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AROUND HOME

Taller than Mom

by Nancy Shobet West

My ten-year-old has become fascinated as of late with trying to imagine what it might be like to be taller than me. Whenever she finds me standing next to a chair, she scrambles up to stand on the chair so that she can tower over me. If we're outside, she angles to get me near a stone wall or bench upon which she can stand to look down on me. Her favorite opportunity is when we're both in her bedroom, from which she can not only stand on her bed to gain a couple of feet on me but can also see both of us in the large mirror over her bureau while she does it.

I'm enjoying her fascination even though I'm not really sure of its source. I think it began earlier this fall when her brother, now 14 years old, reached a height that unmistakably topped my five-foot stature. At first he and I were eye to eye, but it seemed within days he was discernibly an inch taller than me, and then two inches. Initially hard to believe, it's now a fact of our domestic life that he can see the top of my head—and that I routinely ask him to reach for serving plates and glasses stored higher than I can reach.

Holly, just ten years old and small for her age, is still a very long way from reaching my height, and yet the fact that Tim has done so seems to have opened up a door in her imagination. It's as if she realizes for the first time that this is probably going to happen to her someday. She's correct in figuring that the odds are in her favor—at exactly five feet, I am one of the shortest adults I know. It's very unlikely that she—or, in fact, anyone else we know—will be shorter than I am when full-grown. Pretty much everyone can look forward to the prospect of peering down on me at some point in the future.

I'm not sure why she gets such a kick out of climbing to higher elevations simply for the experience of standing next to me and looking down, but it amuses me nonetheless. It seems like such a simple pleasure, and yet there must be more to it, in her imagination. She has never been interested in dressing up or trying on high heels or applying lipstick; this may be her first inkling that occupying an adult body is a novelty yet to be experienced.

And I'm glad if the thought pleases her. Of course, by the time she really does surpass me in height, it will no longer seem like the thrill it does now. By then, there will be more important markers to the growing-up process, milestones that may please her or may dismay her but either way will surely seem more significant than achieving a height greater than her mother's.

But in a way, it's like pulling back the curtain and watching her mind at work. As she "practices" being taller than me by standing on chairs or park benches, she's starting to think about what it will mean to grow up: to be a full-grown woman, an adult, maybe even a mother herself someday. Clearly she's having fun with the idea, and because of that, so am I. Δ



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