

'Such a Lawsuit Requires Such Witnesses'

A story by Salam Al Rassi

Ali Dhawj was a peddler who used to go around the town selling vegetables from the back of his donkey. Ali's efforts in telling stories were greater than his efforts to sell his vegetables. One of his stories went as follows.

Once a man was spending the night sitting with his pregnant wife on his outdoor stone bench between his fattened sheep and his loyal dog Sunseel. The man looked at his wife's belly with admiration and said to her: "Well my dear, if you give birth to a boy I will slaughter the sheep. But if you give birth to a girl then I will slaughter the dog Sunseel."

Hearing that, Sunseel became worried and thought to himself: "From the looks of his wife, she is fat, and her left shoulder is lower than her right one. This looks like that she's going to deliver a baby girl. So it's better for you Sunseel to run away."

The moment the man and his wife went to bed, Sunseel woke up the sheep and told him of his intention. The sheep was scared and said: "What if the woman changes her mind and delivers a boy, then the man will hang me and separate my meat from my bones." Then the sheep asked the dog to release him from the rope that was tied around its neck and the two walked off. Sunseel, who was a pedigree, strode haughtily while the sheep was dragged behind, frightened and meek.

When they arrived at a place called Qarqaman Valley, the dog looked at the sheep and said: "There's plenty of grass here for you. Wait for me here because I have to go find myself something to eat. I will return soon."

After a little while, a wolf was passing by. He stopped to ask the sheep: who gave you permission to enter my territory? "

"This is not your territory," the sheep replied. "Have you got witnesses to prove your claim?"

"I'll go and get my witnesses right away, but I want you to remember that you're in trouble when I come back," the wolf said.

The wolf had not gone far when he saw a group of hungry foxes walking by. He stopped them and said to them: "A healthy sheep is grazing alone in the Qarqaman Valley. If you come with me and say that the place where the sheep is standing belongs to me, then we will attack him and eat him all." The overjoyed foxes started to shout and chant: "It belongs to your father and grandfather before him." The wolf walked back with the crowd of foxes marching behind singing with joy." It belongs to your father and grandfather before. It belongs to your father and grandfather

before."

A hyena, who was called Abu Amer, was taking a nap in a nearby cave. When he heard the cheers of the foxes he went outside and was surprised to see the procession of foxes being led by the wolf Abu Serhan.

"You, cousin Abu Serhan. Since when have you depended on the foxes to achieve your demands?" the hyena asked. "There's an attack against my territory," replied the wolf, "and those are my witnesses."

By this time Sunseel returned to find the sheep trembling with fear. After soothing him, the dog said: "Just stay put and relax. Don't be scared." Then the dog hid behind a few rocks about one hundred meters away and sat down to watch.

Soon the wolf arrived with his witnesses and stopped close to where the sheep was standing, looked at him and addressed the foxes: "You foxes, knowing your famous uncompromising honesty and integrity, I ask you to say the truth and nothing but the truth; isn't this land where this sheep is standing mine, passed from father to son?"

Sunseel roared from behind the rocks, lifted his ears up, opened his eyes wide and got ready to attack. The foxes lowered their tails, squeezed them between their legs, retreated backward and said nothing.

Abu Serhan was mad and scream at the foxes: " Why don't you foxes speak up? Isn't this land mine? Am I not the only owner of it?"

Sunseel roared more and growled and prepared to pounce. The leader of the foxes advanced a little and said: "We for sure know that the mountain on the right belongs to you Abu Serhan. We are also certain that you own that Valley behind those rocks. As for this piece of land where Mr. Sheep stands, we witness before God that we don't know to whom it belongs."

The wolf was disappointed, turned around and started his trip back. On the way he stopped at the hyena's cave, called the hyena and said: "You were right cousin. He who takes three foxes as his witnesses loses his borders."

From the book Hees Bees, published by Nawfal. '**Such a Lawsuit Requires Such Witnesses**' was translated and adapted into English for The Daily Star by Hanna Farha