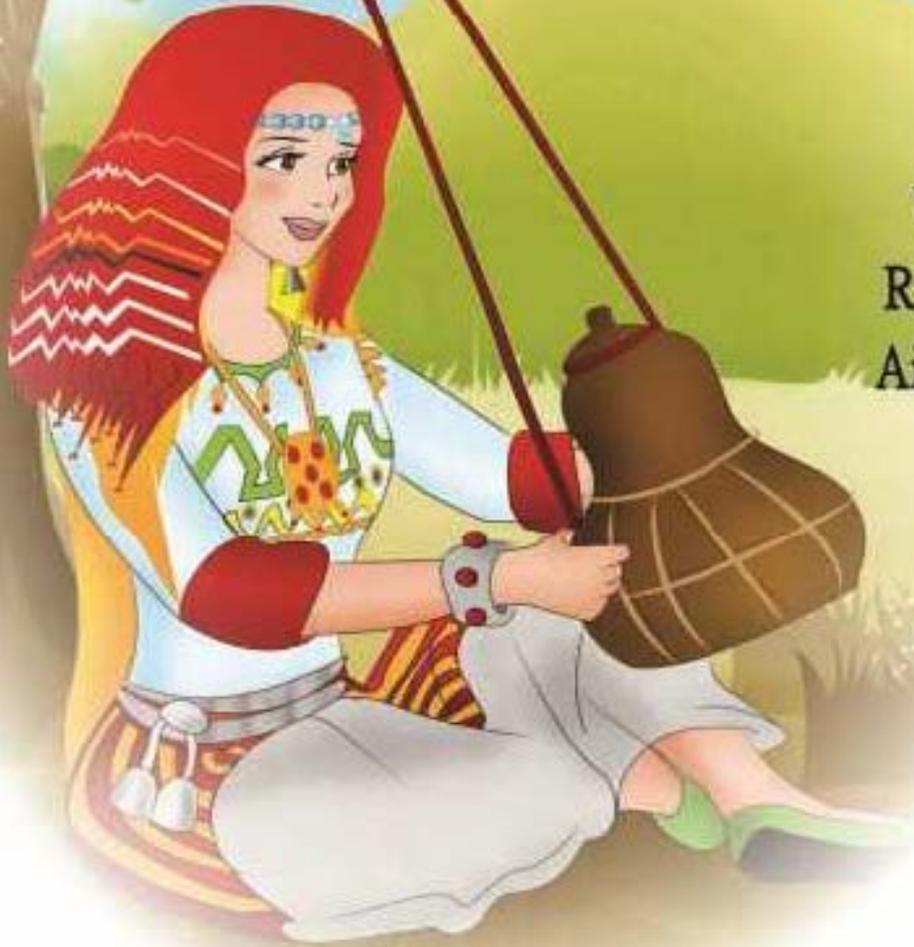


Lunja

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It is a folk story of the Algerian heritage; it tells what happened to the son of the king who risked his life to marry the gorgeous Lunja.

The story aims at developing the values of goodness and beauty and purposefulness.

LUNJA

Once upon a time there was a gorgeous girl named Lunja. Her great beauty spread beyond the horizons. Any young man who aspired to marry her, ought to pay an expensive dowry by committing himself to protect her and jeopardizing his own life in midst of horrors!

Lunja aroused keen interest amongst all the youth. Everyone craved to get married to her. Yet, the way to her heart was strewn with thorns and perils; only a stouthearted young man could dream securing her love. Well, how did her saga get started?

In a sky-scraping castle there lived a king and the queen along with their only son, named Prince Zahar, who one day had gone out promenading in the fields.



There was an old woman standing beside a deep well, filling her carafe. As Prince Zahar drew nearer the well on the back of his dark horse, he beamed at the old woman, saying:

- Good morning! Let my horse drink water, please!

She frowned at him and said

- Do you think that because of your bravery and attractiveness atop your horse, you can do whatever you want? You pale by comparison with the stunning Lunja!

Prince Zahar looked astonished and befuddled; turned away the horse's hooves. He was a little preoccupied, mulling over a bunch of questions without answers. The more days passed by, the more the confusion overwhelmed him.

One day, he ran out of patience and then sent his guards to fetch the savvy old woman. She then told him the story of Lunja, the daughter of the giant monster, living in a far-flung land nobody could reach easily, for the leading road was hemmed in by mazes of death and doom.

The prince rode his horse and left the castle, heading to the region mentioned by the old woman, wherein Lunja dwelt. She already seemed a ghost to him, even lightening his perilous path.

Tired, he stopped and came back to take advice of s wise old man. The latter knew well the secrets of life, was much experimented, broad-minded, a news-gatherer, hence the sobriquet "*Sheikh Mastermind*".



The prince narrated him the whole story, at the end of which Sheikh Mastermind said kind-heartedly and pitifully:

- Your path is laborious, indeed. You'll face death at any moment. Many men had died short of reaching Lunja. I advise you to forget that girl and to get back to the castle to help your father rule the kingdom!

