

ONCE UPON A TIME IN MESOPOTAMIA

Screenplay by

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Based on the book
"TO MESOPOTAMIA AND KURDISTAN IN DISGUISE"
by
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FADE IN:

EXT. TRAIN TERMINAL - DAY

An old train terminal on a dismal morning. OTTOMAN FLAGS hang from the platform ceilings. The platform is empty apart from TWELVE TOUTS, waiting...

A LOUDLY WHISTLING steam locomotive approaches and comes to a slow stop.

SUPERIMPOSE: "Constantinople, December 1906"

The train's carriage doors open and MEN AND WOMEN in European attire stream out.

The Touts rush to them, BUZZING their trade incomprehensibly as they introduce themselves intrusively.

INT./EXT. TRAIN CARRIAGE - SAME

A MAN, with his back turned to us, stands inside one of the carriages with open doors. He is formally dressed and carries two leather-bound suitcases. He steps out of the carriage and onto...

EXT. TRAIN TERMINAL - CONTINUOUS

the platform and follows the crowd into the...

INT. CUSTOMS HALL - SAME

A small red-brick hall with high ceilings. The customs line moves fast and it soon becomes evident why: a lackluster, middle-aged CUSTOMS AGENT occupies the sole desk guarding the exit.

He holds out his right hand with his face cast down:

CUSTOMS AGENT
(pedantically, in
Turkish)
Pasaport.

The Man puts his suitcases down and reaches for his passport inside his jettied pockets. He places it in the Custom

Agent's palms. Without opening the passport and with his face still cast down:

CUSTOMS AGENT (cont'd)
Name and age?

MAN (SOANE)
It is in the passport.

The Customs Agent look ups: he is unkempt and grumpy-looking and he clearly does not want to be there. Whatever he does, he does perfunctorily.

CUSTOMS AGENT
(slightly irritated)
Name and age?

MAN
(sighing)
SOANE, 25.

CUSTOMS AGENT
(smirking)
Full name?

Soane is a stern-looking young man with a black English mustache and a short side-part haircut. The military type, but not intimidating. Dignified. An archetypal British gentleman.

SOANE
(slightly irritated)
Ely Bannister Soane.

CUSTOMS AGENT (O.S.)
Business or pleasure?

SOANE
(smirking)
Research.

The Customs Agent frowns at Soane and stamps his passport quick and carelessly and throws it back at him. He gestures contemptuously at Soane to move on.

Soane picks his suitcases up and walks towards the exit.

EXT. TRAIN STATION - MOMENTS LATER

Soane exits the train station upon a busy road lined with horse-drawn Victoria carriages. The CROWD is of a heterogeneous ethnic mix; there are native Greeks, Italians,

Armenians and Turks. Their distinction is reflected in the clothes they wear, typical for the time period. The Golden Horn is vaguely visible in the distance.

Almost immediately after stepping outside, Soane is approached by an enthusiastic HOTEL TOUT; a short tanned man of undefined nationality, but with a peculiar accent. He rushes his words, giving Soane little time to react:

HOTEL TOUT

Good morning sir! How was your trip?

SOANE

It was wonderful, thank --

HOTEL TOUT

I am sure you are tired. Do you have a place to stay?

SOANE

No... but something tells me that is about to change.

The Hotel Tout pushes a PAMPHLET into Soane's hands. Soane glances over it (we don't get to see the pamphlet).

HOTEL TOUT

You won't regret going there.
Excellent pension...

(snobbish)

"a la Ferang". In the GALATA QUARTER,
just across the water.

SOANE

"A la ferang"?

HOTEL TOUT

(ecstatically,
advertising)

"A LA FERANG!" Cheap, clean, and
comfortable.

SOANE

(indifferent)

I suppose it is as good as any.

Soane tips the Hotel Tout.

HOTEL TOUT

Thank you sir!

The Hotel Tout reaches for Soane's suitcases, but Soane picks them up before he can:

SOANE

I can manage from here, thank you.

The Hotel Tout lowers his head in disappointment and backs off.

Soane walks towards one of the carriages mentioned earlier and addresses an unaware GREEK COACHMAN (early 20s) who occupies the driver's seat.

