

Chapter One: Fairuz

Ismaeel.

Known as Aljarman, the son of the pearls, the one with the pants like the Germans.

Born by the shores of Ras Al Khaimah, holding onto his mother.

Tuffaha was her name.

Which translates as an Apple in Arabic.

The Apple of Ismaeel's eyes as he referred to her always.

Ismaeel had a wish to be one with the sea, transforming his arms and lungs into fins and gills, and finding his currents and tides through life.

Tuffaha, the, calm, defeated soul from Zanzibar - a Tanzanian island off the coast of East Africa.

Tuffaha was bought by Fatima Bint Sharif from Ras Al Khaimah in the Early 1910s¹⁶

Tuffaha also wanted to be held softly by the sea.

She had a long scar on her neck crawling to her shoulder as a reminder.

*She heard about the horrors of the other side, but she didn't know there were two sides at the end of that tunnel - East and West. The tunnels looked similar but the journey on the waters wasn't.*¹⁷

¹⁶ Referring to the manumission description and text about my grandfather *Isameel* and his mother *Tuffah* – book: *Speaking with Their Own Voices: The Stories of Slaves in the Persian Gulf in the 20th Century* – by Jerzy Zdanowski (2014). The description indicated that Ismaeel escaped the city upon hearing about “the document”. Around that year, the British officials were working as an influence to gain power over establishing relations with the Arab tribes that owned the lands with Oil fields. Some tribes refused the notion of slavery abolishment which led to further restricted movements of the slaves

¹⁷ The two tunnels were located at the Old Palace in Dar Alsalam, Zanzibar, and were part of a cave with natural underground chambers, which eventually led to the sea where the slaves could be secreted away without being seen; one tunnel led to the Atlantic Ocean ships and one to the Indian ocean ships.

Tuffaha sang along with others about Fairuz, the boy.

Fairuz translates as the colour “turquoise” in Arabic - which is a male’s name or family name popular among East African and Swahili culture ¹⁸.

As for female naming, it is Fairuza.

Fairuz was a boy who heard his mother’s callings through the waves while he jumped off the ship, freeing himself and others too. The tale of Fairuz lived as he died.

It continued to echo through the journeys of Indian Ocean waters and became a word of solidarity.

“Oh Yal Habib Fairuz – Yabon yebe’onek - **Dear Fairuz, they went to sell him.**

Oh Yal Habib Fairuz, rabatouk ta’hat - **Dear Fairuz, they chained him down.**

Ya Allah, Khal el gharbi teshelah wa tred athamah ma’a almurjan - **Oh Allah, let the western winds blow so his bones become coral”.**¹⁹

Maybe **Tuffaha** believed that Ismaeel was her Fairuz, everyone wanted to have a Fairuz! She hoped he would also be freed.

In 1958

With the discovery of the black gold.

Different types of boats sailed towards the Persian/ Arabian Gulf.

The slave owners became slaves themselves.

The sand, pearls, and dates dissolved into oil tankers and machinery.

¹⁸ Notes on the influence of Zanzibar/Omani relations and social structure, Arabic names were common in Zanzibar, and due to the disruptive climate - Western Winds, that made it impossible to travel during certain times of the year, many Arab traders had formed communities in Zanzibar (Fair, L. (1998).

¹⁹ Field Notes on the TV program: *Music and the Sea Rhythms*, episode 12, Mubarak and Aal-Nassay (2002), the song was originally in the Swahili language then a few Arabic words were added. It was first brought by slaves who were still in the transition to the Arabian/Persian Gulf, and then it was used as singing sea shanties to motivate the crew members to continue to work hard, and not to fear the sea. It was mentioned that the lyrics have changed, and Fairuz became a hero of the pearl divers instead of the little boy who returned to the sea.

In 1959

Isameel handed his mother the Manumission certificate, with a blue-inked stamp that was smudged.

This celebratory moment took a space in one of the archival books

And in my memory

And generations after.

Tuffaha knew the rules.

