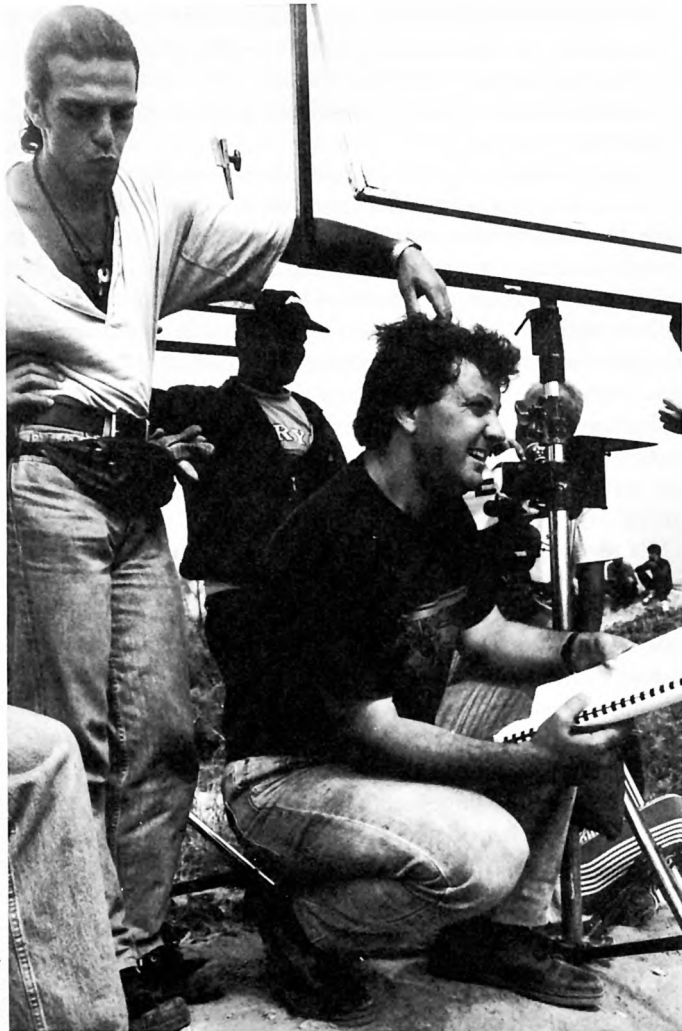


**MICHEL KHLEIFI**

*Tale of the  
Three Lost Jewels*



*Photo by Yto Barrada. Gaza 1994*

*Palestinian film-maker Michel Khleifi at work on Tale of the Three Lost Jewels, the story of a twelve-year-old Gaza boy. The film was made in Gaza with the children's roles played by non-professionals from Gaza and the Galilee.*

**SHEIKH ATTAR'S BIRD GARDEN**

# A large roof-terrace

*surrounded with glass windows, full of birds of every colour and size, kept in small miniature houses. Inside each "house" there are bird nests which have been stuck onto leafless trees surrounded by all sorts of artificial plants. Sheikh Attar enters followed by Yusef, holding his two cages. Yusef is stunned by the sight of the garden.*

SHEIKH ATTAR. Look. I'll keep your birds here for a few days. If they manage to survive, I'll pay you the rest of the money. And if they don't, God will compensate you. That's my condition if you want to sell.

*Yusef does not reply but stares at the birds. He moves closer to them, trying to touch a strange white bird. The birds become excited and Sheikh Attar tries to calm them down.*

SHEIKH ATTAR. Come on, move away, they'll bite you.

*From this vantage point, Yusef looks down and sees a beautiful view of Gaza and its houses and sea-front. He sees a cart in which he makes out Aida and some children sitting around bunches of wild herbs. Yusef turns around quickly, anxious to close the deal with Sheikh Attar.*

SHEIKH ATTAR. Well, what do you say?

YUSEF. Give me what you want, but at least the price of three birds. I swear my mother really needs the money. As for the rest, like you said.