Prince Zahar seemed stoical:

- I must get to her at all costs!

Sheikh Mastermind said:

- Then you ought to heed my directions. Be careful of the *wondrous rock* before you arrive at Lunja!

Prince Zahar got back to the castle confused; would he step back or forge ahead at his own risks and perils?

Very early in the morning, the prince mounted his dark horse and started a journey that lasted days and nights. He crossed quite long distances and confronted unspeakable horrors with fearlessness.



Prince Zahar beheld the weirdly-shaped gloomy fortress. He made out the *wondrous rock* opening and closing tremendously fast. In the evening, the bats were screeching and performing the dance of death, as if warning the prince of the dangerousness of the mission. But he managed to slither through the *wondrous rock* with great agility, and he thus miraculously body-swerved being crushed alive by the fast closing *wondrous rock*. He shouted out in the vacuity of the night:

- Lunja! Beautiful Lunja, come out!

A young girl appeared from above, like a glimmering star ripping through the darkness. She answered back haughtily:

- Who are you, stranger? How come you slipped into the fortress?

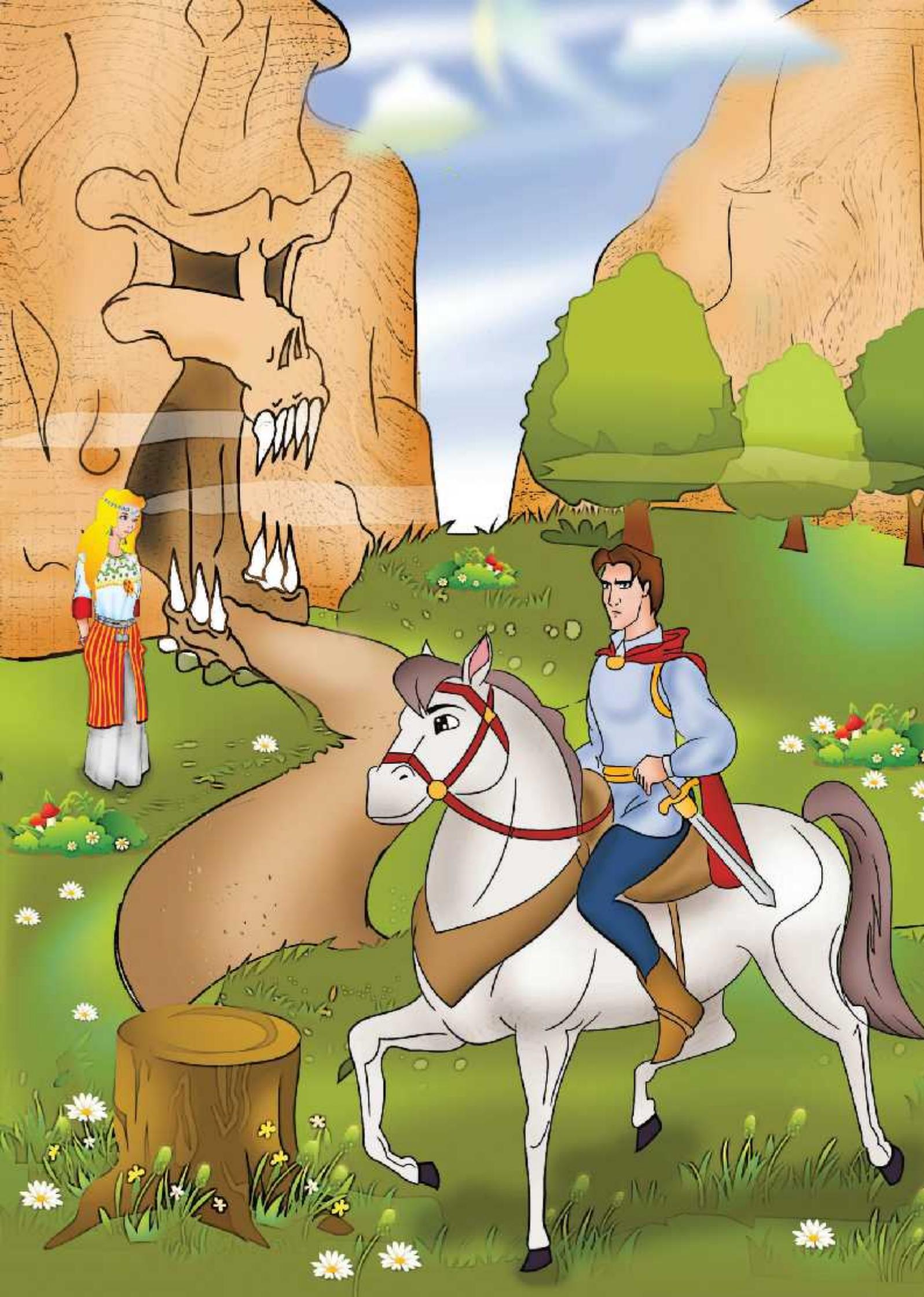
- I'm Prince Zahar. I've triumphed over dangers to wed you. I grant you my heart on a golden plate. I came from a dreamland, Algeria.