SOANE (cont'd)

In service?

The Greek Coachman startles, but regains his composure quickly. He raises his cap to Soane:

GREEK COACHMAN

At your service! Where to?

SOANE

Galata Quarter, pension... "*A la Ferang*"?

GREEK COACHMAN

Ah, the French Pension in the Italian Quarter! A cultured man! Hop on up.

Soane piles his belongings onto the carriage's covered backseat and takes a seat there himself. They depart as soon as Soane is seated.

INT./EXT. VICTORIA CARRIAGE - LATER

The carriage rolls and bangs over the mud-pits that are the roads of Constantinople. In the background, we hear the noise of CLANKING HORSE TRAMS. Soane is clumsily trying to hold himself as they roll and hobble on, which the Greek Coachman notices to his own amusement:

GREEK COACHMAN

(laughing)

First time?

SOANE

(sarcastically)

What gave it away?

This uncomfortable descending ride takes us through messy streets lined with shops selling cheap wares. In the background, we hear MUFFLED SHIP HORNS. The ride gradually becomes more stable.

GREEK COACHMAN
So, what brings you to
Constantinople?

SOANE
I am a linguist. Here to conduct some
research.

GREEK COACHMAN
Lin... quest?

SOANE
(overly articulated)
Ling. Gwuhst. I study languages.

GREEK COACHMAN
Really? What languages?

SOANE
Turkish. And I hope to finish a
Kurdish language study I started last
year.

GREEK COACHMAN
(disbelief)
Turkish!?
(scornful)
Ha!

An awkward moment of silence. The carriage hits a pothole.

The Greek Coachman squints his eyes in suspicion.

GREEK COACHMAN (cont'd)
What is your business with those
Kurdish savages anyway? Why the
interest in their rough tongue?

Soane frowns up at him disapprovingly. He pulls his head
back and pushes his shoulders forward. He seems to hesitate,
but, being British, answers politely in a neutral, academic
manner:

SOANE
It is an understudied language. As
long as it remains such, it may be
perceived unfavorably. I intend to
change that.

GREEK COACHMAN
(brusquely)
So you understand that rough tongue
of theirs?

SOANE

I understand certain dialects, mainly
the ones spoken in Persia...

(hesitantly, but with
genuine curiosity)

You don't happen to know Persian
Kurds, do you?

The Greek Coachman's eyebrows draw closer together.

GREEK COACHMAN

(as if insulted)

No, no... I have no dealings with any
Kurds...

The Greek Coachman looks sullen. His face tenses up while
glancing back and forth between Soane and the road. Then, he
shouts out:

GREEK COACHMAN (cont'd)

Try the bazaar, many Persians there!
(contemptuously)

You may even find your beloveth!

Soane pulls a small notebook from his jettied pockets and
scribbles something in.

SOANE

(subtle grin)

Thank you, I will!

The carriage hits another pothole.

GREEK COACHMAN

(curiously)

Know Greek?

SOANE

I am afraid I don't.

GREEK COACHMAN

(disappointed)

Why not?

SOANE

(awkwardly)

I suppose I haven't got the time to
study it yet...

As they descend further, the Golden Horn with its
unbeautiful wharfs and port comes into our view.

SOANE (cont'd)
Is it much farther?

The Greek Coachman points in a general direction at a PONTON BRIDGE in the near distance. He smiles and turns his head back to Soane:

GREEK COACHMAN
Just across that bridge.

SHORT DISSOLVE
TO:

EXT. PONTON BRIDGE - SUNRISE

A poorly constructed wooden bridge surrounded by hovels and shacks. Many small boats are docked at its sides.

The carriage is amid a sea of PEDESTRIANS. We see: fez, bowler hats, top hats, and turbans. The scene is chaotic and everyone is pushing and pulling at each other. We hear UNINTELLIGIBLE SHOUTING, but it is clearly a mixture of Turkish, Italian, French, Greek, English, and Armenian.

Soane is standing (holding himself up by the driver seat's edge) to get a better look.

SOANE
What's the hold up?

The Greek Coachman throws his hands up and shouts out:

GREEK COACHMAN
(sarcastically)
A toll to cross their beautiful
bridge!

Soane glances around a bit more.

