

## The Garden of Calm Thoughts

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Lina was ten years old, and inside her head, thoughts spun like leaves caught in a storm. Not joyful thoughts—more like “what ifs” with sharp corners.

“What if I’ve forgotten something?”

“What if I’m in the way?”

“What if I was wrong?”

The thoughts repeated like a dripping tap at night. She smiled when others spoke to her, but inside, it was tangled and noisy. She could no longer finish a book without rereading the same paragraph three times. Even drawing—something she used to love—became stiff, like her hand didn’t trust itself anymore.

She wasn’t sad. But she was always tight. Like a knot in a rope that couldn’t loosen. Sometimes, her chest felt too small for her breath. Other times, she would stare at the ceiling at night, hoping her thoughts would fall asleep before she did.

One afternoon, after a noisy morning full of group work and echoing voices, Lina walked home slower than usual. Her bag felt heavier than normal. Not because of books—but because her thoughts had nowhere to go. She didn’t want to go home. She didn’t want to talk. She just kept walking.

She turned left instead of right. Past her street. Past the bakery. Past the square. She didn't really know where she was going. She just knew she didn't want to be where she was expected to be.

That's when she saw it: a little green gate—one she had passed before but never really noticed. It led into a small, crooked park. Not the kind with perfect grass and shiny swings. This one was quiet. A bit forgotten. A bench leaned to one side. The grass was patchy. But the air felt soft.

Lina stepped in without thinking. She sat on the bench and dropped her bag with a thud. She didn't check the time. She didn't plan anything.

At first, she stared blankly. Then she noticed:

- A buttercup leaning to the side.
- A pigeon cooing from a branch.
- A breeze making the leaves whisper.
- The scratch of a squirrel's feet on bark.

Slowly, her shoulders dropped. Her breath, without her asking it to, slowed. Her hands, always fidgeting, became still.

A few steps away, she spotted a notebook on the ground, wet at the corners. It had a few pages left inside. She opened it, took the pencil from her pencil case, and wrote:

"I saw a leaf spinning like a dancer.

I heard a bird sing only two notes.

My thoughts are quieter when I listen."

She didn't plan to stay long. But the minutes passed, and she didn't want to leave. She wasn't fixed. She still felt a storm inside—but here, it didn't roar as loud.

That day, she didn't tell anyone where she had gone. It wasn't a secret. It was just hers.

The next day, she found her way back. And again, the day after. Sometimes with her notebook. Sometimes without. She didn't always write. Sometimes she just looked. Sometimes she just listened.

And each time, she left a little more of the noise behind.

She began to notice that she didn't need the park to feel that quiet. Sometimes, during lunch at school, she would take three deep breaths and remember the sound of the wind in the leaves. Other times, before sleep, she would imagine the buttercup swaying gently and write one line in her mind before drifting off.

Lina still had days when her mind rushed ahead of her, like a dog pulling too hard on a leash. But now, she knew there was a place—inside her, and not just in the garden—where she could pause.

She called it her garden of calm thoughts.

She didn't need a sign, or permission, or even quiet.

She just needed to remember: she could choose to sit. And notice. And breathe.

