

The Mirror that Echoes



Mirror, mirror by the shelves... what truth hides behind ourselves?

Collectively Written by
The students of Regent Secondary School

Chapter 1: Alex's Veneer

"Jamie, did your parents not teach you how to open your mouth to speak? I mean... I'm sure that even someone of your intelligence knows how to talk, right?" Alex scoffed mockingly, shooting a disdainful look at Jamie.

(Katherine, Aura, Aneesa, Dhia, Falisha; 1PRI)

Jamie glanced at him for a moment before turning back to her laptop, ignoring his words. Alex rolled his eyes as she turned her head away from his gaze.

"Do you really think you can get this project done, Jamie?" he sneered, leaning in to make sure she heard him. Alex's eyebrows furrowed, feeling more irritated than before.

Jamie ignored him, still looking at her laptop. Although she had not displayed any emotion, deep down she felt immensely hurt. She lacked the courage to stand up for herself.

(Dhia, Falisha, James, Zack, Eason; 1PRI)

As the days went by, Alex's teasing became more frequent. Jamie was slowly growing tired of Alex's constant buzzing. Sitting at her assigned seat in the library, her shoulders slumped, she sighed softly as Alex continued his taunts. Still, she turned her focus back to her laptop. The tension between Alex and Jamie was palpable.

"Jamie, can you just try to contribute to this project?" Alex snapped. *"You keep staring at your laptop, but you're not even doing anything! I bet you're just thinking about your ridiculous art."*

His tone was sharp, his glare filled with irritation, as if she was the source of his frustration.

Alex sighed, leaning back in his chair, a cold smirk playing on his lips.

"You know, someone who's supposed to be smart shouldn't be this slow."

His voice dripped with mockery. Jamie kept her gaze locked on her screen, refusing to react. Even though his words stung, she knew that showing any emotion would only encourage him further.

(Dhia, Falisha, Zack, Eason; 1PRI)

Jamie kept her gaze fixated on her laptop screen, refusing to react. Even though his words stung, it was best that she did not express her feelings. It would only encourage him to tease her further. Alex scoffed as he saw Jamie ignoring him, like always. His smirk was still visible, but he felt an unsettling pang of unease. Deep beneath his carefully crafted façade, he could not let anyone know about it. If he let the mask slip, he wouldn't know what would be left. His popularity and reputation would be ruined.

On the other hand, Priya was listening to Alex and Jamie's exchanges. She felt that if she said something or stood up for Jamie, she would also get teased by Alex. She thought it was best not to participate in their tussle.

(Adriana, Aniq, Dhia, Falisha, Jen, Rien, Wendy, Katherine; 1PRI)

When the clock on the wall chimed softly, signaling the passing of another hour, Jamie, Alex, and Priya straightened in their chairs. Priya's gaze drifted to the window, looking at the pale winter sunlight streaming in. The peaceful silence was occasionally interrupted by the rustle of turning pages and Alex's taunts. Priya believed the silence was beneficial, as she could focus on the project better.

After looking outside, she turned back to her notes and laptop screen, feeling more motivated to get the project done. Priya thought it was best to speak up about the project, assuming that Alex wouldn't tease her for it.

"Do you guys have any idea how we can finish the project?" she asked, looking at both Jamie and Alex.

Alex glanced at his notes before responding.

"I think we should work on the main objectives first since we haven't finished them yet," he said, looking at Priya as if he hadn't just verbally attacked Jamie.

Priya gave Alex a deadpan look before nodding lightly.

(Arish, Damon, Dhia, Falisha, Haziq, Zafrul; 1PRI)

"I feel we should focus on the main objectives too..." Jamie muttered softly, her voice just loud enough for them to hear.

"Look who has finally decided to speak!" Alex said, his tone cold and mocking.

Jamie looked down and fidgeted with her hands, feeling anxious. She couldn't wait to go back home and paint. She had always used painting as a way of expressing her emotions. To her, painting was a form of therapy that relieved her stress.

She struggled with speaking to others. Social anxiety had always been something she struggled with. Lost in thought, she stared at her notebook. She could still feel the lingering sting of Alex's words.

If only Alex knew how she felt!

She wondered why Alex had chosen to tease her instead of anyone else. Out of everyone in the school, it had to be her!

(Dhia, Falisha, Foo Jia En, Haqeef, Delaila; 1PRI)

Chapter 2: Jamie's World

As the trio were leaving the library, Jamie tripped over Alex's leg and fell to the ground, with Alex glaring at her, chuckling menacingly. She tried to hold back the tears stinging her eyes. Covering her face with her hands, she hoped no one had seen her tears.

"You're such a weak crybaby. What are you going to do? Run to your mother and cry?" Alex scoffed.

After growing tired of her quiet responses, he gave her a hard flick on the forehead and smirked before strutting off. Jamie instinctively reached up, wincing slightly at the sting. The flick had caught her off guard, and she stumbled back a little, dropping her books in surprise.

Kneeling down to gather them, Jamie blinked away the sudden heat in her eyes, waiting until Alex's footsteps faded down the hallway. She didn't understand why he kept teasing her when she had never done anything to him. He always seemed to find joy in her silence, laughing just loud enough for others to hear.

"You are so tiny and quiet. No wonder you have no friends! Haha..."

With no friends to stand up for her and haunted daily by Alex's derogatory remarks, Jamie gradually became insecure. Being an introvert, she always had a hard time socialising. In the end, all she did at school was to keep to herself. She refused to interact with anyone and had remained isolated from her peers since the start of the year.

(Rifqi, Haeun, Ariqa; 1D, Chloe Ngow, Kavin, Nikkil; 1E)

Suffocated by the overwhelming silence, Jamie cautiously picked herself up from the floor and ran into the toilet, sobbing. Standing in front of the mirror, she glared at her reflection in frustration. She despised the sight of her face, flushed red from crying. A disdainful look flashed across her face as she recalled the painful experience she had just endured.

Without warning, she threw her phone harshly against the mirror, shattering it into a million pieces, just like how her heart broke after Alex's cruel words pierced her to the core. These episodes inevitably made the apprehensive Jamie even more insecure than she already was.

(Chloe Pang, Kar Boon, Alden; 1D, Sabrina, Natasha, Ke Xin; 1E)

"Why does he always target me? Why me?" Jamie yelled at her reflection with heartbroken rage. The longer she remained in the toilet, the more her tears welled up. She stared at the mirror, unable to stop herself from feeling annoyed at the sight of the small, frizzled-haired girl in front of her. Worse, the bruise on her face would definitely raise suspicions if her mother saw it later at home.

Amidst the fury bubbling inside her, she wondered why no one had her back.

'There was a crowd that surrounded me just now,' she thought, 'but why didn't anyone help me?'

She pondered at the question until her heart ached, but no answer satisfied her. Her mind drifted to the thought of finally going home. She eagerly anticipated being in the presence of her brushes, paint, and easel. Maybe she would paint a new art piece. She quickened her pace to escape the chaos.

(Eeshal, Rauf, Yu Xuan; 1D, Tansy, Tristan, Aryan; 1E)

Art had always been her form of escape. Weeping as she reached her bedroom, Jamie tried to push away the pain she continued to feel, but it was to no avail. Desperate, she grabbed a piece of drawing paper and began painting a sunflower. As the petals began to bloom on the paper, Jamie felt relieved that Alex was now nowhere near her.

Jamie had always been a gentle spirit who drifted quietly among her peers, but she had no real friends. But she was fine with that. She had her brushes and easel at home for company. But at that moment, she badly wanted someone to support her when she got teased by Alex and his friends. Haunted by Alex's treatment, Jamie often prayed for friends who could support her, so that someone might find the courage to stand up for Alex's taunting. Unfortunately, she realised that she had to do more than pray to escape the awful situation. She concluded that she had to start talking to other students and stop isolating herself.

(Cheng Yi, Daylan, Salem, Wan Theng, Zephyrine, Boxin)

Taking a few deep breaths, Jamie vowed to make new friends for support, so that she wouldn't be picked on by Alex alone. Support from friends might be a better coping mechanism than simply relying on her artwork. She still remembered fondly how she fell in love with painting in Primary 5. Back then, she loved painting more than anything else. She had even represented her school and won a national Art and Craft competition.

She could still vividly remember what she had painted. Her winning piece was a representation of her feelings, as she had never known how to express them directly to anyone. She had painted a tiger, symbolising the strength and courage she wished she had. In the painting, the tiger was chasing a deer. She wanted to be the tiger that chased away the deer, which represented the negative thoughts eating her up mentally.

Sometimes, in her sleep, she dreamt she was the tiger chasing the deer, which eventually morphed into Alex. Sadly, each time she woke up for school, reality sank in. The endless heartaches and tears reminded her that she was more of a kitten than a fierce tiger.

(Alfira, Yuni, Siddharth, Yuanqi; 1D, Putri, Rui Xuan; 1E)

Chapter 3: The Library Legend

A few days later, the trio returned to the library to continue their project and unsurprisingly, Alex jumped on opportunities to tease Jamie. The moment Mrs. Morally caught Alex teasing Jaime, her voice rang out sharply, "Cut it out!" The words sliced through the tense air, freezing both Alex and Jamie in place. She strode towards them with a stern look, her eyes glinting with something between disapproval and quiet wisdom. Standing in front of them, she started speaking in a serious manner, saying something they didn't quite comprehend. With an uncanny smile, Mrs Morally led them to the 'interesting' part of the library (*Min Wey, Kennise, Yeeun, Adele, Rayn, Kayson, Akshaya, Yuan Xiang Lutfil; 1GH*).

The three students gazed at one another feeling clueless about what Mrs Morally was referring to. They hesitated momentarily before nodding silently and trailed after her, questioning and nervous. With a wry smile lurking on her lips, Mrs. Morally led them deeper into the 'interesting' part of the library (*Min Wey, Kennise, Yeeun, Adele, Rayn, Kayson, Akshaya, Yuan Xiang Lutfil; 1GH*).

Jamie crept along, scanning around with wide, uncertain eyes, dragging her feet at times. Priya clutched her books against her chest, as if they might be a shield from what was to come, scanning the dark corridors anxiously. Alex, of course, acted like he didn't care. "Are we there yet?" he muttered, his voice weighed down with irritation (*Akshaya, Jia Qi, Fereena, Jovan, Alden, Dani; 1GH*).

Mrs. Morally laughed at his usual cavalier attitude and retorted with a soft smile, "Just five more minutes." They followed her deeper into the library, entering a part that none of them had ever seen. As they walked, they could witness that this hidden section of the library looked like nothing else in the library (*Akshaya, Jia Qi, Fereena, Jovan, Alden, Dani; 1GH*).

The room they entered was bizarre and foreign. Dust lay motionless in the thin streaks of light that seeped through the gaps in the ceiling. Cobwebs hung like a curtain from tall shelves, and in the middle of the room a giant door stood looming, as if it held some secret magic within (*Xiang Yu, Izz, Jin Tao, Winston, Yuan Jun; 1GH*).

Jamie's breath was caught in her throat, her eyes wide with shock. Priya stood frozen, gaping at the mysterious door, her mouth slightly open in awe. But Alex, being Alex, wrinkled his nose in distaste and brushed cobwebs off his shoulder. "Ew! Why does this place smell like a dead rat?" he complained. Mrs. Morally just laughed again, her eyes glinting with secrets (*Xiang Yu, Izz, Jin Tao, Winston, Yuan Jun; 1GH*).

She raised her hand with no hesitation at all and motioned to the door. "Take this key," she breathed softly, her words freighted with importance. Mrs Morally then passed Priya an old, rusted-looking key. The three of them gazed uncertainly at each other, but Alex, again feigning disinterest, glanced dismissively at the key. (*Aqeel, Alfie, Huei Xin, Kai Jun, Micky, Ruyi; 1GH*).

Mrs. Morally stood in silence, with a smile plastered on her lips, as if she had known this was exactly what Alex was going to do. But she also knew exactly that this was what the trio needed. (Akshaya, Kennise, Xiang Yu, Izz, Jin Tao, Winston, Yuan Jun; 1GH).

Chapter 4: The Discovery of the Mirror

They all cautiously headed toward the door Priya had gestured to, their steps loud despite their efforts to be quiet. After what felt like forever, Priya held the key and gently inserted it into the keyhole. The door creaked open, and they came face-to-face with something rather peculiar and unexpected, a mirror.

(Haziqah, Jayden, Reisha, Rui Xi, Yafi; 2PRI)

It was a suspiciously large mirror. It didn't look ordinary, it had a glowing frame and stood ten feet tall, draped in a crimson velvet cloth. Cobwebs clung to its corners. It featured golden trimmings reminiscent of mirrors crafted during the Victorian era.

Alex bravely whisked off the cloth, sending dust flying through the air. He flicked the dust off his hair like it was no big deal. Priya coughed as she accidentally inhaled the dust. An eerie aura emanated from the mirror, making Jamie uneasy.

Alex remained unfazed.

"It's just a tacky mirror. What's the hype about?" he frowned, beginning to tap his foot restlessly.

Jamie felt a spine-tingling fear at first, intimidated by the mirror's sheer presence. As an artist, she was intrigued by the mirror's craftsmanship and decor. She took a few deep breaths to calm herself. However, curiosity got better of her, and she stepped forward to take a closer look.

Priya stood frozen, her eyes wide in disbelief, utterly shocked by the mirror's majesty. Her eyes sparkled as she leaned in closer, letting out a soft gasp of bewilderment. The three students stared at the mysterious mirror.

