

Tale on a music instrument from Syria

My grandfather's qanun

Inana, who started second grade this year, loved her school and her friends. When she woke up for school on Thursdays, she always felt happier and more excited because they had music lessons on Thursday mornings. Music has always been her favourite subject.

As usual, Inana woke up excited to go to school on Thursday. Her mother had already prepared breakfast for her. She gulped down her breakfast, got ready for school and left home. Inana's school was very close to home. She walked to school with her classmate Sophia, who was their next-door neighbour's daughter. It only took them ten minutes to get to school.

When they entered the classroom, their music teacher Helena was there. Inana greeted her teacher and friends with a happy "Good morning!" This week's lesson focused on traditional musical instruments from different countries around the world. The teacher introduced the children to various musical instruments by showing pictures and videos. The children hadn't seen most of those instruments before. The lesson was really enjoyable, as always. The teacher said "These are just a few of the musical instruments from around the world. There are many more instruments worth knowing. And now your homework! I want each of you to select a traditional musical instrument and search for it. In our class next week, you will give a presentation on that musical instrument to your friends."

Inana was eager to do her homework. When she went back home, she told her parents about it. She was surprised when her mother said that she could help her. Was her mother interested in music? Her mother said, "Ooh, sweetie, let's go up in the attic. I will show you something that belonged to your grandfather". Inana was very excited and curious. When they went up, her mother took out a musical instrument from a box. Inana hadn't seen that instrument before. "Inana, this is called qanun. When we were living in Syria, your grandfather used to play the qanun and sing songs for us every night. Although I didn't know how to play it, I didn't want to give his qanun to anyone after his death and I brought it here with me". Inana was getting more and more excited. The qanun that once belonged to her grandfather, whom she had never met, was a stringed instrument. Was it easy to play? It looked like the harp but it wasn't that big. "This is a beautiful musical instrument, Mum. It has so many strings! "Do you know how many strings it has, Mum?" Her mother obviously didn't know much about the qanun. Inana started to count its strings. Her grandfather's qanun had 78 strings. "How is it played, Mum?" she asked. Her mother said, "First you sit down and put the qanun on your lap. Then, you put these rings on the index fingers of both hands and attach a plectrum to each ring. The qanun is played by plucking the strings with these plectrums. But my father would sometimes play it with his fingers without using the plectrums." Inana put the qanun on her lap and tried to play it by plucking a few strings. The sound was fascinating. "Why didn't you learn to play it, Mum?" she asked. Her mother said: "At that time, the qanun was exclusively played by men. It was very rare to see it played by women. But now women also play this instrument."

When her mother's sentence was over, Inana had made up her mind. Next week, she would take her grandfather's qanun to the music class and introduce it to her friends. And until that day, she would learn more about the instrument. She was sure that her teacher and her friends would love the qanun. And of course she would never put the qanun back in that box in the attic...