CLOSE ON RED SIGN STICKING OUT OVER THE SEA OF HEADGEAR

Suddenly, everyone steps aside as a passage is made for Soane's carriage, and the carriage speeds its way up to the bridgehead.

The road to the TOLLBOOTH is lined with TOLLBOOTH GUARDS in conspicuous white smock uniforms. They are beating Pedestrians trying to cross without paying.

The carriage arrives at the...

EXT. TOLLBOOTH - CONTINUOUS

and the Greek Coachman reaches his hand to Soane:

GREEK COACHMAN
(in Turkish)

Para.

Soane tilts his head to the side, but quickly smiles in understanding. He hands the Greek Coachman a coin, and the Greek Coachman briskly tosses it into the tollbooth.

The barrier goes up, and as they go their merry way down the wooden bridge...

TILT TO REVEAL CONSTANTINOPLE'S SKYLINE AND GALATA TOWER

EXT. A DOWNWARDS-SLOPING ROAD - DAY

A filthy, narrow, downwards-sloping road - but this doesn't stop a FOUR BOYS from utilizing it for their hoop rolling.

Despite the drowsy weather, clotheslines still hang between the high apartment buildings made of stone and timber. Here and there some OTTOMAN FLAGS, but also ITALIAN AND FRENCH FLAGS.

Some shops have already opened up and we can hear ITALIAN CHATTER.

The carriage drives down a bit more and stops at the side of the road.

INT./EXT. VICTORIA CARRIAGE - MOMENTS LATER

The Greek Coachman looks back at Soane and points at an inconspicuous building on their right side.

GREEK COACHMAN
This is it.

The building has no signs and the first floor appears to be some kind of eatery.

SOANE
This is... it?

GREEK COACHMAN
(mockingly)
"A LA FERANG!"

EXT. FRENCH PENSION - MOMENTS LATER

Soane stands in front of a door and knocks on it.

INT./EXT. FRENCH PENSION - DAY

The door is opened by a lovely OLD ITALIAN WOMAN.

OLD ITALIAN WOMAN
Buongiorno! Cosa posso fare per te?

SOANE
(shyly)
Uh... *buongiorno*... goodmorning. Is this the French pension?

OLD ITALIAN WOMAN
(shrugging)
Non capisco!

SOANE
Eh... Hotel "*A La Ferang*"?

OLD ITALIAN WOMAN
(smiling)
Ah... si, si.

The Old Italian Woman gestures for Soane to follow her inside.

INT. FRENCH PENSION - CONTINUOUS

Soane follows her into a narrow wood-paneled hallway. She stops in front of a flight of stairs and looks up:

OLD ITALIAN WOMAN
MARIE! Cliente!

She smiles at Soane and he returns a shy smile.

INT. SOANE'S ROOM - LATER

CAMERA PAN

to reveal Soane's room. It is moderately furnished with an iron stove, a bed, a trunk, a wash-hand-stand, and a desk with a small lamp. The room is light and has a bay window in its center.

WHILST PANNING, we hear this conversation faintly:

SOANE (O.S.)

I suppose those are very reasonable terms.

MARIE (O.S.)

(thick French accent)

Should you need anything, you know where to find me.

SOANE (O.S.)

Thank you.

We hear the DOOR SHUT CLOSE followed by FOOTSTEPS.

Soane walks to his bed, drops his suitcases, and plunges onto his bed. He is exhausted.

INT. GRAND BAZAAR - DAY

A long narrow passage with vaulted arches and a large number of small shops on each side, selling all kinds of goods so associated with the Orient: CARPETS, TINWARE, SPICES, WATER PIPES, and VIBRANT FABRICS.

The Bazaar is illuminated by the morning sunlight falling through openings in the arched ceilings. The bustling bazaar is an ALL-MALE ETHNIC MELTING POT, but dominated by fez-wearing TURKS. Soane is also donning one, making him indistinguishable from the natives.

VENDORS are shouting through and over each other, advertising their trade.

Soane walks down the passage and pauses shortly at various shops, glancing over their wares nonchalantly, ignoring the nosy Vendors who try to engage him.

