

## **Broken but Brave Together**

By Mishara Sarkar

Tyra felt anxious every morning.

It was not because she had to wake up early or because she disliked school. She feared mornings because mornings meant going beyond the big open door.

Every day, her mother woke her up at 06:30. Their new apartment still smelled like paint because they had moved to the city only a few days ago. The house still needed to be in order.

"Time to get ready, sweetheart," her mother would say softly.

Tyra obeyed, even when her stomach felt tight and nervous.

She knew her parents were worried about her. One night, she heard her mother talking quietly to her father in the kitchen.

"We have to leave early for work. The school has agreed to let her come early. The principal says that with time, Tyra will adjust. But her therapy cannot stop, and I need to work longer shifts so we can pay for it."

Tyra covered her little body with her warm blanket after hearing that.

Condition.

She knew about it already. She had once seen the letters written on a paper after coming home from the hospital.

CP.

Cerebral Palsy. 7-year-old Tyra did not know what it meant. But she knew it was her condition. The reason she couldn't walk or talk like the other children.

Her legs sometimes shook when she walked, and words often got stuck in her mouth. But the thing Tyra hated most was none of these.

It was crowds.

Too many sounds together made her feel scared inside. Children laughing, shouting, running, and talking all at once felt like loud drums inside her head.

That was why she reached school every morning at eight o'clock, long before everyone else.

The playground was empty then. Silent and safe.

Tyra loved the swings. She would swing slowly while the cool wind touched her face. For a little while, she felt calm.

But every morning at exactly 9:10, the big front door opened. Children rushed inside loudly. Shoes squeaked. Bags bumped. Voices filled the air. Tyra always closed her eyes before the door opened. Then she swung higher and faster, letting the sound of the wind cover the noise around her. Only after things became quiet again would she get off the swing and walk slowly to class. She always sat in the same place. It was the back corner near the window.

One week became two. Then a whole month passed.

Tyra hardly ever spoke to anyone, maybe to a teacher once in a while. Nobody really spoke to her either. Some children stared at the way she walked. Others giggled at how slowly she answered questions. Most just ignored her. Tyra thought maybe it was easier that way, to remain ignored and invisible.

But one Monday felt different.

The sky was cloudy, and the air smelled like rain. Tyra sat on her swing as usual.

Back and forth.

Back and forth.

At 9:10, she heard the big door begin to open.

Her hands tightened around the swing chains.

She shut her eyes.

Then suddenly she heard a voice nearby.

“He-he-hello.” It was a soft and stuttered greeting.

Tyra slowed down.

She opened her eyes a little.

A small boy stood beside the swing looking up at her. He was almost her height and he was wearing leg braces. He looked nervous too.

“M-my n-name... Aa-adi,” he said.

Tyra stopped the swing completely.

For a moment, neither of them spoke.

Then the boy smiled. It felt warm and kind. Tyra slowly climbed off the swing.

“Hhhi,” she replied very softly. The word sounded weird, but the boy did not laugh.

Instead, he held out his hand toward her.

Tyra looked for a few seconds. Nobody at school had ever done that before. Around them, children were still entering through the big door loudly, but somehow the noise did not feel so scary anymore. Or maybe she felt a bit braver today. Tyra slowly placed her hand into his.

“W-wanna wa-wa-walk?” Aadi asked.

Tyra looked at the giant door ahead of them. The same door she feared every day.

But today she was not alone. Together, they walked toward it.

Their steps were uneven. Their words were broken. But side by side, they felt strong.

And beyond the open door, Tyra did not find fear waiting for her. She found a friendship that felt safe despite the broken words!