LEVEL UP!

EGYPTIAN ARABIC

STORIES

BOOK 1

A1 A2 B1 B2

Level Up! Egyptian Arabic Stories

Book 1

lingualism

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Introduction

Welcome to "Level Up!", a unique approach to reading in Egyptian Arabic. This series is designed specifically for adult learners, offering culturally authentic stories that explore Egyptian life, history, and traditions. Each book in the series contains six original stories, with every story presented in four versions corresponding to CEFR levels A1 through B2.

The innovative format of "Level Up!" emerged from learner feedback on our "One Thousand and One Nights" series, where readers who purchased both elementary and intermediate books found that reading the elementary version helped them build confidence and skills to tackle the intermediate version. This led us to develop a new approach: presenting all four versions of each story together, allowing learners to experience how complexity builds naturally while maintaining the same core narrative.

Why is this approach effective? When you read the A1 version of a story first, regardless of your current level, you build a strong foundation of basic vocabulary and story comprehension. As you progress through the versions, you'll recognize familiar elements while encountering new vocabulary and more complex structures gradually rather than feeling overwhelmed by them all at once.

Each story in this collection has been carefully crafted to reflect authentic Egyptian experiences and perspectives. From traditional pigeon-keeping to historical moments like the 1919 revolution, these stories provide not just language practice but also deep cultural insights. The adult-oriented themes ensure that the content remains engaging and relevant to mature learners.

Throughout the book, you'll find helpful features to support your learning journey. Before each story group, an Introduction provides cultural context, followed by Key Vocabulary that you'll encounter across the different versions. Every story has also been recorded by a professional Egyptian voice artist, with slower, clearer pronunciation for A1/A2 versions and more natural pacing for B1/B2.

How to Use This Book

The unique format of "Level Up!" has been carefully designed to support your learning journey. Here's how to make the most of its features:

Story Versions and Layout

Each story appears in four versions, with layouts specifically designed for different learning needs. All versions include voweling marks (tashkeel) on the Arabic text, using a simplified system that omits the fatha where it can be easily predicted, reducing visual clutter while maintaining readability.

A1 Version:

- o   Three-column format (Arabic script, phonemic transcription, English translation)
- o   The phonemic transcription helps beginners connect sounds to script
- o   Short, simple sentences with basic vocabulary

A2 Version:

- o   Two-column format (Arabic and English only)
- o   Phonemic transcription is removed to encourage direct reading of Arabic
- o   Slightly longer sentences with expanded vocabulary

B1 Version:

- o   Single-column format with English following each paragraph
- o   More complex sentence structures
- o   Quick reference to translation while maintaining focus on Arabic

B2 Version:

- o Arabic text with English on following page

- o Most complex structures and vocabulary

- o Translation placement encourages independent reading

Reading Strategy

We recommend starting with the A1 version of each story, regardless of your current level. This approach helps you:

- o Build confidence with the basic narrative

- o Establish core vocabulary

- o Recognize story elements that will appear in higher levels

- o Progress naturally to more complex versions when ready

Vocabulary and Cultural Notes

- o Before each story group, you'll find:

- o An Introduction providing cultural context

- o Key Vocabulary listing important words and expressions

- o These sections help prepare you for all versions of the story

Audio Recordings

Each version has been recorded by a professional Egyptian voice artist:

- o A1/A2 recordings are slower and clearer, with appropriate pauses

- o B1/B2 recordings maintain clarity while using more natural pacing

- o Use recordings to practice listening comprehension and pronunciation

      o   Listen while reading to reinforce learning

Remember, the goal is to read for pleasure and understanding. Don't feel pressured to move to a higher level version until you're comfortable. Each version offers valuable learning opportunities, and the familiar content helps you focus on new language features as they're introduced.

Visit www.lingualism.com/audio, where you can find the free accompanying audio to download or stream (at variable playback rates).

بُرْج الحمام

The Pigeon Tower

This story revolves around بُرْج الحمام *burg ilhamām*, a pigeon tower owned by عمّ مُصْطفى *3amm° muṣṭáfa* (Amm Mustafa). In Egyptian culture, عمّ *3amm* is a respectful way to address an older man–literally "uncle" but used more broadly in social contexts. The story introduces us to a clash between traditional pigeon-keeping and modern skepticism through the relationship between a grandfather and his grandson.