He continues his nonchalant window-shopping for a little while. Then, we see a RUG SHOP. A conspicuous sign in front reads "PERSIAN SHIRAZ RUGS".

A wide grin overtakes Soane's face; his eyes sparkle and gleam. He clutches his fist to his chest and walks to the shop with great celerity.

INT. PERSIAN SHIRAZ RUGS SHOP - MOMENTS LATER

Soane still has that child-like twinkle in his eyes as he caresses some silk Kashan rugs. He sways to the other side of the shop to feel some sturdy Bijar RUGS with more rigor.

He looks like a kid in a candy shop. Slowly, his dreamy look fades - he realizes he is alone.

SOANE
Hello... anyone in here?

The SHOPKEEPER (small, thin, elderly man) appears from the back of the shop, walking at a slow pace - almost shuffling.

SHOPKEEPER
(quietly, strong
Persian accent)
Yes yes, with you in a moment...

Soane looks at the approaching Shopkeeper delightfully and asks:

SOANE
(subtitled, in
Persian)
How are you, mirza?

The Shopkeeper looks up to see Soane's face and becomes more energetic instantly, his mouth falling open:

SHOPKEEPER
(surprised)
Wonderful now! How are you? Welcome, welcome...
(pointing at a chair
at his desk)
Take a seat... want some tea?

SOANE:
Thank you, but please don't trouble yourself.

As Soane takes a seat, the Shopkeeper pours tea into two tiny tea glasses and places one in front of Soane and then takes a seat himself. The two stare at each other, smiling.

SHOPKEEPER
So, where are you from?

Soane raises his tea glass to take a sip, and with his eyes locked at the Shopkeeper:

SOANE
England.

The Shopkeeper's head flinches back slightly.

SHOPKEEPER

But... you just addressed me in
perfect Shirazi Persian...

(scratching at his
temple)

why would you don a fez?!

SOANE

(smiling)

The fez... well, you know how the
vendors are.

The Shopkeeper leans back, juts his chin out, and frowns at Soane.

Soane blushes; he realizes the implications of his words and puts his tea glass down.

SOANE (cont'd)

(apologetic)

Of course, that does not go for rug
vendors. You are a different breed...
civilized.

Soane darts some glances at the Shopkeeper, waiting for a reaction. The Shopkeeper leans back in his chair and puffs his chest out. A prideful smile crosses his face.

SHOPKEEPER

I don't take offense from esteemed
guests.

(inquiringly)

So... your Persian?

SOANE

Of course. I spent two years in
Shiraz as employee of the Imperial
Bank of Persia and learned the
language while there. Your shop's
sign attracted me... I have very fond
memories of Shiraz and the Shirazi
people and had to visit. I hope the
sign isn't just an advertisement?

The Shopkeeper blinks rapidly, as if to process what he has just heard.

SHOPKEEPER

(shocked)

"Just an advertisement!?"

He rises and stands tall with good posture and looks down on Soane, but not with contempt: with pride.

SHOPKEEPER (cont'd)
Born and raised in Shiraz!

He slumps back into his chair and lets out a shallow sigh.

SHOPKEEPER (cont'd)
(to himself, his
voice breaking)
Oh Shiraz...

The Shopkeeper has an unfocused gaze with teary eyes. He asks Soane rather heartfelt, almost poetically:

SHOPKEEPER (cont'd)
Tell me about Shiraz, tell me about
my city... Has it changed much? Is
Eram Garden still watered? Are poems
still recited at the Tomb of Hafez?

SOANE
(clenched half-smile)
As it was, so it remains.

SHOPKEEPER
(enraptured)
The Pearl among the Emeralds, the
Jewel of Persia!
(in a softer voice)
Tell me, where else did you go? What
else did you see of my country?

SOANE
Unfortunately, I didn't have the
chance to travel extensively. I did,
however, spent a year in Kermanshah
studying Kurdish. Have you ever been
there?

(beat)
In Kermanshah?

SHOPKEEPER
(caressing his temple)
Kermanshah?
(thinking)
Oh yes, yes... I have been there.
(dismissively)
Passed through on my way here, but
that was a long time ago!

SOANE
(lowering his head)
I see.