(Alena, Izzryan, Jannatul, Joli, Priya; 2PRI)

It stood tall and imposing, its frame stretching high and wide, exuding an air of timeless elegance.

Jamie reached out hesitantly, her fingers gliding over the intricate carvings on the frame. The wood was cool beneath her touch, worn smooth by time. Suddenly, she felt something, an inscription etched into the surface. A shiver ran down her spine.

"Guys, I found something," she murmured, breaking the silence that had settled over them like a thick fog.

Priya stepped closer, her brows knitting together as she traced the same engraving with her fingertips.

"What does it mean?" she asked, her voice barely above a whisper.

Their hushed conversation pulled Alex from his thoughts. From where he stood in the corner, he turned his gaze towards them, curiosity piqued.

"What's up?" he asked, making his way over.

As he approached, the dim light flickered against the mirror's surface, casting strange, shifting shadows across the room. His eyes locked onto the inscription, and he read aloud:

"See not just yourself, but what others see."

A strange sensation gripped him, an unshakable pull towards the mirror, as if it was whispering to him, urging him closer. His instinct screamed for him to look into it. It wasn't just an object; it was something more. It was alive!

(Akid, Chloe, Joy, Kah Fai, Snow, Song Ye; 2PRI)

The inscription stared warily back at them:

"See not just yourself, but what others see."

The three stared at the mirror, debating what the inscription meant.

Alex shrugged.

"Maybe it means beauty?"

Jamie frowned.

"I don't think that's what it meant!"

Jamie and Priya exchanged glances before coming to a realization.

"Wait! Maybe it actually means putting yourself in someone else's shoes," Jamie suggested.

As Alex listened to their explanation, it started to make sense. A light bulb went off in his head.

"Wait a minute... does this mirror let me see my friends' lives from their perspective?" he exclaimed in disbelief.

He laughed unkindly at the sheer absurdity of the suggestion.

"Child's play! And you all believe it?" he sneered at the girls, mocking their gullibility.

(Celeste, Geraldine, Jarrod, Mirdhula, Vivienne; 2PRI)

Suddenly, an electric buzz crackled through the air, and a loud crack of thunder pierced the room.

Jamie and Priya jumped in fear, huddling together like frightened cattle, while Alex recoiled in shock. Despite the tension in the air, curiosity gripped him. The mirror hummed with a mysterious hymn, beckoning Alex to come closer.

He took a hesitant step forward, and before he knew it, he was a hair's breadth away from the mirror. He wanted a closer inspection.

"No harm done," he mused to himself. *"Besides, what's the worst that could happen?"*

As he examined his reflection, his brows furrowed in hesitation and unease.

The mirror shimmered fleetingly.

They gasped.

As he crept closer to the mirror, he reached out a tentative hand toward his shimmering reflection. Suddenly, a brilliant flash of light flooded the room.

(Javier, Lin Khant, Miguel, Terrence, Vera; 2PRI)

Chapter 5: Alex's Reflection

Instead of Alex's own reflection, the mirror showed Jamie — her face white and depressed, her eyes brimming with tears. The image was painfully vivid: it was what Jamie looked like when he was tormenting her (*Aqeel, Alfie, Huei Xin, Kai Jun, Micky, Ruyi; 1GH*).

His mind raced as he began reflecting on his actions toward poor, fragile Jamie.

(Christopher, Do Yeon, Haonan, Kai Xi, Keagen, Rayden, Zafran, Zoheb; 1PRI)

The mirror shifted, revealing another scene. This time, he was mocking and teasing her. His eyes flickered between his own reflection and the unfolding memory. A chill ran down his spine. Instinctively, he took a hesitant step backward. Then, the mirror changed once more.

He saw Jamie alone in her room, painting. She was pouring her sadness and anger onto the canvas. The room around Alex seemed to materialise, wrapping around him as gears turned in his head. He was desperately trying to make sense of what was happening. He understood now, this mirror was a portal, a gateway to the truth.

A mesmerizing shimmer glowed within the mirror. Alex felt a pang of uneasiness but quickly brushed it aside. Then, the distortions rippled again, forcing him to witness something he had never endured before, something beyond comprehension.

He saw himself. He was standing in front of Jamie. His heart pounded. What was transpiring before his very eyes? His mind screamed at him as the scene unfolded with eerie clarity.

"Ahh! My favorite memory," his own voice mumbled as the reflection in the mirror sharpened, revealing a shocking scene. There he was, towering over Jamie as she sat, helpless, in her seat.

"Ooh, I remember that! Her face was hilarious! She better know her place, though..." he laughed, feeling exultant about his power, his laugh hollow and cruel.

Jamie was tear-stricken, curled up like a hedgehog. Streams of tears ran down her placid cheeks. Her eyelids quivered, her heart-wrenching sobs and silent cries for help only made Alex feel more barbaric. Her fragile demeanor was no match for Alex's meanness. He felt as proud as a peacock. After all, he was just keeping his social standing in the school intact, or so he told himself. His face lit up with a twisted smile, trying to brush off the guilt that was beginning to creep in.

(Divya, Ee Dong, Prarthana, Liling, Sherae, Valerie, Yixin, Yovin; 1PRI)

The mirror fogged over, erasing the memory, before clearing again. This time, it revealed Jamie's room.

Alex's eyes widened. The scene revealed a chaotic contrast between the state of Jamie's bedroom and the chirpy walls around her. Her room was bright, painted in a soft mint green, yet everything inside was in disarray. Sketchbooks and canvases lay scattered across the floor, their corners curling with the weight of countless unfinished ideas. Her desk, splattered with dried paint, was a testament to hours spent lost in creation. Art supplies spilled over her bed, leaving little space for anything else.

In the corner, Jamie sat hunched over a canvas. Her focus was intense, yet her eyes were distant. The dark, murky colours she had applied bled into one another, forming a background of heavy hues. Words—words that felt like daggers to her heart—slowly took shape, scrawled across the canvas, each one a reminder of her insecurities.

Alex inhaled sharply as he watched the scene.

She wore her hair in a messy bun, strands falling around her face as if mirroring the disarray in her life. Her eyes were swollen and red, tear tracks still visible, a silent testament to the hours of quiet sobs that had racked her body. The dark circles under her eyes spoke of sleepless nights. As her brush moved, more tears fell, mingling with the paint.

Painting was Jamie's only solace. The one thing that helped her breathe when everything else felt overwhelming, especially school, where the weight of expectations and cruelty often became too much to bear.

After what felt like an eternity, Jamie finally stepped back, her hands trembling. The canvas was finished! It was a haunting self-portrait, her image drowned in shadows, surrounded by the harsh, cold words she'd been carrying for so long. The painting was more than just artwork; it was an outward expression of her inner chaos. A glimpse into the quiet pain she carried every day. She looked at her newly painted piece. Suddenly, Jamie grabbed another canvas to let out even more of her frustration, refusing to bottle up her feelings.

(Aidan, Ameera, Cherice, Syarafana, Xin Ru, Wan Ning, Yechen; 1PRI)

As she painted, beads of tears formed around her eyelids, and she began to cry. Tears streamed down her face as she painted a scene of herself being teased in the classroom. She slowly put the brush down on the canvas, a mixture of sadness and anger engulfing her heart. She looked at the painting, filled with dark, gloomy colours. The tragedy of being shoved against the classroom wall haunted her through her recollections.

(Aiden, Janelle, Jordan, Jovan, Sherilyn, Zahid; 1PRI)

Alex stepped back from the mirror, ashamed, shocked, and uneasy. His face wore an expression of sudden realisation. His eyes were wide, pupils dilated, and his mouth agape. A gasp of disbelief escaped him as his body froze.

He had never known how much torment he had caused. He slowly turned to Jamie, his eyes meeting hers for a moment — eyes that were filled with anguish. His mouth opened to speak but his words were caught in his throat. He quickly stepped away, his eyes cast on the floor, not wishing to look up at her. He felt embarrassed for the first time

(Xiang Yu, Izz, Jin Tao, Winston, Yuan Jun; 1GH).

His head was a mess. His mind had gone blank as he asked himself what he was going to do next. He didn't know how to respond. As he stood rooted to the ground, fleeting glimpses of him

teasing Jamie stared back at him from the mirror. He covered his ears with his palms and shut his eyes in guilt, willing the images away. Alex was shaking with remorse and unease.

"I've got to do something," he mumbled as his eyes fluttered open. His breathing slowed as he tried to fight against the crippling guilt.

"If I knew I had hurt her that much, I would have never done that..." Alex thought, as immense regret crept in.

"How could I do such a horrible thing to a shy, innocent girl and cause her so much pain... I must apologise to her, no matter what the consequences are," he resolved with burning determination.

He was going to beg for forgiveness from Jamie, if apologising wasn't enough.

(Ke Ting, Jasmine, Lee Rui, Minden, Qian Ru, Yue En; 1PRI)

Chapter 6: Jamie's Curiosity

'Why is Alex staring at the mirror for so long?' Jamie thought to herself. She watched as Alex stood motionless before the mirror, his expression unreadable. Time stretched on, yet Alex remained as still as a statue, his eyes transfixed on his reflection.

'What is he looking at?'

His eyes darted across the surface of the mirror, his breath shallow, hands trembling slightly at his sides. A flicker of something- fear? Regret? – just something crossed his face.

Jamie shifted her body closer to the mirror, trying to catch a glimpse of Alex's reflection. However, no matter how she adjusted her view, aside from Alex's face, the glass remained a dull and lifeless pane. And yet, Alex looked as though he had seen a ghost. Pale as chalk, it was as if all the blood had drained from his face. His fingers were clenched into fists, like he was ready to go into battle.

(Isabella, Zexuan, Yifan, Jiarui; 1DE)

As Jamie continued to lock eyes with Alex's reflection, she couldn't help but feel a small sense of glee. Whatever he was looking at seemed to be tearing apart his usual mask of ego and arrogance. For the very first time, Alex, the 'popular' guy and captain of the school team, looked absolutely terrified.

'What exactly is he looking at?'

Alex's mouth parted slightly, as if he was about to scream. His voice trembled, barely above a whisper. He stuttered, but Jamie couldn't make sense of what he was trying to say. His knees started to buckle, leaving him pale and stricken. His wide eyes glistened with something Jamie had never seen in them before - guilt. She watched on, her curiosity swelling like a tide creeping to shore. A wave of unease slowly rose within her, threatening to drown her thoughts entirely.

(Mustaqim, Hazim, Rayyan, Qayyum, Jonas; 1DE)

Jamie found herself stepping closer to Alex, drawn forward as if hypnotised by something she couldn't control. The mirror remained blank from where she stood, offering her nothing but a reflection of the room. And yet, she knew for sure that Alex was captivated by it. The mirror held him in a chokehold.

Jamie wondered. Should I turn away? Or should I break the silence, step forward, and find out what's holding him in such a trance? Just as she made up her mind to approach him, she was brought back to a painful memory - Alex embarrassing her during her English presentation. The resentment and hurt of that moment returned, sharp and raw.

'No. Why should I offer my help to him now?'

(Renie, Qairina, Qisya, Phoenicia; 1DE)

Although she decided not to interrupt or help him, Jamie's curiosity continued to gnaw at her. Slowly, she inched forward. What could possibly be in the mirror to make Alex react this way? What could make the overconfident and smug captain tremble like a leaf in the wind, behaving as if he was a petrified boy cornered in a dark alley?

Oh, how the tables have turned.

Gathering her courage, she cautiously took a step forward, hoping to find out what exactly was making Alex behave this way. But then, a whisper of doubt crept into her thoughts.

'What if the mirror does something to me? What if it reveals something I'm not ready to see?'

(Adel, Bazil, Shadiq, Aman; 1DE)

Her heart pounded as loudly as a drum, a battle waging between fear and curiosity. All of a sudden, something shifted. Out of the corner of her eye, she saw a change in Alex. It was as if he had seen something terrible.

His eyes widened and sweat trickled down his face. The temptation to peek into the mirror clawed at her again, and she couldn't push aside her growing interest.

'Was he seeing a ghost?'

(Elyssa, Wai Lam, En Yu; 1DE)

Jamie swallowed hard, her mind racing in all directions. Finally, she steadied her breathing and slowly stepped backward, putting more distance between herself and the mirror. Whatever Alex was seeing was tearing through him. Drops of perspiration began to form on her forehead and upper lip. Nothing could convince Jamie to look into the mirror, an indescribable fear ran down her spine. She wasn't going to take the gamble and put herself in danger.

(Aleeya, Charlotte, Jiho, Marcus; 1DE)

Finally putting the dilemma to rest, she heaved a sigh of relief as she chose not to look. Whatever was inside the mirror, whatever torment it held, she had spared herself from it. A weight lifted off her shoulders, and she shuddered at the thought of what she might have seen.

(Selwyn, Zafran, Jing Xuan, Eshan, Jia Jun, Ismail; 1DE)

As Jamie pulled back, she nearly stumbled into Priya, who stood rooted to the ground, gazing at Alex's back. Priya barely flinched, offering only a brief glance before returning her gaze to Alex. It was then that something dawned on Jamie, Priya had also noticed that something was wrong with Alex. She had seen how differently he was behaving.

'If the mirror has the ability to do that to Alex... what else can it do?'

(Hayden, Steve, Stanley, Kaxden; 1DE)

Chapter 7: Priya's Dilemma

Meanwhile, Priya, who had also noticed Alex's unusual reaction, stared with her mouth agape. She had never seen Alex speechless, and her eyes widened with curiosity.