Key Vocabulary

- بُرْج الحمام (*burg al-hamam*) – pigeon tower, a traditional structure for keeping pigeons

- حمام (*hamām*) – pigeons

- شقْلباظ (*šaqlabāẓ*) – a specialized breed of Egyptian pigeons known for performing acrobatic movements in flight

- عبْسي (*3ábsi*) – a traditional Egyptian pigeon breed with distinctive black feathers

- زاجِل (*zāgil*) – carrier pigeon

- قرين (*qarīn*) – a spirit in Egyptian folklore believed to be a supernatural companion to humans that can cause mischief

- صقْر (*saʔr*) – falcon

- حفيد (*ḥafīd*) – grandson

- الدِّلْتا (*iddílta*) – the Nile Delta region where the story takes place

- طوب اللّبن (*ṭūb illában*) – mud bricks, traditional building material

- غيطان (*ghiṭān*) – fields, agricultural lands

- البِنايات الجِديدة (*ilbinayāt ilgidīda*) – new buildings/ construction, representing urbanization

The Pigeon Tower	*burg ilḥamām*	بُرْج الحمام
Uncle Moustafa has a pigeon tower.	*3ammᵊ muṣṭáfa 3ándu búrgᵊ ḥamām.*	عمّ مُصْطفى عنْدُه بُرْج حمام.
The tower is big and beautiful.	*ilbúrgᵊ k(i)bīr wi gamīl.*	البُرْج كِبير و جميل.
It has many pigeons.	*fī ḥamām kitīr.*	فيه حمام كِتير.
Tarek is Uncle Moustafa's grandson.	*ṭāriʔ ḥafīd 3ammᵊ muṣṭáfa.*	طارِق حفيد عمّ مُصْطفى.
He is fifteen years old.	*3úmru xamastāšar sána.*	عُمْرُه خمسْتاشر سنة.
He doesn't like pigeons.	*miš biyḥíbb ilḥamām.*	مِش بِيْحِبّ الحمام.
One day:	*fi yōm:*	فِي يوْم:
– A pigeon flew away	*– ḥamāma ṭārit bi3īd*	– حمامة طارِت بِعيد
– Then another pigeon	*– wi ba3dēn ḥamāma tánya*	– و بعْديْن حمامة تانْيَة

– Then a third pigeon	– wi ba3dēn ḥamāma tálta	– و بعْديْن حمامة تالْتة
Uncle Moustafa is sad.	3ammᵊ muṣṭáfa za3lān.	عمّ مُصطفى زعْلان.
He said, "It's the qareen!"	ʔāl: "da -lqarīn!"	قال: "ده القرين!"
Tarek doesn't believe.	ṭāriʔ miš miṣáddaʔ.	طارِق مِش مِصدّق.
Tarek watched the tower:	ṭāriʔ rāʔib ilburg:	طارِق راقِب البُرْج:
– In the morning	– fi -ṣṣubḥ	– في الصُّبْح
– At noon	– fi -ḍḍuhr	– في الضُّهْر
– In the evening	– fi -ilmáɣrib	– في المغْرِب
And he saw a big falcon!	wi šāf ṣaʔrᵊ k(i)bīr!	و شاف صقْر كِبير!
The falcon is hungry.	iṣṣáʔrᵊ ga3ān.	الصَّقْر جعان.
Its home is gone because of new buildings.	bētu rāḥ bi-sábab ilbinayāt ilgidīda.	بيْتُه راح بِسبب البِنايات الجِديدة.
Tarek and his friends helped the falcon:	ṭāriʔ wi ʔaṣḥābu sá3du -ṣṣaʔr:	طارِق و أصْحابُه ساعْدوا الصَّقْر:
– They made it a home	– 3amalūlu bēt	– عملولُه بيْت
– In the mountain	– fi -lgábal	– في الجبل

– Far from the pigeons	– *bi3īd 3an ilḥamām*	– بِعيد عن الحمام
Now:	*dilwaʔtī:*	دِلْوَقْتي:
– The pigeons are happy	– *ilḥamām mabsūṭ*	– الحمام مبْسوط
– The falcon is happy	– *iṣṣáʔrᵃ mabsūṭ*	– الصّقْر مبْسوط
– Uncle Moustafa is happy	– *3ammᵃ muṣṭáfa mabsūṭ*	– عمّ مُصْطفى مبْسوط
– And Tarek loves pigeons	– *wi ṭāriʔ biyḥíbb ilḥamām*	– و طارِق بِيْحِبّ الحمام

The Pigeon Tower

بُرْج الحمام

In a small Delta village, Uncle Moustafa has a big pigeon tower. This tower has been in his family since his grandfather's time. Every day, he goes up early to feed the pigeons and let them fly.

