

## “Kindness in Unlikely Spaces”

A personal story

“Dude, are you done with your clearance yet?” my friend **asks** me as I **am** playing games on my phone. “No...not really,” I **scrunch** my eyebrows in immense concentration. My friend **hums** and

**turns** her attention to writing up an essay on her armchair, silently judging my lack of exam season worries. I know it **looks** bad. I didn't have a complete permit and **I'm** also playing games instead of being a nervous wreck, but I **know** that I have nothing to worry about.

"But!" I **shout**, surprising my friend in the process, "I'm sure I'll be done by tomorrow. **I'm** finishing up Sir's requirement later at home." I **grin** and **put** my phone inside my bag, glancing at the time first to make sure if I should be going home now. "Seriously? Good for you," she **chuckles** without lifting her eyes from her paper. I **let** her know that I'm about to head home and we **bid** each other goodbye.

After eating a quick dinner and doing my chores, I **head** to my room and pull out the binder I recently bought. As I begin to search for my previous subject activities to slide inside the binder, I realize that I should be thanking my past self for managing to collect them in the first place. If it wasn't for my teacher's advice to keep them in case he would require us to submit a portfolio of them, I would have thrown them out without a second thought. My mind eventually **begins to wander** off while I **scrounge** for every bit of important piece of paper I deemed worthy without realizing that I should be asleep by now. I finally **insert** the last activity inside the binder and **get ready** for bed, or at least try to fall asleep despite scrolling through social media on my charged phone.

I **wake up** to the sound of my alarm blaring and the glaring sun on my eyes. I **blink** my eyes sleepily and check the time...immediately springing up after seeing how late it already is. "No no no no no," I **mumble** as I **run** towards the bathroom and shower at record speed, nearly slipping on the floor and cracking my head open. I **accept** the reality that I might have to skip breakfast if I didn't want to be late, but **make sure** that I get to **brush** my teeth while getting dressed for school. Before I could slip my shoes on, I **glance** at my portfolio and **tuck** it under my arm securely. I spent the whole night working on it and I don't want to waste my efforts.

I frantically **hail** a tricycle cab and constantly check the time on my phone. I **bite** my lip as a cab finally **slows to a stop** in front of me and I nearly **fall** when I **throw** myself inside. The driver **is** particularly chatty and **strikes** a conversation with me before I could say anything, "You're in a hurry? Saint Mary's, right?" I **sigh** and **mumble** out a frantic yes. I silently **hope** that I still have enough time to be punctual enough and **beat** myself up for staying up too late. What matters most is that I finished the portfolio and I'll be completing that permit, whatever the costs.

A few minutes after the morning ceremony, my friend **pulls** me aside and **asks** me, "So, did you get to finish that portfolio?" I could tell that she is doubtful, but I simply **smile** and **reach** inside my bag, ready to prove her wrong and maybe gloat for a bit. "Of course I-"my hand blindingly **searches** for the binder as my eyes **widen** in fear. I never got the chance to put it inside. Panic immediately **settles** in while I try to **fumble** through the contents of my bag and solidify the fact that yes, my binder **is** not inside. "What's wrong? Did you leave it at home?" she **crosses** her arm and **furrows** her brow in concern. I **try** to rack my brain and **convince** myself that I probably did, reaching for my phone to call my mother. "Yeah, I guess I did." "Oh, okay. Call someone to bring it here for you. **It's** the last day for signing clearances." I **nod** and **wait** for my mom to pick up.

After 5 agonizing minutes of the phone ringing, she finally **answers** my call and I **ask** her to check my room for my portfolio. “There’s nothing here, I’ll go and check the living room.” Her voice **trails** off while my anxiety **multiplies** tenfold. I **begin** to think about other possible places and my heart **drops** at a scary thought. I **put** my entire hope in the chance that it wasn’t where I thought it was, until my mom said, “It’s not here. You probably left it inside the tricycle.” I **sink** to my seat in defeat after thanking her and hanging up. Our first subject teacher **walks** in while I **wallow** in misery.

I **spend** the whole day feeling empty. I **know** that it would be useless to feel regretful over my own mistakes, but I just couldn’t get over them. If only I paid attention during the tricycle ride instead of using my phone, then I wouldn’t have left it in the first place. If only I slept earlier, then I would not have been frantic during the morning. If only I finished my project days before the actual deadline, then I wouldn’t have to feel so panicked. There **are** a lot of things I could have done differently, but I still didn’t do them.

As the last bell finally **rings** over the campus, I desperately **try** to think of a way to complete my requirements. Either I had to beg for my teacher to consider my lack of portfolio and explain my circumstances, or hurriedly go home and look for any activities I might have missed and pass them off instead. The first option **is** truly embarrassing and I know it would not work, but the second option seemed to be viable. It **is** true that I may not have any stray activities at home or I would also receive a fairly low grade if I submitted a single activity only—but it **is** worth a try. I have to face the consequences of my actions, and I need to accept these possible scenarios.

With my thoughts hyper-focused on my strategy, I **march** towards the school gate with determination in my step. But suddenly, I **pause** and **turn** my head towards the silver grills of the guardhouse and I **see** my portfolio, lying between the bars innocently. I rapidly **blink** my eyes and **shake** my head to make sure this was not a hallucination conjured by my tired brain. The guard sitting inside **looks** up from his logbook and **sees** me agape, “Is that yours?” I slowly **focus** my gaze on him and **say**, “I guess?” He **nods** and **continues** on with an amused tone, “A tricycle driver left it here this afternoon, “I gingerly **open** the binder and **flip** the pages, “said you also forgot your change.” I **am** torn between crying from relief and shouting with joy, so I might have made a noise that sounded like a mix between the two. I **accept** the coins and **thank** the guard as I **head towards** the faculty room, still in utter awe and disbelief.

Because of that experience, I realized that I should always be attentive to my surroundings and actions. But the most important lesson I always hold close to my heart, **is** the beauty of decent human kindness from strangers. Everyone has the capacity to be kind, it **is** up to us to offer help to people to create a positive impact in society. Whether you are a tricycle driver or a clumsy student, always remember that every good interaction **is** important—what might be insignificant to you can actually change somebody’s world.