'What could the mirror have possibly shown Alex to make him react in such a manner?' she wondered.

Determined to find out for herself, she approached the mirror. Her hands trembled slightly, her heart raced, and her face turned pale, uncertain of what she was about to uncover.

(Daniyal, Jayden, Daania, Wei Qing, Dylan; 1GH)

The mirror began to shake violently as a flood of images flashed before her eyes, Alex making fun of Jamie's artwork, mocking her for not speaking up, snatching Jamie's wallet and tossing it around with his friends, and so much more. It was as if the mirror was taunting her, shaming her for silently standing by while Jamie suffered under Alex's cruelty. A lump formed in her throat as the images continued to flash past, relentless and unforgiving.

She took a step back in disbelief. Her hands grew cold, and tears rolled down her cheeks. She looked down in shame, questioning herself.

What have I done? I should have helped her when she was being teased.

The more she questioned herself, the more ashamed she became.

(Chloe, Joey, Lee Jia Min, Mason, Faith, Dqaddri, Alya, Yen Chen; 1GH)

Priya glanced at Jamie with empathy. Jamie stood directly behind her, and for the first time, Priya truly understood the grief Jamie had endured. A million thoughts swirled in her head.

Why didn't I stand up for her? Am I a bad seatmate?

Jamie stared back at her in confusion, unaware of the battle raging inside Priya. Pangs of guilt struck Priya hard. She realized that her silence had been far from harmless. She had believed that by staying silent, she could avoid becoming a target of Alex and his friends. But in doing so, she had allowed the teasing to continue. Her silence had empowered Alex, giving him the confidence to torment Jamie even more.

Priya knew it was wrong, but she hadn't had the courage to stand up for Jamie. In her inaction, she had become an indirect accomplice. She stood rooted to the spot, shame creeping over her like a heavy fog. The burden of regret weighed heavily on her heart.

(Hamidah, Elise, Gia, Justin, Rayyan; 1GH)

Her face flushed with embarrassment, and she desperately wanted to bury her shame. She imagined herself in Jamie's shoes, feeling the sting of isolation and helplessness. The burden of guilt rained on her, and a wave of overwhelming emotions crashed over her.

Snapping back to reality, she noticed Jamie's shrinking presence. Jamie approached her with a serious expression and asked in a concerned voice,

"Are you alright?"

Priya couldn't answer. She was struggling to stay composed, her emotions bubbling just beneath the surface. Jamie stared at her in awkward silence, unaware of the storm within Priya. At that moment, Priya knew Jamie had felt hopeless, with no one to lend her a helping hand.

(Alia, Geng Hong, Ashaddiq, Kai Ping, Nurul, Hanning; 1GH)

Tormented by the countless moments she could've spoken up for Jamie, Priya reached her breaking point. With her heart pounding and regret heavy on her shoulders, she made a fierce promise to herself, no more hesitation. She would be fearless. She would stand up for Jamie, no matter the cost.

I should apologize to Jamie and be there for her during recess or whenever she's alone, Priya resolved.

After looking into the mirror, Priya had a chilling realization. What she had thought was harmless silence, had been just as destructive as the actions of Alex. A sense of guilt washed over her as she thought,

Maybe I can ask her how she's coping and give her support when she needs it.

Priya walked up to Jamie, her heart pounding, and apologized for ignoring her. She asked if Jamie needed any help. Every second felt like an hour as Priya waited for a response.

'Will she accept my apology? Will she reject it', Priya muttered under her breath, standing frozen in place.

'I accept your apology, Priya,' Jamie said softly.

Hearing the words she had longed for, Priya couldn't hold back her emotions. Tears streamed down her cheeks, and she thanked Jamie from the bottom of her heart.

'Thank you for accepting my apology,' Priya whispered through her tears. *'I promise I'll make amends by supporting you whenever you need it.'*

(Kaylene, Zhi Yong, Illyana and Jia Xuan; 1GH)

Chapter 8: Jamie's Turn

The moment of reconciliation between Priya and Jamie lingered quietly, but the impact of the mirror's revelations was far from over. As Jamie's thoughts swirled with new understanding, she couldn't forget the image of Alex's stunned, remorseful expression—etched clearly in her mind. What had the mirror shown him to leave him so shaken, so speechless? The heavy silence that followed Alex's gaze into the mirror seemed to hold answers yet to be uncovered.

Why does he look like that? What did he see? What happened?

These thoughts ran through Jamie's mind. Jamie felt grim as she continued staring at Alex. As Jamie leaned closer to Alex to see what was in the mirror, she accidentally knocked down a book, startling Alex. Alex was taken aback and shook his head to clear his thoughts. He stepped back from the mirror and looked over at Jamie. Alex was whispering something under his breath to Jamie but she could not hear a single thing.

'What did you say, Alex? I cannot hear you!' Jamie said to Alex.

'Don't look into the mirror. Don't look into the mirror,' Alex said in an unusually soft tone as he ran away to a corner, hiding himself.

(Jolene, Taalia; 2P, Irhan, Shiera; 2R)

Jamie looked at Alex, even more puzzled than before, and her thoughts continued to race wildly.

What did he see? Why is he reacting like this? What is he thinking about?

Jamie wondered, her hand scratching her head, as her curiosity continued to grow. Her heart started beating rapidly, almost as if it was about to burst. Jamie slowly approached the mirror as tension filled the air. She took in deep breaths, and a cold chill ran down her spine while her hands started trembling. She feared that the mirror would show her things she never wanted to see. Her curiosity got the better of her though, and step by step, she walked towards the mirror and looked into it with a conflicted gaze. The scene of Alex making fun of her suddenly appeared before her eyes, only this time it seemed different. She was seeing herself at the table.

(Javin, Mika, Qian Ru, Vera; 2R)

'S..sh...should I help? What if, what if Alex bullies me too? No! I can't risk being teased by him even though I feel so bad for Jamie. I am just too scared to help. I'm sorry, Jamie'. Jamie stared at the mirror, surprised to hear Priya's voice coming from the mirror.

Jamie could hear Priya's thoughts and feel her emotions as she stared at the mirror. Her words made Jamie feel like she had someone who cared for her. She started to have a glimmer of hope - maybe she wasn't so alone, like she had thought.

Jamie stared at the mirror, her heart heavy as she watched Priya's conflicted expression. It was so clear Priya wanted to help, wanted to stand up to Alex, but the fear and terror of becoming his next target held her back. Jamie felt the weight of it, the same fear she had carried for so long.

Through the vision, Jamie realized Priya's true intentions all along. She had wanted to help, but the fear of becoming another target of Alex's cruelty had held her back. Jamie was stunned. She had never imagined that Priya, of all people, had harboured such kindness and concern.

'I get it,' Jamie whispered softly to herself, her voice barely audible. 'I now know how you feel, Priya.'

For a moment, she felt a strange comfort in that shared fear, a bond she had not expected. Jamie was not angry at Priya. She understood the struggle, the hesitation. She knew how it was like to be bullied.

With a deep breath, Jamie stepped back from the mirror, something small but powerful shifting inside her. 'I'm not alone', she thought. 'And maybe... things can be different now.'

It was not a solution, but it was a flicker of hope. She did not know she had a peer who wanted to stand up to people being made fun of but was too afraid to help. With this new warmth and inspiration, Jamie decided to make it her mission to bring more people who suffered like her together.

(Charmaine, Giann, Syakir; 2P, Javan, Zoe; 2R)

A deep wave of gratitude washed over her as the mirror returned to its ordinary state, reflecting only Jamie's own face. She felt a sense of comfort knowing that there were people who cared about her, even if she had not noticed before.

Jamie's emotions shifted dramatically. Before, she had felt isolated, burdened by the belief that no one understood or wanted to help. Now, she saw the hidden struggles of her classmates and realised there were more allies than she had initially thought. Inspired by the realisation that compassion existed even in the darkest moments, Jamie felt a newfound warmth in her heart.

With clarity and purpose, she decided she would turn over a new leaf and help others heal from such trauma, just as she had begun to heal. She turned towards Priya, who had also emerged from the trance, and they shared a moment of silent understanding. This vision was a turning point. Jamie was no longer just a victim. She was ready to lead change in the school.

(Jia Jun, Maria; 2P, Anna, Huzaimy; 2R)

Jamie stepped up to Priya confidently and said, 'I'm glad you actually wanted to help. I understand why you did not help, and I don't blame you. In fact, just knowing that you really wanted to help gave me a lot of strength. I think the two of us could be more vocal to bring other students together. With everyone's help, maybe we can end the teasing once and for all'.

Priya seemed uncertain with lingering doubt clouding up her mind.

'I don't know... what if nothing changes and it continues?' she asked. 'It's still okay,' Jamie finally answered at last.

(Hui Xin, Pinapat; 2P, Jiawen, Thurain, Wei Le; 2R)

Chapter 9: A shift in Alex

It was time for English class. During English Lesson, Levi purposely sat behind Jamie and was trying to goad her into a reaction by constantly making distracting noises to offend her. When the teacher's back was turned away from them, he tugged Jamie's hair and grinned unapologetically. He felt proud when he noticed the sniggers from his classmates. Jamie ignored him while trying to stay focused in class. Undaunted, Levi vaulted paper balls at her. Seated two rows away from Levi, a guilty feeling struck Alex. He knew how much Jamie was suffering inside. The image of her in the mirror had overwhelmed him and he suddenly had a strong urge to defend Jamie. However, a knot of fear twisted in his stomach as he imagined his classmate's rejection if he stood up for Jamie. Alex tried to catch Jamie's eyes, to offer her some sympathy. However, she was staring ahead at the whiteboard without blinking. Jamie was at a loss of what to do.

(Aniq Faheem, Kaylee, Daphne, Chi Yan, Lance; 3R)

At the end of the lesson, Jamie quickly made her way to the next class. She was visibly distraught by Levi's actions. Suddenly, she tripped. It felt as if the universe was mocking her. Her books flew from her arms, like leaves falling from a tree. The place suddenly fell into an eerie silence. She quickly scanned around to see if anyone had noticed her. To her horror, every single student in the hallway was staring at her. She then began to feel a wave of embarrassment and a knot of fear in her stomach. She froze for a few seconds before quickly regaining her senses. Trembling, she attempted to pick up her books.

(Miqhael, Aniq, Sharwin, Kai Bin, Xavier; 3R)

When Alex saw what had happened, he froze. On the one hand, his friends would not like the idea of him helping Jamie. On the other hand, he felt obligated to make up for his past actions. Alex decided that his own opinions mattered less and began taking small steps towards Jamie. Each step felt heavy, as if his feet were shackled by imaginary forces. He trudged on with every courage he could muster. Soon, he could feel his feet getting lighter as he approached Jamie who was crouched on the floor. Without drawing attention to himself, Alex carefully picked up the books and returned Jamie's English notebook. He slowly glanced at her, with a sheepish smile plastered on his face.

(Lucas, Joel, Shanice, Vanessa; 3R)

Jamie looked up, her heart pounding and her eyes wide with uncertainty. A flood of memories of Alex's past torment flashed before her eyes. The fear of being toyed with lingered at the back of her mind. She questioned herself if Alex was scheming a devious plan to tease her. However, she immediately noticed the softness in Alex's expression. It was not the usual mischievous smirk that Alex was known for. Despite feeling unsure, she could not suppress the almost imperceptible smile that tugged at her lips when she accepted the book from Alex.

(Qistina idora, Jasvinder singh, Tyra irdina, Nur shafiiyah , Ng Yi Ling; 3R)

'Thanks,' she said cautiously, studying him. A part of her wondered whether it was a moment of kindness or something more. She questioned herself whether it was just a joke. However, she felt very touched by his actions of helping her pick up the books.

(Batrihya, Iskandar, Ashton, Anson, Austin; 3R)

Alex quickly walked away. A strange feeling was bubbling up in him. Alex felt his heart skip by a beat. This time, he could not shrug off the seeds of doubt that began forming in his mind. Although he was proud of the courage he had mustered, he wondered if anyone would make fun of him for helping Jamie. Alex and Jamie scurried off in the opposite directions, avoiding eye contact with everyone else.

(Sophia, Allen, Leo, Reeyan; 3R)

Chapter 10: Rumours of the Mirror

Little did the trio know that when they had encountered the mirror days before, an anonymous person was recording what they saw and planned to post it on social media.

When the videos of Alex, Priya, and Jamie looking into the mirror were posted, they quickly became a viral sensation. This made the person who posted the video appear with a mischievous twinkle in their eyes, as their plan had been successfully executed. As the videos gained popularity, word spread to Alex, Priya, and Jamie, who found themselves surrounded by many students who had seen the video and wanted to know if it was true. Jamie saw the crowd forming around her. Since they all knew her as weak, she stared at them with knots in her stomach, unsure of what to do.

The atmosphere was pandemonium—students were full of questions and curiosity, determined to uncover the truth about the mirror. As they continued to be curious about the magical mirror that had appeared in the viral video, they decided to seek out Alex, Priya, and Jamie.

‘Is it true? What did you see?’ The library was flooded with demanding questions.

Alex said, ‘Oh no, what should we do? Do you think we should tell them?’

Priya looked around and said quietly, ‘Shhhhhh... Be careful, whoever recorded us might still be here.’

Rumours were spreading about the old but magical mirror. When the protagonists saw themselves online, they were struck with awestruck silence. Jamie felt overwhelmed and didn’t know whether to stay quiet or answer their questions.