في قَرْيَة صُغَيَّرة في الدِّلْتا، عمّ مُصطفى عنْدُه بُرْج حمام كبير. البُرْج ده عنْدُه مِن أيّام جدُّه. كُلّ يوْم، بيطْلع الصُّبْح يِأكّل الحمام و يِطيّرُه.

His grandson Tarek is fifteen years old. He's not interested in pigeons at all. He always says, "Grandpa, it's 2024! Nobody raises pigeons nowadays!"

حفيدُه طارق عنْدُه خمسْتاشر سنة. مِش مُهتمّ بِالحمام خالِص. دايْماً بيْقول: "يا جِدّو، إحْنا في ٢٠٢٤! محدِّش بيْربّي حمام دِلْوَقْتي!"

One day, Uncle Moustafa noticed that pigeons were disappearing. Every two or three days, a pigeon would vanish.

في يوْم، عمّ مُصطفى لاحِظ إنّ الحمام بيِخْتِفي. كُلّ يوْمِيْن تلاتة، حمامة تِخْتِفي.

"Tarek, something strange is happening!"

"يا طارِق، في حاجة غريبة بِتِحْصل!"

"Maybe it's cats, Grandpa?"

"يِمْكِن القُطط يا جِدّو؟"

"No, I know about cats. This is something else... this is the work of the qareen!"

"لأ، أنا عارِف القُطط. دي حاجة تانْية... دي شُغْل القرين!"

"Qareen?!" Tarek laughed. "Grandpa, the qareen is just superstition!"

"قرين؟!" ضِحِك طارِق. "يا جِدّو، القرين ده خُرافات!"

Uncle Moustafa told him, "Your great-grandfather saw the qareen. It used to take pigeons just like this!"	عَمّ مُصْطفى حكى: "جِدّك الكِبير شاف القرين. كان بِياخُد الحمام زيّ كِده!"
Tarek doesn't believe it but decided to help his grandfather. Every day, he watched the tower. And one day, he saw something in the sky.	طارِق مِش مِصدّق، بَسّ قرّر يِساعِد جِدُّه. كُلّ يوْم، قعد يِراقِب البُرْج. و في يوْم، شاف حاجة في السّما.
A big bird... but not a qareen. It's a falcon! The falcon was flying in the new area they're building near the village.	طير كِبير... بَسّ مِش قرين. ده صقْر! الصّقْر بيْطير في المنْطِقة الجِديدة اللي بِيبْنوها قُريِّب مِن القرْية.
Tarek researched the subject on the internet. The falcons are coming to the area because the new buildings took their lands.	طارِق دوّر على النّت عن المَوْضوع ده. الصُّقور بتيجي للمنْطِقة عشان البِنايات الجِديدة خدِت أراضيهُم.
"Look, Grandpa! The falcons need a place to live. The new buildings took their home!"	"بُصّ يا جِدّو! الصُّقور مِحْتاجة مكان يِعيشوا فيه. البِنايات الجِديدة خدِت بيْتْهُم!"
Uncle Moustafa understood. "Well, what's the solution, Tarek?"	عَمّ مُصْطفى فِهِم. "طيب، و أيْه الحَلّ يا طارِق؟"
Tarek thought and said, "I have an idea!"	طارِق فكّر و قال: "عنْدي فِكْرة!"

Tarek went with his friends and made small houses for the falcons in the nearby mountain. The falcons found a place to live, and left Uncle Moustafa's pigeons in peace.	راح طارِق مَعَ صُحابُه، عملوا بِيوت صُغيّرة لِلصُّقور في الجبل القُريِّب. الصُّقور لقِت مكان تِعيش فيه، و سابِت حمام عمّ مُصْطفى في سلام.
Now, Tarek goes up to the tower with his grandfather every day. He learns everything about pigeons from him:	دِلْوَقْتِي، طارِق بيطْلع كُلّ يوْم مَعَ جِدّه البُرْج. بيِتعلِّم مِنُّه كُلّ حاجة عن الحمام:
– How to choose good pigeons	– إزّاي يِخْتار الحمام الكُوَيِّس
– When to fly each type	– إمْتى يِطيّر كُلّ نوْع
– How to recognize a sick pigeon	– إزّاي يِعْرف الحمامة المريضة
And one day he told his grandfather, "You know what, Grandpa? Pigeons turned out to be nice… not like what I thought!"	و في يوْم قال لِجِدُّه: "عارِف يا جِدّو؟ الحمام طِلع حِلْو… بسّ مِش زيّ ما كُنْت فاكِر!"
Uncle Moustafa laughed, "And you turned out smarter than your grandfather… you solved the problem without believing in the qareen!"	عمّ مُصْطفى ضِحك: "وكمان طِلعْت أذْكى مِن جِدّك… حلّيْت المُشْكِلة مِن غيْر ما تِصدّق في القرين!"

