



7 to 10
YEARS

BUILDING BEAUTIFUL INSIDE

THE SELFIE SUITCASE

A Story by Arkedelic

Parents' Guide

STUDENT CON

THE SELFIE SUITCASE

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THE SELFIE SUITCASE

“Don’t!” Jane ducked behind Mario just as Nik raised his phone.

“But it’s a group shot!” Nik protested, camera still in the air.

“I said no.” Her voice was flat. Final.

Mario, now acting as a walking photo shield, gave a helpless shrug. “She’s been like this since we got off the train.”

It was true. On the first morning of their long-awaited hill vacation, Jane had already avoided two selfies, a family photo near the misty valley, and even a boomerang with Sam at the breakfast buffet. She kept tugging at her sleeves, adjusting her ponytail, and walking slightly behind everyone, like a shadow that didn’t want to be seen.

“Alright,” said Sid, always the diplomat. “Let’s click one without her. She can join if she feels like it.”

She didn’t.



That afternoon, the family gathered on the picnic lawn near the hill resort. Cousins ran across the grass, grown-ups opened snack boxes, and someone started a game of charades. Jane sat beside her cousin Anika, quietly pulling at her oversized hoodie.

“You okay?” Anika asked, passing her a handful of trail mix.

Jane shrugged. “I just don’t want to be in photos.”

Anika tilted her head. “Can I tell you a secret?” She pulled out her phone and opened the gallery. “This is me. Last year. I hated every picture.”

Jane peered at the screen. The girl in the picture looked nothing like the confident Anika beside her now. She looked stiff. Unsure. Almost like—



“Was it the way you looked?” Jane asked hesitantly.

“No,” said Anika. “It was the way I felt I looked. And the more I stared, the worse it got. My smile looked weird. My eyebrows didn’t match. I hated the mole on my cheek. But nobody else saw all that. Only me.”

Jane was quiet for a moment. “But what if other people do notice?”

Anika grinned. “Then they notice. And then they move on. People are too busy fixing their own sleeves and hiding their own moles to care for long.”

The next day, the group trekked to “Sunpoint Cliff,” a gentle trail that led to the most scenic overlook in the valley. The wind was

cold and clean. Everyone was laughing — except Jane, who hung back again.

At the top, Sid pulled out the Squad flag they always carried on trips — a hand-painted cloth with their names and a sun with sunglasses.

“Tradition,” he said, waving it.

“Group photo time!” Mario yelled, already forming a human pyramid.

Jane took a step back.

“Come on, Jane!” said Sam. “No pressure. But also... lots of pressure. We need your head to complete the sunshine!”

Jane hesitated.

Then Anika, already in position, made space with a smile. “We’re not perfect. Just photogenic in our own weird ways.”

Jane looked down at her shoes, then up at her friends — all grinning, wind-blown, muddy, mismatched, joyful.

For the first time in two days, she laughed. “Fine. One photo. But just one.”

Snap.





And just like that, the sun
came out — both in the sky, and in her chest.

Later that night, tucked under thick blankets, Jane opened her suitcase. She took out a polka-dotted pouch she hadn't touched all trip. Inside were sunglasses, scrunchies, a lip gloss she never used, and a tiny note she had scribbled to herself weeks ago: "Smile. But only if you look nice."

She read it again. Then slowly, she tore it up and let the pieces fall into the wastebin by the bed.

From now on, she decided, her smile didn't need permission.

Not even from herself.
THE END

VALUES FROM THE STORY



1. How can I support my child when they feel self-conscious about their body, face, or looks?

Context in the story: Jane avoids being photographed during the entire family holiday. She hides behind others, checks her reflection obsessively, and refuses to be seen. Her self-consciousness isn't loud. It's quiet and isolating. The turning point comes when her cousin Anika shares her own experience of feeling uncomfortable with her looks, helping Jane see that how we feel about ourselves can distort how we think others see us.

Real-world connection: Many children today struggle with how they look in photos, especially in a world filled with filters and social media expectations. Feeling self-conscious can cause them to withdraw, avoid memories, or develop shame around perfectly normal features.

How parents can use the story: This story gives parents a gentle way to talk about appearance-related anxiety. You can use it to open conversations about your child's self-image, including fears about looking "wrong" or being judged. It also helps normalize these feelings without magnifying them — offering stories, examples, and quiet validation instead of correction. Rather than focusing on "you look fine," focus on how feelings can distort perception and how self-kindness often begins when we hear someone else say, "Me too."



2. How can I help my child stay positive — even when it's hard to feel that way?

Context in the story: Jane's mood is noticeably damp throughout the vacation. Her self-doubt colours the entire experience, keeping her from enjoying group moments. But she begins to shift — not through a pep talk or forced optimism — but through empathy, perspective, and shared stories from Anika.

Real-world connection: Positivity isn't always about cheerfulness. For children, especially those prone to self-criticism, staying positive can mean holding space for hope even when something feels awkward, ugly, or hard. Stories like this show that positivity often begins from connection, not correction.

How parents can use the story: Use this moment to show that positivity isn't a forced smile. It's the courage to come back into the moment after feeling low. Encourage your child to talk about when they've "opted out" of something due to how they felt inside. Share times from your own life when someone helped you see things differently. By modeling honesty and recovery, not just cheer, you give children a real-life tool to reframe their inner voice when it's harsh.





3. How can I help my child feel good about themselves instead of comparing with others?

Context in the story: Though Jane never says it out loud, her comparison is implicit — she’s constantly adjusting her appearance, hiding behind Mario, and avoiding cameras in situations where everyone else seems carefree. Through Anika’s story and the Squad’s warm encouragement, she begins to see that confidence isn’t about matching others — it’s about coming into your own light.

Real-world connection: Children often compare their looks, bodies, or smiles with peers or family members, especially when photos, social media, or extended gatherings amplify those comparisons. These feelings can build silently and deeply affect how they participate in social life.

How parents can use the story: This story can spark a rich conversation about comparison without needing to mention it directly. Ask your child what they think Jane was feeling, and if they’ve ever wanted to hide from a picture or event. Encourage them to notice things they admire about themselves — not just in appearance, but in spirit and courage. Keep praise grounded in who they are, not just how they look. And if you notice comparison creeping in, offer empathy first, and reassurance second.

Assessment Questions for “The Selfie Suitcase”



Q1. Why did Jane avoid every photo during the trip?

Purpose: To help children recognise how self-criticism can distort how they see themselves.

Follow-up: Have you ever felt like hiding from a picture or a moment because you didn't feel “good enough”?

Q2. How did Anika help Jane see her feelings differently?

Purpose: To show that empathy and shared experiences can help replace shame with courage.

Follow-up Has anyone ever said “I felt that way too” and made you feel less alone?

Q3. What did Jane notice when she looked at her friends on the cliff?

Purpose: To teach that “no” isn’t only for danger, it’s part of mutual respect.

Follow-up: What helps you remember that you don’t have to look like everyone else to belong?

Q4. What did Jane do with the note she had written, and what did that mean?

Purpose: To show that the words we tell ourselves can shape how we feel.

Follow-up: If you wrote a new note to yourself today, what would it say?

Q5. How did Jane’s smile at the end of the story feel different from before?

Purpose: To remind children that self-acceptance starts when we stop waiting for approval.

Follow-up: When do you feel most like your true self — not trying, just being?

See you next Monday with another interesting story!

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