Alex was screaming on the inside, fearing he might lose his popularity for being in a secret room with Priya and Jamie. Priya remained nonchalant, knowing she wouldn’t lose any popularity due to her relatively unknown presence at the school.

(Danish, Elysha, Rene, Yue En, Chloe 2D/E)

‘Ring....ring....’ the bell for recess rang.

As soon as the bell rounded, they were like ants swarming to food, all rushing in at once with excitement beyond imagination. The library, which had once been a quiet place for people to wait and be inspired by curious minds, was now filled to the brim with students, all eager to discover whether the magic mirror was real.

‘Where is the mirror? Where are you hiding it?’

Mrs. Morally’s heart thundered in her chest as the students rushed in, bombarding her with questions about the magic mirror. Suddenly, one of the students in the crowd shouted, ‘Hey, get out of my way! I want to see the mirror first!’

‘No! I want to see it first!’ Chaos erupted in the library, and the students soon began arguing and even fighting with each other.

Seizing the moment of chaos, Mrs. Morally ran into a room with the mirror while everyone was distracted. She grabbed the mirror and, with a swift motion, slipped it into a secret room. Silently, she closed the door behind her and replaced the magic mirror with a normal one where it had once been. When nobody was looking, Mrs. Morally sneaked past the noisy crowd of students.

'Hey, instead of wasting time arguing about who sees the mirror first, why don't we go try to find it?' one student suggested. The students suddenly began searching high and low, trying to find the magic mirror, but they still couldn't locate it. Then, a student pointed to a suspicious room and said, 'Hey, what's inside that room? Maybe it's where the magic mirror is!'

The students started banging on the door, trying to get inside to see what was hidden. When they finally managed to get in, all they saw was a plain old mirror.

'Have we been lied to?' the students wondered. The air crackled with tension as frustration mounted.

'Once we find those three people, we're going to confront them!' one of the students shouted. They all rushed out of the library, heading off to confront Alex, Jamie, and Priya.

(Zhang Zitan, Kong Leng, Jun Xiang, Oliver Khoo, Sreeyan 2D/E)

The school bell rang, signaling the end of another long class. Priya and Jamie were walking out of class. They had not even taken a step, a swarm of students surrounded them, as though they were making a human shield. The students started shooting questions at them, pushing and shoving each other, trying to get a glance at the girls, as though they were a viral sensation.

"What did the mirror look like?" "Is the mirror real?" "What did you see in the mirror?" Feeling like they were being interrogated, the two girls stared at each other with an uncomfortable look and tried their best to ignore the questions being bombarded at them. Racing thoughts went through Priya and Jamie's minds - How did we even end up in this position? What did we even do wrong? I wish everyone could just leave us alone!' Jaime murmured under her breath. They both shuffled their feet, avoiding gazes. Seeing this, some students made painful remarks about the two girls. Jamie tried to ignore the harmful words of others, barely being able to contain her emotions, while Priya suffered from a knotted stomach. 'What did I do? What's everyone saying? I wish they could stop pestering us!' Priya thought to herself, frustrated and confused.

All this attention was foreign to them, and the frenzied gossip only made it worse. Streaks of sweat started trickling down her forehead, and she started panting aggressively as she grasped for air. Her eyes were on the verge of letting out a stream of tears; all the colour from her face had disappeared, leaving her with a rather pale complexion. This was the aftermath of the exhaustion she felt while they made a tearful retreat out of the hallway, with a dim glimmer of hope that recess would be their safe haven. By the time recess rolled around, Priya and Jamie were feeling slightly better. The canteen was filled with voices intertwining with cheerful chatter and genuine smiles from students. The moment Priya and Jamie set foot in the canteen, everyone's eyes darted towards them, some giving conflicted gazes, while for others, a hesitant smile broke through.

Sometime after the pair were seated, Priya had to use the washroom, leaving Jamie all by herself, and her fading resilience was reflected in her hunched posture. An ache of loneliness crept in as a heavy silence filled the air. Mocking sneers could be heard from afar, and they came closer and

closer until a group of girls stood in front of Jamie. They started to throw insults and comments at her ruthlessly.

'You're such a liar! I bet you are enjoying the attention and fame!'

'You're such an attention seeker!'

(Joelle, Isabelle, Xyra, Lydia 2D/E)

Although Jamie was under constant searing humiliation and mocking sneers from her fellow students, she made a change and started to shift her perspective by trying to act with a fiery resolve, talking back, and trying to silence the other girls, which made her heart start to swell with pride and courage.

Despite her persistence, the group of girls teased her about her experience with the mirror, so much so that a crowd soon began to form. They talked about her in such a condescending tone that it started frenzied gossips amongst the crowd. Her heart started to fill with dread and anxiety, her mind drowning in the thought of why she had even bothered to try and be brave in the first place, and her fading resilience was reflected in her hunched posture. Her stomach felt knotted as she could not keep standing up for herself anymore.

That was when suddenly Priya snatched her by the hand and dragged her out of the brightly lit spaces where the crowd was, into a quiet hallway.

(Han, Irfan, Rex, Ming cong, Nathan, Jhaswanth 2D/E)

As Priya and Jamie were walking to the canteen for recess, they were reading through the comments under the viral video of them in front of the magical mirror, feeling a sense of suffocating shame. Not being able to control the curiosity, they looked through more into the comment section.

'They just want attention.' 'Attention seekers.' 'Get a life!'

Suddenly, Priya was overwhelmed with emotions. She broke down, screaming 'Stop! Spare me some sympathy!' she got on her knees and covered her face, bawling her eyes out.

The people around her started laughing, as they thought that she was being over dramatic due to her loud crying.

'The discipline master is coming!' someone shouted. Everyone who was crowding around Priya, broke up in a frenzy, leaving Priya and Jamie alone.

'Go back to your form classes! Do you want detention for what you did?' As the roar of the discipline master echoed in the canteen, many students began to scamper in every direction. Priya and Jamie heaved a sigh of relief as the canteen went into complete silence.

(Qisrina, Janelle, Rufah Pyay Pyay, Zara 2D/E)

Students were spreading information about the timeworn grandeur of the mirror, claiming that it had disappeared into thin air. Seeing the eager curiosity of the students, Mrs. Morally's heart pounded like a drum. Knowing that she was the one who had hidden the mirror, Mrs. Morally panicked in despair, fearing that the students might find out the truth. She couldn't bear the thought of them discovering her actions, as it would not only expose her but also shatter the trust and respect the students had for her. In the meantime, Alex, Priya, and Jamie were unfairly accused of lying, despite being innocent and telling the truth.

At school, students looked at them with downcast eyes, while others gave awe-stricken glances. Skeptical smirks were seen in the hallways with mocking sneers and secretive chuckles echoing from afar. The school buzzed with anticipation, and confusion filled the air. Whispers about the inexplicable mirror were relentless, with questions coming from every direction. Priya and Jamie felt a suffocating pressure; they couldn't explain what had happened to the mirror, shuffling their feet and avoiding the gazes of their friends. They were buried in their own thoughts, paralyzed by dread. Shadows of doubt danced in the minds of the students regarding Alex, who had claimed he didn't even know about the mirror's existence yet still accompanied Priya and Jamie on their search.

Meanwhile, Levi felt a wave of relief wash over him. He had always wanted this—revenge on Alex for abandoning him for popularity. Levi had always wanted to be the popular one, and Alex's betrayal left him feeling jealous and upset. Now, seeing Alex being doubted, Levi's lips curved into a tight-lipped grin. This downfall of Alex brought him immense satisfaction, his heart swelling with pride. Little did he know, however, that something was coming to teach him a lesson for his selfish behaviour.

(En xin, Wan wen, Kaia, Dhinie 2D/E)

After the entire ordeal, Priya and Jamie sat together in their form class, and the atmosphere was quiet and tense, as a heavy silence filled the air. The sunlight poured through the windows, bathing the room in warmth. Jamie's expression was shocked, and she took a bated breath after she had seen Priya's shattered façade, wanting to help and comfort her.

Priya felt a sense of suffocating shame and searing humiliation as she wanted to help comfort Jamie from the constant sneering and laughter. Jamie felt a dim glimmer of hope as a hesitant smile broke through after seeing that someone was willing to help her.

'Thank you for helping me. I'm grateful to have you as you are my one and only friend, and you saved me from them,' Jamie said to Priya. 'No problem, Jamie,' replied Priya. 'Anytime you need help, you can come find me, Jamie.'

'Jamie, do you need a hug?'

'Sure, I could use a hug right now.' Jamie was usually a quiet person and had no one to talk to about her problems, but after confiding in Priya, Jamie's hidden wounds were healed bit by bit, and she felt a safe haven when talking to Priya.

There was a sense of newfound camaraderie. Priya felt weighed down by regret as she was always scared to stand up for Jamie, as she was afraid that Alex would start mocking her as well. As they walked out of class, they saw Levi snickering at his phone while walking past them. Priya

decided to peek into Levi's phone as her curiosity had gotten better of her. She had seen herself and Jamie being filmed by Levi. Priya, gathering courage, confronted Levi with what she had witnessed.

'Levi, why were you filming us?' Levi asked in a condescending tone, 'I wasn't filming you.'

A tense silence hung in the air before it was broken by Priya. 'I just saw Jamie and me on your phone screen,' Priya said, hands trembling with hesitation as she was afraid of Levi.

Priya demanded for Levi's phone to verify her doubts.

Chapter 11: Priya Steps Up

The classroom buzzed faintly as sunlight pierced through the overcast skies outside. Jamie sat at her desk in the corner of the classroom, trying to make herself seem invisible. The scattered footsteps reverberated through the room as a small group of classmates approached Jamie's desk, their faces twisted into cruel grins.

'Hey, loser, still carrying that old bag? This looks like something my grandmother would carry,' one of them sneered as they yanked the bag off her shoulder, ripping one of the shoulder straps. The air carried heavy tension; time seemed to stand still, though muffled laughter from another class brought Jamie back to reality.

Jamie shuffled her feet, avoiding their gazes, while one of them took her pencil case and dumped everything out with a mocking grin. Jamie instinctively gathered her things from the ground as they tried to auction off her items at a ridiculously low price.

'Hey! Does anyone want to buy these pencils for a dollar each?' they shouted, erupting into piercing laughter. The classmates around them avoided eye contact and pretended to be busy with their own work.

(Madi, Jolin, Alarique, Danish, Michael, Stephanic; 2GH)

'Why are you always sitting alone? It's pathetic!' her classmates teased relentlessly, their faces twisted into disdainful smirks. Jamie could hear their cutting remarks, but all she could do was sit there and feel the searing humiliation rise up in her throat.

'She's such a loner; that's why she never talks to anyone,' one of them commented with a playful shrug. Although she didn't show it, Jamie felt embarrassed and humiliated by the constant sneering. She found herself helplessly scanning her surroundings, hoping someone would step in.

But all she saw were conflicted gazes as her classmates walked past her. An ache of loneliness crept in when she realised she was completely powerless. Past memories flooded Jamie's mind as she recalled the previous times they had harassed her and how she had stayed in defeated silence all along. Tears ran down her cheek as she realised she didn't have the courage to stand up for herself and tell the teacher about it. Her heart pounded like drums as they relentlessly tormented her. Her mind felt empty.

(Stanislas, Twinkle, Isaac, Ananya; 2GH)

While sitting in the canteen with her friends, Priya realized she had left her mathematics book in her locker. As she gradually got closer to the classroom, the sounds of items dropping on the floor grew louder, sparking her curiosity. Priya's footsteps echoed inside the classroom. When she entered the room, a shiver ran down her spine as she took in the scene before her.

(Zafeera, April, Olivia, Jayden, Anaqi, Jacob; 2GH)

Priya remembered the promise she made to Jamie. Summoning every ounce of courage, she made her way toward Jamie and the bullies, extending her hand in a quiet offer of support and

positioning herself between them. With furrowed brows, she scowled at the classmates who were making fun of Jamie.

'What is your problem? Get out of my way!' they growled.

'Stop it. Why are you doing this to her?' Priya snapped, her gaze sharp and unflinching.

'Why do you care about what we're doing?' one of them shot back furiously.

'You think you can stop us?' another sneered.

'Making fun of people is wrong, and you need to stop!' Priya's voice rang out, steady and firm.

The tension between them escalated, and the argument persisted for a few minutes until Priya's patience ran thin. She decided to put an end to it.

'Enough is enough! I'm reporting this to the teacher!'

(Yan Cong, Alya, Nurin, Sean, Charlyn; 2GH)

Priya grabbed Jamie's hand tightly and pulled her out of the classroom, giving her trembling hand a firm squeeze. Slowly, Jamie's shaking subsided. She finally felt a wave of relief, gratitude, and a sense of belonging as someone had finally stood up for her after months of suffering.

'Thanks. Thank you so much...' Jamie stuttered, fumbling through her words as her face turned red like a tomato.

Jamie had finally found someone she could trust, a safe haven in Priya. For the first time, Jamie realised she wasn't alone. Priya had stood firm against the classmates who had tormented her. After a moment of awestruck silence, Priya said,

'Before I go, I just want to tell you to be careful. I'll always be here for you. Don't suffer alone. If you need anything, I'll be there.'

A newfound camaraderie blossomed between Priya and Jamie.

(Owen, Nadheem, Carol, Yee Kai, Aleysha; 2GH)

After that day, they were often seen together, chatting away during recess and walking home after school. Priya always stuck close to Jamie, concerned for her well-being and wary that her best friend might be made fun of again. When they saw Priya with Jamie, they backed off, afraid of getting caught by the teacher.

