

## Kindness and Bullying Story

One day, when I was at senior school, I saw a girl who was being always being bullied walking home from school. Having said that it didn't seem to worry her much, or so we thought. Her name was Katie and she hadn't long been at the school. I thought she brought a lot of it on herself because she seemed to be so different to us all. We looked down on her a bit. She wore old fashioned clothes and scratched glasses and her hair was always scruffy. She acted liked she didn't care what anyone thought of her. This day was no different. She was carrying an old torn carrier bag with her books in it and I thought, 'Why does someone have to do that? She asks for trouble.' Instantly I crossed the road and hung back to try and avoid her. I knew she lived somewhere close to where I did and I didn't want any excuse to have to walk with her.

As I did so, I saw a bunch of girls from the cool crowd running up behind her. They were the ones everyone admired and smiled at because they seemed to be so confident and popular. I crossed back thinking that if I was quick enough I could catch up with them. I was always trying to get in with them. As I did so they careered into her on purpose, knocking her and the carrier bag flying. Everything tumbled out on to the grass, including her packed lunch, or what was left of it, all squashed up. Someone stepped in it and hopped around trying to get the plastic covering and the sticky mess off her shoe. Katie was by now down on the ground on all fours looking rather dazed. Her glasses had come off and landed in the grass about ten feet from her. They didn't try and help her. They just looked at me and said, 'Do you want to come with us? We're going to Tesco's.' I wanted so much to rush on with them because it was my big chance to get in with them. They knew I'd seen them knock her over and they were feeling awkward. One of them started a conversation with me and urged me to follow them but at that moment Katie looked up and, when saw this terrible sadness in her eyes, I knew she was fighting back tears.

My heart went out to her and I stopped following them straight away. I went back and gave her back her glasses. The girls then rushed ahead with a curt 'sorry' and 'we're in a rush' but I was aware from their manner that by helping Katie I had blown it with them. 'Are you okay?' I asked. She looked at me and couldn't answer and I knew they'd hurt her quite badly. 'Thanks!' Suddenly there was a big smile on her face. It was one of those smiles that showed real gratitude and I thought at the time that she could be quite pretty if she at least made an effort or two.

I helped her pick up her things, and asked her why she'd only just joined the school. Rumour had it shed' been expelled from her last. She said her parents had just divorced and her mother, with whom she lived, had been forced to move house.

I would have never gone around with someone like that before. She was a bit too quiet for me and liked different things. She was more the brainy type, though everyone called her a thickie. But we talked all the way home, and I carried some of her things. She turned out to be a pretty nice girl. I asked her if she wanted to come shopping with my friends from dance class that weekend and she smiled so brightly I nearly cried. In fact my friends quite liked her. In fact the more we got to know Katie the more my friends thought the same of her as I did. She grew on you.

Monday morning came, and there was Katie trailing behind all the other girls in her class walking on her own. She still looked a bit out of it but she was at least carrying a bag we had helped her to buy at the market at the weekend. It wasn't expensive—the one which several girls used—and certainly better than a carrier bag. 'You really are Miss Popular aren't you?' I said loudly and sarcastically so the cool group could hear me. I couldn't believe I had the nerve to make such a comment in front of them but something inside me made me do it. She laughed and put her head on my shoulder playfully.

I never made the cool crowd and nor did she but over the next few years, Katie and I became best friends. When we left school we both went our separate ways. I went to London to study drama and Katie went to Edinburgh to study medicine.

Katie graduated and became a doctor. I hadn't seen her for years until out of the blue I was invited to her wedding. When I turned up that day I couldn't believe my eyes. She had blossomed into a true beauty. She now wore contact lenses and had slimmed down to a model figure. She was marrying a wealthy guy who obviously doted on her. It was as if she had suddenly turned from Cinderella into a princess while my life had juddered to a halt. My career had never taken off and I had no boyfriends to speak of. I was hopelessly poor and really quite lonely. In fact I felt a tinge of jealousy. There was Katie, surrounded by so many glamorous people that I couldn't even get a look in to wish her well. But at some point in the reception I saw her point in my direction and put her head on the shoulder of her adoring new husband. He left her side and came over to where I was. We sat in the corner together watching with admiration the way Katie was conducting her large successful wedding party. I wondered what she had said to him about me to bring him to do this.

'She wanted to thank you,' he said, clearing his throat. I could tell he loved her very much.

‘For what?’ I asked.

‘For coming today. It was important for her you came today and it was quite difficult to trace you. Katie particularly wanted to remind you of what you did for her.’

I was still at a loss as to what he meant. I looked over at my friend Katie with disbelief as her husband told me the story of the first day we had met. Katie had confided in him what she had never had the courage to tell me. Her parents—neither of whom were there as her mother had died and her father was overseas—had gone completely separate ways after their divorce which had been hurtful. Then she’d been forced to change schools and move home. And while she didn’t show it, the bullying and ridicule had been getting to her. She had even come close to killing herself. In fact, she’d had planned to run away over the very weekend we had met.

Seeing us talking Katie came over to join us. I listened completely shocked as this beautiful, successful girl told us all about that sad time. I saw from her husband’s eyes that she was still deeply grateful for that moment of friendship I had shown her. Not until then did I realise how much that invitation to go shopping had meant to her that weekend. She had been saved by the actions of myself and my friends.

Never underestimate the power of your actions. With one small gesture you can change a person's life. For better or for worse.