

CUDDLES

(by Suruchi Puri)

Chapter-1

Arrival

It was a damp night. The last evening sizzled with showers, enough to soak an elephant. Dad's snoring was making me a helpless creature. I just couldn't sleep with that heavy noise. Just then, a sudden crack added to my surprise. 'Who on the earth would be here at this time?' I lifted myself off the bed to have a glimpse of the stranger.

The clock struck sharp 12 at the midnight. I tiptoed in the corridor. The new guest had already given his sign of arrival. A bleak voice followed by a raucous bark dashed through my ears. I was wondering how to tackle the situation when the voice again convulsed and disappeared. It seemed that the new guest and me were playing hide and seek in the wee hours of midnight. I followed the footsteps and to my surprise, I saw a tail wagging. I leapt forward and last but not the least, I met the alien. He was a little white German shepherd pup. I wanted to give him space so that he could come meeting me at his own will. He realized my movement in a short span of time and thus, I found a new companion in the world.

I dashed towards the bathroom and got myself with a towel. Mom shirked for I was going to make an awful use of it. But I didn't respond. I put the towel on his body and rubbed gently. In a few minutes, he was wiped off completely. By the time, I prepared some milk and poured it into a bowl. The bowl was presented by my aunt on my birthday. It was gifted so that I could put down my chocolates in it. She knew how much I loved chocolates. But I thought to make use of it in a different manner. Mom was getting hot tempered by seeing all the activities going around her. She complained but I didn't care.

The entire night, the new companion had put us awake. I decided to make him stay in my house. I had no brothers and sisters, nor too many friends in the locality. So his presence was likely to make me feel more joyful. Now, at least I had someone with whom I could share my happiness and sorrows.

The very next morning, I quickly packed my school bag and bid goodbye to my new friend. He barked in a low voice and wagged his tail. Probably, he was thankful to me as he found a new family to live with.

On reaching the school, I went straight to my class. Alice and Lusy were already there busy chatting. I was very excited to tell them about the previous night incident. I threw my bag and joined the group. After waiting for my turn to come, I bursted out and spoke at length.

“So, now you have a new companion at home!” Alice said.

“Ya!” I said.

“How at are you planning to take care of him?” Lusy asked in a soft voice.

“I am planning to purchase some good dog care books from my pocket money.” I said in a jublious manner.

Chapter-2

Christening

That evening, I invited all my friends to my home. Alice, Lusy, Jack and Peter came with loads of gifts in their hands.

“Hi!” Lusy said.

“Hi!” I said.

“Where is the newcomer?” Peter asked.

“He is in the corridor. Come and meet him.” I replied in a delightful manner.

We went together towards the corridor to have a glimpse of the stranger.

“Wow! He’s so handsome!” Jack remarked.

The pup was indeed of fond beauty. He was a little bundle of fur. Everyone agreed he was a strange looking puppy. His face was a pitch black but the rest of his body, except for the patch on his back and smaller one around his tail area, was as white as snow. Don’t get me wrong, he wasn’t ugly; on the contrary, he was an adorable bundle whom you just wanted to squeeze and love. His teeth, which were pearly white, were revealed in a grin which frightened my friends. I instructed the pup not to show his anger. Soon, he realized that the guests are indeed my known ones. He wagged his tail and barked in a bleak voice. Jack patted him.

Soon, we all were sitting across the dining table, tasting the tomato soup garnished with coriander.

“Hey! The soup is too good to resist!” Peter said.

“Ya! He’s right!” Alice added.

“So what are your plans?” Lusy asked.

“I couldn’t understand. What plans dear?” I asked.

“I mean to say, what are you thinking about giving the name to the pup?” Lusy explained.

“Oh! I still don’t know! Can you suggest me with some interesting names?” I pleaded.

“Why not to search the names on the net?” Peter said.

“Ya! It’s a good idea!” I said.

We turned on the computer. More than a thousand names were on display. We all had different preferences. With no similar views, we got confused. Just then, the pup came running after us. Alice took him in her lap and hugged gently.

