**THE AWARD**

“THE JOURNEY OF A THOUSAND MILES BEGINS WITH A SINGLE STEP.”

Young, tall, dashing , handsome all these compliments one can easily attribute to him, therefore we all fondly call him our superstar,. A pair of well-tailored jeans, branded T-shirt, smart sunglasses, he enters the classroom with an air of complete ease .

He is non other than our star Vikram , 17 year old Vikram Godbole.

He notices no one, he speaks to no one, listens to no one . He is all by himself and with himself.

Can you believe that the hero of this story is an autistic child?

Yes , it’s the irony of his destiny.

He lives in his own world, and no one can make the smallest change to it. He has no friends , no foes. We can hardly communicate with him . Our words have no meaning, our gestures have no significance.

He is the master of himself, no one can order him, no one can convince him, he lives in a world beyond all this.

From the day , I joined this Special School, I tried to make friends with him; but never succeeded. I always wondered how I would ever establish a rapport with him . Sometimes , fully composed, sometimes utterly restless ,physically aggressive, and turbulent.

It was Friday afternoon. It was the art and craft class.

Vikram came to the classroom with his usual style and took his seat. I gave him a drawing sheet to colour which he completed in no time but with complete involvement. When I handed over to him another sheet he looked at it with utter dismay.

It was a butterfly. He coloured it fully black and flung it out. He caught my hand in anger. I was completely unprepared for it. His grip was firm and strong . Somehow I wriggled my hand from his clutches.. He started banging his head on the desk in distress. All the other kids were too frightened. They didn’t know what was happening.

He went to the wall and started banging his head against it. I was afraid that he may hurt himself. I knew that they have this tendency of self-infliction. I called for immediate help.

His parents were called to take him home.

Three days later. ..It was Tuesday afternoon. I wondered whether Vikram would come or not.

He came escorted by his mother. He came and quietly took his seat.

“ Today is Vikram’s birthday. “ said his mother.

“ Oh, so nice; Happy Birthday Vikram!

May God bless you always.”

No one could sing for him as my special kids cannot talk properly or sing. They only shook hands with him.

“ Vikram, say sorry to Mam, touch her feet and take her blessings.” I wondered if Vikram had understood what his mother had said, but he had.

“Mam,Vikram cried a lot that day after coming from school. I think he had understood he had done something wrong; I think he had realized that. “

“Is it?”

Vikram bowed down to touch my feet , but I gently lifted him up and held his hands..

“It’s alright Vikram, I know you are a very good boy, don’t do it again.”

He looked at me for the first time in these five months and gave a faint smile ; but for me it was a million dollar smile. I knew he was trying to accept me in his small little world. This was his first step towards this journey.

I heard my heart’s soft whisper , this step will surely take you a long …long way .

I felt I had won an Oscar Award.

**Curie Pereira**