

Colorful Messages

At Tari's new school, her deskmate, Pelangi, doesn't speak to anyone. Can Tari find a way to get her to open up and become a friend?





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Let's Read

 **The Asia Foundation**



It's Tari's first day at her new school. She is excited to make new friends. Who will be her deskmate? "Tari, you can sit next to Pelangi," Teacher says.



“I went fishing all night long, and all I caught was a tiny ‘teri’ fish. Pelangi, you can call me Tari!” “Hahaha!” Everyone laughs—except for Pelangi. Is Pelangi a quiet girl? Tari thinks.



During music time, Teacher teaches them a new song. “Tralala...trilili...” Everyone sings along, except for Pelangi.



“Pelangi...why aren’t you singing? Is there a problem?” Tari asks. But Pelangi stays quiet. Is Pelangi a shy girl?



Ring! That's the lunchtime bell. Pelangi opens her lunch box. Her meal smells delicious. "Pelangi, your fried rice looks so good it makes me hungry. Can you take me to the canteen?" Tari asks. Pelangi remains silent. Huh!



“You can come to the canteen with us,” Bunga offers. “Pelangi doesn’t talk,” says Pipit. “Pelangi only talks to Teacher,” Bunga adds. “She whispers. No one can hear her.” Huh, doesn’t Pelangi like to make friends?



During language study, Teacher asks the students to write an essay about the holidays. Why is Pelangi drawing in her book? That's strange, but her drawings do look great.



Everyone gets to read their essays to the class, except for Pelangi. Her voice is too soft, so Teacher reads it for her. “Nice drawing, Pelangi,” Teacher says. That’s cool. But why can’t she read her essay on her own? Tari wonders.



Yay, the next class is physical education! Teacher explains the rules of the relay race. "Run, jump over the hoop, and pass the cone, and the next team member takes over."



Tari runs as swift as lightning. Her team is leading. She has made it easy for Pelangi, her teammate, to complete the relay. But Pelangi freezes. “Run quick, Pelangi! We are going to lose!” Tari gives her a little push.



Bump! Pelangi falls down. Tari must have pushed her a little too hard. Teacher takes Pelangi to the school clinic. Tari hopes Pelangi is okay.



After school, Tari notices Pelangi walking with a limp. She offers her a ride home. "Pelangi, I'm so sorry. Can I take you home? Where is your house?" Pelangi does not speak, but she points in the direction of her house. Tari drops her off at home and waves goodbye.



The next day, Pelangi misses school. Tari feels really bad and decides to visit Pelangi after school. Bunga and Pipit agree to go with her.



Ding-dong! Tari presses the doorbell at Pelangi's house. The girls hear an adult voice. "Pelangi, can you open the door?" "Okay, Mom, in a minute." Is that Pelangi's voice? The three girls are surprised. This is the first time they've heard her voice.



“Hi, Pelangi!” Pelangi does not answer. She gestures for them to enter the living room and walks away. Meanwhile, Tari, Bunga, and Pipit admire a display of Pelangi’s drawings and trophies.



Soon Pelangi's mom greets the girls. It turns out that Pelangi's leg still hurts a little. Her sister's also unwell, and that is why Pelangi missed school that day. "Pelangi, I have to go check on your sister. Would you like to prepare fried rice for your friends? I've set up all the ingredients," Pelangi's mom says. "Yes, Mom," whispers Pelangi.



Pelangi starts cooking. The pleasant aroma of fried rice fills the room. Tari starts to think differently about her new friend. Pelangi seems like a nice girl, and she likes to help her mother.



After cooking, Pelangi offers fried rice to her friends without a word. “Delicious!” Bunga exclaims. “You can be a great cook when you grow up!” Pipit says. But Pelangi stays silent.



After eating, Pelangi takes them to the patio. The girls sit in awkward silence. Suddenly Tari gets an idea. Pelangi loves to draw. Tari takes a piece of paper and a pencil from her bag.



Tari draws Pelangi as a chef and writes, "Pelangi is a great chef." Then she gives the picture to Pelangi



Will Pelangi respond? Tari, Bunga, and Pipit are a bit worried. But Pelangi takes a piece of paper and a colored pencil. Then... She draws a colorful picture and writes "Thank you" under it.



Soon Bunga and Pipit are also writing messages. “Come to school tomorrow. We will write each other colorful messages,” Tari says to Pelangi. Pelangi smiles. Pelangi does like to make friends after all. It’s just that she has her own colorful way of showing it.



Do you know why Pelangi does not speak at all in school? It is not because she doesn't like to make friends. Pelangi suffers from an acute anxiety condition called selective mutism. With this condition, Pelangi stays mute in situations that make her feel anxious and uncomfortable, such as in school. This condition may affect her performance at school. How do you help friends like Pelangi? People with selective mutism feel comfortable around people they are close to. They get really anxious around people they don't know. Try to interact with them in familiar settings, like their home. Give them support for every simple interaction they make. Gradually, they will become comfortable with you. Source: HelloSehat.com



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