Manumission doesn't erase Aldain²⁰:

payback, economy, dried fish, pearls, back to the sea

In 1965

Back to the sea

Last attempt to touch the pearl and the last air bubble.

Ismaeel returned to the sea²¹.

As the sea did not fear Allah. The women conversed and requested.

"Toub Toub ya Bahar -, redeem, redeem yourself O'sea.

Ma takhaf men Allah, Ya bahar? - Aren't you afraid of Allah, O'sea?

Arba'ah, khames dekhla, yebhom - Four months has passed, and the fifth is upon us, bring them back

Yebhom, ma takhaf men Allah - I beg you, Aren't you afraid of Allah?

Yal lumi – hat bin rumi - Oh Lime, bring Rumi back with the precious jewel”²²

²⁰ Aldain: translates to *the debt*. The systematic ownership of the slaves and their families' resources. It sometimes can be paid back by money, labour, work, or selling one of the slave children to another family, etc., or never. The debt was one of the most problematic social and economic systems in the Arabian/Persian Gulf social fabric. There were documented incidents of slaves freeing themselves by paying or attempting to free themselves by escaping to Mecca in Saudi Arabia, but the owners asked other slaves to haunt them or force them to return. The manumission provided by the British Agency did not provide any protection whatsoever until the U.A.E was established as a sovereign state. It was still not clear how manumission provided any value legally.

²¹ Most of the enslaved in the Arabian/Persian Gulf worked as pearl divers and palm tree farmers, in which they worked in hard conditions.

²² Field Notes from the TV program: *Music and the Sea Rhythms*, episode 12, Mubarak and Aal-Nassay (2002). Toub Toub was a ceremonial practice done by women, mostly slaves. The act is performed to converse with the sea as a person, to form a power-play with the spirit world to bring back the pearl divers from the depth of the sea realm. The women would perform the ritual on the fourth month during the pearling season, they would gather and walk in rhythmic movement into the sea, some would sing, some would play the drums, and others performed repetitive ritualistic acts, like dipping a cat into the water to communicate with the sea, also burning the sea with a hot iron or a wooden piece, others throw sharp items to cut the sea open and lastly, they perform a cleansing act by pouring a laxative herb. The sea becomes the rival, and the only way to its salvation is to redeem itself.

Tuffah knew while holding Islameel's cloth

The debt

With Fish, rice, jars, and the sun.

*Back to the sea, **Tuffaha** surrenders.*

Chapter Two: *Delma*

Shaikha²³

The royal lady, the one with the wide eyes, and gentle hands

Shaikha was kidnapped as a girl from her home in what is now the Stone Town in Zanzibar.

After several changes of ownership

Shaikha was sold to an Arab slaver in the Mecca slave market²⁴ and was brought to Abu

*Dhabi in 1925*²⁵

Shaikha learnt the crafts of Arab bridal preparations.

She served and served.

*From Nelah*²⁶ body mask, henna²⁷ on hair, red ink on lips, and sewing the wedding garments.

Shaikha was famous for her mark.

She applied a mixture of rice water with the Nelah across the face

While it is drying, apply her warm gentle hands, and rub it in till it shrinks up and cleans the

skin.

Shaikha also learned how to weave cotton, dye it, and make it into a beautiful fairuz thoub.²⁸

²³ A common name in the region, from the word Shaikh, meaning royal, Shaikha for a female royalty or the leader and used in Sheikhdoms in Arabian/Persian Gulf countries.

²⁴ The annual pilgrimage to Mecca, the Hajj, was the biggest vehicle for enslavement. When the open Trans-Saharan slave trade died out, Muslim-African Hajj pilgrims across the Sahara were deceived or given low-cost travel expenses by tribal leaders; when they arrived at the East Coast, they were trafficked over the Red Sea in the dhows and discovered upon arrival in Saudi Arabia that they were to be sold on the slave market rather than to perform the Hajj.

²⁵ During that time, Abu Dhabi was the "capital of the Bani Yas tribal confederation under the supervision of the British official representatives.