Just then, an idea struck my mind. I thought to give the name ‘Cuddles’ to the pup. I shared my viewpoint with others. ‘Cuddle’ means to hug in an affectionate manner.’

Jack thought it to be a brilliant name. Ultimately, it was decided that the stranger would be named ‘Cuddles’. We all felt proud to choose such a name for our dear one.

“Your dog will have an identity crisis with that kind of name.” Peter winked.

We laughed. Cuddles woofed and wagged his tail. Probably, he was listening!

Chapter-3

Bath

It was Sunday and I decided to take Cuddles under the shower for a bath. I purchased a special dog shampoo from a saloon. I thought that a bath would probably give respite to Cuddles from the hot weather. I took him under the bath tub and switched on the shower.

“Bow! Bow!” his voice croaked.

I massaged shampoo all over his body. Then, I washed him out. I had already kept the towel ready. I wiped off his body gently till it was dry. It was a nice experience for him.

But the very evening, a horrible thing happened. ‘Cuddles’ was nowhere to be found. I thought he may have gone to Alice’s house. But he wasn’t there also. We even searched him in the nearby park and market but to no avail. We shuffled from one place to another but all gone waste.

We came back home dejectedly. To our surprise, Cuddles greeted us in his sweet voice. But to our dismay, he was covered all over with mud. Moreover, an awful stench was coming from him. I felt like hitting him. I realized that I bathed him that morning only but seeing him in this condition, I thought all my efforts had gone waste. I could hardly believe my eyes for what Cuddles had done to himself.

I took my forehead in my hands and looked towards Alice. She smiled and comforted me. Now, I knew, I had to do the entire process of cleaning him up again. The sheer thought shuddered me. But there was no other option.

Chapter- 4

The drops

That day, we slept till late in the morning. It was actually Sunday. So, none of us had the tensions either to go to office or school. We sorted out many plans to spend the holiday. Dad wanted to enjoy his evening in the theatre where the show 'Romeo and Juliet' was playing. On the other hand, mom had a different opinion. She had plans to go out and watch the art works of M.F.Hussain, showcased at India Habitat Centre. Probably, no one had the time to listen to what I wanted to say. I had thought to spend my day at the awesome 'Fun and Food' village with my entire family. I still remember the time when we had last gone there. Not only the rides but off course the yummy food was too good to resist.

After much heated argument, ultimately, it was Dad who won the toss. It was agreed that the day would be spent at the theatre watching the play. Perhaps, I would call it a boring one indeed. But there was no other option.

Mom started preparing food to take away with. Sandwiches, biscuits and wafers- all were ready in a jiffy. In our talks, we forgot Cuddles. I reminded my parents about him. Now, we couldn't take him along with us. Mom decided that he would stay back at home.

Cuddles ears' drooped a little, listening to these words. I never wanted to leave him alone. But I had to comply with my parents' words. The very next moment, we stepped out of the house with our packets and lo! The first drop of rain fell on my cheeks. No sooner, it started to pour down heavily. Probably, all our plans went under water.

'Cuddles' was too happy to receive such nature's gift. He knew that now he wouldn't be left alone in the house. Dad became very angry with the sudden downpour. None of us had ever expected it.

With a heavy heart, we went inside the house. The food which was meant to be taken with was unpacked and no sooner, I and Cuddles attacked on it. We ate all. Mom didn't say anything.

As storm clouds came together and gusts of wind shake coconut trees, Cuddles got very excited and his chuckle changed to a sweet melodious bark.

"Woof! Woof!" he screamed and as the first drops of rain hit the verandah steps and scent of fresh earth, passed through the house, he started roaring. It was a welcome spell of rain which brought a respite from sweltering heat. Perhaps 'Cuddles' enjoyed every drop of unexpected shower.

Chapter-5

Chase

I just came back from school and flung my bag on the sofa. Mom was busy preparing the food. I dashed into the kitchen.

“How was your day at school?” mom asked.

“Oh! It was great. Today I had my Mathematics exam. I solved all the questions and scored full marks.” I said.

“What are u preparing for today?” I added.

“Koftas with rice! I hope you would lick the chops!”

“Ya! Sure!”

