

Bailing Students

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This is about a night that gave me some assurance that I had met my commitments as a teacher in some small amount.

I was lying in bed reading a comic (Tom and Jerry) when the telephone rang. (There were no mobiles then) The call was from the Saddar Police Station, saying some one wanted to talk to me. I looked at my watch. 12.30 am. Past midnight. I said, "Put whoever it is on the line." I heard pleading, "Please come to the *thana*. I have been in the lock-up since morning after I had an accident around St. Joseph's College. I have damaged the Minister's car and have already paid him an amount that will cover all cost of repair. The SHO refuses to let me out on bail. Please come.'

I got into my little red beetle Volks Wagon and sped off, hoping that my parents who live across the way had not seen the lights go on and off. I walked into the *thana* as though I was the I.G (all drama!) I was greeted by the SHO who told me the whole story. I said call the boy, I want to talk to him alone. He said I would have to go to the lock-up but when I got up to go he changed his mind.

(I think we were both playing games with each other) When my student Rizwan, who had a Chinese mother and a Pathan father who worked in the Middle East, and wasn't around, appeared, he was in tears. Tall, intelligent, sometimes cheeky, now completely deflated.

As he came in on a dramatic note, I asked him to come near me. When he was close enough, I pretended to cross question him, I asked him what he was doing near a girls' college etc. I told him to bend down and twisted his ears, gave him a gentle, almost loving slap on the back of his head. (All this to make the SHO happy). Then I told the SHO to prepare papers to accept bail from me, since I was a gazetted officer, an adult, in my senses and a responsible citizen, and a Government servant. He was quiet and suddenly looked very thoughtful. Looking at the clock, I asked him to hurry up, since I have the requisite qualification and also to send for some tea for me. (Dreading the prospect of drinking out of dirty cups and sweet tea). When I told him if he had any difficulty I could speak to his superiors, even though it was 4 am.

Then he spat it out__ the Minister of Education (a childhood friend of mine) whose car had been damaged, "had ordered for Rizwan to be in the lock-up for four days to teach him a lesson" That last bit sent my temper soaring. I knew the Minister's bedroom number and phoned him. He had barely said hello when I went for him, hammer and tongs! What did he mean by throwing his weight around and without legal justification?' He was annoyed at this: " How come you are there at the *thana* at this time of the night? I am going to call uncle and aunty and tell them: your students are your responsibility in the college, not after." "That is where you are wrong. I take full responsibility for their behaviour and I have come to defend his rights. You have no business to make this a case of personal vendetta. Go to bed. I am going to the press!' At which I could see him mentally take a leap in the air __ knowing me since school days at St Lawrence Convent School, Karachi. His tone changed and he wanted urgently to talk to the SHO. I could only hear him say *Ji*, Sir. The SHO was a changed man but he

wanted to have his bit of the glory. ‘Mein tu keh raha tha, Sahib sun naheen rahya thay.’ (I was telling the Sahib all along but he wasn’t listening). Well, I thought, it was over. I asked for the papers to sign to which he came up with another gem, “*Hum ladies ka bail accept naheen kartay hain.*’ (We don’t accept bail from ladies.) Why? I blew my fuse__ I argued, took hold of the dirty books and read him the relevant paras etc. Finally he dained to accept Rizwan’s uncle’s signature__ and let Rizwan go. Rizwan’s uncle by the way had been at the police station since 8pm with money and a tiffin carrier.

When everything was done, it was almost time for Fajjar. I waited till Rizwan came skipping out of the lock-up. He came towards me , diving towards my feet. Anticipating this, I got him mid-way, pulled him up with his thick black oily hair and gave him another (this time hard) hit on the back; led him to the car, stuffed him in, told him to get lost. Leave the police station immediately and told him to ring me when he got home.

I reached home early morning__ and the earlier call from Rizwan crying like a baby saying thank you __ made my day. Rizwan is now grown up, married and a successful man. But he still comes and hugs me. I love it.