



The Glue Jar

By Aarti Gupta

Memory can play cruel tricks on the mind. It will have you record some of the most insignificant details and lose the ones that you would do anything to remember.

Like any other day at St. Mary's Convent School, we were all sitting in our neat, straight rows, faithfully doing the task assigned. The boys were in their gray pants and the girls in gray, pleated, knee-length skirts. Everyone was wearing a white, long-sleeved shirt with the school name and symbol embroidered in maroon and gold on the pocket. Tiny feet in black shoes kicked through empty space because of legs too short to reach the floor. The daily pattern was interrupted when a messenger from an older class entered.

"Class, I will return in a few minutes. I want you to continue with the social studies lesson. When you are done gluing the continents down, color in the oceans blue because on a map, blue means water. OK? Monitor One, you are in charge until I return." And with that, Miss Needhi left.

I wonder where she's going. Teachers get to have all the fun. This is too sticky and gooey. Can't we cut out more shapes? Elmer's glue makes a big mess. The brush glue bottle would make this easier.

"I should get one of those glue jars with a brush in it. That would make it so much easier!" I offered this random thought to no one in particular.

"What are you talking about?"

I turned in the direction of the voice. It was the boy behind me. He had short black hair that formed a straight line across his forehead. His skin was wan and pale, a great contrast against his hair.

There's something about him. What is it? Oh, I remember. He's Miss Needhi's nephew. Yes, that's it.

"I said that if I had one of those glue bottles that

come with a brush, it wouldn't be so hard to glue these things down. The brush would spread the glue better."

"I'm not deaf! I heard what you said. But what glue bottle with a brush are you talking about? There's no such thing," he stated coolly, as if he had all the knowledge in the world.

"Yes, there is!"

"No, there's not, because I would have seen it if there was one."

"What's all the noise back there? Don't make me come back there!" threatened the monitor with the power he now possessed. Usually he was very quiet and kept to himself. Absolute power corrupts absolutely.

Why do boys always think that they're so smart and important? If they were so smart, they wouldn't act so stupid. Next year when I get the highest grade on the final exam, I'll be the monitor and then I'll show them what a real monitor is supposed to be like!

Silence. Then a few seconds later I said, "I've seen one of those glue jars."

"I bet you haven't!" said Miss Needhi's nephew.

"I bet you I could even get one of those."

"How can you get something that isn't real?"

"I'll bet you anything that I can bring one in tomorrow."

"Fine. The bet's on."

"Fine," I agreed.

We were too young to realize that in order for a bet to work there needs to be a wager.

What was I doing? What was I thinking? Where had I seen that bottle? I knew I'd seen it, but where? Or was that a dream? Maybe I could take a stick and tie some bristles to it and then put it in a jar full of glue.

With these thoughts in my head, I started my walk home. That walk home



was, and still is, a blur in my mind. I didn't notice anything on that walk because all that mattered was getting that glue bottle—one way or another. I didn't even notice that I had reached my house until my sister nearly pounced on me, asking if I wanted to play. I was unsuccessful in finding a glue bottle with a brush, and I was unable to tie some bristles onto a stick.

On the way to school the next morning, I again became absorbed in my thoughts, this time trying to think of excuses for my failure.

I know what I'll say. I'll say that the bottle broke on my way to school and that was the only bottle I had.

As I stood in the doorway to the classroom, the excuse no longer seemed valid. It was darker in there than it had ever seemed before. Taking a deep breath, a very deep breath, I entered, preparing for the humiliating defeat ahead. I scanned the room for my adversary.

He's not here. Maybe he got scared because he thought I'd bring one in! I feel so happy. Why is everyone so loud? Where's Miss Needhi and the sister? Shouldn't we be learning something right now?

"Guess what? Guess what?" the girl closest to the door asked me.

"What? What?" I replied, slowly catching the excitement in the room.

"Miss Needhi's nephew is dead! You know, the boy who sat behind you. His little brother scared him when he was at the top of some stairs in their house, and he fell down. They were taking him to the hospital. The road was really bumpy so the car kept bouncing up and down, up and down, and so he died in the car."

That day everyone was let out of school at noon. That was an unprecedented event. Never before, to my knowledge, had the school been closed without a holiday explanation.

Why do boys always think they're so smart and important? If they were so smart, they wouldn't act so stupid.

The babysitter was startled to see me home so soon. After a thorough interrogation about the event, she left me to myself. I was very sorry that Miss Needhi's nephew had died. I knew what death was. I wasn't stupid. It was when someone can never come back. I was six years old. He didn't know he had won; he never would know. Still, I hadn't quite lost, had I? I was sorry and happy at the same time. That was all the thought I

gave to the matter—then.

