's not your business what I do in the evenings. Are you my father?'

'But Lisa, you know about these men,' I argued, 'If your father were here he would tell you the same.'

'What do you know about my father?' she shot back, even more angrily. 'It's not your business. Go away and study, "fresh field"'

I was silent. I could not talk to her like my mother did, but I would not go away. Suddenly she said, 'I am sorry, I should not have said that. You should study and do what you are doing. It's the way to a good future.'

'Then why are you throwing yours away?' I asked.





‘I don’t have a choice,’ her voice suddenly broke. ‘I am trapped.’ She told me how this man had seen her at school and would sometimes give her gifts and a ride in his car. ‘Then, last week, he said he wanted payment for the gifts,’ she said, and stopped. Her eyes told me what that meant. He didn’t want money from her. He wanted something else.

‘You can’t let him,’ I said angrily. ‘If you don’t want to, you just say “No”. There should be no payment for a gift. Not this kind of payment.’

‘Easy for you to say,’ she replied, ‘but all my friends used to say that I was a “baby”, that I had no experience... and they laughed and shared secrets and kept me out. They said that I was not cool... that I didn’t know how to have a good time... I thought if they just saw me with him in a car, they would stop the teasing and they would think I was cool. And now...’ Her voice dropped to a whisper, ‘and... I can’t pay him back with money. We don’t have any,’ she finished.



What could we do? How could I help Lisa? I liked her. She was a beautiful girl and smart. In fact, I had always thought she was one of the popular girls. Then, suddenly, I had a thought. I'd ask David. 'Lisa, don't listen to them. I know it's not easy but look, I think I may have an idea. But I need to discuss it with David...'

'David?' Lisa was surprised. 'What does he know? He's just a...'

'Don't say it,' I found myself saying. 'He is not a disabled person. He is someone who has a disability, just like I am someone who has a big dark

spot on my arm. David is....is...is bigger than his legs that don't work. You should see him as a person first and then see his weak legs as a challenge in his life. He is a person with weak legs, not a weak-legged person. You see, there is a difference.' Gosh! I had not known that I understood so much about David, but when I said it, it was true. 'Look, it's time to go back to class. We'll talk again once I talk to David okay? In the meantime, just carry on as normal and if they bug you and you want to talk to someone and not feel alone, come and find me. Okay?'

'Okay,' said Lisa and she managed a small smile. 'Thank you. To be honest I don't think you can change anything. But thank you for trying and for caring.'

'That is what friends are for,' I smiled back.



I told David everything. ‘But we can’t do anything. We are only two or three who think like that,’ I ended. ‘So many of our classmates and others don’t think that way. What can we do?’

‘You give up too quickly,’ said David smiling. ‘We’ll find a way... First, let’s sort out Lisa’s problem.’

‘What can we do though?’ I said. We thought about it for a long time. Then I had an idea. ‘We know he does not really want money, but if we give him some, then he can’t ask her for anything else can he?’

‘Let’s try it,’ said David. Lisa was not sure, but we decided to do it anyway. It was better than doing nothing.

David, Lisa and I collected all our money. It was not much but we went with her when the man came after her. Lisa gave him the money and told him she did not want to go with him. She said she was giving him the first part of the payment for the gifts. He was furious but what could he say? There were three of us and we all acted as if this was a perfectly normal thing to do. Nothing else. The man did not really want the money. He threw it back at Lisa. ‘I don’t want your money,’ he shouted, ‘or you. I can find ten other girls like you.’

‘You can help to make sure he does not find other girls, Lisa,’ we said. ‘Talk to your real friends and warn them about him.’ Lisa nodded. She smiled, but she also had tears in her eyes. ‘I don’t know how to thank you...,’ she began.

‘Then don’t,’ David interrupted and we all laughed. David was so good at making people feel okay about difficult feelings.

It took a long time, but slowly we found that many more of our classmates felt like us. Lisa told the girls, one by one. David and I worked with the

boys one by one. It took time but we found more and more of us were serious about our work. Like Lisa, many of us pretended we wanted to be cool, but we were not really ready for more than having a good friendship between girls and boys. Slowly things changed.



Other things happened. David asked the teacher quietly and alone if we could have a debate in class about what it means to have a relationship with someone of the opposite sex. The teacher was surprised but she agreed. 'Watch people carefully during the debate,' David told me. 'Never mind how they vote, just watch to see who thinks what.'

I was surprised. There were at least a dozen people who seemed to feel that having a relationship did not automatically mean sleeping with someone. They did not say it with their votes: they said it with their eyes and with how slowly their hands went up during the vote.