“Go and wash your hands!”

Lunch was perfectly set on the table. I and Cuddles took our positions. Cuddles would always sit close to me so that he could peep into what I am eating. He definitely had the right to know whether the same food was being served in his plate or not.

That evening, we came upon a noisy scene at our garden. Two monkeys were creating a nuisance by spoiling all our plants. We didn't know what to do. Suddenly, Cuddles came from nowhere and started chasing the monkeys. He leapt forward towards them. Monkeys got frightened and climbed to our rooftop. But this couldn't deter Cuddles from chasing them. He hurried his way upstairs. Seeing his arrival, the monkeys jumped to our neighbor's rooftop. In order to chase them, Cuddles also took a great leap from the rooftop. And lo! Thump! He fell down and broke his leg.

We felt sorry for him. Perhaps, now Cuddles knew what he had done to himself. I took him to a doctor nearby who gave him an injection. He also gave a packet of medicine to be mixed in his food.

In a fortnight, Cuddles became alright. But this incident could never fade away from my memory.

Chapter- 6

Cookies

It was Christmas Eve. All were busy preparing for the big day. This festival always remained close to my heart. It was not just because I got the gifts but also the entire family came together to share their experiences with each other. On that eve, mom and I decided to go for shopping at Spice mall. We decided to accompany Cuddles with us.

The guard at the gate stopped us to check our belongings. I knew it was just a kind of security measure. On entering, I was amazed to see the mall's alluring look. There were balloons, stars and colorful strips of paper hanging all around, giving the entire atmosphere, an exciting look.

Since it was Christmas Eve, a huge crowd could be seen thronging at the place. Cuddles became very excited. He woofed and wagged his tail.

We entered the very first shop where Christmas trees were on display. There were both big and small ones. Every year, we bought a new Christmas tree from there. Mom was having a look at them, while Cuddles sneaked out of the shop. We didn't notice his move.

We were engrossed in choosing the most suitable tree for our home. I decided to purchase a big one. Mom agreed and did the payment. After that, we went into a readymade garments shop. Mom chose a white top with a matching blue denim skirt while I chose a long brown gown, to wear on the big day. We did some other shopping and decided to return. On reaching the gate, I realized that something was missing. After a while, I realized about the disappearance of Cuddles. I cried bitterly but mom comforted me. We decided to make a hunt for him.

We peeped into every shop and went on asking everyone about him. Suddenly, we came upon a noisy scene at one shop stop. It was a bakery shop. People were shouting and brandishing sticks at some creature. We also joined the mass as curious onlookers. Soon, we came to know that the cause of uproar was none other than Cuddles. We were informed by the owner of the shop that he gulped down all chocolate cookies served for a customer.

We felt very sorry for this incident. I took Cuddles in my lap and twisted his ears to make him realize his mistake. We had no other option but to pay to the owner for the damage. We left from there in an embarrassing situation.

Chapter- 7

Winner

The summer holidays were on full bloom. I and my friends had a great time in the evenings. We used to enjoy playing badminton, kho-kho and various other sports.

There was a fountain in the nearby park. We used to play near it. We could actually feel the cool breeze passing through us. It gave us a respite from the sweltering heat and torpid summer days.

We would splatter mitti all over our hands, would count the dots on ladybirds and partnered with parakeets and barbets in their musical cacophony. Cuddles would also accompany us.

We didn't mind sharing space with the bees and the butterflies. One can say that we painted ourselves with all the colors of the wind.

That day, we decided to play a different game. We have had many fights to decide on what to play or not but none could reach to a certain conclusion.

Since Alice was the oldest among us, the decision was handed over to her. She thought for a while and reached on a conclusion that a race would be the best sport for that day. We all felt satisfied by her decision.

Jack was overconfident that he would win the race. After all, he had several trophies and cups to his credit in various sports events held in school.

We drew a line from where we had to start. A tall pole was our destination. Everyone had to touch the pole before returning to the starting point. It was Billy to whom we handed over the process of administration. He had to see whether the players are adhering to the set rules and regulations or not. In case, someone cheats, he would be disqualified from the game.