بُرْج الحمام

The Pigeon Tower

في قَرْيَة صُغيّرة مِن قُرى الدِّلْتا، حيْث الغيطان الخضْرا بِتمْتِدّ على قدّ ما العيْن تِقْدر تِشوف، هتْلاقي بُرْج حمام عمّ مُصْطفى اللي أعْلى مِن أيّ بُرْج تاني مَوْجود. البُرْج ده مِش مُجرّد مبْنى – ده تاريخ عيْلة كامْلة. جدّ عمّ مُصْطفى بناه بِإيدُه مِن الطّوب اللّبِن، و أبوه زوّد عليْه دوْر، و دِلوَقْتي عمّ مُصْطفى بِيْحافِظ على المَوْضوع ده.

In a small village in the Delta, where the green fields stretch as far as the eye can see, stands Uncle Moustafa's pigeon tower, taller than any other tower around. This tower isn't just a building – it's an entire family's history. Uncle Moustafa's grandfather built it with his own hands from mud bricks, his father added another floor, and now Uncle Moustafa maintains this tradition.

كلّ يوْم، قبْل ما الشّمْس تِطْلع، عمّ مُصْطفى بِيطْلع السّلالِم الضّيّقة لِلبُرْج. بِيفْتح الشّبابيك الخشب، و بِيسْمع صوْت الحمام بِيْسلِّم عليْه. عنْدُه أنْواع كِتير: الزّاجِل الأبْيض، و الشّقْلباظ اللي بِيعْمِل حركات في الهَوا، و العبْسي اللي ريشُه إسْود لامِع.

Every day, before sunrise, Uncle Moustafa climbs the narrow stairs to the tower. He opens the wooden windows and hears the pigeons greeting him. He has many types: the white carrier pigeons, the acrobatic Shaqlabaz that performs tricks in the air, and the Absi with its shiny black feathers.

حفيدُه طارِق، طالِب في أوّلى ثانَوي، شايِف إنّ تَربيةْ الحمام دي حاجة قديمة. "يا جِدّو، النّاس دِلْوَقْتي عَندها موبايلات و إنْتِرْنِت. محدِّش بِيبْعت رسايِل معَ الحمام زيّ زمان!"

His grandson Tarek, a first-year secondary school student, sees pigeon-keeping as something outdated. "Grandpa, people nowadays have mobile phones and internet. Nobody sends messages with pigeons like in the old days!"

عمّ مُصطفى بِيبْتِسِم: "الحمام مِش لِلرّسايِل بسّ يا طارِق. دي فِطْرة و صنْعة. كلّ طيْر فيهُم لُه شخْصية."

Uncle Moustafa smiles, "Pigeons aren't just for messages, Tarek. It's instinct and craftsmanship. Each bird has its own personality."

المُشْكِلة بدأت لمّا الحمام بدأ يِخْتِفي. الاوّل، اخْتِفِت حمامة بيْضا مِن أحْسن الزّاجِل. و بعْدين، كلّ كام يوْم، حمامة تانْيَة تِضيع. عمّ مُصطفى قلِق، و بدأ يِحُطّ علامات على قدم كلّ حمامة عشان يِعْرف مين اللي بِيِخْتِفي.

The problem started when pigeons began disappearing. First, a white pigeon vanished, one of the best carriers. Then, every few days, another pigeon would disappear. Uncle Moustafa grew worried and started putting marks on each pigeon's foot to track which ones were disappearing.

"أكيد ده شُغْل القرين!" قال عمّ مُصْطفى بِثِقّة. "أبويا حكالي إنّ القرين ظهرْلُه هِنا في البُرْج ده. كان بياخُد الحمام الكُوَيِّس بسّ."

"This must be the work of the qareen!" said Uncle Moustafa confidently. "My father told me the qareen appeared to him here in this tower. It would only take the good pigeons."

طارِق، اللي مِتْعوّد يِدوّر على تَفْسير عِلْمي لِكُلّ حاجة، مكانْش مُقْتنِع. "يا جِدّو، لازِم يِكون فيه سبب مَنْطِقي. مُمْكِن أَقْعُد في البُرْج أراقِب؟"

Tarek, who was used to looking for scientific explanations for everything, wasn't convinced. "Grandpa, there must be a logical reason. Can I stay in the tower and watch?"

