

# *My Good Hearts*

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It was my first year in the Model School and I had been made the class teacher of the rowdiest section of class ninth. When I reflected on the class behaviour I realized that it was because I had a collection of bright and witty students who had always been labeled as the good-for-nothing brats. My life was very eventful that term because my children were sure to do something new everyday to keep me occupied! I really had to use all my imagination to win their trust and to keep them from mischief along with cajoling them to study. They were full of energy and it was running in all directions.

Amongst these naughty and restless ones there was a very shy and quiet student, Hareem. She was very attentive in the class and would answer when asked but never volunteered to participate in class discussions. Though everyday I had to deal with something or the other, I had no idea that the biggest event that session would be related to Hareem.

Hareem was never absent from school, so one day when she didn't turn up I was a bit disturbed. However, thinking that maybe she had high fever or something else I continued with my routine. When my period ended, I went to the staff room and the commotion there was surprising. I was told that Hareem's elder brother Nasir – an O' Level student of our school- had died after falling from the terrace. This was very shocking for all of us. Senior teachers went to Nasir's house for condolence but the news that they came back with was even more alarming. It was being said that the child had taken his own life and that his death was not an accident. All kinds of rumours circulated.

In the evening I went to Hareem's house for condolence. The child was in such a miserable state that she just sat with her head bowed down. When a class fellow told her that I had come she just put her head on my shoulder. It was very difficult for me to say anything and the only thing I could think of was to tell her that she was not alone and we all were with her in this challenge of losing a beloved and bearing all the rumours and malice.

Two days later Hareem's best friend Sabeen stood up in the class and said that Hareem had asked her to convey a question to me. The question was "How will I be able to join the school again, with everyone asking me about my brother's death?" I looked at the class and said to them that this was a question for all of us. I asked them if we were courageous and sensitive enough to take care of Hareem when she came back. The whole class said that they would do everything to support her and after a five minute discussion it was decided that all of us would behave normally, nobody sympathizing with her. We also decided that without being noticed all students will keep an eye on Hareem and would handle the situation if anyone from any other class would approach her. Students asked me what if some teacher asked her any such thing and I told them that they would not. I then told Sabeen, Hareem's friend, to call her up and ask her to join the school without any fear.

The next step was to talk about this issue in the staff room and politely say to all my colleagues that any reference to her brother would make Hareem uncomfortable and that we should all respect her privacy and not feel sorry for her or continue to sympathize with her in ways that are not comfortable for her.

Hareem joined school the next day and I could read the fear in her eyes. I told her to complete her pending work in three days' time and then submit her assignments (this being the routine for any child who has been absent for three to four days).

Recess came and I substituted my break duty with the teacher on duty that day. With my support students did not let any one approach Hareem. She remained unaware of our activities. The message was soon conveyed across the school that no one was allowed to invade any one's privacy.

It filled my heart with pride when I saw that it took only three days for Hareem to be back to her normal self. The unity and team spirit of the class had rejuvenated her. She laughed and smiled with her friends and resumed her life as it had been before the unfortunate event. Hareem is now in a medical college.

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