

The Test Paper

Covered with

Candy



By Umm Zakiyyah
Illustrated by Sbnotion

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Published by Al-Walaa Publications
Dallas, Texas (USA)

Dedication

To every boy and girl in the world — and the little boy or girl who lives inside each of us, even the grown-ups.





“But it’s not fair, Mom!” Zahra said.
Zahra and her mother were sitting at the kitchen table eating dinner.

“Why does Maha get a new bike and a trip to the water park, and I get nothing?”

Mrs. Khan looked at her daughter and shook her head sadly. “I’m sorry, Zahra,” she said. “But we don’t have as much money as Maha’s family.”

Zahra’s shoulders dropped in sadness. She hated when her mother talked about money. It seemed everything she couldn’t do was because they didn’t have enough money.

After dinner Zahra and her mother started clearing the table. “Your father said he can get ice cream for you after Qur’an school tomorrow,” Mrs. Khan said cheerfully.

Zahra opened the refrigerator and put a half-full pitcher of juice inside. “Thanks, Mom,” Zahra said quietly. She hoped she sounded grateful, but she didn’t feel excited. Eating candy and ice cream in the parking lot after school wasn’t her idea of a fifth-grade graduation gift.

Zahra used to love getting free candy and ice cream from her father’s ice cream truck, but now she felt too old for it.



That night Zahra lay awake in bed thinking about middle school. In a few months, she would be in sixth grade. She liked the idea of a new school full of lockers and grown-up classes, but it was hard to stop thinking about Maha. Maha would probably laugh at Zahra for not having new clothes for sixth grade. Maha would have new clothes. Maha always had new clothes.

Why couldn't Zahra have new clothes too?

Zahra knew she shouldn't care about all the things Maha had, but it was hard not to. "Pleasing Allah is most important," Mrs. Khan always said. "So as Muslims, we should focus on going to Jannah."

Jannah was like Heaven, a Paradise prepared especially for true believers in God. But you could only go there after you die, and only if you did good deeds.

"In Jannah, you'll have everything you want," Zahra's mother would say. "When you get there, you won't care about what other people have."

"But why can't I have everything I want now?" Zahra would complain. "Why do I have to wait?"





Mrs. Khan would frown then say, “Life is a test, Zahra. Remember that.” And Zahra did remember it. Her mother wouldn’t let her forget it. But Zahra had no idea what her mother meant.



The next morning Mrs. Khan drove Zahra to school. When they arrived at the school, Zahra and her mother saw Mr. Khan serving candy and ice cream from his truck to the children and their parents.

“As-salaamu’alaikum!” Mr. Khan called out. *Peace be upon you!*

“Wa’alaiku-mus-salaam!” Zahra and her mother said cheerfully in return. *And peace be upon you!*

Mrs. Khan walked over to her husband’s ice cream truck, and Zahra hurried inside the school for her first class.



In the classroom, Zahra sat down in her assigned seat next to Maha.

“I hope you know I’m the Qur’an competition winner,” Maha said in a loud whisper. “They’re giving out the prizes today.”

“I already know that,” Zahra said grumpily. But she didn’t look at Maha. She was too embarrassed.

Last week Maha had won first place in the Qur'an competition, and Zahra didn't win anything. Zahra had worked really hard to memorize everything. But when it was time to recite in front of everyone, she had become so nervous that she forgot everything.



“I just wanted to make sure you didn't forget,” Maha said in a loud voice. “You know, like you forgot all those verses in the Qur'an competition.”



Some children laughed and pointed at Zahra, and she sunk low into her seat. She couldn't wait until this day was over.