“On your marks, get set and go.” Billy announced. We set off. Jack was ahead of all. I ran with all my efforts. We all perspired heavily. Soon, we saw Jack touching the pole and moving back. We thought him to be the ultimate winner. We all were left behind. But what a surprise! Cuddles soon overtook him. He ran as fast as his short legs could take him. He soon reached the pole, touched it and started running back to the starting point. We were still behind him, panting heavily. Cuddles became the first one to touch the starting point. Jack lost the game.

We had already decided that the winner would be treated with chocolates. To add a feather in the cap, Cuddles was fond of chocolates. It

was a day of great honor for him. We all patted on his back and he enjoyed these unexpected showers of love thrown over on him.

Chapter-8

In the gardens

Before the monsoons came, the little river outside the home town was just a narrow stream. We had named it 'Sweet Spring' river. This name was given to it as several white flowers blossomed on its banks during spring. Wading across, it was an awesome experience.

Just touching the river there was an expanse of tea gardens. I often wandered through them, watching the men at work and women in their bright, sizzling pink saris, picking tea.

Cuddles would always accompany me, everywhere. He would glance at the tea pickers, often now and then.

We have had black tea in the mornings. 'Cuddles' was used to sipping tea daily. This helped him in remaining awake throughout the day. He couldn't think of skipping it even for a day.

As it happened that day, mom was churning some milk and water in the pan to prepare tea when she noticed that tea bag containing tea leaves was empty. She didn't know what to do. Market was yet not opened. So she decided to forgo tea that day.

Everyone in the family woke up. Dad became very annoyed at mom for not serving tea. But nothing could be done. I woke up, brushed my teeth and went towards dog house where Cuddles was sleeping soundly. One could hear his snoring at a long distance. Coming closer, I shouted at him. But it was of no use. He was in the habit of waking up only by the aroma of tea when poured into his mug.

Something struck me and I dashed inside the bathroom, took some water in a bowl and threw at him in a rage. 'Cuddles' was baffled. He gave me a good grin that time. But I simply ignored. He sniffed his mug, but to his dismay, it was empty.

He understood that something was wrong. I made him see the empty tea packet. He understood the entire matter. He at once, lifted himself and started walking in the north direction. I didn't know what struck his mind. I closely followed his footsteps and saw him entering the tea garden. To my surprise, I saw him plucking the leaves and putting them in one of the small baskets used by the tea workers. In no time, he boasted of a huge collection of tea leaves. Putting the basket in between his teeth, he set forth towards the home. Mom and dad became surprised at his behavior. Mom liked his attitude and 'Cuddles' was soon in her good books.

Chapter-9

Chatura

‘Cuddles’ was notorious not only among the family members, but also in the neighborhood.

There was an early onset of summers. Since I loved mangoes, I asked for the same to my dad. Dad promised to bring the mangoes for the entire family while returning from office. I became overjoyed by listening this.

I waited for dad till late in the night. He knocked the door and I was handed over a bagful of mangoes. I became jubilant. Mom had already prepared the food. We washed our hands and sat down to dine. After dinner, I opened the bag of mangoes, got them washed and distributed among the family members. That day, I was so anxious for dad to come home that I just forgot to give Cuddles, even a single meal.

I felt sorry for my behavior. I went towards Cuddles. But he just moved his face in the other direction. Probably, he was angry with me.

So, I took out a mango from the basket, got some milk and went to the kitchen. I assembled all the ingredients and in no time, prepared a yummy milkshake. I made it especially for Cuddles so that he could forgive me. I poured the shake in his mug and kept close to his nose.

He sniffed and thinking it to be delicious, gulped down the entire lot. From that very day, he became a great fan of mango milkshake. Often, he refused to drink plain milk.

One day, as it happened that Aunt Emily, our neighbor, bought some mangoes for her family. At that time, ‘Cuddles’ was roaming around here and there. The aroma of mangoes brought him inside the aunt’s house. While she was busy with her daily chores, Cuddles sneaked into the dining room where mangoes were kept.