عمّ مُصْطفى وافِق، و طارِق بدأ مُهِمّتُه. جاب الكاميرا بتاعْتُه، و لابْتوب قديم، و قعد يِسجِّل كُلّ حاجة بِتِحْصل حَوالِيْن البُرْج. لاحِظ إنّ الحمام بِيِتْوَتّر في أَوْقات مُعيّنة، و بِيِخْتِفي دايْماً في نفْس الوَقْت مِن اليوْم.

Uncle Moustafa agreed, and Tarek began his mission. He brought his camera, an old laptop, and started recording everything that happened around the tower. He noticed that the pigeons would get nervous at certain times and would always disappear at the same time of day.

في يوْم، و هُوَّ قاعِد في البُرْج بِيْراقِب، شاف حاجة كِبيرة بِتْطير في السّما. صقْر جميل، بُنّي مِحْمِرّ، بِيحوم فوْق البُرْج. طارِق صوّر الصّقْر و بدأ يِدوّر في الإنْتِرْنِت. اكْتِشف إنّ ده صقْر حُرّ، مِن النّوْع اللي كان عايِش في المِنْطِقة مِن زمان.

One day, while watching from the tower, he saw something large flying in the sky. A beautiful falcon, reddish-brown, circling above the tower. Tarek photographed the falcon and started searching the internet. He discovered it was a free falcon, a species that had lived in the area for ages.

"بُصّ يا جِدّو!" قال طارِق و هُوَّ بِيوَرّي جِدُّه الصُّوَر. "الصُّقور دي كانِت عايْشة فِي الأَراضي اللي بِيِبْنوا علَيْها المدينة الجِديدة. لمّا خدوا أرْضُهُم، بدَأوا يِدوّروا على أكْل فِي حِتت تانْيَة."

"Look, Grandpa!" said Tarek, showing his grandfather the photos. "These falcons used to live in the lands where they're building the new city. When they took their land, they started looking for food in other places."

عمّ مُصطفى بصّ لِلصُّوَر بِاهْتِمام: "بَرْضُه القرين... بَسّ المرّة دي شكْلُه اتْغيّر!"

Uncle Moustafa looked at the photos with interest. "Still the qareen... but this time it changed its form!"

طارِق فكّر فِي حلّ. معَ صُحابُه فِي المدْرسة، بدَأوا يِعْمِلوا بحْث عن الصُّقور المصْرية. عِرْفوا إنّها بِتِحْتاج أماكِن عالْيَة تِبْنِي فيها أعْشاشْها. و فِي الجبل القُريِّب مِن القرْيَة، لقواأماكِن مُناسْبة.

Tarek thought of a solution. With his school friends, they began researching Egyptian falcons. They learned that falcons need high places to build their nests. And in the mountain near the village, they found suitable locations.

بِمُساعِدِةْ مُدرِّس العُلوم، عملوا بِيوت خشب صُغيّرة لِلصُّقور، و حطّوها فِي الجبل. حطّوا جُوّاها أكْل لِلصُّقور، و معَ الوَقْت، الصُّقور بدأِت تِسْتقِرّ هِناك.

With help from their science teacher, they made small wooden houses for the falcons and placed them in the mountain. They put food inside for the falcons, and over time, the falcons began to settle there.

الحمام رِجع يِطير فِي أمان، و الصُّقور لقِت بيْت جِديد. طارِق بدأ يِطْلع معَ جِدُّه البُرْج كُلّ يوْم، مِش عشان يُحْرُس الحمام بسّ، لكِن عشان اِكْتشف إنّ فيه حاجات حِلْوة فِي التّقاليد القديمة.

The pigeons returned to flying safely, and the falcons found a new home. Tarek started going up to the tower with his grandfather every day, not just to guard the pigeons, but because he discovered there was beauty in old traditions.

"تِعْرف يا جِدّو؟" طارِق قال و هُوَّ بِيْراقِب حمامة شقْلباظ بِتِعْمِل حركات فِي الهَوا. "يِمْكِن مفيش قرين، بسّ فيه سِحْر برْضُه فِي الحمام ده!"

"You know, Grandpa?" said Tarek while watching a Shaqlabaz pigeon performing tricks in the air. "Maybe there's no qareen, but there's still magic in these pigeons!"

عمّ مُصطفى ضِحِك: "و أنا اِكْتشفْت إنّ الجيل الجِديد مُمْكِن يِحِلّ مشاكِل قديمة بِطُرُق جِديدة!"

Uncle Moustafa laughed, "And I discovered that the new generation could solve old problems in new ways!"

