



Aisha and the Dollar That Changed Everything

Written by Erfanul Alam Siddiquee

Illustrated by Ghazal Qadri



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Chapter 1

Aisha and the Dollar Dilemma

Aisha's blue pencil moved carefully across her homework. One by one, she made sure each maths problem was correct. When all fifteen problems were checked, she snapped her purple ring binder shut with a satisfying 'click'.

"Aishaaa! Time for school!" Mama called from downstairs.

"Coming, Mama." Aisha zipped her backpack and hurried downstairs.

The morning sun was shining brightly through the windows, making the kitchen feel warm and safe. Aisha loved these moments with her parents before the busy day began.

Baba was at the kitchen table, sipping his coffee and reading the news on his tablet.

“As salaamu alaikum and good morning habibti,” Baba smiled. “All ready for school?”

“Wa alaikum as salaam Baba,” she kissed his cheek, took a bite of toast, a sip of milk and relaxed into a steady smile. “Yes! And I checked my homework twice.”

That was how Aisha did things. Even though she was only nine years old, she liked to be thorough. Her father often said she would be good at helping him with the finances of the house one day. Aisha wasn't sure about that, but she did like using the pretty green notebook her Mama gave her to help her keep track of her allowance.

The school bell rang loudly. Aisha grabbed her lunchbox and ran outside with the other children. The spring air smelt fresh and sweet. Her favourite time of the year.

“Aisha! Over here!” Huda waved from their usual spot under the jacaranda tree, its purple blossoms drifting down like tiny bells in the breeze. Aisha smiled and ran over, trying not to spill her apple juice.

“Did you finish your maths homework?” Huda asked, opening her colourful lunch bag.

“All fifteen problems. I checked my answers twice,” Aisha smiled broadly, her Mama's signature omelette sandwich poised in her hand.

Huda giggled. “Of course you did! I need to start being more organised.” She said it like she was making a promise to herself.

Sophie, their new friend who had recently moved to Barakah Heights, joined them with her lunchbox. Though she came from a different faith, she had quickly become a part of their friendship group.

“That bird spotter’s guide at the school book fair looks amaaaazing,” Sophie said as she sat down beside Aisha. “Are you still saving for it?”

Aisha nodded eagerly. “It’s such a cool book. It has a checklist where you can tick off every bird you spot, and contains lots of puzzles, facts and games about each bird. But I just need one more dollar...” Her heart sank a little as she thought about waiting another whole week for her allowance. The school book fair would only last three more days. What if all the bird spotter’s guides were sold by then? She had already planned which birds she would find first.

“Can’t you ask your parents?” Huda asked, biting into her sandwich.

Aisha shook her head. “Mama says my allowance helps me learn to make good choices. If I want something extra, I need to save for it.” She had been saving for two weeks, writing down every coin in her notebook with her favourite blue pen.

After finishing their lunches, the girls all played tag together in the playground.

Aisha ran to hide behind the swings, her scarf flapping in the breeze. For a moment, she leaned on the cool metal support posts to catch her breath. That's when she saw it—the glint of a golden coin on the black tarmac. There, under the swings, was a shiny dollar coin. Aisha looked around to see if anyone else had noticed it too. Everyone around her was laughing and squealing, but no one seemed to be looking for something lost. She bent down and picked up the dollar, feeling the cool raised metal engravings with her fingers. Her heart fluttered with a sudden realisation.

One dollar! This is exactly what I need for the bird spotter's guide. With this dollar, I could buy it tomorrow at the book fair. I wouldn't need to wait for next week's allowance!

Aisha carefully placed the coin in her pocket. But as she walked back to join the girls, the dollar felt heavy. Not the weight of the metal itself, but something else... like a tiny voice whispering something she couldn't quite ignore.

"There you are!" Sophie and Huda said breathlessly.

"Sorry, I got distracted. I found something..."

They both gave her a quizzical look.

"I found a one-dollar coin."

"Oooo."

"Wait, you know what this means, right? Now you can get your bird book!" Huda grinned.