He jumped upon the dining table, selected a big mango, put it in his mouth and came down. Meanwhile, aunt came inside the room. Seeing Cuddles, she shirked with fervor. Cuddles just slipped between her legs and ran towards home.

The door was open. I was sitting on a rocking chair enjoying the novel which I had just bought from a nearby bookstore. Cuddles just dashed into the house. He didn’t feel my presence. I saw him hiding something under the sofa in a secret manner. Perhaps, he didn’t want anyone to see his treasure hunt.

A few moments later, I saw Aunt Emily, entering the room. She was panting heavily. I feared what made her run inside the house like this. She seated herself on the sofa and asked “Where is Cuddles?”

I didn’t respond. She repeated the question again. Probably, one could catch a glimpse of her anger. I was just thinking the reason behind her question, when she again asked the question.

Ultimately, I had to speak up. “Has Cuddles done anything wrong?”

“Ya! He is a big thief!”

“But what has he done?”

“He has stolen a mango from my basket. I don’t know where he has kept it!”

Probably, now I came to know what Cuddles was hiding under the sofa at that time. I knew he would be thrashed by aunt. So, I thought it is better to keep mum and not to disclose his presence in the house.

“He hasn’t come this way!” I said.

“You are a big liar! I know he is here only. Call him at once!”

With no other option, I had to call out Cuddles. A few seconds later, he came into the scene. He was with a big fat mango held tightly in his jaws. He placed his booty besides my paw. His ears drooped a little.

I understood at once, why he had done such a thing.

I began speaking “I knew why Cuddles has done this mischief. Actually, he is used to taking mango milkshake in his daily routine. Whenever, we went to market, he would just stop aside the mangoes seller. We had no other alternative but to purchase the fruit for him.

He refused to move from there unless we made the payment to the seller and put the fruit in our safe custody. We had to often offer mango milkshake to him. Today, we didn’t have any mangoes kept in the refrigerator. He must be craving for the milkshake. So that’s why, he must have stolen one from your basket. I plead you to forgive him this time. He won’t do this again.”

Aunt Emily didn’t reply for sometime. I waited for her response. Finally, she agreed to forgive Cuddles for his deed and patted him in an affectionate manner. ‘Cuddles’ too wagged his tail. Probably, he felt ashamed and guilty of his mistake.

He repented and confessed his crime by putting his paws on aunt’s feet. We had a happy ending that day. From that very day, we named him, ‘Chatura’ meaning a person fond of appetizing and mouthwatering dishes. He was a great gobbler.

Chapter-10

Locked

It was a routine affair. I used to leave home for school early in the mornings. Cuddles would always accompany me to the bus stand. That day, as usual Alice and Jack were waiting on the bus stand. I reached there and greeted them.

“Hi! How are you?” I asked.

“Oh! I am fine!” Jack replied.

“Hi Cuddles! How do you do?” Alice questioned.

“Bow! Bow!” Cuddles woofed. He put his paws on Jack’s feet probably to greet him.

Alice patted Cuddles. She had some coconut biscuits with her. She gave two to him. Cuddles leapt forward and gulped them down in one go.

We laughed at his behavior. After all, he was named ‘Chatura’ by us. Few minutes later, our school bus came. We boarded the bus and bid farewell to Cuddles. He wagged his tail and remained at the bus stand till the bus was no longer visible to him. Then he returned back to home.

Mom usually prepared savoring boiled chicken for him. He used to eat all, leaving not even a single morsel.

After stuffing his tummy, he generally took a nap in the corridor itself. It was time for me to come back home. Mom always asked Cuddles to get up and go to the bus stand to fetch me.

That day, I took the last seat of the bus. After following a hectic schedule of studies, I was feeling tired and thus went to catch up a short nap in the bus itself. I knew that my bus stand is the last one, so was assured that I would wake up by that time.

But it so happened, that I remained asleep even when my stand came. When I got up, I saw myself in an empty bus. I screamed but there was no one to listen. The bus was locked from outside. I peeped outside the window and saw myself in a complete new surrounding. A house with a thatched roof was standing besides there. I couldn’t see anyone there.

I was wondering what to do. Just then, I saw Cuddles arriving there panting heavily. Probably, he had been chasing the bus for me.