بُرْج الحمام

فِي قَلْب الدِّلْتا، حيث النّيل رسم على مرّ السِّنين خريطة مِن التّرع و المصارِف، و حيْث الأرْض السّوْدا بِتِرْوي عطش الغيطان الخضْرا، بيُقف بُرْج حمام عمّ مُصطفى شامِخ، شاهد على زمن بِيِتْغيّر. مِن بعيد، شكْلُه زيّ المِدْنة – رُفيّع و طَويل، بِشبابيكُه الخشب المنْقوشة، و الحمام الأبْيض بيْطير حَواليْه فِي دَوايِر مُتناغْمة، كإنّه بِيرْسم حُدود ممْلكة فِي الهَوا محدّش يِقْدر يشوفْها غيْر أهْل الفنّ ده.

عمّ مُصطفى نفْسُه وَرِث البُرْج عن أبوه، اللي وَرِثُه عن أبوه. تلات أجْيال شافِت الحمام بيْطير مِن نفْس الشّبابيك، كلّ جيل ضاف للبُرْج حِكاية. جِدُّه بناه مِن الطّوب اللِّبن، حطُّه على أساس مِن حجر جِيري قديم. أبوه زوّد عليْه دوْر، و عملُه القبّة المُميّزة اللي فِي السّطْح. و عمّ مُصطفى نفْسُه حافِظ على التّقاليد، رغْم إنّ الزّمن اِتْغيّر و العالم اِتْغيّر معاه.

"الحمام ده مِش طُيور و خلاص." كان دايماً يِقول. "ده فنّ و صنْعة و تاريخ. كلّ حمامة فيهُم بِتِحْكي حدّوتة."

حفيدُه طارِق، طالِب فِي ثانَوي، كان شايِف المَوْضوع بِعيْن مُخْتلِفة. شابّ مُتعلِّم، بِيِحِبّ العُلوم و التِّكْنولوجيا، و بِيِقْضي وَقْتُه بيْن الكُتُب و الموبايْل. بالنِّسْبالُه، بُرْج الحمام كان مُجرّد بقية مِن ماضي معادْش لُه مكان فِي عالم النِّت و السّوْشْيال مِيدِيا.

"يا جِدّو، الدُّنْيا اِتْغيّرِت. النّاس بقِت تبعت رسايِل فِي ثانْية للصين! مين مِحْتاج حمام زاجِل دِلْوَقْتي؟"

The Pigeon Tower

In the heart of the Delta, where the Nile has drawn over the years a map of canals and waterways, and where the black soil quenches the thirst of green fields, Uncle Moustafa's pigeon tower stands towering, a witness to changing times. From afar, it looks like a minaret – slim and tall, with its carved wooden windows, and white pigeons flying around it in harmonious circles, as if drawing the boundaries of an aerial kingdom visible only to those who know this art.

Uncle Moustafa himself inherited the tower from his father, who inherited it from his father. Three generations watched pigeons fly from these same windows, each generation adding to the tower's story. His grandfather built it from mud bricks, setting it on a foundation of ancient limestone. His father added a floor and built the distinctive dome on the roof. And Uncle Moustafa himself maintained the traditions, even as time changed and the world with it.

"These pigeons aren't just birds," he would always say. "They're art and craft and history. Each pigeon tells a tale."

His grandson Tarek, a secondary school student, saw things differently. An educated young man, loving science and technology, spending his time between books and mobile phone. For him, the pigeon tower was merely a relic from a past that no longer had a place in the world of internet and social media.

"Grandpa, the world has changed. People now send messages to China in a second! Who needs carrier pigeons nowadays?"

عمّ مُصطفى كان بيبْتِسِم بِهُدوء، و كإنّه عارِف سِرّ الزّمن. "الحمام مِش لِلرَّسايل بَسّ يا طارِق. ده لِلرّوح... لِلفَنّ... لِلحُرّيّة. إنْتَ فاكِر الطَّيّارة اِخْترعِت مِنْيْن؟ مِن مُراقبةْ الطُّيور! و البوصْلة بْتاعةْ موبايْلك؟ الطُّيور عِرْفِت الاِتِّجاهات قَبْل البشر بآلاف السّنين!"

لكِن المُشْكِلة اللي ظهرِت خَلّت الاِتْنيْن يِفكّروا في المَوْضوع مِن زاوْية تانْية. حمام عمّ مُصْطفى بدأ يِخْتِفي، واحْدة وَرا التانْية. الأوّل راحِت "سِتّ الحُسْن"، أجْمل حمامة بيْضا في البُرْج. بعْدها بِيوميْن اِخْتفى "السُّلْطان"، الشُّقْلباظ المشْهور بِحركاتُه في الهَوا. و بعْدها "الملِك"، العِبْسي الإسْود اللي كان فخْر البُرْج.

