

The Girl Who Loved Roses



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An Arabic Story by Sara Hajjar

Many beautiful flowers grew in the park. There were lilies, carnations, violets, tulips, and many more besides. The colours were amazing to look at, and the smell of the flowers was very soothing.

Maya's favorite flowers were roses; she loved the red ones, the yellow ones, the pink ones, the orange ones, and the white ones. Every day she would go to the park and pick a rose of each colour, then she would take them to her mother's grave at the bottom of the park. Maya's mother had died two years ago after becoming very ill, and the young girl had promised herself that she would visit the grave every day so that her mother would never be forgotten.

One day, while Maya was picking roses in the park, she saw a boy sitting on the grass wearing a school uniform. He had a yellow rose in his hand, and he was tearing all of the petals from the rose, one by one. Maya ran over to the boy and shouted at him.

'Why are you tearing the petals off of that beautiful flower? Why are you doing that?'

'Because I am bored,' replied the boy. 'Why are *you* getting so upset about it?'

Maya could feel the tears welling up in her eyes as she said to the boy: 'I am upset because I love roses, and my mother loves roses. I pick some for her every day, and if you tear them all there will be none left!'

The young boy felt sorry for Maya and asked: 'Where is your mother?'

Maya pointed silently towards her mother's grave at the bottom of the park. She sat down on the grass clutching her roses and asked the boy for his name. He told her that his name was Sami and that he had run away from school because he was finding mathematics class too hard.

Sami learned that he never saw Maya at school because her father was too poor and so could not afford to send her. The young girl told Sami that she often wondered what it would be like to go to school and have friends to play with.

Sami asked: 'Do you like maths? I don't like maths and I can never understand how to do it.'

Maya took a look at Sami's maths book and chuckled as she told him how easily the sums could be worked out. Her father had taught her about mathematics everyday at home and she loved working out the sums and was very good at it too.

'You can do maths better than me!' exclaimed Sami. 'You should come to school.'

But Maya was sad because she knew that she could not afford to go to school even though she loved the idea very much.

Suddenly a tall man appeared in the distance. He was shouting Sami's name and the young boy looked very sheepish as he explained to Maya that this was his maths teacher Mr. Karim.

When Mr. Karim approached the children, he asked Maya why she also was not at school. The young girl explained to the teacher that she was not at school because her father was very poor and he could not afford to send her to be educated.

'I am very sorry to hear that,' said the kindly teacher, 'but I must take Sami back to school now because he is not supposed to be here.'

Sami reluctantly went with his teacher and they both left Maya alone in the park once more.

On their way back to school, Sami told Mr. Karim about how Maya was so good at doing sums, and how she loved to learn from her father.

‘She seems like a very smart girl,’ agreed the teacher, ‘and it is a great shame that she cannot afford to go to school.’

The next day, after school had finished, Sami went back to the rose park to play with Maya. The two children met in the park every day that week and played and talked and studied for hours.

The following week, Maya’s father woke her early in the morning. He had a big grin on his face and was clearly very excited about something. ‘You need to get up and get dressed for school!’ he told his daughter.

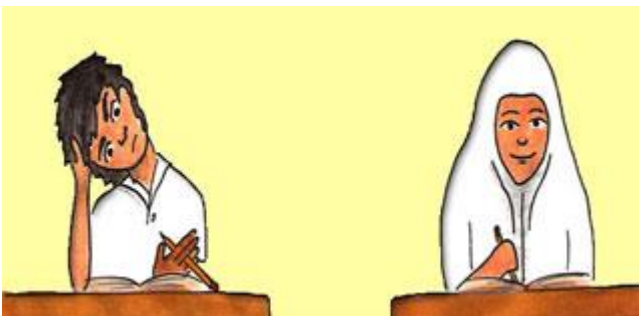
Maya could not believe her ears as she jumped out of bed. ‘How is this possible?’ she asked her father.

‘When I awoke this morning there was a note on the door. The note said that you have been given a place at school!’ he exclaimed. ‘And there is also this,’ he said with a smile as he handed Maya a neat bundle of clothing that turned out to be a brand new school uniform.

Maya could not believe her luck. A generous stranger had dropped off the note and the uniform and now Maya was going to go to school at last!

Sami was also delighted when he saw Maya that morning because he knew that she was very clever and deserved to be at school.

The two soon became the very best of friends, and Sami made sure that Maya knew the names of all of the teachers and where the classes were and how to make the best of her new life at school. Thanks to his help, Maya settled into the routine of school and enjoyed learning and did very well in all of her classes.



Although Sami was very happy for his new friend, he continued to struggle in his studies and did not get good grades for

most of his subjects. Even though he needed help, the young boy was too embarrassed to ask and so he did not enjoy school as much as Maya.

At home, Sami's parents were very angry with him for not doing well at school. One day, his father said: 'Maybe it is because you are spending too much time with that new girl.'

'But she's so clever even though this is her first time at school,' protested Sami. 'Even though her father is poor she is still good at maths because he taught her at home and...'

'Poor!' interrupted both of his parents at once. 'Why are you wasting your time with someone like that? Can she even write? Ha! You need to be making friends with important people that can help you succeed in life.'

Sami was very disappointed with his parents and could not believe that they could think in such a way. They did not like Maya just because she was not rich or privileged. 'How can you not like a person just because they are poor,' thought the young boy.

The weeks went by and still Sami's did not do well in school. Eventually he got over his embarrassment and plucked up the courage to ask Maya for help. She smiled at her friend and chastised him for waiting so long before asking for her help. She told him: 'Good friends help each other without judging, and it would be my privilege to help you.'

It turned out that Maya was brilliant at explaining all of the complicated things that Sami struggled with, and before too long his grades reflected his hard work and Maya's excellent help.

Mr. Karim was so pleased with Maya and Sami that he decided to send a letter to Sami's parents and to Maya's father explaining how each child had helped the other: Sami had helped Maya adjust to life in school and had looked out for her and made sure she was not alone on her new adventure; while Maya had helped Sami to study and gain better grades than he had ever had before. Mr. Karim wrote in each letter that the behavior of the children towards each other was truly admirable and he was very proud to have them both in his school.

When Maya's father received the letter he was so proud of his daughter and told her that her mother would also be very proud.

When Sami's parents received the letter they were also very proud, but they were also humbled and both regretted their bad feelings towards Maya. They realized how wrong they had been to judge the young girl just because her father was poor.

It was then that Sami's parents asked their son to invite Maya to join them for dinner the following day.

When the time arrived, Maya was very nervous and stayed close to Sami the whole time. But she need not have worried. Sami's parents were completely charmed by the young girl. She was polite and friendly and made intelligent conversation that impressed them both very much indeed.

'Thank you so much for helping our son with his schoolwork. It was really kind of you,' said Sami's mother with a warm smile.

Maya told her that it was Sami who was the good friend as he had always been there during her time at school and had befriended her and looked out for her. 'I am very grateful to Sami for his friendship,' said the young girl.

Sami and Maya's friendship continued to grow and grow. They both did very well at school, and when it was time for them to take their exams they both passed with flying colours!

In the summer they went to the park everyday to pick roses and say hello to Maya's mother. One day, Maya looked up to the sky and whispered: 'Mother I am so happy and so lucky, and I know that you are proud of me and that you love me.'

What Maya would never know was that she owed a great deal of her happiness to the kindly teacher Mr. Karim. It was he who had placed the new uniform and the invitation at Maya's door because he believed that the young girl deserved an education, and because he knew that she needed a friend.