(Jia Hui, Zi Xin, Rayden, Farzan, Aariz, Qiyong; 2GH)

Chapter 12: Jamie's Bold Idea

A few days later, Jamie, inspired by Priya's actions, decided to start an Art Club with Priya. 'Hey Priya, I would like to start an Art club for those who are interested in art and are struggling because of them being made fun of. Do you think this is a good idea?' Jamie asked, her voice brimming with excitement.

'Yes, that sounds like an excellent idea, Jamie! It'll be a good place for us to connect and make friends with one another!' Priya exclaimed delightfully. Both Jamie and Priya then approached the school principal to request for permission to start the Art club and get resources like art materials. Almost as if they were in sync, both girls decided that the goal of the Art club would be to serve as a safe space for members to use art to freely express their emotions.

(Zeith, Naqib, Nawfal, Sabari, Serene, Mutiara; 2D/E)

After getting permission, Priya and Jamie designed bright and colourful flyers to hand out to their schoolmates. They also pinned some posters on the noticeboard in the canteen to raise awareness so that people would know about their art club. Within a few days, Priya and Jamie received questions and visitors asking about the Art club. During the first session, Priya and Jamie were awestruck that so many of their classmates had actually joined their Art club. During the session, a participant asked if she could still be in the Art club despite not knowing how to draw. Jamie and Priya assured the participants that art was simply just about expressing themselves and that there would be guidance during the programmes.

(Belle, Hakimi, Ryan, Reigne, Adli, Joel; 2D/E)

The participants engaged in a wide variety of different activities which included painting, sculpting and even poetry. The Art club members were all overwhelmed with joy and exuded smiles that would brighten up the room. One particular Art piece was done by Lilian, a secondary two student. It showcased a distraught girl sobbing uncontrollably as tears trickled down her cheeks, her eyes glistening with unspoken pain, showing the hidden wounds that she felt. Yet, Lilian exuded a calm disposition, almost as if painting her emotions had given her an unspeakable sense of relief.

(Feng Weng, Zhin An, Janelle; 2D/2E)

Meanwhile, Jamus and Michael, both classmates of Priya and Jamie, proudly shared their art pieces with the two girls. Jamus painted an artwork of a young boy. His eyes were smouldering with rage, fists clenched so tight and yet, his mouth was sealed like it was glued shut, which in Jamus's words, represented a muted fury, ready to release all that rage at any moment. Michael, on the other hand, had sculpted a group of clay figures that were eating together happily and when the other members asked what that represented, he cheerfully told them that it was his ideal secondary school life. The members talked and actively engaged in their activities and the atmosphere of the room became lively yet peaceful at the same time. To them, this had become a safe haven where everyone could share their experiences without getting JUDGED.

(Sky, Devan, Ishaq; 2E)

After about an hour of engaging in art activities, Jamie and Priya invited the members to form a circle and share their stories. To the pair of friends, this was a helpful way for everyone to give

each other support and to understand each other. Meanwhile, the other members looked hesitant and anxious to share and exchanged worried looks with one another. This was until a girl named Michelle bravely stood up and volunteered to share her account of being teased. Michelle's face remained neutral, but her eyes were puffy and she looked nervous.

'My... my name is Michelle... and I want to share my story on how I was mocked by a group of girls when I was out to catch a movie by myself a couple of weeks ago,' She stuttered nervously. 'While waiting for the movie to start, a group of girls came to the row of seats where I was seated. They sat next to me and mocked me for my appearance. The girl on my right started pinching me and the one on my left stepped on my toes constantly crushing them under her weight.' Michelle said with a shaky voice, her eyes wet with tears.

Moved by her sharing, several members had teared up while others walked over to her and embraced her with open arms. Michelle's sobs gradually faded into a weak smile, one that conveyed gratefulness for the support she received. Priya and Jamie looked at each other, and gave each other supportive nods, knowing that the Art club had truly served its purpose of being a safe haven for students. Jamie and Priya were proud of themselves because they had helped people and made them braver by sharing their stories about being made fun of.

(Aqib, Lukes, Garis, Kaeden, Wen feng, Ira; 2D/E)

Word about the Art club spread throughout the school as more students expressed their interest to participate in the art activities and group sessions. To Jamie's amazement, in the next session, Alex had turned up. He blushed as he asked Jamie if he could join the sessions. Some of the Art club members exchanged looks with each other and doubted Alex's authenticity of having turned over a new leaf. Jamus, another person who despised Alex, shouted loudly from the back of the classroom, 'How do we know you are not just planning to come in and ruin our safe haven. What if you start making fun of us instead?'

In murmured whispers, Alex shyly replied, 'I.. I was also a victim of such mockery when I was younger—for my weight... I just want to try and become a better person. Can I please have your permission to stay in the Art club?' Alex stuttered as his head hung low. He shuffled his feet, avoiding their gazes. At this point, the other Art club members softened their expressions and eventually agreed to let him in and participate in the art sessions.

(Ashrina, Naqeeb, Kaylen, Kevin, Daniel, Zac, Agatha; 2D/E)

With the permission of their Art teacher, Jamie and Priya were able to display some of the artwork done by the club members. These art pieces were displayed along the hallways, celebrating the passion of the club members.

(Koi En, Sulaiman, Zhuo Xi; 2D/E)

Many students walked by, adoring the art pieces and were impressed by the stories that the artworks represented. However, there was also a group of students who expressed their displeasure with the art pieces. One girl, named Lucy, had her eyes ablaze when her eyes met one of the art pieces- the one done by Lilian. Without a second thought, she disfigured Lilian's work by pouring water on the canvas and scribbling nasty words on it.

(ZhiYing, Yu Xuan, Farisha; 2D/E)

Chapter 13: Resistance

'Hey, Alex! I miss seeing the old you,' Levi said to Alex while they did their secret handshake along the hallway. It was their trademark! 'What did Levi mean when he said "the old you"? What is he trying to tell me?' thoughts bombarded Alex's mind.

Suddenly, Levi snapped his fingers in front of Alex's face, jolting him back to reality. Levi's laughter echoed off the walls, cruel and unrelenting, as he made fun of Alex's reaction. Despite his urge to question him, Alex chose to ignore Levi's teasing. They both then went to get their meals for recess and started to eat.

'Hey bro, just between us, seriously what happened? This is not the Alex I know,' Levi pursued. 'I've changed for the better because I've realised that my actions have impacted others negatively. Don't you think you should give it a shot?' Alex asked in a well-mannered tone, his eyes twinkling guiltless.

Levi stood there frozen and was too stunned to react or even say anything. He didn't question nor did he say anything to Alex after that and simply walked away in disbelief. 'What's gotten into Alex! The Art club must have done something to him! I am going to make this ridiculous Art club and its members miserable!' Levi swore to himself. It was at that moment that Levi made a resolve to tarnish the reputation of the Art club.

(Lydia, Rovelie, Ariella, Dayrish, Ashlee; 3R/I/D)

'Hey, have you heard about the Art club? I heard it's actually a place for bad things to happen!' Levi whispered to another student. 'Stay away from those people! They get into your head like parasites before they control your mind!' he added confidently. Within an hour, Levi's poisonous words had spread and the new name for the Art club was - "The evil group". Jamie was bestowed the title - 'The Manipulative Queen Jamie'. The rumours had become worse and multiple people started coming out as 'victims' claiming that Levi's rumour was true.

By the end of the week, the whispers had reached the club. Once regarded as a creative, welcoming space for like-minded students, the Art club now found itself isolated, with other students distancing themselves. Many believed the rumours, and some even started avoiding anyone associated with the club. The school halls were filled with quiet whispers and stares whenever a member walked past. Even the Art club members started to split based on their opinions. Some were furious at the untrue rumours and wanted to revolt in anger while others were scared and feared it may ruin their future.

(Terry, Rayyan, Mingyao, Javen, Ryder; 3I)

'Jamie! Did you hear the nasty rumour that has been going around?' yelled Priya grinding her teeth. When Jamie finally heard the rumours that were being spread, it hit her hard. She felt a sinking feeling in her chest, especially since the things being said were completely untrue. The stress quickly built up, and Jamie couldn't shake the feeling that everything was falling apart. She began doubting her decision to start the Art club. 'Priya, was starting the Art club a good idea? Did we... make things worse? We're just making ourselves targets at this point, right?' Jamie asked in a shaky voice. It was a tough conversation, and she felt disappointed because what was supposed to bring them together, seemed to be pulling them apart.

When the usual weekly meeting finally came, one member suggested taking action on the person spreading the rumours, and others started questioning if staying in the club was worth the risk. 'Why not give them a taste of their own medicine? We should show them how it feels to be treated like nothing,' a member suggested menacingly, arousing an applause from some of the other Art club members. Jamie felt overwhelmed, unsure how to fix things or keep the group from falling apart. She didn't know how to keep them from becoming as bad as those who had teased them. A part of her wanted to retreat to her shell, and yet another part that sounded like a silent, whispering voice, told her to be brave and openly address the Art club.

(Hilyah, Syasmin, Zara, Anila, Zhi le, Ain; 3I)

Finally, she decided to step up. Jamie gulped, took a deep breath, her hands shaking slightly and stepped to the center of the room. The silence was almost unbearable. Every single member in the Art club was watching her, some doubtful and some hopeful, waiting for her to address the rumours. Her heart pounded in her chest, and she could feel the weight of their expectations pressing down on her. She wasn't used to being the center of attention, but this was important. She had to do this.

'Hey, everyone,' Jamie started, her voice a little unsteady at first, 'Look, I know things have been... tense lately. And I get it. I would like to firmly state that our club does not do any inappropriate activities like the rumours,' her voice rose, unwavering and full of hope, claiming the silence. She could see the frustration on their faces, the clenched jaws and the tight shoulders. But she also saw something else, something softer.

She continued, 'We were taught to be better than this. This club was meant to be a place where we can come together, be ourselves, and do what we love. It's supposed to be a space where we feel accepted, not where we feel like we need to fight back against rumours or start pointing fingers. We don't need to act. Not every action needs a reaction! We've done nothing wrong, and the teachers know that. The truth is on our side.' Her courage became contagious, inspiring some around her.

For a moment, there was nothing but silence. It stretched on, and Jamie could feel her chest tighten, wondering if they were still angry. But then, slowly, one by one, people began to clap. It was quiet at first, but it grew louder as more people joined in. The sound filled the room, and Jamie felt her shoulders relax for the first time all day. Priya was the first to walk over to her and her comforting presence brought Jamie a sense of relief. Without saying anything, Priya gave her a quick pat on the back, a silent sign of approval. 'You did good! We needed to hear that,' Priya said, her voice steady and comforting.

Jamie let out a breath she didn't realise she was holding. The room was no longer tense and was full of energy again. It was the kind of energy that only came from having a shared understanding. She looked around at her friends, at the people she'd spent so much time with. They weren't angry anymore. They were on her side, and for the first time in a while, Jamie felt a sense of calm settle over her. The Art club had found its center again and Jamie knew, at that moment, that no rumour, no matter how loud, could ever take that away. (Hadden, Ying Xuan, Ventus, Megan, Danish, Sky; 3I/D)

Chapter 14: Confrontation Looms

The class had just wrapped up their grueling PE lessons with a 2.4km run. The students staggered off the field and made their way towards the canteen. Jamie wished she could disappear into thin air when she found herself walking among Levi and his friends. However, her body was damp with sweat, and the unmistakable odour of perspiration lingered in the air, announcing her presence.

‘What’s that smell?’ One of the classmates remarked, wrinkling his nose.

‘Who forgot their deodorant today?’ Another sneered, his voice thick with sarcasm. The entire class turned their gaze towards Jamie. She felt a lump form in her throat and her face turned a bright scarlet. Awkwardly, she glanced around, gulping as a wave of shame washed over her. Grinning maliciously, Levi shouted out and pointed at Jamie, ‘I think the smell is coming from here!’ Laughter erupted from the gang. Someone else chimed in, ‘Jamie smells like pungent socks!’ The teasing intensified and Jamie came to the horrifying realisation that the entire class was now focusing on her, yet again.

(Viyron, Yi Xian, Samuel, Rafiq, Taufik, Dalwin; 3D)

Jamie’s heart raced, her emotions threatening to overwhelm her as the first tears slid down her puffy cheeks. She could feel the warmth spreading to her whole face, but the ruthless sting in her eyes was nothing compared to the weight in her chest. She quickened her pace, as if the faster she walked, the further she could outrun the emotions clawing her. To her dismay, Jamie found that there was no escaping this predicament despite her hastening steps.

From a distance, Alex watched the scene unfold, his chest tight with a mix of guilt and helplessness. His eyes traced the paths of the tears down her cheeks, and for a moment, something in him screamed to go after her, to ask if she was okay, to offer some kind of comfort. But he didn’t move. His feet were glued to the floor, his body betraying his gallant intentions.

Alex’s apprehension did not go unnoticed. Cocking their heads in his direction, Levi and his friends stared quizzically at his lack of response.

‘Alex, why don’t you join us over here?’ Levi finally broke the silence. Alex’s throat went dry as the words struck his chest. He hesitated, the silence pressing in, but when he finally spoke, his steady voice was quieter than usual.

‘I don’t want to do this anymore.’