Lunja felt pleased upon seeing him and she liked his way of talking. She let her long hair reach down to the ground. He held the hairy rope and climbed over the wall. The prince was astounded by the incredible length of her hair. In the evening, the giant monster came back into his stronghold. He scrutinized nooks and crannies. He conjectured a stranger had entered the fortress. He then questioned Lunja.

She lied to him:

- Oh, just a hungry man came closer to the *wondrous rock* asking for food to not starve to death. I gave him bread and milk, before he walked away!

In the early morning, Lunja went out with Prince Zahar in a horse ride. The giant monster got up at the echo of the *wondrous rock*'s shutting. He called out but Lunja did not respond.





He stared out the window and he spotted her along with a young man straddling a horse. His eyes spewed wrath, as he scooted down the stairs, yelling like hell, his long fangs and terrible fingers protruding like swords. Blurred by ire, he lost his way, as though he were not a habitu  of the whereabouts. He strived to slide out but the *wondrous rock* mashed his fat body. He shrieked devilishly before he perished.

Lunja and Prince Zahar rode on smilingly. In a forest trail at the foot of the mountain, they espied two eagles fighting each other. A strong eagle was grappling with a weak eagle. The unequal vulture fight stirred Prince Zahar's feelings of chivalry in the face of injustice. He then intervened to free the weak eagle from the claws of the strong eagle. But the latter took the chance and kidnapped the prince, flew higher in the sky, leaving Lunja alone with the horse.

Lunja remained lonely and astray in the absence of Prince Zahar. She wept for the sorrow of parting blow. She had waited for his comeback for days, till she lost hope and then got on the horseback. She did not where to go. Yet, the horse knew instinctively the way back to the castle of the king.

After many days and nights of ride, Lunja got close to the castle, all downhearted. She dismounted, left the horse out of sight, and she sneaked into the castle in rags. She asked the guards to help her work as a servant of the king. And she got what she hoped for.

Everyday Lunja would sit by the window, calling back the knight Zahar. She wondered to where the eagle had flown away with her beloved prince. Was he alive or already dead?

Then one time baffled Lunja surprisingly glimpsed out of the window an eagle hovering in the air of the castle. It was the weak eagle Prince Zahar had once rescued in the fight counter to the strong eagle. The weak eagle was flying over deliberately, as if struggling to convey a message to her.

Lunja tilted her half-body over the windowsill, waving her hand up left and right. The eagle continued flapping its long wings expressively. She then rushed out of the castle and followed the eagle as her guide. Once arrived at one of those hills, the eagle landed and directed its sight toward a gigantic tree. Lunja halted, her forehead sweating profusely.

Lunja inched toward the colossal tree. She heard a weak moan; it turned out it was Prince Zahar's sigh. Her heart throbbed. She threw herself to the trunk, but the giant eagle was faster than her, as the mischievous broad-winged bird seized the prince and promptly lifted him skywards. Lunja felt for the prince, waving her bare arms discontentedly, *shouting down on* the unfairness of life.

Though fatigued, the prince overheard her indignation below and managed to stammer a few of urgent words for her:

- You must bring in a fatty ram and leave it grazing by the river. Once the giant eagle will see it, it will let me go!

Lunja carried out the scheme of eagle-abducted Prince Zahar. Unbelievably things went well as projected. Lunja salvaged Prince Zahar from the claws of the horrible vulture. Sadly, the prince fell seriously sick, hindering him from moving. He was thus confined to leaf-made bed Lunja had prepared.



Many days flew by to see Prince Zahar recover. His only treatment was the nectar of trees and olives, under the care and tenderness of Lunja.

Afterwards, the stunner and the young prince went back to the town in disguise to avoid being recognized by people. The day after their comeback, the maid Lunja wished to meet the king, but the guards denied her access. Her imploring cries reached the hearing of the king who asked what was going on in his castle. Shortly afterwards, a butler ushered her in. The king questioned her:

- What's up, our maid?

- Your Majesty, since my coming in this castle we miss you smile!

The king was taken aback by her words, yet he did not interrupt her talk. Lunja went on:

- I will soon remove the veil of sadness in your castle and wipe the tears for good.

She then withdrew after he got the king's nod. Behind the door she demanded to the guest to go in to see the king and the queen.

What a delightful surprise it was! The king and the queen stared unbelievably at their beloved son; they had lost any hope of seeing him back home for months. Lunja tiptoed out of the roomy room, leaving the reunited family enjoy precious moments of son's homecoming. She beautified herself and came back in the royal court.

Brimming over with exultation, Prince Zahar said:

- She's named Lunja. The wife whom I chose; I've been away because of her charms. What do you think about her, Your Majesty?



The king and the queen agreed on their wedding. Their celebration was held in the city with great fun and the guests reveled in the impressive banquet. Since then, the castle had lived enchanted days and glowing nights in the honor of Zahar and Lunja, and pleasure went hand in hand with serenity.

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