



7 to 10
YEARS

BUILDING BEAUTIFUL INSIDE

THE EMPTY DESK

A Story by Arkedelic

Parents' Guide

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THE EMPTY DESK

Dhru was just... gone.

One day he was there, sitting beside Sid, carefully sharpening his pencils and offering half of his guava candy.

The next day, his desk was empty.

No explanation. No farewell. Just a quiet announcement from the teacher: "Dhru has had to leave school. Let's all wish him well."

Wish him well?

Sid stared at the desk. The pencil marks were still there. The little sticker Dhru had stuck under the edge was still stuck. The space felt exactly the same.

Except it didn't.

By lunch, the Sunshine Squad was already buzzing.

"Maybe he moved cities," said Jane, unwrapping her sandwich.

"Maybe his parents are spies," said Nik. "And they had to go off-grid."



“Maybe he’s sick,” said Sam. “Or something happened.”

“I don’t care,” Sid muttered. “He’s gone.”

Mario blinked. “You okay?”

“I’m fine.”

But Sid wasn’t fine.

He didn’t join the Squad in the park that afternoon.

He didn’t laugh when Nik did his ostrich-dance in the corridor.

He didn’t finish his milk at lunch. Which, for Sid, was practically a national emergency.

By Wednesday, even the teacher noticed. “Sid, you’ve been quiet this week.”



Sid shrugged.

On Thursday, he didn’t come to school.

The Squad gathered at Sam’s house after class.

“He’s not sick,” Mario said, holding up Sid’s text. “He said he ‘just didn’t feel like it.’”

“That’s not Sid,” Sam frowned.

Jane nodded. “He’s stuck.”

“Should we go over?” Nik asked. “We bring snacks, Sid opens up, we all cry, cue happy music?”

So they did.

They showed up at Sid’s house with biscuits, a sketchbook, and a box of sour lemon candy that Sid couldn’t resist.

His mom smiled. “He’s in his room. Hasn’t wanted to talk much. Maybe you all can help.”

They found Sid lying on his stomach, staring at the ceiling.

Jane walked in like a hurricane. “Right. We’ve had enough of mopey-Sid. Time for a game.”

“No thanks,” Sid mumbled.

Nik tried next. “Want to hear my latest theory about Dhru being a space alien whose mission ended?”

“No.”

Sam sat down gently. “Do you miss him?”

Silence.

Then, barely audible: “Yes.”

The room grew still.

“He was my friend,” Sid whispered. “Not the loud, crazy kind. But... the small, steady kind. He let me borrow his pens. We made up those silly paper flip games. He helped me learn the 7 times table. And now he’s just... gone.”

“Did he say goodbye?” Mario asked.

“No. No message. Nothing.”

“That’s the worst,” said Jane softly. “When there’s no ending, just a gap.”

Sid blinked hard.

Then he sat up. “I don’t even know where he is.”

“You don’t have to,” said Sam. “To remember him.”

They pulled out the sketchbook.





“Let’s make a page,” Mario said. “For Dhru. Like a memory journal.”

They each drew something.

Sid sketched Dhru’s exact pencil box — down to the nick on the corner.

Nik doodled a detective badge (“in case we ever go looking for him”).

Jane wrote, “You were the calm in Sid’s storm.”

Mario printed, “Not all friends need to stay forever to matter forever.”

Sam folded a little paper kite and pasted it on. “For when goodbyes take the wind out of you.”

By the time Sid smiled, it was the kind that wobbled a little.

But it was real.

“Thanks,” he whispered. “He was quiet. Most people didn’t even notice him. But I did.”

Mario patted his shoulder. “And now you helped all of us know him too.”

Back in school, the desk next to Sid stayed empty for another week.

Then someone new came in.

Sid didn’t move his chair. Didn’t shift away.

He smiled at the new boy and offered him half a guava candy.

THE END

VALUES FROM THE STORY



1. How do I support my child through loss or sadness, especially when they don't understand why it happened?

Context in the story:

Sid experiences a quiet but very real kind of loss when his deskmate Dhru leaves without warning or goodbye. There's no explanation, no closure — just absence. Sid's sadness becomes hard to name, so he withdraws emotionally and physically from others until the Squad helps him process the grief in their own gentle way.

Real-world connection:

Not all loss in a child's life looks dramatic. A friend moving away, a teacher leaving, or an abrupt change in routine can trigger grief that adults often overlook. These experiences still matter deeply to children, even when there's no big event to mark them.

