

Saraaya who was kidnapped by the ghou and her story with Zharif at-Tool

Once upon a time there was a pretty and smart girl in Haifa, the most beautiful city of Palestine. Her hair was long and as black as December's nights, and her face was as pure as the full moon on a night in August. When the old people of Haifa used to make riddles, like: "Something with the shape of a bowl, can easily sink in the sea, has pearls inside and has an outside like copper", it was that girl, Saraaya, who knew the answer: "The pomegranate." All people loved Saraaya and she loved them as well, but it was the sea which she loved most. She used to walk every day on its sands, telling her secrets to the waves. One day, while she was walking by the sea, she heard a voice calling: "Saraaya, Saraaya." She looked around but found nobody. The voice came back again: "Saraaya, Saraaya."

- "Who are you?", she asked.

- "I am the male ghou of the sea, don't feel scared."

- "What do you want from me?"

- "Oh Saraaya, I loved you at once when I saw you. Do accept me as a husband? I will make you the queen of the kingdom of the ghouls of the sea."

- "I cannot, as I promised myself to marry the one who will be chosen by my heart."

The ghou became sad and left, but he came back again and again asking the same question: "Do you accept me as a husband?" She always gave him the same answer: "I cannot, as I promised myself to marry the one who will be chosen by my heart." The ghou did not get discouraged, however he decided to do something. He built a castle on Mount Carmel which overlooks the sea and the city of Haifa. One day, while Saraaya was walking on the beach, the ghou kidnapped her and took her to the castle, where he kept her behind closed doors. When he went down, he closed the gate of the castle, but made a small window in the highest part of the tower, as he knew how much she loved the sea. He did not want to prevent her from seeing it. Before leaving, he promised to visit her everyday by the time of sunset. Indeed, he came next day and called her: "Oh Saraaya, beloved one of the ghou, lower your hair so that I can climb up." She lowered her long braid and he used it to climb the tower. When he reached the small window, he entered carrying diamonds, beautiful gowns, food and sweets. He asked: "Do you accept me as a husband?" She gave him the same answer: "No."

Several days passed while Saraaya was held in the tower, looking at the sea and crying, as she missed her family and the people of Haifa. She used to sing: "Woe to me, woe to me. The ghou kidnapped me, and I have no lover!"

By that time, a young handsome man called Zharif at-Tool was living in the village of Umm az-Zinat (an abandoned village on the western slope of Mount Carmel), where he worked as a storyteller. As he thought the people of his village were fed up with his stories, he decided to move to the big city of Haifa, hoping to be able to work there.

That was not a big issue, for one could reach Haifa easily from Mount Carmel. Indeed, one day he left early in the morning carrying his provision and stick and walked down along the mountain side. While he was walking in the afternoon, he heard singing: "Woe to me, woe to me." The ghou! kidnapped me and I have no lover!" The voice was so beautiful and clearly coming from the forest. Zharif at-Tool entered the forest. The closer he came to the place, the louder the voice became, until he reached the castle. Then, he became sure that the voice was coming from there. He moved around the castle searching for a door or a window through which he could enter but did not find any, which was very strange. As he felt very tired, he sat down in the shade of a huge tree and fell asleep. Scaring footsteps awakened him, so he hid himself behind the tree trunk and saw the ghou! of the sea going up to the castle, where he stood and started calling: "Oh Saraaya, the beloved one of the ghou!, lower your hair so that I can climb up." Then, Zharif at-Tool saw the longest, darkest and most beautiful braid coming down from the small window right to the ground. He saw how the ghou! used it to climb up and then disappeared. Zharif at-Tool waited for three hours, but the ghou! did not come back. As he was tired, he slept behind the tree trunk and did not wake up until the morning, when he saw the ghou! coming down from the tower of the castle. He kept watching him until he entered the forest and disappeared into the sea. When Zharif at-Tool was sure that the ghou! had gone, he stood under the tower and started calling: "Oh Saraaya, the beloved one of the ghou!, lower your hair so that I can climb up." But no answer. As he called again without receiving any answer, he said to himself: "This was certainly a dream." Yet, he decided to call the last time as loud as he could: "Oh Saraaya, the beloved one of the ghou!, lower your hair so that I can climb up." Suddenly, he saw the braid coming down shyly and hesitantly. And once it reached the ground, he held it and climbed up quickly until he reached the small window, where he saw the most beautiful girl ever (when a handsome boy sees a beautiful girl, what happens? Hearts beat: *bom, bom, bom*).

Saraaya asked: "Who are you and what are you doing here?" He answered: "My name is Zharif at-Tool, from the village of Umm az-Zinat. I work as a storyteller and I know many stories and tales." Saraaya felt so happy:

- "My name is Saraaya, tell me a story."

- "What can you offer me?"

- "A beautiful dance for each story."

They agreed on that and kept on telling stories and dancing, forgetting that there was a ghou!. They were not aware that the sun was setting. The ghou! arrived and called: "Oh Saraaya, the beloved one of the ghou!, lower your hair so that I can climb up." Saraaya had no choice as she felt very scared, so she lowered her braid. When the ghou! came in and saw Zharif at-Tool, he shouted loudly at Saraaya: "I gave you my heart, love, money and gold, and I asked you to become the queen of my kingdom, but you

cheated me!” Saraaya answered crying: “I never cheated you; I always told you that I will follow my heart.” The ghoul got mad of jealousy: “I will kill you and him.” Saraaya: “Please, do not kill him. I will marry you and live with you in the ghouls’ kingdom of the seas, just leave him alive.” Since the ghoul was in love, and lovers are usually tolerant, he released Zharif at-Tool and took Saraaya with him to the kingdom of the seas. If you (listeners) walk on the beach of Haifa and are in love, you will hear Saraaya’s voice singing: “Oh Zharif at-Tool, the man of Mijana songs! Days passed and I still love you.” You must be in love to be able to hear her. This is my story, which I told to you and hid in your heart.