

The Girl Who Tried So Hard

A girl named Suzanne was in a small classroom at St. Mary's Elementary School. She was seven, with wild curls that refused to be tamed and eyes that always seemed to be chasing something invisible. To an outside observer, Suzanne looked like every other child in her class, except when she didn't.

Other children sat quietly during lessons, their hands folded, eyes forward, pencils moving like soldiers marching in unison. Suzanne tried to be one of them. Every day, she tried hard.

But inside her head, it was never quiet.

"Focus, Suzanne. Focus now. You have to." – she kept telling herself.

"Don't tap your pencil. Stop tapping. It's too loud. The teacher will look at you again." – she kept nagging herself.

"No, you can't draw in your notebook right now. Not now. But I really want to... No! You can't!" – she kept beating herself up again and again.

She wasn't trying to be difficult. She was trying harder than anyone knew.

While other kids just... did the work, Suzanne was wrestling with herself, minute by minute. Her attention was slippery, like soap held in wet hands. She kept grabbing for it, only for it to slip again.

Every sound distracted her. Every flicker of light out the window pulled her thoughts like a magnet. Every desire to doodle, to hum, to move, became a

battlefield in her mind. And every time she pulled herself back, told herself "No, not now," it cost her something, something invisible.

Glucose. That's what it was called.

Not that Suzanne knew that word, not yet. But inside her body, each act of self-control burned through her stores of that precious fuel. It was the same stuff that powered her thinking, her patience, her ability to stay still, to keep quiet, to resist the screaming urge to do what she wanted.

By the time the lunch bell rang, her glucose tank was empty.

The other children were still bright-eyed and calm, chatting and laughing in the yard, bouncing balls, jumping ropes and riding scooters around. Suzanne stood among them like a starved lion trying to play house with sheep.

That's when it happened.

She saw her friend Maya giggling with someone else and felt a stab of something hot and sharp inside her. The feeling burst forward. Her hand shoved. Maya stumbled.

Suzanne didn't mean it. Not really. But her brakes were gone.

Seconds later, another classmate asked her why she had done that.

Suzanne snapped back, "Why don't you mind your own stupid business?"

And then came the part she had dreamed about all morning, the thing she wanted to do since the moment she'd walked into school. She stood in the centre of the schoolyard, spun around and around, threw her arms out, and

let out a roar. A loud, guttural, unfiltered scream echoed across the blacktop like a lion announcing its kingdom.

The children stopped and stared. "She is crazy," Suzanne heard one of them whisper. A teacher came rushing over.

"Suzanne! That is not appropriate behaviour. You're being far too loud."

But Suzanne didn't care anymore. Her glucose tank was empty. Her energy to hold it all in was gone. She looked at the teacher with blank, wet eyes and said nothing.

She was taken to the Quiet Room, a small, beige space with soft cushions and no noise. It was supposed to help. It didn't. Suzanne sat on the floor and cried, her cheeks hot with shame, loneliness curling around her like a fog.

"What's wrong with me?" she thought. "Why am I like this? Why can't I be normal like them?"

She rubbed her eyes raw. For a long time, she sat alone. Until the door opened, and someone new stepped in.

It was Trudy, a sixth-class girl with a calm voice and gentle eyes.

"Hey," Trudy said, sitting cross-legged on the floor near her. "I saw what happened. Can I tell you a secret?"

Suzanne looked up, curious through her tears.

"I used to be like that, too. Actually, sometimes I still am."

Suzanne's mouth fell open a little. "You?"

Trudy nodded. "Yep. My brain used to feel like a tornado. I'd want to scream, jump, run, draw, and talk all at once, even when I was supposed to sit still. I didn't understand why it was so hard. Everyone else just... did it. But for me, it was like I had to push a mountain just to sit in my chair."

Suzanne blinked. "But... you don't seem like that now."

"That's because I've been training," Trudy smiled. "Not like sports training. Mind training."

Suzanne frowned. "Mind training?"

"Yeah. See, the part of your brain that helps you focus, stay calm, and wait your turn, it works like a muscle. Yours isn't weak because something's wrong. It's just that you've been using it so hard without rest, it gets tired faster. And you haven't had the right kind of practice to make it stronger."

Suzanne's eyes widened. "You mean... I can train it?"

"Exactly," Trudy said. "Just like lifting little weights before you lift big ones."

She pulled out a small notebook from her pocket. "Wanna see some tricks?"

Suzanne nodded, sitting up.

"First trick: lists. Every morning, I write down three things I want to do. They can be silly, like 'look at clouds' or 'smile at someone', and I have to do three things. Like homework or brushing my teeth. Doing this for just five minutes a day helps my brain learn how to switch between want-to and have-to."

Suzanne looked intrigued. "That doesn't sound too hard."

"It's not. And then, trick two: routine practice. I pick one small thing I do every day for 10 minutes. It could be drawing quietly, sorting beads, or even just breathing slowly. Doing something regularly helps build my brain's ability to stay with something, keep my glucose resources at bay, even when it's not exciting."

"Does it work?" Suzanne asked.

Trudy grinned. "Totally. Not right away, but slowly. And the best part? When I feel myself running out of regulation, when I feel that lion starting to roar, I take a break. Or I eat something healthy. Even a glass of water helps sometimes."

Suzanne was quiet for a long moment.

"What if I mess up again?" she whispered.

Trudy's smile softened. "You will. Everyone does. But the muscle grows anyway. Every time you try, every time you stop yourself or learn from it after, your brain gets stronger and you don't use up so much glucose. You won't notice it at first. But one day, you'll be sitting in class and realise the noise doesn't bother you as much. Or the thoughts don't pull you away like they used to."

Suzanne's eyes filled with tears again, but this time, not just from sadness.

"Thank you," she said, voice cracking.

Trudy gave her a gentle hug. "You're not alone, Suzanne. You're just at the beginning of your training. And I promise—it gets easier."

That night, Suzanne sat at the kitchen table with her favourite pink pen. She opened a notebook and wrote her very first list:

Want To:

- Spin like a lion.
- Draw cats in space.
- Eat strawberries.

Have To:

- Sit still for 5 minutes.
- Finish my reading homework.
- Say something kind to someone.
- She looked at it for a moment, then smiled.

Tomorrow, she would still want to roar. She would still feel the battle in her head. But now she knew it wasn't her fault, and it wasn't forever.

She had a lion inside her. But now, she was learning how to tame it.

One small roar at a time.