After a short pause, the Shopkeeper resumes his questions, the only thing he is truly interested in:

SHOPKEEPER
(excitedly)
Have you been to Persepolis?

SOANE
(blase)
Needless to say.

The Shopkeeper looks Soane straight in his eyes:

SHOPKEEPER
(melancholic)
We were a great empire once. We
rivaled Greece and Rome. Were greater
than Rome!

SOANE
(uncomfortable)
You still are great.

The Shopkeeper SLAMS the table and knocks over the glasses.

SHOPKEEPER
(glowering)
Great? Ha! This dynasty was founded
by an eunuch!
(beat)
An eunuch!

Soane glances at the SPILLED TEA expressionlessly and seems to remember what he is here for. He crosses his arms and bends for-over to address the Shopkeeper with a sharp but desperate voice - borderline impolite.

SOANE
About Kermanshah... Do you, by any
chance, happen to know Kurds from
Persia? I intend to finish my
research.

The Shopkeeper fakes a smile and deliberately lowers his head to study Soane. He squints his eyes and his fake smile turns into a genuine small laughter.

SHOPKEEPER
(sighing)
No, no... of course not... Try the
Persian Consulate, it is your best
chance.

Soane shakes his head in frustration, raises a bitter smile, and rises:

SOANE
 (subtitled, in
 Persian)
*Thank you for your hospitality,
 mirza. I won't take more of your
 time.*

The Shopkeeper remains seated. He half-smiles and raises his right hand to the corner of his eyes.

EXT. PERSIAN CONSULATE - DAY

From a narrow alley, the upper floors of the Persian Consulate: a dirty red-painted building flying the Persian flag. The building is surrounded with iron fencing and stone fencing pillars. The gate into the courtyard is open and unguarded.

Soane walks through the gate and into the poorly kept...

COURTYARD

and continues walking to a flight of stately stairs leading to the consulate's entrance.

INT. PERSIAN CONSULATE, ENTRANCE HALL - SAME

The entrance hall is dark and featureless with paint chipping from its walls. A flight of curving stairs goes up to the visible second floor. A desk in the middle of the hall is occupied by a suave-looking little PERSIAN CLERK. Briefly put: the building is unworthy for a nation that styles itself empire.

Soane walks up to the Persian Clerk.

SOANE
 (subtitled, in
 Persian)
Excuse me.

The Persian Clerk looks up:

PERSIAN CLERK
 (blase)
Yes, how can I help you?

SOANE

I am an English linguist. I spent a year in Kermanshah researching the Kurdish language. I would like to meet some Persian Kurds to finish my study. A good friend referred me to you.

The Persian Clerk rolls his eyes, picks up the phone horn and dials a number. SOMEONE answers, but we can't hear his voice. The Persian Clerk is unreadable; his eyes are up looking at Soane the whole time he is on the phone:

PERSIAN CLERK

(on phone)

A Shirazi is here, pretending to be an Englishman.

SOANE (O.S.)

(surprised)

Huh, wh --

PERSIAN CLERK

(on phone)

wants to meet Kurds for a...

(mockingly)

research.

(beat)

Uh-huh.

(beat)

Uh-huh.

(beat)

Uh-huh.

(beat)

Uh --

(beat)

Huh.

The Persian Clerk puts the phone horn down.

PERSIAN CLERK (cont'd)

(blase)

Up the stairs, first door on your left.

Soane has a blank look. The Persian Clerk, now smirking as if he has caught Soane in a lie, repeats what he just said - this time in Persian:

PERSIAN CLERK (cont'd)

(in Persian)

Up the stairs, first door on your left.

INT. PERSIAN CONSUL GENERAL'S ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

PERSIAN CONSUL GENERAL'S P.O.V.

of the room's entrance. The Persian Consul General's Room is lavishly furnished and decorated with all the fine things associated with Persia; bright colored rugs decorate the floors, meticulously carved oak walls, the finest silverware. The room stands in stark contrast with what we have previously seen of the building, perhaps a reflection of the Persian Consul General's corrupt nature.

We hear KNOCKING on the door.

PERSIAN CONSUL GENERAL (O.S.)

Come in.

The door opens and Soane walks in and bends his head and upper body in respect.

SOANE

Salam.