*Sheikh Attar laughs and takes the two cages. He opens them and liberates the birds, giving the cages to Yusef.*

YUSEF. It's alright, uncle, I'll take them when I come back.  
Either with the birds inside them, or without the birds.  
*Sheikh Attar laughs again, puts the cages to one side and  
walks out, pushing Yusef gently in front of him.*

SHEIKH ATTAR. That's business for you: either you win or you  
lose. Come, I think I rather like you.  
*Then the sounds of the noon call to prayer mix with the  
birds' singing.*

**A STREET IN THE "DOLLAR" NEIGHBOURHOOD**

*Yusef runs out of Sheikh Attar's house, looking happy and  
intent on following Aida. (...) Yusef looks at the lemons  
hanging from a nearby tree, picks a few, stuffs them in his  
pocket and leaves the garden. He counts his money which he  
happily stuffs in his pocket with the lemons. He starts  
sprinting in the direction of the cart but is suddenly stopped  
by a call coming from a large neighbouring house.*

SALAH. Yusef, Yusef, Yusef.  
*Yusef looks up and sees his friend Salah gesturing to him.*

YUSEF. I haven't got time.

SALAH. Come, or wait!

YUSEF, *to himself*. What does he want from me?  
*On the house balcony, Salah's family appears. Yusef takes a  
few steps backwards and tries to run away. As he does so,  
the money in his pocket falls out and he runs after it  
shouting. Then a few lemons also fall out. He hesitates: what  
should he run after? He decides to follow the money and  
loses a shoe in the process. Salah comes and helps him.  
Yusef picks up the last note from the ground. Salah hands  
him his lost shoe, Yusef sits down and puts it back on.*

YUSEF. I've got to run back to the camp.

SALAH. Come, come to to my house. I, I've sp... spoken about you to my dad.

*Salah's father comes down. Yusef pretends to be happy.*

SALAH'S FATHER. Salah really likes you, more than all his other friends. Come in and eat with us.

YUSEF. Thank you, I'm not hungry and I've got to go back to the camp.

*Salah's father looks surprised.*

SALAH'S FATHER. You live in the camp?

YUSEF, *innocently*. My father wanted to move to a big house but then he went to prison... I've really got to run.

SALAH'S FATHER. Well, I'll drive you there.

YUSEF. In a car?

*Yusef jumps up for joy and hugs his friend. Salah is also delighted and pulls his friend towards a modern-looking jeep which is packed with oranges. Yusef looks at these huge quantities of oranges, while Salah looks on proudly. (...)*

YUSEF. Wow! You have so many oranges!

SALAH. We own many groves and my dad sells oranges to the whole world, even to Europe!

*He grabs Yusef by his clothes and climbs in, banging the door with immense pleasure.*

### **SALAH'S FATHER'S JEEP**

*Salah and Yusef are sitting next to the father. Yusef is holding a rabbit by the ears and is looking very uncomfortable.*

SALAH'S FATHER. Tell your mother that she can come and see me whenever she wants any meat, or anything else

she may need. Tell her she can rely on us.

SALAH. I... I... to... told my father that you haven't eaten any  
me... mee... meat in a long time.

*Yusef looks at the rabbit which is also facing front. He does not reply, but starts to drift into his thoughts again, so much so that he no longer listens to what Salah's father is saying. He is anxiously looking for the cart. Where has it disappeared?*

SALAH'S FATHER. And you too, come whenever you want. Come and play with Salah.

*In the distance, they see a military check-point. Salah's father veers the car to the right to avoid the check-point. The jeep moves into the outskirts of the camp, where a few houses are scattered. Yusef looks at these intently, seeking the cart.*

YUSEF. Are these the houses of the Gypsies?

SALAH'S FATHER. Yes, there, on that wasteland.

*The car moves away from the Gypsy houses. Yusef looks back and sees some children running around. Suddenly, he cries out: he has seen the cart.*

YUSEF. Uncle, please let me get out here, please.

*Salah's father does not understand what has suddenly distracted the child. He tries to calm him.*

SALAH'S FATHER. Don't worry, I'm taking you home.

YUSEF. Oh please, please let me get out, I want to get out. I'm going to lose her again!

*The jeep stops. Yusef hands the rabbit to Salah, who refuses to take it. The father is about to say something, but Yusef is impatient so he takes the rabbit and runs towards the Gypsy houses. Suddenly, Salah remembers the case of oranges on the back seat.*

SALAH'S FATHER. He forgot his oranges!

