



**THE KINDEST PERSON IN CLASS**



A large group of 5th graders were eating lunch in the school playground. It was the end of the school year and the next day was prize day.

"I am sure Geeta will get 1st prize for academics," said one child.

"Santosh the genius is sure to get the maths prize," said another.

"Meena will be best artist and John will be best singer as usual," said someone else.

"And Karun will win the prize as usual for being the fattest kid in class," laughed another child cruelly.

"Not just the fattest but also the stupidest," said another mean child, laughing loudly.



Karun looked down and ate his lunch silently. He said nothing as he cleared up their lunch corner, making sure that no debris remained.



As usual, he helped Anil, the boy who had polio and had difficulty with walking, after which he helped his teacher with a heavy pile of books she was carrying.



He was used to being teased by some of the others in class, about his weight and his poor reading and writing skills. But he was very sad about it. Being fat was bad enough but to have difficulties with studies was worse and to have no talents like some of the others in class had made it almost unbearable for him.

After school, Karun walked slowly home, feeling more sad than usual because of the lunch time conversation that afternoon.



He saw the new girl in class, Anita, whiz past on her bicycle and waved to her. Someone said that she was a really fast runner and a great cyclist, he thought. "I wish I were like her...maybe I would not be so fat then," he sighed.



Suddenly Karun heard a crash and a cry. Looking up, he saw that Anita had fallen down. He rushed to help her, lifting the bicycle off her leg and gently helping her up. "It hurts," said Anita, her eyes filling with tears, and pointing to her foot, which had started to bleed. "I know it hurts...but don't worry, I will help you. Come home with me, I live nearby...and we can clean up your foot and put some medicine on it," said Karun.



When they got to Karun's house, Anita saw that although it was small, there was much noise. "Do a lot of people live in your home?" she asked. "No, just my parents and me...and my pets", said Karun.





When they went inside, Anita and Karun were greeted by barks and meows and clucking and chirping and all sorts of animal sounds. "No, no, not now...Anita is hurt," said Karun to three dogs who came running out to greet him, two cats that rubbed against his legs, a squirrel that jumped onto his shoulder, a pigeon that had a bandaged leg and hobbled towards him.

"Why, I didn't know that you had such an array of pets", said Anita, amazed at the menagerie. "Where did you get all these different animals?"



"Karun often rescues animals that are hurt or homeless and brings them home," said his mother, who was now helping Karun to dress Anita's wound.

"Wow, Karun, what an amazingly kind person you are! And to think you never told any of us about what you do at home...I don't think anyone in school knows about this!"

exclaimed Anita. "Well, it's just that I love animals", said Karun modestly. "And I feel real sad for them when they are abandoned and homeless, or when they are injured...how can we just leave them on the street? So, I bring them home and look after them until they are well. Some of them get adopted by friends and some just continue to stay with me because they have nowhere to go."



The next day, which was also prize day, Anita told everyone at school about how Karun had helped her and about her discovery of his kindness to animals. The story of Karun's shelter for homeless and injured animals flew around the school until the headmaster got to hear about it.



## PRIZE DISTRIBUTUION

While Karun was sitting quietly amongst the students clapping for his classmates who won prizes for excelling in various activities, suddenly he heard his name being called: "And this year we have a new award, for the kindest person in class", said the principal. "You see, it is wonderful to be good at math or science, writing, sport, art and music and of course children deserve awards for those activities. But we believe that it is time we recognize how important it is to be kind and helpful...so the prize for the kindest person in class goes to someone whose name also means kindness...Karun—who has been unfailingly helpful to his friends. And for those of you who do not know, Karun has a very special talent...he runs a special home for injured and abandoned animals.



We are very proud to have Karun in our school." There was loud applause and Anita, who sat beside Karun, slapped his back in excitement, pushing him to get up to receive his prize.



"I know it hasn't been easy to be teased about being fat or not being good at studies", his teacher said to Karun later on. "But some things are more important...like being kind and helpful...and that's what you are, Karun", she said patting him. "And if the others are smart, they will learn to be more like you instead of teasing you."



Years later, when Karun grew up, he set up a large shelter for animals that were abandoned and injured and both people and animals who came to him for help felt that he was the kindest person they had ever known.



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