How parents can use the story:

This story helps parents recognise that grief in children isn't always loud. It can show up as quiet withdrawal, loss of interest, or even unexplained fatigue. Rather than brushing off the change as “not a big deal,” this story encourages validating those feelings. Parents can create rituals of remembrance like drawing a picture, writing a note, telling a memory that help children name and honour their feelings, even without closure. These small acts give the child agency in their grief and help them carry love forward, not confusion.



2. How can I support my child through changes like shifting schools or saying goodbye to close friends?

Context in the story:

Dhru's sudden departure triggers an emotional imbalance in Sid. The fact that he had no time to prepare, no chance to say goodbye, and no understanding of where or why Dhru left, makes the change even harder. The Squad recognises this and helps Sid navigate the emotional weight of losing a friend without warning.

Real-world connection:

School-age friendships play a significant role in children's emotional stability. When a friend moves away or leaves abruptly, it can feel like a piece of their world has gone missing. These goodbyes, especially unspoken ones, can be deeply unsettling.

How parents can use the story:

This story can guide parents in helping children acknowledge and respond to difficult transitions. Even if a child doesn't cry or speak about it, behavioural changes (withdrawing from social activities, avoiding routines) may signal unresolved emotion. Parents can talk about the friend, invite the child to express what they miss, and reassure them that missing someone is normal and healthy. Helping a child welcome new people, while still holding space for those they've lost, is a powerful lesson in emotional flexibility.





3. How can I help my child when they're kind but always get taken for granted?

Context in the story:

Sid's friendship with Dhru wasn't loud or flashy — it was built on quiet acts of kindness, like sharing pens and creating flip games. But when Dhru leaves, there's no acknowledgment of their friendship, no farewell — it's as though their connection never existed. That erasure deepens Sid's sadness and shows how quiet, kind children are often emotionally overlooked.

Real-world connection:

Children who are quietly kind, not assertive, attention-seeking, or loud, often form deep but understated bonds. When these relationships shift or break, their grief can feel invisible to others. These children may internalise the feeling that their kindness isn't noticed or remembered.

How parents can use the story:

This story invites parents to affirm the emotional value of quiet kindness. If your child feels overlooked or unimportant in a friendship, acknowledge how much it takes to care for someone deeply. Reflect with them on the impact they made, even if the other person didn't say goodbye. Let them know that being kind isn't about being remembered perfectly; it's about being true to who they are. Help them honour that connection privately, through writing, drawing, or rituals, so they feel seen and validated in their loss.

Assessment Questions for “The Empty Desk”

1. Parent Prompt:

“How do you think it feels when someone you care about leaves without saying goodbye?”

Purpose:

To help your child recognise and name the emotions that come with sudden, unexplained changes in relationships.

Follow-Up:

Use Sid’s feelings about Dhru’s disappearance to talk about the mix of confusion, sadness, and even frustration that can happen. Reassure your child that these feelings are normal and worth sharing, even if they don’t have all the answers.



2. Parent Prompt:

“What’s one way you could remember a friend who isn’t around anymore?”

Purpose:

To encourage healthy coping through memory and tribute.

Follow-Up:

Discuss the Squad’s idea of making a memory page for Dhru. Invite your child to think about their own rituals — drawing, writing a note, telling a story — as a way of honouring someone they miss.

3. Parent Prompt:

“Do you think you can make space for new friends while still caring about old ones?”

Purpose:

To build emotional flexibility and openness to new relationships.

Follow-Up:

Reflect on how Sid eventually welcomed the new boy without forgetting Dhru. Help your child see that welcoming new people doesn't erase old bonds — it simply adds more connections.

4. Parent Prompt:

“What would you do if a friend didn't explain why they left or stopped talking to you?”

Purpose:

To help your child think about healthy ways to process uncertainty in relationships.

Follow-Up:

Talk about how closure isn't always possible, but creating their own goodbye or memory can still bring comfort. Reinforce that unanswered questions don't mean the friendship wasn't important.

5. Parent Prompt:

“Why do you think even quiet friendships can mean a lot?”

Purpose:

To help your child appreciate the value of subtle, consistent acts of kindness in relationships.

Follow-Up:

Use Dhru and Sid's quiet friendship as an example. Ask your child to share a time when a friend's small but steady actions made a big difference. Remind them that not all friendships need to be loud to be meaningful.

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with another interesting story!



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