The Persian Consul General is a middle-aged man with a thick mustache, wearing a long black coat. He sits behind a sturdy desk situated in the center of the room. Next to him, his SECRETARY (an awkward looking, permanently smiling little man who nods affirmatively at everything the Persian Consul General says).

Soane, with his hands clasped in front, waits for the Persian Consul General to initiate the conversation.

PERSIAN CONSUL GENERAL

(delightfully)

Please, take a seat.

Soane smiles in acknowledgment and takes a seat at the Persian Consul General's desk.

PERSIAN CONSUL GENERAL (cont'd)

(disarmingly)

So, how can I be of your service?

SOANE

(matter-of-factly,
but humble)

I was referred to your excellence by a good friend. You see, I spent three years in Persia; two in Shiraz as employee of The Imperial Bank, and one year in Kermanshah. There, I started a study on the Kurdish

(MORE)

SOANE (cont'd)
 language. Unfortunately, duty back home called and I was unable to finish my research. To my delight, I learned of a large Kurdish presence in Constantinople. However, none seem to be from Persian Kurdistan. My dear friend told me if anyone knows where to find them, it would be you. And for that, I am here.

Soane drops his chin to his chest.

The Persian Consul General gives Soane a silent look. He purses his lips in thought, tilts his head, and pauses. He snaps his fingers at his Secretary, who lights him a cigar and hands it to them.

PERSIAN CONSUL GENERAL
 (frowning enquiringly)
 So, how long have you been in Constantinople?

Soane gives him some darting gazes, too humble to look him straight in his eyes.

SOANE
 About seven months.

The Persian Consul General takes a deep puff from his cigar and blows the smoke into Soane's face brusquely.

Soane waves the smoke away with his hands. He smiles nervously; stunned and tight-lipped.

The Secretary smirks.

PERSIAN CONSUL GENERAL
 How long do you intend to stay?

SOANE
 I... I don't know yet. I have leased my apartment for three years.

PERSIAN CONSUL GENERAL
 (intrusively)
 Where is your apartment?

SOANE
 The Galata Quarter. May I know why you are asking these intrusive questions?

PERSIAN CONSUL GENERAL
 (prevaricating)
 Do you like it there?

Soane's face reddens. He leans back, but can't sit still. He makes rapid lip movements as if looking for the right words:

SOANE
 Nicer neighborhoods aren't within my
 budget. I don't under --

The Persian Consul General puts his cigar down, stands up, and BURSTS OUT in an abrupt and official manner:

PERSIAN CONSUL GENERAL
 Why this disguise? Wherefore these
 lies? The truth were better; tell me
 your native town!

Soane adjusts his posture to sit up straight. His neck bends forwards, then stiffens back up. He looks both astonished and confused. Lost for words, he utters pathetically:

SOANE
 Lies?

PERSIAN CONSUL GENERAL
 (incredulous)
 Yes, lies! It is evident to me that
 you are a Shirazi; your accent and
 manners betray you. And I wish to
 know what you have done to render
 expedient this kind of appearance,
 and this weak story of being an
Englishman!

Soane has an expression of sudden realization on his face. He stands up and speaks up indignantly, raising his voice:

SOANE
 Your excellence, you are mistaken! I
 am an Englishman. Born and raised in
 England. I can prove it to you!

PERSIAN CONSUL GENERAL
 (slams fist on desk)
 Prove it then!

The Persian Consul General holds his elbows wide from the body with his chest thrust out, waiting for the evidence to be presented.

Soane grabs in his jetted pockets and pulls out his BRITISH PASSPORT. He hands it to the Persian Consul General. Soane clenches his jaws and tightens his lips; he looks wild-eyed.

The Persian Consul General opens the passport and browses through some pages while exchanging looks between the passport and Soane, evaluating.

Soane looks defiant; he has drawn himself up to full height and has a challenging stare.

The Persian Consul General's glances become less and less self-assured until he becomes unable to meet Soane's gaze. He hands the passport back to Soane and lowers his voice, rather humbly.

PERSIAN CONSUL GENERAL (cont'd)

(cordial)

Well, you shouldn't speak Persian so fluently. You see, your countrymen are usually so backward in acquiring our language, that when one appears talking as we do, can you expect us to believe it?

