

Kindness of the Heart

a parable

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Amina's blue scarf draped gracefully over her head and shoulders. As she looked at the brick building, much smaller than her old school in Chicago, she started to feel clammy. She saw a sea of faces, mostly white. Nobody had brown skin like her, and she didn't see a single hijab. A tall boy wearing a red cap said, "What's on your head?" Amina hurried inside, filled with trepidation, hiding her trembling hands in her pockets.

Mr. Logan introduced her to the class. "Everyone welcome Amina Bu...uh...Bu...kaha." "Bu-kha-ri" Amina corrected over the giggling students. Her face flushed, and she imagined turning as red as a tomato. She tried to hide her face until lunchtime.

Amina had biryani. "That stinks!" said the same boy from that morning. She lost her appetite and slammed her lunchbox shut. A tiny girl sat down and said in a sweet voice, "Why do you wear that?" Amina hesitated, "It's called a hijab. In my religion, women cover their hair to be modest," she murmured. "I think it's beautiful, and the spices in your lunch smell delicious," Emily replied. "Thanks. It's a traditional dish of chicken and rice." Amina said. Emily whispered, "Don't listen to John. He bullies everyone."

At recess, a pretty girl named Tara, with hair as yellow as the sun, shouted, "You smell like your lunch!" Amina struggled to hold back her tears. She didn't say a word for the rest of the day. All she could think about was her friends back in Chicago, where there were many Pakistani-Americans and muslims at her school.

The next morning, she dreaded going to class. She jumped when she heard someone behind her, "I got a *horrible* haircut yesterday so I have to cover my ugly hair!" John was wrapping a t-shirt over his head, and Tara was pointing and laughing. Amina ran into the bathroom so nobody would see her sobbing.

At recess, she nearly fell when someone bumped into her. "What's wrong? Is that scarf covering your eyes?" Tara taunted. "How would you feel if I pulled it off?" Amina felt her hands clench and her body start to shake. "The same way you would feel if I pulled down your pants!" Amina ran away, through the parking lot, and down the street to her house.

Her mom dropped a basket of laundry with a thud when Amina barged in. She explained what happened, and her mom hugged her. "I'm sorry that you are being bullied, but you can't leave school," she said, leading Amina to the couch. She took the holy book of Islam (Quran) from a shelf and opened it to chapter 41, verses 34 to 35 and read, "Good deeds and evil deeds are not equal. Return evil with good, and he who is your enemy will become your dearest friend. But none will attain this attribute save those who patiently endure; none will attain it save those who are truly fortunate."

As a punishment, she was grounded. Amina felt horrible for her transgression, but didn't mind being grounded because she didn't have any friends to see. Feeling guilty, she vowed never to disobey again. She accepted her punishment and designed a plan to solve the problem.

Amina woke up early to make cookies to pass out at school. "These are *really* good," John said, with a curious look. When she walked into the classroom, Amina saw Tara trip and fall into a model of the solar system with a big crash. Just then, Mr. Logan arrived and saw the broken model.

"Tara! That's the second time you've destroyed school property. You're suspended!" he said. "Mr. Logan," Amina interrupted, "I saw her trip and fall. It was an accident." Tara's eyes widened with shock. "In that case, Tara, you can fix it during recess," Mr. Logan said.

Instead of going to recess, Amina asked if she could help repair the model. "Why are you being nice to me after I was so mean?" Tara asked. Amina shrugged. "In my religion we are

taught to be nice to everyone, even our enemies,” she said, holding out the box of cookies. Tara took a nibble. “These are amazing! You’re so kind. I’m sorry for bullying you.”

The news of Amina’s kindness spread quickly. Soon, all of the students were asking for cookies, and Amina was showered with compliments. Even John apologized. By the end of her first week at school, Amina felt happier than ever, and couldn’t wait to be ungrounded so she could spend time with her new friends. She thanked her mom and God for guiding her to the solution, and knew that in the future, she should always turn to her faith to find the answers to her problems.