



Sam's Sunny Smile

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Sam walked into the bustling schoolyard, his shoulders hunched. He clutched his blue backpack tightly, his round glasses slipping down his nose as he looked at his shoes. The sounds of laughter and shouts seemed too loud for him.



During recess, Sam found a quiet corner by a big oak tree. He sat with his knees to his chest, still hugging his backpack like a shield. Other children zoomed past on scooters and swung high on the swings, but Sam just watched, a tiny frown on his face.



A group of kids kicked a colorful ball nearby, their giggles echoing. Sam wished he could join, but his feet felt glued to the ground. He pulled his hoodie strings tighter, feeling like an invisible speck in a world full of bright, busy stars.



Back in the classroom, Sam tried to focus on his drawing, but a wobbly line appeared instead of a straight one. A tiny tear escaped his eye and rolled down his cheek, landing on his paper like a raindrop. He quickly wiped it away, hoping no one saw.



Just then, a girl with bright red pigtails and a sunny smile, named Lily, slid a colorful drawing across his desk. It was a picture of a happy little monster. "Hi, Sam," she whispered kindly. "I like your blue hoodie."



Sam's eyes widened behind his glasses. He looked at the drawing, then at Lily, a tiny spark of surprise in his usually downcast gaze. He didn't say anything, but a faint blush spread across his cheeks. It was the first time someone had noticed him.



Lily pointed to a funny detail on her monster. Sam, still quiet, carefully pointed to a similar monster he had drawn, tucked away in his backpack. A small, almost invisible smile played on his lips as Lily gasped with delight.



Lily started telling a funny story about her monster, making silly noises. Sam listened, his shoulders relaxing. Suddenly, a little giggle bubbled out of him, a sound he hadn't made all day. Lily's smile grew even wider.



At afternoon recess, Sam didn't hide under the tree. He and Lily were busy building a magnificent sandcastle together, complete with tiny flags made from leaves. Sam even offered a small plastic shovel to another child who wanted to help.



The next morning, Sam walked into school, his blue hoodie still comfy, but his backpack wasn't clutched tightly anymore. He waved a confident little wave at Lily, who was waiting by the door. A big, happy smile lit up his face, ready for a bright new day.