

Jbene - theatre script by Nick Bilbrough

Narrator 1: Once upon a time there lived a married couple in Palestine who had almost everything they wanted in life.

Narrator 2: The only thing they didn't have was a child, and they wanted one more than anything.

Narrator 1: And then one day their lives became perfect and a beautiful baby girl was born.

Narrator 2: Her skin was as white as cheese so they called her Jbene.

Narrator 1: Jbene was loved by everyone who knew her and she grew up into a beautiful young woman.

Narrator 2: Many of the young men in the village wanted to marry her.

Young man 1: Jbene, would you like to drink tea with me?

Young man 2: Jbene, would you like to come to my house for dinner?

Young man 3: Jbene, would you like to go for a walk with me?

Narrator 1: The other young women in the village became jealous of Jbene.

Young woman 1: Why does everyone like Jbene so much?

Young woman 2: What does she have that we don't have?

Young woman 3: I think we should teach her a lesson.

Narrator 2: The young women of the village asked Jbene to come to pick fruit from the Christ-thorn trees with them.

Narrator 1: The Christ-thorn trees were a long way away and it was a difficult journey to get there.

Narrator 2: But Jbene was the kind of person who always wanted to help people, and so she agreed to go with them.

Jbene: Of course I will help you.

Narrator 1: They walked for many hours. When they finally got to the place where the Christ-thorn trees were, they asked Jbene to climb one of the trees.

Young woman 1: Go on Jbene! Climb to the top where the best fruit is!

Young woman 2: Higher! Higher Jbene!

Young woman 3: Keep going Jbene! Don't stop until you get to the top!

Narrator 2: When Jbene got to the top of the tree her body was scratched from the thorns and she was crying in pain.

Narrator 1: The three women didn't care. They lit a fire at the bottom so that Jbene couldn't get down and started to walk home, leaving Jbene in the tree.

Young woman 1: You're not so beautiful now, Jbene, are you?

Narrator 2: Jbene waited in the tree for many hours before the fire went out and she could get down.

Narrator 1: But now she was all alone, and she didn't know her way home. She started to cry again.

Jibene: I don't want to be beautiful anymore. Being beautiful only gives me problems.

Narrator 2: Jibene took some soot from the fire and she rubbed it into her face and arms.

Narrator 1: At that moment the owner of the land rode by on his horse. He looked down at Jbene and thought she was his servant. He spoke angrily to her.

Landowner: What are you doing here? You should be looking after the sheep. Go and look after the sheep now.

Narrator 2: Jbene didn't know what to do. The landowner pointed to the sheep in the next field and Jbene slowly walked over to them.

Narrator 1: She sat down between them and started to cry.

Jbene: What can I do? I don't know how to get home. I don't know if I will ever see my parents again.

Narrator 2: The sheep seemed to be really listening to her and when she told her sad story they also started to cry.

Narrator 1: And then the sky started to cry too and the rain fell down on poor Jbene.

Narrator 2: But the rain washed her face and body clean. At that point the rich landowner came back. He looked down at Jbene and he saw that she was not his servant. He also saw that she was very beautiful.

Landowner: I am so sorry. I thought you were my servant. Will you forgive me?

Narrator 1: Jbene told him the whole story of what had happened to her, and as she did so the landowner fell more and more in love with her. He got down on his knees and looked up into her eyes.

Landowner: Do you think that one day you could marry me?

Narrator: And what do you think she said?

Notes on the story

This story was recommended to my many teachers of English throughout Palestine. It is a traditional Palestinian story and there is a version of it in the very detailed and comprehensive collection, 'Speak Bird, Speak Again' by Ibrahim Muhawi and Sharif Kanaana.