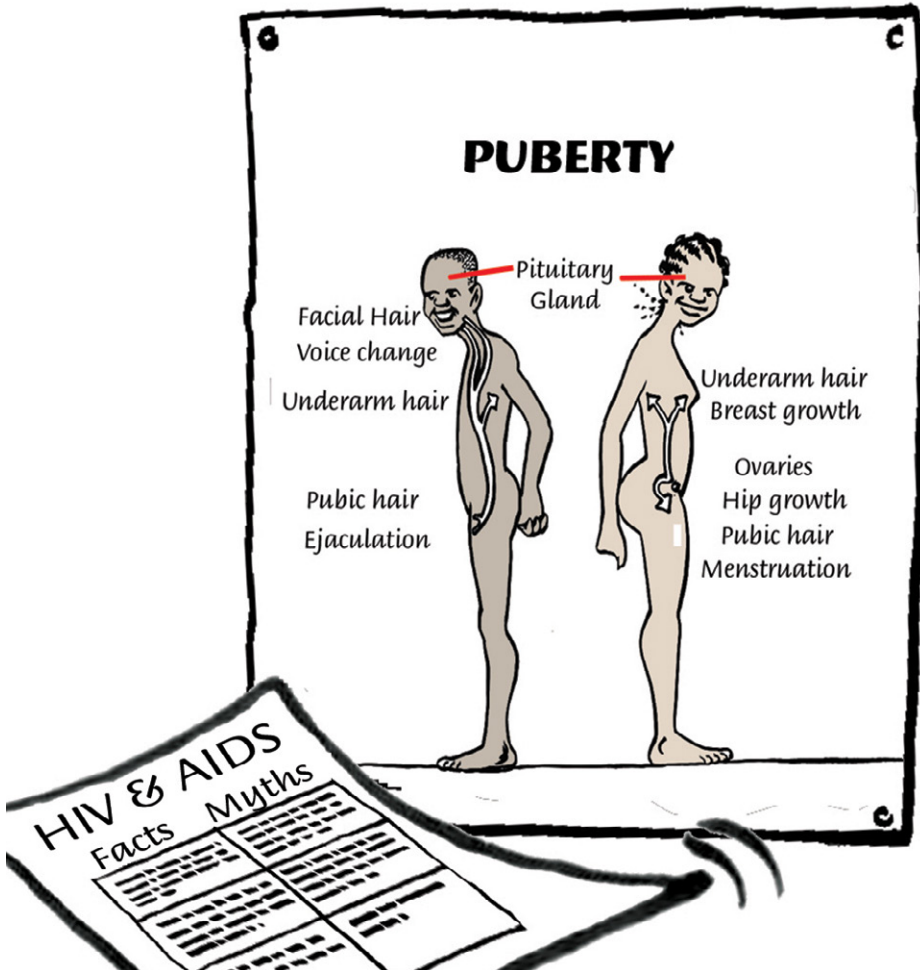


Lisa had a really good idea. ‘You know, these people tell us a lot of things to make us do what they want,’ she said one day. ‘I have a cousin who is becoming a nurse and she says a lot of the ideas we have about these things are wrong. It is not good for young girls to get pregnant too early. The body is not ready for having a child and that can affect their health even later. Also the way the child is born is important; you need the right medical care. And she knows a lot of important things about the changes in boys’ bodies too.’

In the Science lessons, Lisa started asking some of the important questions. When is a girl’s body ready to have a child? What happens if you have a child too early? Do boys’ bodies change like girls’ do? What do drugs really do to the body and the brain? Her cousin came to give us talks about these things. We were shy at first, but to be honest it was good

to know the truth about these things. How else could we make the right choices?

We continued watching, learning and talking to people. Slowly more and more people thought like us. They wanted to study; to get out of the slums we lived in; to do better. They wanted to control what they did with their bodies and when.



Turning inside out

One day a new teacher arrived in our school. He set up an after-school club to teach ‘life skills’. We did not know what those were. You lived life and that was all there was to it. But it wasn’t. Mr Mathai taught us about how to value ourselves; not by being cool but by really feeling good about ourselves inside. We learned about feeling we were something – by ourselves – not because someone gave us money or we shared our beds. My mother had been trying to teach me that, I realised. And we were taught about how to listen to the inside of yourself.

Mr Mathai taught us how to negotiate when we were put in a difficult position, how to stand up for ourselves and our friends. ‘You don’t have to follow the crowd,’ he said, ‘why should the crowd think for you when you can think for yourselves?’

All that happened two years ago. Now our school is well-known for how well the students do. Oh, we all have girlfriends and boyfriends! Lisa and I are in a relationship, but we are serious about our studies. No diseases or early pregnancies for us. A lot of our friends think the same too. We have fun and parties. We are also respectful of each other. Don't get me wrong, it is hard sometimes to resist our feelings, but as David says, 'think before you act: a passing pleasure or a lost future. What are you going to choose?' I say, 'it's important to bring your true inside, out.'

Turning inside out

This is a story aimed at what we call 'level 1' (ages 10-12). It deals with discrimination and bullying, which is a big part of school-based violence. It is also about peer pressure and self-esteem. In the story, Mark struggles, and almost fails, to do the right thing/ behave in the right way in the face of peer pressure; and Lisa finds that her attempt to accommodate peer pressure has left her with a dilemma when an adult is asking more of her than she is ready to give.