The words hung in the air, and Levi’s expression shifted, disbelief flashing across his face. Without warning, Levi grabbed Alex by the collar and slammed him against the wall, the impact knocking the air out of him.

‘What happened to you?’ Levi snarled, his face inches from Alex’s, his eyes a mixture of confusion and anger. Alex’s heart raced, but he forced himself to stay still, fighting the rush of panic building in his chest. He tried to step back, but Levi’s grip tightened, pulling him back into place.

'Where do you think you're going?' Levi sneered, his hot breath seething against Alex's nose. Alex could feel Levi's vice grip tightening even further but something in him snapped.

'Back off!' he growled, his voice rougher than he had intended. With a sudden surge of strength and fury, Alex easily shoved Levi aside. Levi stumbled back, his eyes wide with shock.

Alex stood there with his chest heaving as he tried to make sense of what had just happened. His body was still trembling with adrenaline, but beneath it, a strange sense of clarity began to form. Levi did not speak but continued to stare at Alex in disbelief. The person standing in front of him was not the same Alex he had known, and the realisation hung heavily in the air.

(Marcus, Jovi, Zayden, Ethan, Aufi, Zhe Lin; 3D)

That night, a surge of thoughts swirled in Alex's mind like a swarm of bees. He kept mulling over and over again on how he could have helped Jamie, but the guilt still lingered like a boulder on his back. Alex wanted to take some sort of action to prevent a similar incident from happening again, but he was afraid his fear had not been overcome. The apprehension at the possible consequences of his actions filled his very being. In a dilemma, he kept tossing and turning in bed. A wave of panic loomed over him. It was a nightmare, being reminded of the past, and Alex was suffering through every minute of it. The air suddenly felt heavy and still. Alex tried to will the thoughts away while doing his best to fall asleep. It was a cold and chilly night for Alex, as cold sweat droplets rolled down his neck, and he broke down in the comfort of his own bed, alone and scared.

He recalled the memories of his primary school days despite his best efforts to keep them at bay. Alex tried to fight it, but the dark memories loomed in his mind until he saw them vividly as they played out as clear as day, right in front of him.

(Natasha, Lucius, Afwan, Charlene, Zenky, Junhui; 3D)

He was in Primary Four. Alex's scrawny frame did not help in his efforts to rise beyond his full height as he had struggled to look Levi in the eye. Not one day passed when Alex would not get teased by the now familiar face in front of him. Levi would snicker at Alex while calling him 'Toothpick' due to his physical appearance. Levi loomed over Alex, his shadow swallowing him whole. Besides the hurtful words, Levi also liked to push Alex with so much force that he would fall to the ground. Alex was helpless and could not fight back. In such situations, he would end up running to the furthest toilet in school and cry alone. Shame was all that filled his heart then.

(Isabelle, Irdyna, Falysha, Ritika, Joreen, Philantha; 3D)

Because he had been humiliated in front of everyone so many times, Alex made a vow to himself that he would never let anyone make fun of him again. He started hitting the gym, putting on muscle, and getting stronger—his body slowly changing, like someone sculpting a statue out of rough stone. He became bigger, his frame broadening, aided by a pubescent growth spurt that added height and strength, like a plant shooting up towards the sun. By the time he started his first year in secondary school, no one could recognize him anymore, least of all Levi. He had grown so much – his face more defined, his posture more confident – that in all physical sense, he had completely transformed into a different person. In the end, when he walked into secondary school, Alex became the one person he had always dreaded the most: a troublemaker.

Stuck at a mental crossroad, Alex sighed, his chest heavy with the weight of it all. He hugged his bolster tighter, the soft fabric offering small comfort. He thought about Jamie and remained conflicted about how he should help her.

(Jun Quan, Darius, Brandon, Dylan, Zi Heng, Alvis; 3D)

Chapter 15: The Big Incident

The annual school art carnival had completely transformed the art room into a stunning and vibrant exhibition space. The walls were lined with colorful paintings, intricate sculptures, and drawings, creating an immersive atmosphere which showcased the diverse talents of the students. The room buzzed in excitement as each corner held a unique piece of art, capturing the imagination of all those who entered. Throughout the day, students popped into the art room during their recess and lunch breaks, and even after school, to admire the fascinating pieces. The artworks were beautifully painted, molded, and sketched, with each piece showing a story. Many artists in the Art club used their creations to escape the teasing they faced. One artwork, however, stood out. It captured everyone's attention with its striking details and bold designs, becoming the highlight of the event.

(Jeremiah, Irfan, Azri, Ilyf, Sawa 3G)

Jamie's art piece captured the attention of everyone who passed by it in the gallery. It reflected hope amidst adversity; each stroke of the brush conveyed the message about her darkest times, with a glimmer of light waiting to break through. The warm reds, oranges, and yellows blended with cooler blues and purples, representing a balance between happiness and sadness. Priya, always one to appreciate Jamie's creativity, was in awe of the artwork and was particularly moved.

'This is incredible, Jamie,' she said, her voice filled with admiration. 'You have managed to capture something so profound. The way the colors shift and flow is like a journey from struggle to strength.'

The rest of their group also praised Jamie, each person commenting on the emotions conveyed in the piece. It was clear to everyone that this artwork was not just beautiful but could tug the audience's hearts. Priya was quietly proud of Jamie. Her art piece served as a testament to her ability to channel personal experiences and feelings into something so universally relatable.

(Rania, Adam Aiman, Daylan Rauf; 3G)

The air suddenly turned cold when Levi's group slithered towards Jamie's painting. Levi inched closer to Jamie and stared at her intimidatingly. He snarled, 'I heard about your painting, and it looks like poop. Yucks! Where is that smell from?' He exaggerated his actions to signal that Jamie's painting was harassing his nostrils. While flailing his arms around, Levi pushed the painting down to the ground. He pretended to trip and stomped on the painting. The canvas ripped itself, and Jamie could feel her guts ripping along with it.

'53Oops, sorry! I didn't mean to step on the poop!' Levi exclaimed, immediately generating loud laughter around him. Priya glanced at Jamie, who was standing rooted to the ground. Jamie forcefully held back her tears while Levi and his friends continued taunting her. Alex, who was standing quietly at the corner, felt crushed.

A few minutes later, the Art teacher entered the room. She had not seen what had gone on. 'Why is Jamie's painting on the floor and why is it torn?' the teacher questioned furiously. A few of Levi's

friends defended him by saying that Levi had accidentally knocked against it. The Art teacher stared at Levi for what seemed like eternity before hastily leaving the Art room. Levi and his friends broke into loud laughter and gave each other triumphant pats on the back and turned back to the artwork on the floor.

(Kiean, Stephan, Gibson, Lu Heng, Fahri, Jae Xun, 3G)

Jamie kept her head low. Tears started to well up in her eyes as she watched Levi continue to stomp on her artwork without a care in the world. Jamie felt a deep sense of helplessness. She longed to stand up for herself but struggled to summon the courage to speak up.

(Yorick, Eryna, Jayden 3G)

At that moment, Alex, who had been watching intently from a corner of the room, was battling with his own thoughts. With his heart thumping against his chest, he willed himself to stop caring about what others would have thought of him if he intervened. Finally making his decision, Alex approached Levi at a steady pace. He placed his arms firmly on Levi, signaled for him to stop.

At first, Levi misunderstood his gesture and laughed aloud, thinking that it was a sign of encouragement. However, he was stunned into silence when Alex said firmly, 'Please, stop.'

For a moment, nothing was spoken between the two of them, but their eyes conveyed a million words. Tension filled the space between the damaged art and the boys.

'Levi, I think we should stop targeting Jamie and other students. I can clearly see how damaging and hurtful our actions have been. These few days, I am overwhelmed with a sense of shame for my past behaviour. I really cannot allow you to continue acting this way,' Alex finally broke the silence.

Murmurs filled the room as the students started whispering to each other, anticipating what would happen next. A haunting silence filled the air as a crowd gradually formed around them.

(Tristen, Thansin, Le Bin, Rezky, Qisan, Miu 3G)

Alex then slowly turned towards Jamie. He looked at her with gentle eyes. 'Hey Jamie, I'm sorry for treating you badly in the past. I realised how hurtful my actions were, and I should not have done that. I hope that you can forgive me,' he said awkwardly, biting his lower lip anxiously.

Jamie could feel the weight around her being lifted and broke into a weak smile. She nodded slightly, showing that she accepted his apology. Gratitude slowly began to wrap around her like a warm embrace. A new feeling whispered through her veins, a gentle current carrying the weight of kindness.

When Levi heard Alex apologising to Jamie, his blood boiled with anger. Resisting the urge to yell at Alex, he snapped, 'Whose side are you on? One moment you were with us, now you are here apologising to her. Choose a side; you can't just apologise and expect us to still be friends!'

Alex had almost forgotten Levi's presence. He was gripped by elation that Jamie had accepted his apology. He turned sharply to face Levi and replied firmly, 'I have hidden behind my cowardice for too long, Levi. I was not willing to face my own fears and insecurities. Instead, I taunted this innocent girl without much care for her feelings. It is time for me to make amends. I still appreciate you Levi, and I hope that you will also realise that hurting others will not take away our own pain and imperfections.'

Levi opened his mouth to respond, but he was at a loss for words. He suddenly sensed a shift within the room. People were nodding at Alex in approval while others inched closer to Jamie. His face flushed red, and he suddenly wished he could vanish into thin air.

(Celeste, Richelle, Qisya, Shanice 3G)

The ripples of changes felt by Levi soon enveloped the crowd. Possibilities of kindness and second chances were blooming in the Art room and had taken a new form. The students in the Art room who watched the whole scene with bated breaths suddenly broke into thunderous applause. Their voices rose in unison as there were waves of praises and compliments towards Alex for showing his courage and standing up for Jamie. Levi darted his eyes through the crowd and noticed his friends were hanging their heads in shame. Smoldering with resentment, Levi stormed out of the art room, knocking down more precious art displays. Some of Levi's loyal friends followed him like lost puppies, believing that Levi had done nothing wrong. The others stayed behind, blending into the crowd. With every cheer, Alex's confidence grew as he knew that he had inspired many students.

(Daniel, Bella, Shein, Tze Chong; 3G)

Chapter 16: A Ripple Effect

After Alex's bold move, the school hallways felt different. The air seemed to hum with possibility, as though every conversation had the potential to change something. Whispers of support spread like wildfire, as students who had once kept their heads down now exchanged knowing glances, realising that silence no longer seemed like an option. As Alex walked down the hallway, he overheard a conversation between two students. 'Did you see what he did?' one of them whispered into the other's ears, full of admiration. 'He actually stood up to them. I didn't think anyone had the guts. He's so amazing!' 'Yeah!' her friend replied. 'It's like... that incident finally gave everyone permission to speak up. I feel like I should be doing more.'

Alex was full of pride. He was proud that he was able to make a difference in the school environment that no one else could. Later, during lunch, one student walked up to Alex's table. 'I just wanted to say that what you did was really brave of you! I would never have the courage to speak up like that. I really admire you! Could you please teach me how you did it?' he said quietly. Alex glanced up, surprised by the sincerity in his voice. 'It's not enough to just notice it,' he replied, voice steady but soft. 'We all need to act, or it's never going to stop. Why not join me?' He nodded, his gaze now meeting the other boy's. 'Yeah. You're right. I think... I think I can do more.'

The bell rang, signalling the end of lunch, but as students filtered out of the cafeteria, Alex noticed more eyes on him than usual. It was like something had clicked inside the walls of the school. Although the change was still in its early stages, there was a quiet understanding that the old silence was no longer an option.

(En Qi, Ashleigh, Beatrice, Ong Shun; 3H)

Alex was known to be very rude and hostile and would pick on anyone. His presence alone would send a shiver down the spines of many students and everybody's shadows seemed to shrink. Alex, who once had a bright, intense look in his eyes, had now transformed into a gentle and compassionate person. He had turned over a new leaf and decided to change his whole persona. His smile softened and he replaced his thundering voice with a tone of kindness and his rapid-fire insults changed to loving kind compliments. From that day onwards, Alex had found himself in the centre of a new type of attention, one where everyone started to look up to him for his heroic act of standing up for Jamie and his actions began to shift the way people thought about courage and standing up for what's right.

(Sohoni Sharvil Gourish, Leon Fong, Imran, Melville Tan Jing Hong; 3H)

As the weeks stretched into months, the ripple effect of Alex calling out Levi began to transform the school. Students who had once been silent onlookers or even participants in teasing started reflecting on their actions. The heavy silence that had surrounded teasing and mocking no longer felt tolerable.

For Priya, the change was deeply personal. 'I stayed quiet when Jamie needed me,' she confessed to her class one afternoon. 'I won't make that mistake again.' Inspired by Alex's courage, Priya began speaking up in class, challenging the subtle teasing that often went unnoticed. 'Even harmless jokes can hurt,' she pointed out to a discussion group. 'We need to do better.' Others started following her lead. One boy, who had once snickered at Levi's remarks,

approached a friend and admitted, 'I didn't realise how much damage we have caused.' The harsh edges of those who used to tease others were softened by newfound empathy. Students began reaching out to Jamie, befriending her and inviting her to sit with them at lunch. 'Your art was amazing,' one classmate told her. 'You're so talented.' Jamie's once timid smile became radiant, lighting up the room.

(Lauren, Yadi, Weijing, Bethlyn; 3H)

Having seen how one word of encouragement could affect so many, Priya felt a new surge of confidence well up inside her now, to voice her opinions in the class and nail the silent killer-ways through which teasing continued to assail its victims. Her smile, once timid, now shone across the room brightly every time she spoke.