²⁶ Nelah is an Indigo dye- an organic compound with a distinctive blue color. Indigo is a natural dye extracted from the leaves of some plants of the Indigofera genus, grown and used throughout the world, in India in particular. Nelah is used as a scrub to whiten the skin and moisturize it. It is also used to brighten dark spots around the neck, knees, and elbows.

²⁷ Henna is a black dye prepared from the dried and powdered leaves of the henna tree. The practice of putting Henna on hands and feet is very common today in Arabian/Persian Gulf countries. It is a celebratory act for women, especially brides.

²⁸ Thoub is a long-sleeved ankle-length traditional dress with embroidery on the chest and end of the sleeves. It is a common clothing piece in Arabian/ Persian Gulf countries as it follows Islamic traditions. It is also influenced heavily by Indian Salwar Kameez design- from India and Pakistan.

In 1939

On Shaheen's Henna night²⁹, the women wore the golden ornaments which they displayed with some profusion on their arms and legs. They sang to the bride:

Ameena fe Amani-ha - Faithful in her wishes

Maleha fe ma'aneha - Beautiful in her meanings

Tajlat wa injelat hata - It became clear and even clearer

Sa'alet Allah yehaneha - I asked God to bless her

Jabeenha kal Bader badhi - Her forehead is like the full moon

Wa reegha yeshfy amradhi -Her saliva heals my illness

Laha rab elsama radhi -The Lord of Heaven is satisfied with her

Wa ahsen fe ma'aneha - And better in its meanings³⁰.

Shaikha was carrying her own Ameena.

Shaikha knew, Shaikha refused.

To adhere, to serve, and to continue.

"May you rot, or may you swell, or may a beast take you to Delma"³¹

Sliced tents and robes

Shaikha found herself in Delma, with Onaizah³²

Tied to a palm tree, and flogged. Flogged and whipped with Sa'af³³ that was still green.

²⁹ Henna Night is a gathering held before the wedding ceremony among South Asian and Middle Eastern Muslim communities. During a Henna party, the bride-to-be, her female family members, and friends gather to apply intricate henna designs on their hands and feet. a ritual that symbolizes the start of a blissful marriage

³⁰ Ramdan, Mutar (2020). Folklore and instruments, from the Emirati and Kuwait House of Music, U.A.E Dept. of Antiquities and Museums. Ameena Fe Amaneha song is part of the Yalwah folklore gathering for the bride-to-be. The bride either sits on the floor or a chair in the middle of the hall or yard, and women surround her in two lines, holding a green fabric above the bride's head and moving it in steady motion or the women stand with soft leaning movements front and back towards the bride. Then after the song is done, the bride walks to her husband, and it says that they rub their feet with their husbands for good luck and offer the husband water and drink after him as a sign of partnership and prosperity.

³¹ A famous saying per Shaikha and Ameena's notes regarding slaves who refuse to work. Delma is an area between Doha the capital of Qatar and Abu Dhabi the capital of the U.A.E where slaves were taken to torture and discipline. Additional information and mention of the Delma area can be found in the Bin Jalmound House museum in Doha.

³² Onaizah is a derogatory name for Anzah which translates to a goat, noting that slaves were given derogatory names to differentiate between the slaved and non-slaved persons.

³³ Sa'af which translates to palm tree fronds or branches. Date palm trees are a social and religious symbol of prosperity, fertility, and generosity in the region. On the other hand, it is associated with punishment as it was used to tie slaves or any disobedient person under the sun and the fronds were used to create robes, whips, and rods to flog.

Their thorns and spikes were still on them

Until their flesh was raw and bleeding

The boiling strained rice water³⁴ was poured on the bleeding women

*Cutting through their previous scars to new ones, deeper than the waves that lead them
there.*

***Shaikha** and Onaizah couldn't take it*

Onizah rested at the age of 14

*And **Shaikha** was released after the birth of Ameena.*

In 1945

***Shaikha** had Saleh*

Um Alwalad³⁵ is free, they said, not the boy.

