

Obviously Deceptive

Can a book really be judged by its cover? I don't know.

But I do know about Alex.

A typical lesson at my school would start off peacefully with everyone in the classroom attentively learning until around 08:45 when, just like clockwork, we would be interrupted. 3..2..1 ... 'Bang! Bang!' The door would open and Alex would emerge. He would dash to his seat and make himself as small as possible by doing that weird squat walk as everyone watched in amusement. His stained shirt would be soaked with sweat and the classmates sitting around him would cover their nose because of the ... *ahem* ... unique body odour (bold with strong hints of perspiration). 'Alex! Why can't you be punctual?' the teacher would say furiously. Alex would stare at the teacher with the same old expressionless face while other people held back their laughter.

One day during PE lesson, when Alex stepped out of the changing room, one of the naughtiest boys pointed at him and shouted, 'Watch out! That stink bomb is coming! Let's see who will be the unlucky ones to team up with him today.' As usual, Alex stood there with no intention to fight back. When I saw Alex being bullied, I wanted to defend him. But I wasn't stupid - that would make *me* the next target for ridicule and

humiliation. *Not* joining in was already a big contribution on my part. *I'm under pressure too, Alex! So, yes, you're welcome, Alex.*

It was the right thing to do – right?

It was a Monday morning and I was late for school. While I was walking briskly (sprinting recklessly) towards the school, I was blocked by an old man and a boy holding him. *Move! You're old! You have nowhere to go to anyway! Don't come out at this time.* I managed to push past them and continued toward ... *Wait ! Wasn't that.....?*

“Alex?” I had to turn back to look.

It was.

“Alex, what are you doing? We'll be late!”

“I am taking my grandpa to the daycare center. No worries! I'll rush back to school in a moment.’

Everything made sense now.

Since that day, I would talk to Alex whenever I had time. The more I chatted with him, the more I learnt about him and the dire situation he was in. We had a lot in common, but at the same time, we couldn't be more different. He grew up in a poor single-parent family home. He had to take care of his little sister and grandparent. He cleaned the house, bought groceries and even cooked for his family on a little stove at the corner of his home.

I couldn't explain it but I suddenly saw the world as something bigger than myself.

"Wow, the stinky bug has got a friend. What a miracle!" Everyone was laughing loudly. Almost instinctively, sitting next to Alex, I rose to my feet and calmly said, 'Do you really think your jokes are funny?' The class suddenly turned dead silent. The bully looked down and quietly moved away from us. Watching him walk away, I started to feel sorry for him! *Forgive him for he doesn't know what he's doing.*

Life is indeed a book. A big beautiful colouring book - it's up to us what colours to use.