Soane relaxes. He half-smiles in acknowledgment of the Persian Consul General's half-apology.

The Persian Consul General half-smiles back and sits down. He gestures for Soane to do the same, which Soane does.

The Persian Consul General points at a CIGAR CASE, suggesting whether Soane would like one.

SOANE

No, thank you.

The Persian Consul General picks up his cigar, but catches Soane's askance stare. He remembers. He puts the cigar out.

PERSIAN CONSUL GENERAL

I haven't forgotten about your peculiar question... A SHEIKH FROM SINA arrived a few months ago. A self-imposed exile, I believe. I haven't met him, but his last known whereabouts are a caravanserai in the Old Town. I don't know whether he still stays there, but that would be your best chance.

The Persian Consul General snaps his fingers.

His Secretary stands up and runs to a cabinet on the other side of the room. He pulls a drawer and takes out a map. He runs back to the Persian Consul General and hands him the map, which he opens and spreads across his desk. He rises and gestures for Soane to look over the desk with him as he DRAWS DIRECTIONS ON THE MAP.

EXT. CARAVANSERAI - DAY - RAINING

A two-storied building in terrible condition; featureless and bleak. Its windows are barred and it looks more like a prison than a hotel.

Soane enters through the caravanserai's low arched-gate.

FROM SOANE'S P.O.V.

a wide view of the muddy, seemingly empty courtyard. A gallery runs around the caravanserai's ground floor, upon which the rooms open. We hear NEIGHING HORSES. Then, we see the SHAPE OF A MAN ("GALLERY MAN") squatting in a corner below the gallery. Soane walks over to him.

SOANE

Excuse me.

Gallery Man looks up at Soane: he wears a giant turban and he may or may not be blind. A rather insidious-looking man.

GALLERY MAN

(low voice)

Yes?

SOANE

I am looking for the Sheikh from Sina.

(beat)

A Kurdish man. I was told he resides here.

GALLERY MAN

(surreptitiously)

He may or may not.

SOANE

I am sorry?

GALLERY MAN

(pointing at rooms)

He may be here...

(pointing at exit)

He may have gone...

(MORE)

GALLERY MAN (cont'd)
 (looking up)
 Or he may be with GOD.

Soane pulls his coat over his head and flips him a coin.

GALLERY MAN (cont'd)
 (pointing at rooms)
 He may be here...
 (pointing at exit)
 He may have gone.

Soane is getting soaked from the rain and takes cover under the gallery. He reaches in his pockets to find another coin, all the while Gallery Man looks up at him from his squatting position. Soane finds another coin and puts it in Gallery Man's palms firmly, then closes his palms for him, as if to communicate: "this is all you get."

Gallery Man puts both coins under his turban and throws his head back at a room behind him.

Soane walks to the room excitedly and KNOCKS on its door.

SERVANT (O.S.)
 (subtitled, in
 Kurdish)
Who is it?

SOANE
 A friend from foreign lands.

We hear INDISTINCT CHATTER coming from the room. The door opens and the Servant, who is a spitting image of Soane, invites Soane in without taking further notice of him:

SERVANT
 (subtitled, in
 Kurdish)
*Welcome, welcome. May you come with
 blessings.*

Soane enters the room.

INT. SHEIKH'S ROOM - CONTINUOUS

A spacious but rather dark rectangular room. Wooden boxes and some earthen water pots are put against the walls. The floor is covered with a long kilim leading to the far end of the room. There, below a skylight just sufficiently illuminating the room, sits the Sheikh from Sina (in action lines "the Sheikh"): a gloomy-looking man in his 40s, bushy-browed, and black-bearded. He wears a small white turban and

is smoking a pipe. He sits under a *korsi* (a low heated table with a blanket thrown over it).

We hear RAIN POURING on the skylight above him.

SHEIKH FROM SINA
Friend from foreign lands! Come and
sit with me.

Soane takes a seat below the *korsi* opposite the Sheikh.

The Sheikh takes some puffs from his pipe while the Servant pours them some tea. The Sheikh gazes at Soane curiously while a smile slowly builds on his face; Soane smiles back shyly. Then, the Sheikh speaks up with a soft, wondrous voice:

SHEIKH FROM SINA (cont'd)
It rains as if it were the day of
judgment...