The next day one of the sisters came to see our class. She was new. I could tell because I had never seen her before. Her white wimple was freshly starched and there were a few strands of black hair—escapees from her tight bun—all around her face. With rosary beads in one hand and the forefinger of the other hand on her lips, she quieted the class.

“Miss Needhi's nephew is dead! You know, the boy who sat behind you. His little brother scared him when he was at the top of some stairs and he fell down.”

"As you all know, Miss Needhi's nephew passed away two days ago. She loved him very much. Right now, she's very sad. You all can make cards for her, to make her feel better. Inside them write, *We will miss him dearly. He was a good boy.* Here—I'll write it on the board for you to copy. You can give them to Miss Needhi when she returns tomorrow."

We all set to the task as if it were a math lesson, instead of a showing of sympathy and sorrow.

Miss Needhi was surrounded by twenty-nine children the next day, all eager to offer their tokens of sympathy. I was not one of the twenty-nine. I was standing aside, the last person in line. Unlike the others, I wasn't very eager to give her my card. I hesitated. The pattern broken, she looked at me. Her gaze focused on mine. Her eyes were small, swollen, and red. I didn't know what that meant. All I knew was that there was something wrong.

This doesn't feel right. Maybe I should say something to her. Maybe I should tell her about the glue jar. Should I tell her I didn't really know him?

Then the sister came to stand next to me. She was silently instructing me to give Miss Needhi the card. I quietly surrendered my false sympathy; Miss Needhi, knowing her part in this formality, quietly took it. Like all the other twenty-nine children, I'd written, *We will miss him dearly. He was a good boy*, even though it was a lie. How did I know he was good? I had never spoken to him before. In fact, I did not even know the meaning of "dearly."

In doing as I was told and following everyone else, I have most likely been forgotten by Miss Needhi. Yet, I

have not forgotten her. Miss Needhi was never quite the same after that, especially toward our class. She was cold, just as cold as our thirty identical cards must have been to her. However, that is not the only factor contributing to my residual guilt. Over the past ten years I have forgotten his name. Hard as I try, I cannot remember it. Had I ever known it? After ten years, I'm not even sure of that. ★

Miss Dickinson, You and I Would Not Have Been Chums

You're nobody? How very sad—
To live a life so flat
That you must scurry from the world
Like a mouse before a cat.

How lonely to be nobody
Oblivion can't make you free—
How much you missed by taking refuge
In transparency.

I love Earth's glorious expanse
And all its flaws could not
Persuade me to hide in a universe
No bigger than my garden plot.

When I emerge from my cocoon,
I'll be a butterfly
With freedom to sip from every flower
That blooms under Creation's sky.

But you emerged a small plain moth
To waste your precious days
In flitting from your own race,
From its fire's intense gaze.

Or did your chrysalis ever crack
Until the day you died?
Perhaps you spent the rest of your years
A child rapt up inside.

Where was the color in your life
When all you wore was white?
Why were you content to be a moth—
To stare longingly into the light?

Still, Miss Dickinson, though we may be
As different as day and night
We share one essential in our souls—
You and I both live to write.

—Elizabeth Swiney,
Ninth grade, School of St. Mary,
Tulsa, Oklahoma

Dreams From France

Sluggish July twelfth and sifting
through the mess
of her headache,
it was hot so humid hot her last day in France
that the language
dripped off her like sweat,
all the words
she used to know
splattering mispronounced
on the cobblestones of
that ancient city.

Dryly the remnants of July twelfth
pounded through her
gateless window;
one final hour
en français and
he appeared for dinner,
pushed the shadows around on his plate with
the bent tines of a cafeteria fork.

Perhaps it was not just she
who had forgotten how to talk.
There were no words on his plate,
no matter which corner he banished his food to.
The two of them misplaced their vocabulary,
accidentally let it fall
over the windowsill of her room
with the ashes of a crumpled cigarette.
She would say,
"hier soir, hier soir . . ."
and she would say
it can't be over. I need another dance—
I need to stay in France and live in French,
and she would say, if she knew the way
to place her lips and tongue in order to speak,
speak to me,
but useless she could not penetrate the silence,
she found no words and time was passing:
he knew no language and the minutes clacked,
the minutes clicked on
(*ne pars pas, ne pars pas*)
quietly July
twelfth
dissolved from her.

—Maggie Goodman,
Eleventh grade, Lakeridge High School,
Lake Oswego, Oregon