SALAH, *drifting*. I'll t-t-t-take them to him tomorrow!

SALAH'S FATHER. You know where he lives?!

SALAH. No... b-b-b-but I'll ask t-t-t-tomorrow at school...

*Salah's father hesitates. He looks at Salah who is leaning out of the door, sadly pondering his friend's treachery and holding back his tears. The jeep drives off quickly, separating Salah from his friend.*

### **AIDA'S NEIGHBOURHOOD**

*Yusef crosses the wasteland which is covered by a layer of deep-red sand, carrying his rabbit by the ears. At a distance from him, a group of children are flying paper planes which bear the colours of the Palestinian flag, while a shepherd chases a solitary sheep that has escaped from its flock, whistling at it and throwing stones to make it come back. Yusef arrives in the neighbourhood intent on finding Aida (...). Someone leans out of a balcony. Yusef understands from their talk that somebody is very sick. (...) Suddenly an old, run-down car emerges from behind the house pushed by a group of men and women who have been joined by Aida. (...) She comes back his way and seems irritated.*

AIDA. Didn't I tell you to come tomorrow to the oasis?

*Yusef does not reply and looks at her anxiously.*

Why are you carrying that rabbit like an idiot?

YUSEF. I want to take it to my mother. Someone gave it to me.

*It's a present for the house.*

*Yusef looks at her innocently so she smiles. She is about to leave but, as soon as she takes a step forward, she is suddenly filled with happiness that he is there. So she comes back to where he is standing and takes him by the arm.*

*(...)*

AIDA. I don't want them to say that you've brought bad luck upon us. God forbid but my father's grandmother is dying and if she dies today I won't be able to see you tomorrow.(...)  
*Aida's father and a few other men and women come out. (...)  
Yusef and Aida find themselves surrounded.*

AIDA'S FATHER. Come on darling, she wants to speak to you.  
*Aida goes with her father followed by everyone else. Even Yusef finds himself in the group as if he too has become a member of the family.*

### **GRANDMOTHER'S ROOM**

*The grandmother is lying on her bed while the large family which is composed of several man and women, their children and their grand-children sit in silence around her. Cupping glasses have been placed on her forehead. One of the women sitting next to her says:*

WOMAN 1. Turn on the lights.  
*Several hands reach out for the switch but the lights fail to come on.*

VOICES. The Israelis have cut off the power, may God cut them off!

WOMAN 1. Alright then we'll go and get some torches and lanterns.  
*Several of the girls and the women move around trying to look for torches and lanterns while some of the children leave the room. The grandmother moves her head and looks towards the door. She mutters to the woman next to her. The woman looks at Aida.*

WOMAN 2. Come, she wants to talk to you.  
*Aida hesitates but finally decides to go forward. Yusef follows her as if he has forgotten all the others around him. He stands next to Aida's father. From the outside of the room appear some torch lights. Aida sits next to her grandmother*

*who waves a hand, asking the women to move away from the bed. The women obey. Then she tells Aida to come nearer her. She whispers to her. The child nods, as if in agreement, then listens again to the faint mutterings coming out of the old woman's trembling lips. This time she shakes her head to say no.*

GRANDMOTHER. If I stop seeing who I am after this night of exile, don't be scared. For there is a rock, my rock, which is carved with my name. It stands on the mountains that look over all the bygones of the past. I want you to go and write your name on that rock so that it becomes yours.  
*Aida tries to move away but the grandmother holds her back.*

If you do that, I will give you the necklace.  
*The grandmother then gestures towards Yusef. Everyone is surprised. Two women come in carrying a torch and a lantern. This suddenly gives the scene a new atmosphere. Aida's father pushes Yusef forward gently, while a tear has fallen on his cheek. Aida stands there as if waiting for him. But the old woman gathers all that remains of her strength and utters one sentence which is heard by all those present.*

GRANDMOTHER, to Yusef. Did you bring me the present?  
*And without hesitation as if he had been expecting this question all his life, Yusef answers clearly and serenely.*

YUSEF, *nodding his head.* Yes, I brought it.