Saleh went west to serve, Ameena went East to trade

Henna and spices, and wooden elephants and bangles

*Debts were paid and **Shaikha** finally rested her gentle hands on her chest*

³⁴ This was a common practice in Delma to discipline slaves. Rice is one of the most common grains used in the region, imported from India and Pakistan, and the rice water would normally be thrown away after cooking the meal, yet it was used to torture the slaves.

³⁵ Um Alwalad translates to mother of the child- was given to a slave who had given birth to her master's child and as a result, she possessed a special legal status that allowed her release upon the death of her master, but not her children.

Chapter Three: Zar

Ameena, the trustworthy, the faithful one, the truth

Ameena was taken to sail through the Indian Ocean³⁶ with her mother's Fairuz thoub³⁷.

Worked, sold, and carried through several places.

She acquired three tongues: Arabic, Hindi, and Persian

Ameena, unlike her mother Shaikha, was strong, tall, and stubborn, she was her own Fairuzah³⁸.

Ameena was sold for one hundred and seventy-two Rupees³⁹ in a town called Rajasthan⁴⁰.

She was gifted to Siva, a wealthy widow priest⁴¹

Ameena was amazed by women priests.

They were held in great reverence by the captured ones

Women priests could calculate time, foretold events, and hosted Zar.⁴²

Ameena desired, but she was kept afar.

"Childless you become, Alshaikha⁴³ has only herself and her shaitan"⁴⁴

³⁶ Ameena was a slave to a Bahraini trader who went to India, Iran, and Zanzibar regularly, she had a strong build and oversaw cooking and serving in the ships due to her endurance to harsh environments. It was common in Bahrain and Kuwait to travel across the Indian Ocean due to their strategic location and the economic advantages they had at that time, both the U.A.E and Qatar and areas in Oman were not as prosperous as Kuwait and Bahrain.

³⁷ Fairuz thoub means turquoise dress, which was made by her mother Shaikha, and it influenced her to call her *Fairuzah* as her second name and nickname in the family as a symbol of strong-headed women. The dress is currently kept in my mother's chest of drawers.

³⁸ Referencing the legend of Fairuz, the symbol of resistance, See p.6

³⁹ 172 Indian Rupees equals 1.90 Euro, 2.06 USD. Ameena Fairuz, audio notes (2012).

⁴⁰ Rajasthan is a state in northwest India. The slave traders established several slave trade centers, especially in a city called Mandor in Rajasthan. It was a hub of Muslim, European, and African slave traders along with spices, meat, and gold.

⁴¹ Siva was an Ethiopian merchant, and according to Ameena, she was married to an Indian merchant from whom she inherited all her wealth. She also was a slave, but they had a different hierarchy system of slaves which allowed her to be free as long as she remained a widow of her master and never re-marry again.

⁴² Zar is music and dance ritual with centuries-old roots in Ethiopia and Sudan, is traditionally performed by a lead woman to exorcise jinn or evil spirits. There are different types of Zar sessions depending on the region, however, in the Arabian/Persian Gulf countries; it is practiced mainly as Jin exorcism, the practice of reconciling the Jin and the possessed person using Quran verses using Daf. The person who is possessed by Zar is expressed by a range of behaviors, such as involuntary movements similar to epilepsy, and inability or unwillingness to speak or vague language. Nowadays, Zar is illegal in most of Arabian/Persian Gulf countries.

⁴³ Alskhaika from the word Shaikha, means royalty, or leader of a group. In the context of Zar, the Shaikha is the person who leads the session and performs the exorcism.

⁴⁴ Shaitan translates to the devil or Satan. The quote is presumably said by Siva who refused Ameena's participation in Zar since she was still young and unmarried according to Ameena Fairuz's recorded audio notes in 2012. It was believed that either the Zar chooses you or you enter the Zar and sacrifice your soul, and the ability to bear children.

***Ameena** only prepared the pipes, hashish ⁴⁵, and the animal offerings, she was trusted to perform, to dedicate, to serve.*

Sacrifice for protection.

Sacrifice for a return.