From that day onwards, Priya did not stop speaking up but stood up-not only against harmful actions, but also for kindness, empathy, and inclusion. And every day, her smile grew a little brighter, her relationships a little stronger. She began to notice the difference within a few weeks: those class leopards who stuck only with their group would initiate conversation with her, and others even joined in discussions that she may have started.

(Arissa, Zakiah, Fatheha, Tithi, Annisa 3H)

Meanwhile, Alex was adjusting to his new role in the school. He wasn't used to being seen as a role model, but he embraced it with quiet determination. During breaks, he would check in on Jamie, offering kind words, and even tried to apologise to others he had hurt in the past. 'I've done a lot of wrong things,' Alex admitted one day during lunch. 'But seeing how everyone's starting to change, it makes me want to improve myself for the better.'

His sincerity struck a chord with his peers. Slowly, a shift began to take place in the school. Small gestures, like holding doors open or inviting someone new to join a conversation, started to replace the whispers and snickers that once filled the hallways. Students began to feel more confident sharing their stories, and others listened with empathy rather than judgment. Soon the air was buzzing with potential, a promise of better days.

One afternoon, the principal called a school assembly. 'Changes don't happen overnight,' she said, addressing the students. 'But what we've seen recently in this school is a testament to what's possible when we stand up for what's right. To those who have taken the brave step to create a more inclusive environment, I thank you. Keep it up.'

The applause that followed wasn't for any one person—it was for everyone who had contributed to the change, no matter how small their actions seemed. Jamie looked around the hall, feeling a warmth, she hadn't experienced before. It wasn't perfect yet, but the school was becoming a place where she could finally feel accepted.

And it all started with one brave stand.

(Janelle, Saliafiqah, Karwoon, Kai Xin, Si Lok 3 Honour)

One day, Priya had noticed Levi sulking in a corner, face reddened from humiliation and the sting of what happened days before. She approached him cautiously, not wanting to alarm him. He noticed her approaching him and snapped,

‘What do you want?’

Priya then sat beside him and placed her hand on his shoulder.

‘Are you going to try and change?’

‘After what just happened, why should I?’ Levi said, glaring at Priya.

‘You were mean to Jaime though. You mocked others and lowered their self-worth and you clinged on to Alex for popularity’s sake.’

‘So, what’s your point?’ Levi asked sarcastically.

‘Why? Why do all that? No one has ever dared to teased you, and I don’t think you have any reason to. We went to the same primary school, and you were kind back in Primary One. What happened to you now?’

‘I just thought that if I was popular, I would have more friends. Now the spotlight isn’t on me anymore.’

‘There are other ways of being famous and popular.’

Priya pointed to Alex, who was now surrounded with a group of students.

‘But I don’t have friends anymore, and I don’t think anyone will have the heart to forgive me.’ Levi sulked again.

‘Then, let me be your first friend and the first to forgive you.’

Levi hesitated for a moment. A dark shadow fell over his face but lifted before it could set. He mumbled, ‘Thank you. I’m sorry Priya.’

The apology hung in the air, simple yet profound. She then took his hand and led him into a group of students and introduced themselves before pushing him in and disappearing amongst the crowd. Levi was shocked, not knowing what to do, but in the end, he decided to listen to her advice and with a deep breath had a resolve to not tease others again. Meanwhile, on the other hand, Priya was smiling with pride as she saw Levi change for the better and interacting with students instead of making fun of them. There was a moment when their eyes met, and she nodded in approval as he started to encourage others too. Alex saw everything, and he was proud that Levi had decided to turn over a new leaf with the help of Priya.

(Jaden, Yi Jie, Emma, Zi Jing; 3H)

Chapter 17: The Mirror's Secrets

Weeks later, the trio returned back to the library. As they stepped into the library trying to look for a space to work, they felt a sense of strangeness in the atmosphere. Sunlight streamed through the tall windows, dust swirling lazily in its golden glow. Jaime's fingers tightened around the strap of her bag, and gazed at the far corner—the place where everything had changed. The quiet hum of turning pages and muffled whispers filled the air, but to them, the silence felt heavier. Alex let out a low whistle as he pulled out a chair, his eyes scanning the familiar rows of books before settling on the empty space where the mirror had once stood. 'Feels different now, doesn't it?' he murmured, almost to himself. As they settled in, all the memories of the mirror came rushing back causing the trio to discuss about the mysterious mirror they had encountered weeks ago. One by one, they started sharing their experiences, recalling the visions and how the reflections had changed them.

(Angelu, Krishni, Valerie, Si Han, Brenda, Hui Ru, Mikayla, Suci; 2PI)

Priya sank into her seat, smoothing the edges of her sketchbook with slow, deliberate movements. Her lips parted slightly, then pressed together as if trapping a thought she wasn't ready to share. Across from her, Alex drummed his fingers against the wooden table—once restless, now subdued. 'I still remember what I saw, the mirror showed me the victims' perspectives of being teased daily,' he admitted, his voice quieter than usual. Jaime's hands stilled over her pencil case, her jaw tightening ever so slightly. The memory sat between them, thick as the scent of ink, unspoken yet undeniable.

'The mirror,' Priya finally said, her voice barely above a whisper. She traced invisible patterns on the table with her fingertip. A flicker of something—curiosity, hesitation—crossed Jaime's face before she exhaled, shoulders sinking. 'I thought it was lying to me,' she confessed, the corner of her mouth twitching in a wry half-smile. 'But maybe it knew me better than I did.'

(Leroy, Rong Jun, Steven, Zhongwen, An Yu; 2PI)

There was a pause. It was the kind of silence that settled deep, like the hush before a confession, the breath before the truth fully formed. Alex leaned back, rubbing his palm over his face before exhaling a short, breathy chuckle. His grin was crooked, but there was something lighter in his eyes, something almost free. 'It definitely taught me the error of my ways and how mean I was to Jamie,' Alex reflected.

Priya tilted her head, considering his words. Then, with a small smile, she flipped open her sketchbook and picked up her pencil. 'I'm glad we all changed for the better, thanks to the mirror.'

(Ashton, Davian, Damien, Yoji, Farel, Alfred, Haekal; 2PI)

They all had the same question in mind. Who had led them to the mirror? How did the mirror know so much about them. With their renewed unity, they were determined to find out more about the mirror's secret. A lingering doubt clouded their thoughts, 'Could this be the librarian's doing?' The trio thought of the old spooky place they found the mirror in and went back to look for Mrs Morally.

The three friends stumbled into the dusty, dimly lit room, the air thick with the scent of ancient paper and wood. Sitting at the corner of the room, Mrs Morally sat perched on a tall wooden chair, her legs crossed with an air of casual grace, as though she had been expecting them all along.

She was smiling a small knowing curl through her lips that seemed to hold a thousand secrets. It was that kind of smile that could either make you feel welcomed or make your skin tingle with the sense that you were being watched, a little too closely.

'Oh! Hi, Mrs Morall', Jamie nudged her two friends as they were still in a daze, unaware of Mrs Morally's presence. They whipped their head around, slightly frowning in suspicion due to the 'coincidental' meetup of the group and the mysterious librarian. 'I see you three have figured it out?' Her words danced in the air, playful and teasing as she was not entirely serious. The room was filled with awestruck silence. The trio exchanged bewildered glances, their exhaustion evident in the sagging of their shoulders and the weariness in their eyes. Mrs Morally sat back in her chair, adjusting her glasses as she gave a cheeky grin. 'I always knew you'd find it,' she said, dancing around the truth. The three then realised it was all part of her plan. She had planned for them to discover the mirror.

(Yu Xuan, Avery, Shenee, Sara; 2PI)

Chapter 18: The Art Club Flourishes

Priya stole a glance at the room around her. Everyone was enjoying their time together, working on an art project. The quietness of the room was comforting to them. There was no noise to distract them and they felt at peace with the world, a tranquil haven of peace and quiet. The quiet hum or relaxation permeated the room. A serene retreat, where the mind could unwind in stillness. An oasis of calm, where words are few and serenity reigns. A space where silence nurtured the soul. The calming rhythm of quietude fostered a soothing mood. Gentle energy fills the space, offering a sense of ease. The environment offered a gentle, soothing quiet, perfect for healing. Subtle tranquility lingered in the air, fostering a peaceful retreat for those in search of it. The quiet surroundings embraced her in a soothing calm.


(Azizah, Sharifah, Pou Sheng, Akid, Cayden 3E)

The classroom was packed, and the room was filled with the cheerful chitter chatter of students as they busied themselves with paintbrushes. Walls were decorated with colourful artwork. The art supplies were scattered across the many tables in the room. The artroom was filled with colourful paintings lined up against the wall to dry. The sound of students talking amongst themselves was oddly peaceful to those working on their project and the sunlight shining on the art projects from outside seemed to make the colours pop more vibrantly. Table tops had dried up paint on them which created a beautiful mess of colours. The warmth in the classroom created a cozy environment for the students to work in comfortably and the pops of colours in the midst ignited a creative spark for all in the room. For the first time, everyone was getting along with each other. Jamie was glad to be there, and to have her close friends by her side. Whenever she needed suggestions on her work, all she had to do was turn to them and they would kindly provide her with their opinions.

‘Could you hand me that colour, please?’ Jamie whispered to Priya. She needed to add some final touches before she could finally hand in her artwork that she felt she had been working on forever. Priya handed Jamie the paint, peering at the almost finished painting. It was a fantastic piece of work that aptly captured the theme they were working on.

(Aura, Suhairyn, Xavier; 3E)

Jamie was emotionally moved by the deep and meaningful influence of her Art club, and she could clearly see the positive changes it has made, both in herself and perhaps in others as well. The Art club has clearly improved the lives of everyone here who has joined and herself. The walls of the Art studio were adorned with sketches, half-finished murals or mood boards to help them with their ongoing process of exploration and self-expression. The rich aroma of paints, clay, oils, acrylics and various mediums mixed with the faint trace of wood from canvases filled the studio. A sensation of warmth radiated. Natural light from the windows bathed the room with a soft, ever-changing glow, casting



shadows that seem to animate the work around them. Shared admirations of techniques, small feedback between pieces or casual conversations between artists filled the room. The space felt alive with potential and creativity, a sanctuary where ideas could take shape and transformations happened through the hands of its creators as they evaluate through their pieces standing within them. Jamie's heart swelled with pride as she beheld the vibrant legacy of her art club. She was deeply moved by the tangible manifestation of her club's passion and dedication.

(Rayyan Naufal, Qaisarah, Bernice, Joel, Ryan, Mikkelas 3E)

Seeing the club members share their art so freely filled Jamie with a deep sense of fulfillment, knowing their collective energy has brought out the best in each of them. She watched all of them with pride and confidence and her heart swelled as watching each one of them grow and evolve. It was like every person in the room was unlocking new levels of potential, their creativity flourishing in ways she never imagined. She saw the way they supported each other, how their shared moments of inspiration sparked something bigger than just individual achievements. Each brushstroke, each line, each piece of art was a reflection of their journey, and with each passing day, they became more than just a group. They became a family and a community. At that moment, she knew that what they were building together was something special, and her belief in them was unwavering.

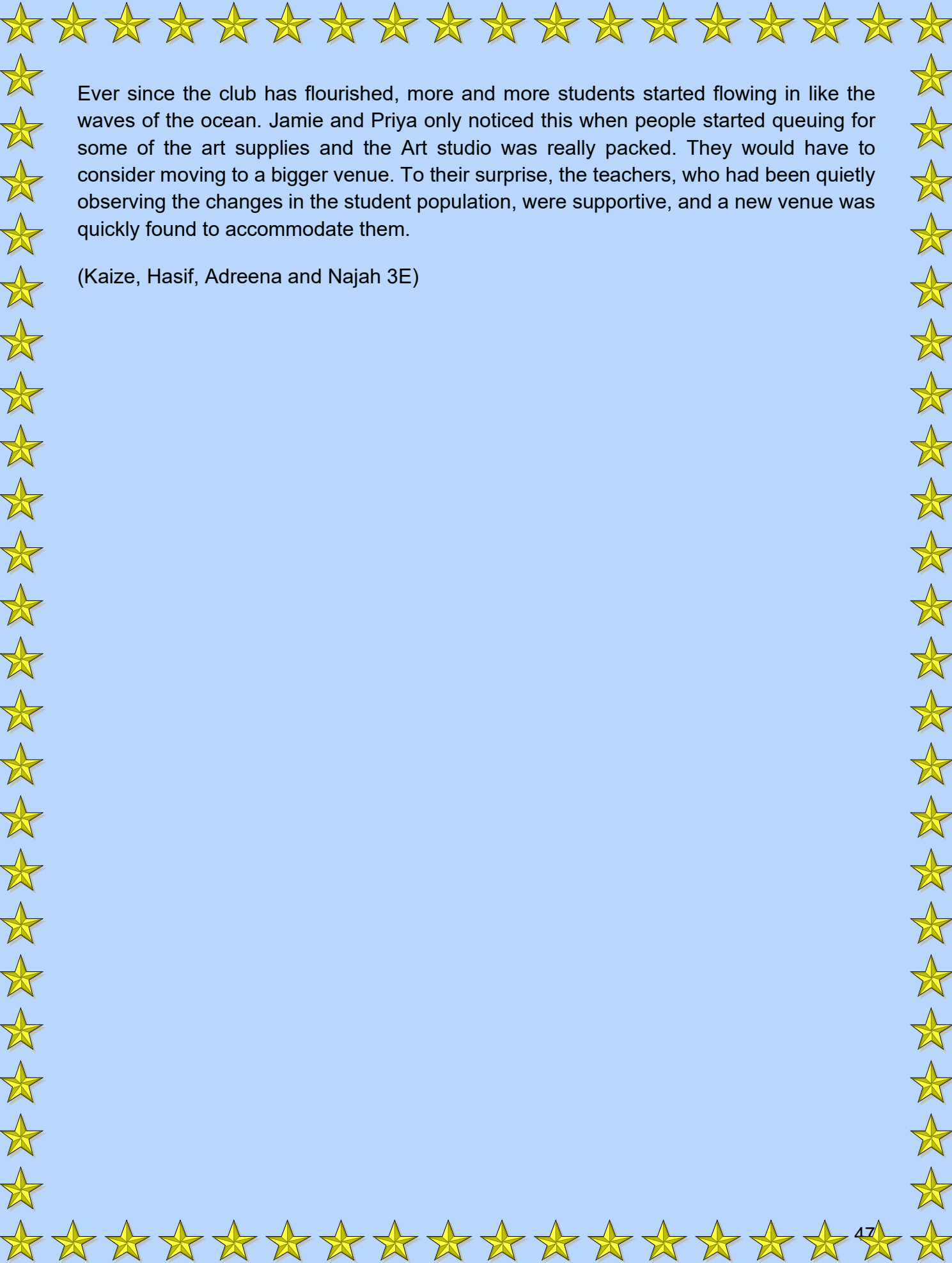
(Asha, Jia Cheng, Chloe, Ryan, Weijie; 3E)