I felt relieved by seeing a known one. I saw Cuddles roaming here and there. Perhaps, he was searching for me. I called out for him. He recognized my voice and came near the bus. I looked outside the window. He saw me

there and woofed. He understood that the bus was locked. He ran inside the house nearby and came out with a person.

I at once recognized him. He was our school bus driver. I saw Cuddles pulling his dhoti. The driver didn't understand why Cuddles was behaving like this. While coming closer to the bus, Cuddles started howling.

I called out the driver. Seeing me in trouble, he at once unlocked the bus. Out came me. I was thankful to Cuddles. The driver asked the matter and I narrated the entire incident. I didn't know my way to home but Cuddles assured me. So, I bid farewell to the driver and accompanied Cuddles. He knew the way to home as he had an excellent smelling power.

At last, we reached home safely. From that day onwards, Cuddles became my best companion ever.

Chapter- 11

History class

It was history period in the class. Mrs. Smith taught us history.

That day, we were studying about the great Indian emperors. Students were feeling bored and sleepy. It was usually a common scenario.

“Akbar and Shajahan are not anymore. Then why to take out dead bodies from their coffins?” I whispered in my friend’s ears.

“What are you murmuring?” Mrs. Smith sharp eyes bumped into mine.

“No mam! Nothing!” I said protecting myself.

Reaching home, I put down my bag carelessly. I was feeling dejected. Mrs. Smith had given a lesson to learn at home. I never liked history.

The food was ready on the dining table. I ate and went inside my room. I put down my history book in front of Cuddles and asked him to read. He too felt sleepy and dozed off. Perhaps, even he didn’t like the subject. He often howled loudly seeing the book in front of him.

I had no other option but to learn the lesson. After that, I went off to sleep. The next day, when I went to school, news flashed that mam had caught down with fever. It was announced that she would remain absent for fifteen days.

I was overjoyed by listening this.

At last, we got rid of that dreadful subject and Mrs. Smith, for some days. I told Cuddles about the incident. He too felt excited and woofed.

We celebrated the event by having sweets.

Chaptert-12

Eminent personality

Our Headmaster declared holidays for some days due to the ongoing renovation work at school. We felt excited and started making plans how to spend the holidays.

Alice and Jack suggested going on trekking. It was a great idea, only if the parents allowed.

It was decided that all of us would ask from our parents and would meet at sharp 6'o clock, the next evening, in the 'Butterfly Park'. The name of the park sounds strange. This name occurred in a person's mind when he saw several colorful butterflies hovering on the flowers, while strolling down the path.

He shared this name with other people residing nearby. They agreed and the park got the recognition.

At last, the most awaited moment came. We all were eager to share our parents' decisions. Peter and Jack replied in affirmative. But Alice declared that her parents didn't give her the permission to go to a far flung area, for trekking.

Thus, the idea to go on trekking went waste. We felt dejected and decided to turn to our homes. On our way back, we saw a peculiar poster, in the market. We just stood there and read aloud. It was regarding a dog show to be held in the Community Centre.

The winner would be handed over a trophy and a cheque of five thousand dollars.

Peter whispered something in Alice's ears. I didn't notice what he said. Alice felt jubilous.

I asked for the same. Peter and Alice gave the suggestion about the participation of Cuddles in the show. I thought it wasn't a bad idea. I agreed.

Now, the only thing was to train Cuddles for the great show. I decided to train him for the music and dance competition.

'Salsa' or 'Jazz'. I was confused. For the former, one needs to have had a partner. Since Cuddles had no girlfriend so we decided to forgo 'Salsa'.

We thought training Cuddles on Mozart's music beats. Probably this could fetch him the trophy. I also started planning about his wardrobe. Alice suggested that blue denim pant with yellow t-shirt and a light brown bow would be the best attire for him.

We started preparing for the show. Cuddles would deliberately repeat the mistakes again and again. I was his mentor and made him learn steps like dancing on two feet and wagging his tail in sync with Mozart's music beats.