GRANDMOTHER. Well, well there is still some goodness left in this life. As long as you are still around and the land is there, then there is no fearing for us. Does a righteous claim vanish because no one is making it?  
*She shuts her eyes as if she were about to die. Without opening them again, she gestures to Yusef to come forward, holds his hands, nods her head, slowly opens one eye, withdraws her hand and lets it fall to the side. She looks at*



*Aida and makes a very subtle gesture to her. Aida understands and walks out of the room pulling Yusef behind her. The others surround the old woman's bed. From the outside we hear the sounds of the funeral of a martyr.*

VOICE 1. This is the funeral of Abou Rabi's son.

VOICE 2. He got a bullet in the middle of the head. It smashed him to pieces.

VOICE 3. Flowers that have barely bloomed rising to decorate the skies.

*Everyone exits, leaving the grandmother on her own. Suddenly, she gets up, removes the cupping glasses from her forehead. She smiles and mutters proudly.*

GRANDMOTHER. The bloody soul snatcher got scared again!  
Couldn't get the better of me!!  
*Outside the youyous of the women burst out like magical birds.*

### **SUNSET, SANDY BEACH**

*A few naked rays of sunshine gently settle between the stormy clouds and the sea, sending their last light to illuminate the way for the fishing boats returning home. The beaches are surrounded by barbed wire on all sides. The seagulls seem to share the singing with the women's youyous, giving the martyr's funeral the awe of nature itself. The funeral marches parallel to the sea, men carrying the hearse on their shoulders as well as wreaths of flowers and angry banners and flags. Indeed, the seagulls seem to celebrate the martyr's departure to an exile with neither beginning nor end. Passers-by stand by respectfully and angrily watch the ritual before them with its chanting of nationalist slogans. Aida squeezes past the large bodies of the adults which are closely knit together. She is followed by Yusef. They go in the opposite direction to the funeral. In the distance, a military jeep waits, watching and prepared for*

*trouble. The two children look at the clouds in the sky.*

AIDA. Come on, hurry up, can't you see the clouds: "If it clouds over in the afternoon find yourself a solid tent."

YUSEF, *merrily*. "And if it rains early?"

AIDA. "Carry your stick and fly away."  
*Aida walks in front of him, stands at the edge of the sea and points at a very distant point.*

AIDA. When you reach the UN building you take a left and then you reach a very long road. Take a right and you'll get there straight away.  
*Yusef nods but he does not want to leave. However, the roaring of the military jeeps brings him back to reality.*

AIDA. You have to go before the curfew otherwise the army will eat you up.  
*She laughs and pushes him gently but he remains standing motionless.*

AIDA. What's wrong with you? Are you being silly again?

YUSEF. Why did she give you the necklace?  
*The question strikes Aida like an arrow. She looks at him and moves closer.*

AIDA. She asked me two questions and said that if I answered properly she would give me the necklace.

YUSEF. Did you answer her when you nodded?  
*Aida nods her head saying yes and then silence.*

AIDA. In the first question she said: "Do you want the necklace?" and I nodded my head to say yes so she said: "He who wants to marry you must first find the three jewels that are missing from the necklace." Then she asked me: "What if he doesn't get them? Does he marry you?" So I said no.

YUSEF. When I grow up I want to marry you.

AIDA, *laughing*. You, stupid?

YUSEF. You'll see.

*He turns round and runs off but then stops. Aida too sets off but both seem to want to say something. Yusef hesitates, takes a few steps more slowly and then stops again.*

AIDA. Go on then. I'll wait for you tomorrow in the oasis.

YUSEF. I forgot to ask you what your name is.

AIDA. Aida.

*He stares at her.*  
Aida! Aida! I said Aida!

YUSEF. Ah! Aida!

*Yusef runs off merrily then shouts at her from a distance.*

YUSEF. As for me, I'm Yusef.

*They drift further and further apart, separated by a sand-hill. Suddenly Yusef cries.*

YUSEF. Ask her where the jewels were lost, ask her.

AIDA. I think she said South America.

*From the Israeli military observation post a huge projector is suddenly switched on. It has a piercing power and so awesome a light that it carves the corners of the sea and its dark beaches like a sword. It is as if the Israeli soldier who moves the projector were a light swordsman declaring war on the shadows of the Jinn and the monsters of the darkness. And yet he finds nothing but the shadows of the two children, running in different directions.*

*Gaza, 1993*