عمّ مُصطفى كان مُتأكِّد إنّ ده شُغْل القرين – الكائِن الخفي اللي الناس في القَرْية بيِحْكوا عنّه مِن زمان. "أبويا شافُه... كان بيِظْهَر في الفَجْر، هُوَّ طَويل أوي، و بياخُد أحْسن الحمام."

طارِق، بِطبيعةْ جيلُه المُتشكِّك، قرّر يِحِلّ اللُّغْز بطريقْتُه. ركّب كاميرا رقمية في البُرْج، و بِرْنامج تتبُّع على اللابْتوْب القديم بْتاعُه. قعد أيّام يِراقِب و يِسجّل كُلّ حاجة: أوْقات طَيَران الحمام، اِتّجاهات الرّيح، حتّى درجات الحرارة.

الحَلّ جِه في فجْر شِتْوي، و الضُّباب لِسّه مغطّي الغيطان. طارِق شاف صقْر حُرّ، مِن النّوْع المصْري النّادِر، بيِحوم حَوالَيْن البُرْج. الصّقْر كان جميل و قَوي، ريشُه بُنّي مِحْمَرّ بِيلمع في أوّل ضوْء النّهار.

لمّا بحث في المَوْضوع، اِكْتشف حقيقة مُحْزِنة. المدينة الجديدة اللي بيِبْنوها على حُدود القَرْية خدِت أراضي الصُّقور البرّية. المباني العالْية و الشّوارع الواسْعة قضّت على بيئتْهُم الطّبيعية. الصُّقور، في كِفاحْها لِلْبقاء، بدأِت تِدوّر على مصادِر جديدة لِلْغِذاء.

Uncle Moustafa would smile quietly, as if knowing time's secret. "Pigeons aren't just for messages, Tarek. They're for the soul... for art... for freedom. Do you know where the airplane was invented from? From watching birds! And your phone's compass? Birds knew directions thousands of years before humans!"

But the problem that emerged made them both think about the matter from a different angle. Uncle Moustafa's pigeons started disappearing, one after another. First went "Beauty Queen," the most beautiful white pigeon in the tower. Two days later "Sultan" vanished, the Shaqlabaz famous for its aerial acrobatics. Then "King," the black Absi that was the tower's pride.

Uncle Moustafa was sure it was the work of the qareen – the invisible being that village people had spoken about for ages. "My father saw it... it would appear at dawn, very tall, taking the best pigeons."

Tarek, with his generation's skeptical nature, decided to solve the mystery his way. He installed a digital camera in the tower and tracking software on his old laptop. He spent days observing and recording everything: pigeons' flight times, wind directions, even temperatures.

The solution came on a winter dawn, while fog still covered the fields. Tarek saw a free falcon, of the rare Egyptian breed, circling around the tower. The falcon was beautiful and strong, its reddish-brown feathers gleaming in the day's first light.

When he researched the matter, he discovered a sad truth. The new city being built on the village's edge had taken the wild falcons' lands. The high buildings and wide streets had destroyed their natural habitat. The falcons, in their struggle for survival, began searching for new food sources.

"شُفْت يا طارِق؟" قال عَمّ مُصْطفى لمّا عِرف الحقيقة. "حتّى القرين بِيتْغيّر معَ الزّمن. زمان كان رُوْح خفية... دِلْوَقْتي بقى ضحية لِلْعُمْران!"

طارِق حسّ إنّ المُشْكِلة أَعْمق مِن مُجرّد حمام بِيخْتِفي. دي كانِت قِصّة صِراع قديم بيْن التّطوُّر و الطّبيعة. معَ صُحابُه في المدْرسة و بِمُساعِدة مُدرّس العُلوم، بدأ مشْروع لِإنْقاذ الصُّقور. عملوا مخميّات صُغيّرة في الجبل القُريّب، و بدأوا يوَثّقوا حَياة الطُّيور البرّية في المنْطِقة.

و معَ الوَقْت،بقى البُرْج مش مُجرّد مكان لِتَرْبية الحمام. بقى مرْكز صُغيّر لِدِراسةْ الطّيور، بِيزورُه طلبةْ المدارِس و الجامْعات. طارِق نفْسه بقى خبير في سُلوك الطّيور، بِيجْمع بيْن حِكْمةْ جِدُّه القديمة و العِلْم الحديث.

"تِعْرف يا جِدّو؟" طارِق قال في يوْم و هُوَّ قاعِد معَ جِدُّه في البُرْج بِيراقبوا غُروب الشّمْس. "يِمْكِن القرين مكانْش عايِز ياخُد الحمام... يِمْكِن كان بِيْحاوِل يعلّمْنا درْس."

