

The Seekers of the Sky Lanterns



When She Was Gone: A Lesson in
Loyalty

shosho !



In the sun-drenched school courtyard, Dania and Abeer sit together on a wooden bench, sharing snacks and laughter during their break. The atmosphere is light and cheerful until Zainab approaches them with a mysterious and knowing look in her eyes.



Zainab leans in close to the group and whispers, asking if they noticed that Manar is absent from school today. The girls look around the crowded yard, realizing for the first time that their friend's usual spot is empty.



Zainab smiles mischievously and suggests that Manar only pretends to be kind, prompting the others to join in the critique. Dania and Abeer begin to nod, adding their own complaints about Manar's behavior while the air fills with hushed, unkind whispers.



Bashayer walks toward the group, noticing the secretive huddle and the sharp, judging tone of their voices. She stops just a few feet away, her expression calm but observant as she wonders what has captured her friends' attention so intensely.



Bashayer asks the girls who they are talking about, breaking the cycle of gossip with her steady voice. Dania quickly explains that they are just discussing Manar and how her attitude can be quite difficult and insincere sometimes.



Bashayer raises her hand slightly to get their full attention and looks each of them in the eye with a serious but kind gaze. She asks the golden question: if Manar were standing right here with them, would they say these same things to her face?



A heavy, sudden silence falls over the courtyard as the girls stop talking and look down at the ground in embarrassment. The realization hits them hard, and the playful atmosphere is replaced by a deep sense of regret and reflection.



Bashayer explains that if a word isn't kind enough to be said to someone directly, it is usually the wrong thing to say. She reminds them that true character is shown by how we treat people when they aren't there to defend themselves.



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The next morning, Manar returns to school with a bright smile, and her friends rush to greet her with genuine warmth and excitement. Dania, Abeer, and Zainab welcome her back sincerely, feeling a new sense of appreciation for her presence and their bond.



Bashayer watches from a distance, a soft smile playing on her lips as she sees the group reunited in true harmony. She knows that real friendship is a treasure that must be protected and preserved even when a friend is far away.