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## Rent a Family

by Lesley Dawson

“How many children do you have?”

I am getting tired of being asked this by the families of my students. It seems to be a flaw in my character that I have to say “None”. The response to this is usually “Haram. Poor you,” This has never seemed to be a problem in my life before, but it is now.

Nasser, a student from Nablus, came up with a possible solution to my problem when he said “Doctora, don’t say you have no children. We, your students, are all your children.”

“Thank you habibi,” I replied as I slyly asked him, ”so how many children does that mean I have?”

He thought for a moment and counted up, “there are twenty on our course and another twenty on the upgrade programme, although some of them are a bit old to be your kids”

I looked him with a twinkle in my eye, “is that number possible, even if I married at 14 years old and was pregnant every year?”

He thought for a while and then sighed, “no, even for a Palestinian mother that is too many.”

I discussed my dilemma with my English neighbor who was married to the son of a prominent local Christian family and knew everybody, “it is no good, you will have to marry a Palestinian.”

“Even if I do, I think it is a bit late to have any kids.”

Her eyes opened wide as if struck by lightning “I know what we can do. You could rent some kids from a Palestinian family up in Lebanon. That is far enough away to escape detection. You could show family photos of your kids. As long as they are a bit western looking you could get away with it.”

“How will I explain the fact that they are not here with me?”

“You will have to say that you and their father are divorced and his family retained custody of the children.”

But everyone will still pity me and say, “Haram, poor you. So how is that better than saying I have no children?”