عَمّ مُصْطفى هزّ راسُه بابْتِسامة: "في الحَياة يا طارِق، مفيش حاجة بِتْروح على طول. كُلّ اللي بِيخْتِفي، بِيْسيب وَراه حِكْمة."

دِلْوَقْتي، البُرْج بقى أَعْلى مِن الأوّل، و الحمام بِيْطير أحْلى مِن زمان. و الصُّقور بقِت جُزْء مِن المنْظر الطّبيعي لِلْمكان. و في الفجْر، لمّا تِبُصّ لِلسّما، تِشوف الطّيور كُلّها بِتْطير معَ بعْض، في رقْصة قديمة قدّ الزّمن نفْسُه.

أغاني المدْرسة

The School Songs

Set against the backdrop of the 1919 Egyptian Revolution against British occupation, this story takes place in a rural Delta village. At this time, education in Egypt occurred primarily in كُتّاب *kuttāb* – traditional schools where children learned reading, writing, and Quranic studies. The kuttab system was particularly important in rural areas, where it was often the only form of education available. These schools typically consisted of a single room or courtyard where students of different ages would learn together under one teacher.

سِرّ الكُشري

The Secret of the Koshari

This story takes place in وِسْط البلد *wiṣṭ ilbálad* (downtown) in Cairo, specifically on شارِع طلْعت حرْب *šāri3 ṭál3at ḥarb* (Talaat Harb Street), one of its most famous thoroughfares. The tale centers around كُشري *kúshari* (koshari), Egypt's beloved national street food dish made of rice, pasta, lentils, chickpeas, and spicy tomato sauce. In Egyptian urban culture, street food establishments often become neighborhood institutions, with recipes passed down through generations and fierce loyalties developing among customers.

سارة و القُطّة

Sara and the Cat

This story explores the relationship between a young girl and a stray cat in Cairo, where street cats are a familiar part of daily life. In Egyptian cities, cats have maintained a special status since ancient times, freely roaming neighborhoods and often forming bonds with local residents. The tale takes place in one of Cairo's old residential buildings, where a common feature is the perpetually broken أسانْسير *ʔasansər* (elevator) and the بوّاب *bawwāb* (building's doorman) who always promises it will be fixed "tomorrow" – a tomorrow that never comes. These aging buildings, with their long flights of stairs and close-knit community life, form the backdrop for many everyday stories of Egyptian urban life.
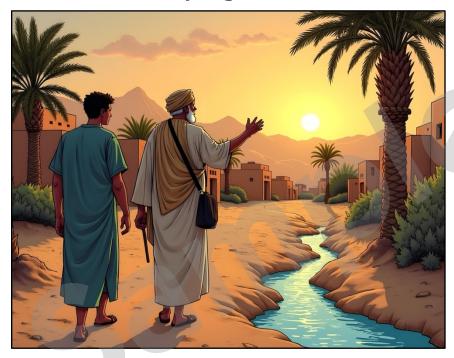
هدايا العرايِس

The Brides' Gifts

In the modern district of مدينِة نصر *madīnit naṣr* (Nasr City), where apartment buildings have transformed desert into urban landscape, the ties of community remain strong in Egyptian life. Wedding celebrations, like the one in this story, become events for entire buildings to participate in, particularly during the ليلِة الحِنّة *lēlit ilḥínna* (henna night) – a joyous pre-wedding celebration where the bride's hands and feet are decorated with intricate henna patterns while women sing traditional songs and celebrate together. These communal celebrations are often orchestrated by respected figures like the neighborhood's حاجّة *ḥágga* (hagga) – a maternal figure whose influence extends beyond her own family to all the building's residents. The story also highlights how service workers like عمّ يوسِف *3ammª yūsif* (Uncle Youssef), the delivery man, become integral parts of the

عِيون سِيوَة

The Springs of Siwa

In Egypt's Western Desert lies واحِةْ سِيوَة *wāḥit sīwa* (Siwa Oasis), a unique cultural landscape where ancient traditions meet modern tourism. The oasis is known for its distinctive architecture using كَرْشيف *karšīf* (karshif) – a building material made from salt rock and mud – and its intricate water management system of عِيون *3iyūn* (natural springs). These springs, which have sustained life in the desert for millennia, are managed through the أَفْراج *ʔafrāg* – a traditional system of water channels and irrigation schedules overseen by the community elders. In the B2 version of the story, while fictional spring names are used (following the traditional naming patterns of the Siwi language), they represent the real system where each spring has a traditional name in سيوي *sīwi* (Siwi), the local Amazigh (Berber) language.