

The Friendship Bench



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In the corner of the school playground stood an old wooden bench. It was silver-grey and weathered, with peeling paint and carved flowers along the backrest. Most children ran past it without a second look. But Mia often wondered about its story. She had curly black hair in two puffy buns and a yellow t-shirt with a sun on it. Her red sneakers were always ready to explore.



Mia was eight years old and small for her age, with warm brown skin and freckles across her nose. She had a gap between her front teeth when she smiled. She loved noticing things other people missed. One sunny morning, she saw something strange. The carved flowers on the old bench were glowing softly, like tiny golden lamps. Mia blinked and looked again. The glow was still there.



Mia walked closer. On the bench sat a boy she didn't know. He had fair skin, rosy cheeks, and light-brown hair with a side part. His round glasses slipped down his nose. He held a sketchbook under one arm like a shield. He looked lonely. Mia remembered how it felt to be new. She took a deep breath and sat down beside him.



"Hi, I'm Mia," she said. "What's your name?" The boy looked up, surprised. "Leo," he said quietly. "I'm new here." Mia noticed the glow around the carved flowers had become a little brighter. It felt warm and friendly, like a secret hello. "What's your sketchbook for?" she asked. Leo hugged it closer but didn't answer.



Leo opened his sketchbook slowly. Inside were beautiful drawings of birds, trees, and rockets. "Wow!" Mia said. "You're an artist!" Leo's cheeks turned pink. "I like to draw," he said. "I want to be an astronaut someday." Mia's eyes grew wide. "Me too! I love space!" They both laughed. The bench glowed brighter, and the carved flowers seemed to smile.



From that day on, Mia and Leo met at the bench every break. They drew rockets and planets together. They talked about stars and faraway galaxies. The bench became their special spot. Other children noticed the two friends laughing and drawing. Sometimes they glanced at the bench and wondered. What was so special about that old bench?



One day, a girl named Zoe stood alone near the fence. She kicked a stone and looked sad. Mia saw her and remembered the glowing flowers. "Let's invite her," Mia said to Leo. They walked over and said hello. Zoe smiled shyly. They all sat on the bench together. The glow was warm and golden. Zoe showed them her collection of shiny rocks. Soon, they were all talking and laughing.



More children began to notice. When someone looked lonely, Mia or Leo would say, "Come sit with us." The bench was always open. The carved flowers glowed softly whenever a lonely child sat down. The children started to call it the Friendship Bench. They learned that a simple hello could make a big difference. Even the playground teacher, Ms. Hart, noticed.



Ms. Hart had short black coils and a warm smile. She wore a teal cardigan and a silver necklace shaped like a leaf. She watched the children gather at the bench each day. "That bench is magic," she said to Mia one morning. Mia nodded. "It glows when someone is lonely," she whispered. Ms. Hart's eyes twinkled. "I think you children are the magic," she said.



But one day, Leo didn't come to school. Mia sat on the bench alone, feeling lonely too. The flowers glowed softly, but Mia didn't notice. She missed her friend. Then a boy named Sam sat down beside her. "Are you okay?" he asked. Mia looked up. "My friend is sick," she said. "I'm sad." Sam nodded. "I'll sit with you," he said. They talked, and Mia felt a little better.



The next day, Leo came back! He had a cold but was happy to see everyone. Mia ran to him. "I missed you!" she said. Leo smiled. "I missed the bench," he said. "And you." They sat together, and the flowers glowed brightly. Ms. Hart came over. "I have an idea," she said. "Let's make a Friendship Bench rule. Anyone who sits here is never alone." The children cheered.



The children painted a small sign and hung it on the bench. It said, "The Friendship Bench: Sit here if you want company." Ms. Hart helped them add a painted heart. Now everyone knew what the bench was for. If someone felt lonely, they could sit down. And someone would always come. The bench became the heart of the playground. It was a place of belonging.



One rainy day, a new girl named Aisha stood by the door. She looked nervous. Mia saw her and smiled. "Come with me," she said. She led Aisha to the Friendship Bench. "This is where friends meet," Mia said. Aisha sat down. The flowers glowed warmly. Soon, other children joined them. They told stories and shared snacks. Aisha felt welcome. She knew she belonged.



The Friendship Bench taught everyone something important. Kindness begins with noticing others. A small hello can change a day. The old wooden bench, with its carved flowers, still stands in the corner. Its glow is a gentle reminder. Whenever a lonely child sits there, friends are never far away. And the children of the school always remember: everyone deserves a friend.



Mia and Leo still draw together on the bench. They dream of space and stars. But now they also dream of new friends. They know that the Friendship Bench will always be there. It will glow for anyone who needs a friend. And the children will come, with smiles and open hearts. Because on the Friendship Bench, no one is ever lonely for long.



So if you ever visit that playground, look for the old wooden bench with carved flowers. You might see it glowing softly. And you might see children sitting together, talking and laughing. That's the magic of the Friendship Bench. It reminds us all that kindness and noticing others can make every child feel they belong. And that is the best magic of all.