Sacrifice for a payment.

*Then the Zar finally chose **Ameena**⁴⁶*

She accepted.

Sat sang and sorrowed between the Shadows.

Daf ⁴⁷, Bukhoor ⁴⁸, Verses and blood

***Ameena** knew there was no return*

Knives under the pillows, goat blood on the feet

***Ameena** became a priest herself⁴⁹.*

⁴⁵ Hashish, shortened to hash, is an oleoresin made by compressing and processing parts of the cannabis plant, commonly used in the region, especially by women during Zar sessions, and illegalized when U.A.E was established in 1971.

⁴⁶ It was believed that the Zar chooses the person to embody and give the powers for exorcism. According to Ameena's audio notes (2012), she was chosen that evening when her owner Siva was unable to perform and took the chance to work as a priest.

⁴⁷ Daf is a Middle Eastern frame drum musical instrument, used heavily as the main instrument in Zar sessions and believed to be the only acceptable musical instrument in Islam teachings. It traditionally has a round wooden frame, jingles, and a thin, translucent head made of fish or goat skin.

⁴⁸ Bukhor or frankincense is a perfume with scented oil, and it contains a type of incense, which consists of wood scraps infused with scented oil. It is believed that a certain type of incense attracts the Jin and helps with exorcism.

⁴⁹ Ameena worked as a Zar priest in Rajasthan till she could afford to free herself. She continued the practice in Bahrain and Dubai to afford to live with her husband and children.

In 1971

While slavery was officially abolished, greedy hands were looking for the Aa'beed⁵⁰

***Ameena** was a Khadamah⁵¹ at neighborhood.*

A nanny at James's house

And a Zar priest in Rashidiyah⁵²

***Ameena** always believed in good omens*

Goat blood, Ameenas⁵³, a knife under the pillow, and sugar on the graves of loved ones⁵⁴.

In 1998

*At **Ameena's** feet*

I was filled with stories of her sorrows and triumphs.

Many of which I have documented, and others forgotten.

***Ameena** thought I would accept my fate and the omens*

I didn't, for they were quite harmless. Yet I could see the troubling eyes.

⁵⁰ Aa'beed prular, Abd singular, translates to the word slaves, it is a socially unacceptable word that is still used to describe Afro-Emiratis or any African descent person in the region. Other words such as Khal- which translates to Uncle or dark spot on the skin and the word Khadam which translates to the servants, are used to describe Afro Emirati's in slavery history context till today.

⁵¹ Referencing the word: Khadam, means a servant. Ameena referred to herself as Khadamah multiple times, the word can be used in different contexts as a house-maid, but Khadamah is associated with an African descent person.

⁵² Rashidyah is one of the major areas in Dubai city that hosted Zar sessions; it is still popular to this day.

⁵³ Ameena believed that the only way to not be cursed as a Zar priest was to extend her legacy by naming all her granddaughters Ameena. Currently, there are 5 people called Ameena in the family, and I'm the eldest one. We were given special treatment and additional protection during the rituals back then.

⁵⁴ Spreading sugar on the graves of loved ones was an uncommon ritual yet practiced by Zar attendees and priests. It was believed that it helped to make the dead's time sweeter.

I couldn't find myself while she carried me to her house entrance.

Where she just slaughtered the goat⁵⁵

Dipped my feet and hands into the running blood

An imperfect sketch

*My memory has furnished me with the manners and customs of a people among whom I first
drew my breath.*

But I carried on.

Stories.

Everything was a story to me then, though I couldn't think beyond myself

*I have always pictured her at the docks, about to get on a ship to India, to Iran, to Doha, to
Dubai.*

It took me years to understand, to observe, and to admit.

Circulating till I hit the point of breaking point.

*And to the point of her departure, **Ameena** is my Fairuza.*

⁵⁵Slaughtering a goat in front of a new house or any building entrance used to be a common practice that was believed to be a blessing that symbolized a sacrifice for good luck. The meat would be distributed to the neighborhood or the poor to protect the new house/building from the evil eye.