My eyes met hers and we both grinned before leaping into the water. Now, I was an excellent swimmer. Yet, a few months ago, things were very different, and I had to thank her for helping me…

I was always afraid of water. This phobia could not be explained, but I knew that the moment I stepped near any body of water, my legs would turn to jelly. I would imagine myself drowning in the water and flailing about helplessly. That was why I had never gone into a swimming pool until swimming became a school requirement. My school wanted all pupils to pass a swimming test, and if they could not, then they would have to attend weekly swimming lessons in school, which sent shudders down my spine.

Thus, my parents signed me up for swimming lessons at the pool near my house. With great reluctance, I attended those weekly lessons, and each one was great torture for me. I was naturally clumsy, and my phobia of water did not help at all. Every lesson, I would be spending my time thrashing about in the water, while my classmates would be swimming countless laps effortlessly and even doing somersaults like dolphins in the water. How was I going to pass the test at this rate?

In my swimming class, there was an exceptionally athletic girl. Tall and muscular, her name was Kathy. She was the best swimmer in our class and always looked at me with disdain, especially when I flailed about pathetically in the water.

Once, after a particularly long and arduous swimming lesson, I spotted Kathy swimming gracefully in the pool. Mustering my courage, I asked meekly, “Kathy, can you teach me swimming?” She stared at me coldly, and I thought she was going to reject me. To my surprise, she nodded after a few moments of silence.
From then on, Kathy stayed back for about an hour after every swimming lesson to coach me. She taught me how to propel myself forward in the water and I gradually gained confidence in the pool. Sometimes during swimming lessons, when my phobia got the better of me, she would pat my back comfortingly. She would encourage me when I was afraid. She would urge me on when I was discouraged. Slowly but surely, I improved under her guidance and encouragement, and realized that beneath that cold, nonchalant expression of hers was a kind, gentle heart. That was how I made a new friend.

Four months whizzed past in a flash and it was time for me to take my swimming test. Before leaping into the water, I took a deep breath to calm myself down. The image of Kathy’s encouraging smile appeared in my mind and gave me confidence.

I jumped into the pool and followed all of Kathy’s advice. I swam gracefully, just like a fish, and passed the test with flying colours.

“Congratulations!” Kathy chirped when she learnt of my outstanding performance in the swimming test. By now, we were already close friends because of the weekly free training she gave me. I threw my arms around her and hugged her tightly.

“Thank you! You’re a wonderful friend! If not for you, I would not have done so well!” I exclaimed.

Tears of gratitude were streaming down my face as I remembered how Kathy had been so understanding and encouraging although I was so much worse than her. She did not look down on me. She helped me without expecting anything in return.

Since then, our friendship blossomed. We met frequently to have fun with each other, sharing both joy and sorrow. Surprisingly, I grew to love the water, and most of our time spent together was in the pool, frisking about cheerfully.

Splash! Cold water hit my face, jolting me out of my daydreams. Kathy stuck out her tongue. “Catch me if you can!” she teased, before swimming away frantically. I immediately gave chase as our peals of laughter rang in the air.
A friend like Kathy is hard to come by. She has a heart of gold and I will definitely treasure our precious friendship.

By Isabelle Ong, P6