It was rigorous one month training for Cuddles. In spite of his disobedient nature, he managed to memorize some good steps. Finally, the long awaited day came. We all went to the show. My friends took their respected seats. So did I. So did Cuddles. Our name was first to be announced. I took Cuddles with me.

We both reached the center-stage. The entire audience greeted both of us. Cuddles looked at me. Perhaps he was afraid to perform before so many people. But I comforted him. The performance started with Mozart's music beats. I didn't know what happened, but Cuddles just started walking leisurely and seated himself at the corner of the stage. This was not the step I had ever taught him. I wondered what he was doing. I switched on to other song for another performance. But to no avail. Cuddles seemed to stick at that place. He was getting on to my nerves. I became baffled and irritated. Cuddles didn't move from his place.

Meanwhile, the audience got annoyed and rebuked us. They started pelting stones at us. We had to leave the stage, the very moment.

I would never forget that humiliation, which I had to bear due to Cuddles, in my entire lifespan.

Chapter-13

Letter

That day, Cuddles was sleeping soundly as he was too tired. Mom had told us to bring vegetables from the market. We have had a very bad experience. We wandered for about an hour and found none of the vegetable vendor. We decided to return back. Suddenly we bumped into a vegetable vendor. Looking at him, one could say that he was in his mid-twenties. His hair was golden brown and had a short black moustache. His moustache seemed funny to his. He looked us and asked- “What do you want?”

I seemed to be lost in my thoughts. He put his question again. I replied- “1 kg tomato and half a Kg onion”. He measured and promptly gave. I handed over the money to him. Then we returned. ‘Cuddles’ was too sleepy. He just dozed off without even eating his meals. I too sat comfortably in a chair and switched on the television.

I was engrossed in watching television. Suddenly doorbell rang. I rushed to the door and opened it. It was postman. Cuddles never had any encounter with him. He just became a mute spectator and watched closely what he was doing. The postman handed over some letters to me and took my signature on a paper. He bid goodbye to me and went.

Cuddles came near me and sniffed the letters. It was a new experience for him. One letter was for dad and one for me. I opened the letter and read it. It was a school circular wherein the parents were asked to send their child for an educational trip to Shimla. I became excited and rushed towards kitchen. Mom was already there busy peeling the onions. I could see the tears rolling down her cheeks. She asked-“What is it in your hands?”

I replied-“Letter from school! Our school has organized a trip to Shimla in the forthcoming holidays. Would you allow me to go?” She remained mum for some time. I waited impatiently for her to reply. She answered- Yes! You can go!

“Hurrah!” I shouted. I had to fill the form and send it back to the concerned authority. I searched for pen and within a few minutes filled the form. I took Cuddles along with me to the post box and dropped the letter. I knew that the school authorities would send me a token number in lieu of the letter posted.

Days went by but I didn’t receive any token. In a dejected mood, I went to the school to inquire about that. I was shocked to hear the reply. I was told that the token had been sent to my home and was indeed been received by someone. I became totally confused.

I came back home and asked mom and dad about my letter containing the token. They said they didn’t have any information about my letter.

“Who on the earth has taken my letter?” I thought. I was wondering when I saw Cuddles coming back to home after playing with his friends. I was least bothered what he was doing that time. The question kept revolving my mind throughout the entire night and I couldn’t sleep.

The next day, as usual, I went to pour some tea in Cuddles’ bowl. While I did this, I came across something lying on the grass carelessly. I took it and read. To my utter shock and dismay, it was the letter from my school. It also contained the token. Now I knew that it was Cuddles who received the letter and didn’t bother to let me know about that. I felt like punishing Cuddles for his deed. It was because of his fault that I was unable to go for the trip. Controlling my temper, I asked Cuddles about the incident and showed him the torn letter which was of no use now. Cuddles remained quiet and fell into my paws. He licked my paws and wagged his tail affectionately. Seeing his behavior, I understood that he didn’t want to be separated from me for even a few days. He never liked the idea of mine going to the trip leaving behind him alone. Tears rolled down my cheeks and I cried bitterly. I didn’t know that he loved me so much. I promised him that I would never let him down. From that day onwards, we became great chums.

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