Inspired by the talents of her peers, Jamie suggested to combine various students' artworks to form an exhibition to share the stories of the students. Jamie then asked her classmates if someone would be willing to contribute to the project. No one reacted at first, but then a shy student to whom Jaime had never spoken to before, hesitantly raised his hand. He was grinning from ear to ear. And suddenly, more hands were up in the air. Jaime's heart bloomed. Never did she think that her idea would receive so much support from the class. She nodded quietly to Priya standing next to her. Times really had changed in the school.

(Aqeef,Kaiser,Aniq, Naureeq; 3E)

Now that the project was underway, due to the increased demand, the art supplies in the studio had to be doubled to ensure that artists had everything they needed to pursue their creative projects without limitations. This expansion allowed for a wider variety of materials, catering to the diverse needs of the growing number of participants. Jaime was thrilled by how successfully the project was coming along and touched to see how hard the team was working to ensure everything was ready.

(Ailey,Ryan Chuang,Shannon, Zheng Yang 3E)

A decorative border of yellow stars with black outlines surrounds the text. The stars are arranged in a rectangular frame, with one row at the top, one at the bottom, and vertical columns on the left and right sides.

Ever since the club has flourished, more and more students started flowing in like the waves of the ocean. Jamie and Priya only noticed this when people started queuing for some of the art supplies and the Art studio was really packed. They would have to consider moving to a bigger venue. To their surprise, the teachers, who had been quietly observing the changes in the student population, were supportive, and a new venue was quickly found to accommodate them.

(Kaize, Hasif, Adreena and Najah 3E)

Chapter 19: Alex's redemption

The air was thick with the distinct scent of paint, mingling with the murmurs of students deep in concentration, surrounded by an array of canvases and art supplies. Brush strokes filled the air with whispers of imagination and inspiration. Outside this bustling sanctuary stood Alex, heart pounding as he clutched a modest painting—a simple, abstract representation of a bridge, its lines evoking connections yet to be made. Sweat glistened on his palms as insecurity gnawed at him, tempting him with thoughts of retreat. He hesitated, hands hovering nervously at the door handle, his breath catching like a fish gasping for air. Each step he took felt like a monumental stride, his footfalls soft against the cool tiled floor, until he finally crossed the threshold into the room.

‘Jamie, can I talk to you?’ Alex’s voice broke the gentle murmur, tinged with apprehension. Jamie looked up from her canvas, curiosity intermingled with caution. As she set her paintbrushes down, the focus of her surroundings shifted to them, the room suddenly enveloped in an expectant silence. ‘Follow... me...’ she responded softly, motioning with a nod of her head. Together, they slipped out of the art room, stepping into the wide, echoing corridor that felt almost cavernous in its emptiness.

Gathering his breath, Alex cleared his throat, a nervous twitch that seemed to amplify the tension between them. ‘I made you this painting. It’s not much, but I hope it conveys my sincerity.’ The confession was spilled - a testament to his struggle.

Jamie hesitated, her fingers gently brushing the edges of the painting as she examined it with careful deliberation. The tentative lines and colors spoke volumes, and Alex watched as her expression shifted, softness replacing her earlier caution. His heart raced, pounding loudly in his ears, drowning out the surrounding sounds as he searched her face for any clue of her thoughts. ‘Thank you... I appreciate it,’ she replied, her voice simple yet laden with significance. Those words bridged a chasm between them, stitching together the torn fabric of their relationship with threads of forgiveness.

‘Really? Thank you!’ Alex breathed, feeling an immense weight beginning to lift from his shoulders, yet fully aware this was just the first step on a long journey toward atonement.

‘Are we friends?’ he asked tentatively, desire for camaraderie lacing his voice.

A giggle escaped Jamie’s lips, a sound as bright and warm as the sun breaking through clouds after a storm. Her smile erupted like spring flowers after a long winter, breathing light into the space between them. ‘Yes, we are friends!’ she responded, her affirmation a balm that soothed his lingering guilt. It was a moment unlike any other; the first time Jamie truly smiled and laughed in his presence, a refreshing shift that invigorated the atmosphere around them. Alex felt the shackles of his remorse begin to fade. Resolute,

he vowed to demonstrate his sincerity through meaningful actions, letting this blossoming friendship guide his way forward.

At that instant, Alex's heart thumped with a renewed sense of purpose. He recognised that defending others wasn't merely an act of bravery; it was about cultivating a community where every student could feel safe, seen, and valued. As he walked away, he glanced back once more at Jamie, who now wore a genuine smile. A sense of hope blossomed in Alex's chest, a vision of a brighter school environment illuminating his thoughts. He felt ready to take on the challenge of championing kindness, fostering an atmosphere where compassion could flourish, leaving behind the shadows of cruelty that had once clouded his past.

(Enya Grace Tan, Kayris Sam, Valerie Chong, Faith Lim, Eunice Clemente 3I)

Alex returned to the library and stood before the mirror. He held still for a minute, one that felt like ages. The time spent had a reason. For a long time, the guilt had been sharp, as though the devil itself had been tormenting him with his past actions and his cruelty towards his schoolmates, lurking behind him like a shadow everywhere he went.

Alex stood in front of the mirror. Its surface shimmered like liquid silver, reflecting not just faces but truths. Alex remembered the moment it showed him Jamie being overwhelmed by his tormenting.

(See kiat, Jayen, Vince, Eben, Glerick, Ferrel 3I)

Taking a deep breath to steady himself, he took a moment to study the face looking back at him in the mirror. His voice, when it finally surfaced, was soft and shaky.

'I... I've come to forgive myself.'

Alex left the library soon after. As he strode down the corridor to his next class, he felt a slight breeze through his hair and fingers. A feeling that felt a lot like peace flowing into his heart. His internal torment and guilt had come to an end. Each step forward felt lighter, as though walking on air.

In the Art room, the smell of paint lingered throughout the area, and a thick layer of grime coated the windows. Alex was getting materials for an upcoming art exhibition. Jamie was there too, working on her part of the exhibition. They worked quietly, allowing her to take the lead, showing his growth in humility and respect. Seeing her brows furrow as she scrutinised a colour that she couldn't get quite right, he mustered the courage to speak.

'Do you need any help?'

Jamie's head snapped up, startled. She had been so engrossed in her work that she had forgotten he was even there. Hesitating for just a moment, she shook her head.

'Thanks for asking, I can do it myself though.'

After they had finished gathering materials, they started to create new artworks for the upcoming exhibition. Jamie found herself sometimes staring curiously at Alex. His behaviour was so uncharacteristic of how he used to be. Where there was once chaos in his mannerisms, he was now a picture of calmness.

They walked towards the Art club meeting space where they spent their time silently, after creating numerous artworks. Out of boredom, Alex decided to look around at the various artworks framed on the walls. Alex looked at some of the paintings, and thought he saw his own actions being illustrated on the artwork. One painting showed a figure looming over another, swallowing it whole. Another piece showed a wall of faces, echoing insults at a small child. Seeing those pictures, discomfort gripped Alex like a cold hand, and his knees trembled like jelly. Feeling embarrassed by his former self, Alex put the artworks away and continued to assist Jamie. Alex, now turned to face his past with pride, no longer running away from it, but facing it straight on.

(Justin, Aaron, Le Kang, Izzan, Hong YI, Dionie; 3I)

'Priya, could you pass me that brush?' Alex called out, trying to balance on the unsteady ladder as he streaked the crimson red paint across the brick wall. As Priya rushed over to pass Alex the brush, Jamie, at the other end of the wall, was working on the branches of the tree. Alex reached over to Priya at the bottom of the ladder and proceeded to add some final touches to the mural. 'We're done!' Alex rejoiced. The three of them took a step back to admire their hard work. The mural's vibrant colours contrast against the muted, cracked surface of the building, sprawling across the rough brick wall. The mural depicted a tree, roots sinking deep into the earth, symbolizing unity and growth. As they admired the majestic image, Alex felt a strong sense of belonging and pride. For the first time, his contribution felt meaningful, not driven by ego but by a desire to create something positive.

'Things feel different don't they? Priya asked. Alex nodded in agreement.

'For the better, I think. I just hope I can keep earning their trust.' Alex muttered under his breath, trying not to express the suffocating weight he had been carrying. He hoped that he would eventually get over it. 'It isn't that hard to earn their trust. Even though you have done many wrongs before, it is still possible to turn over a new leaf. Everyone deserves

a second chance, and so do you.' Priya replied, with quiet excitement bubbling from within.

(Zhining, Cerise, Gwenn, Qihui, Yi Xuein 3l)

Chapter 20: A New Culture

Two months later, the school atmosphere had changed visibly. A radiant sense of belonging filled every corner of the school, replacing the once-muted halls with warmth and laughter. Students supported one another with renewed camaraderie, and the air buzzed with hope, as if the school itself was breathing in the promise of a brighter tomorrow.

Alex, Jamie, and Priya could feel the shift. The school now pulsed with renewed unity. Hesitant smiles broke across their faces. The students' voices intertwined in cheerful chatter, echoing through the corridors, complementing the colourful murals around the school. It was as if the school had turned over a new leaf.

The walls seemed to come alive with each brushstroke and splatter of paint, showcasing the talent and passion of the students. The vibrant atmosphere was a testament to the power of art to transform not only physical spaces but also the hearts and minds who experienced it.

(Aaryan, Aden, Caleb, Dani, Darshika, Faqif, Kathleen, Rizqi, Trevor, Zara; 2GH)

As Alex walked through the hallways, he marvelled at the transformation. Everywhere he turned, there were genuine smiles and bursts of laughter, creating an atmosphere of warmth and excitement. It was as if the very air shimmered with a mystical aura, and with every passing moment, his heart swelled with pride. The hallways were no longer just passageways but living galleries of expression. On the left side of the corridor, a quote caught Alex's eye:

'Good words bring good feelings to the heart. Speak with kindness, always.' – Rod Williams.

(Absi, Aira, Danial, Hafiz, Jeremyah, Owen, Richie, Shubham, Yu Jie 2GH)

Stepping into the art building, Alex felt an ethereal glow stir within him—a quiet yet persistent spark of hope. As he wandered through the vibrant hallways, his steps fell in rhythm with the gentle hum of joy that filled the air.

He observed two students in deep conversation, their voices rich with cheerful energy as they shared stories about their day. A little farther down the hall, a group of students approached a quieter classmate, extending a kind invitation. 'We'll be providing free food after CCA! Come join us!' a student said.

Alex watched as the other's face lit up with the warmth of belonging. His chest tightened with emotion. The school was becoming a home of genuine kindness, connection, and acceptance. Inspired by the heartfelt moments unfolding before him, Alex made his way to the art room, eager to share what he had witnessed.

(Batrisyia, Darren, Iman, Josephine, Lucas, Syuhadah, Yuxi, Xuane, Zhuoyue; 2GH)

Upon spotting Priya and Jamie, Alex waved enthusiastically.

'Shall we take a walk to the coffee shop for lunch? I've got so much to tell you!' he asked.

Priya and Jamie exchanged light grins and nodded. 'Let's go!' they exclaimed.

As they stepped out of the school gates, their laughter mingled with the warm afternoon air. They paused momentarily, turning back to take in the sight of their beloved school. Nostalgia washed over them as they reminisced about the precious memories they had made within its walls.

Their eyes landed on a gigantic poster by the entrance, bearing the words:

'No act of kindness, no matter how small, is ever wasted.'

Their hearts swelled with pride. At that moment, they knew they were part of something greater. A newfound camaraderie formed between them as they shared their dreams for the Art Club and the school, their eyes shining with determination and a vision for a brighter tomorrow.

'No act of kindness, no matter how small, is ever wasted.'

(Andika, Charmaine, Fatris, Firdhaus, Javier, Pei Rou, Perseus, Tiffany, Wei Xiang; 2GH)

THE END!



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