

SHARIFA AND THE FISH



A true story

Sharifa and the fish

“Sharifa, go to the market and please bring us a nice fish”, said Mum, Asma. “They should have a fresh catch today at the market”, she added.

Twelve-year old Sharifa sprang to action. She loved going to the market and seeing all the usual and unusual things. And fish was her favourite.

“Don’t forget to take the money from my purse”; said her mum.

Sharifa took the money and ran out the door. “Oh, and while you are there please pick some groceries, too”, yelled Mum. But Sharifa was already turning the corner.

Along she went, down the winding alleys. Now and again, she would hum to herself – one of her favourite songs by Lata Mangeshkar. She met many of her friends and took a peek inside the shops that lined both side of the streets. It seemed that everyone knew her, as they all waved to her affectionately. After all, she was a very popular little girl – always helpful, cheerful and resourceful.

The roads were busy on that sultry day. Young Sharifa had to be very careful of the traffic which consisted of anything that could walk or move. There were horse carriages, bicycles, pull-cycles and cattle carts; and hoards of people moving haphazardly in every direction. It seemed that the whole world was in a harried festive mood today.

At long last, she found herself in the market. It was buzzing with people and flies. The smell was unbearably exotic – all sorts of fishy and veggie smells, mingling with the trash washed up in previous night's rain.

Sharifa wandered around the market for a while. She loved to look at things and know their prices. She was fascinated by the colourful fish of all sizes. Some were flat like chappatis, while others were fat like laddoos. Some had rainbow colours while others were charcoal black and boring grey. She even saw a white fish and another that looked like a snake.

She also had to be careful of the pick-pockets, beggars and the destitute – they were always too eager to help themselves and make away.

As she was walking past a particularly large pile of fish, a man called to her from behind the pile. “Are you looking for fish, or just looking?” he boomed.

She hesitated before answering. Could she trust a stranger? Then she saw the man’s face. He was an old man with a kind face. He reminded her of her own grandfather, whose name was Qamarali - a very generous and kind man. All at once, she blurted out: “Mummy has sent me to buy a nice, fresh, fish.”

“How much money do you have?” he asked curiously. “I have only two rupees”, she said.

“Oh! I could give you a nice big fish for two rupees”. And he sprang to action and pulled out a large fish from the pile. He handed the fish to



Sharifa, and took the money she gave him.

But the fish was far too big and heavy for little Sharifa to carry by herself. So the kind man handed her a bag made of thick muslin cloth. “Put the fish inside the bag and carry it home quickly or it will start to rot”, he said.

Still, the bag was too heavy, so Sharifa resorted to simply dragging the bag, with the fish’s googly eyes sticking out from the bag and watching her every move.

Along she went, dragging and pulling. Huffing and puffing, but not giving up. People around her were amazed. Some were even amused and quipped how ‘she had caught a fish bigger than herself’.

When a very tired but excited Sharifa reached home, everyone was aghast. “What have you brought?” asked her aunty Sakina in a shocked voice. But Mum had an idea. “We should have a fish feast and invite all the neighbours to it”.

So everyone got busy with cleaning, cutting and frying the fish. It was a smelly gaily atmosphere around the neighbourhood. The prospect of a fresh fish had obviously brought delight. Everyone laughed and giggled at the fish’s googly eyes. They all ate the tasty fish, and marvelled at Sharifa’s new feat and teased her. “She’ll be pulling a whale soon!” said her aunty sweetly.

As for Sharifa, that was one of the most memorable adventures of her life – but it was only the beginning of greater adventures that would soon follow.

