

**Text: Excerpt from the novel**

**Short Girls**

By Bich Minh Nguyen

*Note: Mr. Luong, a first-generation Vietnamese American, has invented several devices for short people, which he has always tried to sell but without success. One day he is invited to an audition for a talent show for desperate inventors. He is accompanied by his American-born daughter Linny and their friend Tom.*

[...] Three bored-faced judges, all men, sat behind a long table, surrounded by cameras. Mr. Luong put his inventions on the desk set in the middle of the room and arranged the suitcase and ladder nearby. In the background, a huge screen printed with the block-lettered logo for Tomorrow’s Great Inventor loomed. [...]

5 Mr. Luong stood behind the desk. He tried to strike a shoulders-back posture, keeping his hands folded in front of him, and to Linny he looked like a kid in the final anxious round of a spelling bee.

“My name,” he started, squinting at the camera lights, “is Dinh Luong. I am inventing products in Michigan and the United States and I am a U.S. citizen. I have three products  
10 today to show for short people in the United States and America. Some people say short people are no reason to live, but I say short people have many reasons for becoming happy.”

“Show us what you’re referring to,” one of the other judges interjected. He was the shorter one, thin and intense-looking. The third judge, the only one wearing a suit,  
15 laughed.

Mr. Luong fumbled with the box to reveal the Luong Arm. “This is my Luong Arm,” he said. “It’s very useful. I can demonstrate on many things how useful it is. All my inventions are very useful. I have the Luong Arm which is right here. Here I also have the Luong Eye and then I have the Luong Wall. So I have a big three, which is important.”

20 Linny cringed at his deteriorating English and thickening accent, the way he was even now falling into an embarrassing Mr. Miyagi-like cadence. His eyes darted from camera to camera. For once in his life, perhaps the only time in his life, he was attempting to make good on two decades of promises; he was trying to stand in front of that panel of judges and pitch his work, let it go forth to critics, the world, when Linny and Van had never truly  
25 thought he could. And he was going to blow it all with his unsteady English.

“Listen, man, I can hardly understand you,” the short judge said. “Can either of you?”

The lead judge shook his head. “Sorry, I don’t think this is going to happen.”

Linny made herself walk to the center of the room, right in front of her father, under the hot lights of the cameras. She said, “Let me explain. May I? There are three great

30 inventions here, all designed to help short people make their lives a little easier. One is a  
Luong Arm, that can get things that are out of reach; another is called the Luong Eye, to  
help people see in a crowd; and the third is called the Luong Wall, which is basically a set  
of shelves that rise and lower with a remote control. All of these make it easier for short  
people to get what they need, or to have whatever they need come to them.” The  
35 descriptions flowed with surprising ease, and when she glanced at Tom he nodded.  
“Not bad,” the short judge said. “Are you the translator?”

Linny glanced at Tom again, who gave her an encouraging smile. She didn’t dare check  
her father’s reaction when she said, “Yes. I’ll translate.” [...]

When the judges invited them, with Linny as the presenter, they emphasized, to the  
40 second round of the competition, next month in Las Vegas, her father stood so still that  
the short judge called out, “Don’t get so excited there, buddy!” Linny made a show of  
thanking the judges, going up to shake their hands, while her father silently gathered the  
Arm and Eye back in their box, refusing even to look at Tom.

The three of them should have been among the few cheering as they left the audition  
45 room. Linny actually did feel like celebrating, and Tom seemed to share the feeling, but  
Mr. Luong stormed toward the exit.

The camera guys zeroed in on them.

“These stupid TV people,” Dinh Luong finally spat out as he reached the hallway.  
“They’re all about the TV. My friends warn me. They said it. Watch out for the TV people.  
50 Well, they can take their Las Vegas somewhere else.” [...]

(709 words)

Source: Nguyen, Bich Minh. *Short Girls*. New York: Viking Penguin, 2009, 254-259

## Annotations

### Lines

<sup>7</sup> spelling bee contest in which contestants spell words aloud and are removed from the  
contest when they spell a word wrongly

<sup>20</sup> to cringe at sth. to feel embarrassed by sth.

<sup>20</sup> deteriorating becoming worse

<sup>21</sup> Mr. Miyagi-like cadence friend of the Luong family who speaks poor English with a  
special rhythmic flow of words

<sup>22/23</sup> to make good on sth. to do what you have said you would do / to keep a promise <sup>24</sup>  
to pitch sth. to present / to advertise sth. powerfully

<sup>24</sup> Van Linny’s elder sister and Mr. Luong’s eldest daughter

<sup>47</sup> to zero in on sb. to zoom in on sb.