They exchange some more glances. Soane bites his lips and rubs his jaws. He takes a sip from his tea. Then, as if the tea was a potion that gave him courage, he speaks up boisterously:

SOANE
(subtitled, in
perfect Kurdish)
*How I wish I was in sunny Kurdistan,
far away from this miserable city.*

The busy Servant turns, his jaw dropped. The Sheikh's smile vanishes and a flat gaze appears in his eyes as he slowly withdraws the pipe from his mouth.

SHEIKH FROM SINA
(disbelief)
You... you speak Kurdish? How?
(expressing cautious
wonder)
Where are you from?

Soane's face is beaming, his eyes wide and glowing.

SOANE
I was born in England, but I have
lived among your people. There, I
learned Kurdish and fell in love with
your country.
(MORE)

SOANE (cont'd)
 (passionately)
 I have yearned for it ever since I
 left it. You don't know how much your
 acquaintance means to me.

The Sheikh's stunned look fades at Soane's unexpected but
 welcomed outburst:

SHEIKH FROM SINA
 (joyously)
 I thought all my friends had
 abandoned me! I did not expect to
 find one in this miserable place!
 God works in mysterious ways!
 (bending over)
 Tell me, how did you find me? Why did
 you come to visit me?

SOANE
 I found you via the Persian Consul
 General. The purpose of my visit is
 not yet important...

Soane's fist gets tighter. His posture tenses up. He looks
 the Sheikh straight in his eyes and shouts out:

SOANE (cont'd)
 Tell me about your country! I want to
 reminisce it, to see it again, to
 feel it again!

Soane freezes in this dramatic position for a few beats. The
 Sheikh's unfocused gaze and slight smile tells us he has
 already wondered off to Kurdistan in his thoughts. Soane
 assumes a relaxed position. The Sheikh takes a puff from his
 pipe.

SHEIKH FROM SINA
 (in a quiet voice)
 To see it again...
 (eyes brightening as
 memories are
 recalled)
 No description from memory comes
 close to the real freedom of plain
 and mountain, to the slow march of
 the clanging caravan, to the droning
 song of the shepherds on the hills...
 The fresh air and hot sun can not be
 imagined; they can only be felt. The
 glorious sunsets over endless hills
 can only be seen with your eyes, not
 through the eyes of another.
 (MORE)

SHEIKH FROM SINA (cont'd)

(scornful)

The longer I stay in this filthy town of sharpening and guile, the more these memories fade. Until one day, they become but a vague memory of a distant past. A life not lived.

The Sheikh's unfocused gaze vanishes. He makes direct eye contact with Soane and tells him firmly:

SHEIKH FROM SINA (cont'd)

I will not let it come to that. I intend to return soon. As for you... well, if you want to see it again, you have to return.

SOANE

(rhetorically, to himself)

Return?

(beat)

That is impossible! I am not a native, nor do I have the means!

SHEIKH FROM SINA

(sanguine)

Difficult? Perhaps.

(beat)

But not impossible.

Soane looks quizzical.

The Sheikh takes another puff from his pipe.

SHEIKH FROM SINA (cont'd)

Which languages do you speak?

SOANE

Well... apart from Kurdish, I am fluent in Persian. And I have a limited knowledge of Turkish and Arabic.

Soane grimaces and he makes a slight head-shake.

I don't understand how --

The Sheikh points at his Servant and asks Soane:

SHEIKH FROM SINA

Describe my Servant for me.

SOANE
 (puzzled)
 Describe him?

The Sheikh nods.

Soane glances back and forth between the Sheikh and the Servant. Then, he just stares at the Servant for a few moments. The Servant remains static. A twinkle appears in Soane's eyes. He looks at the Sheikh and both crack a smile.

SHEIKH FROM SINA
 If you want to see as one of us,
 travel as one of us. Go in disguise
 and keep your mother tongue to
 yourself.

SOANE
 What about my British passport?

SHEIKH FROM SINA
 That should be the least of your
 concerns, for it will definitely be
 the least of your challenges.
 (beat, smiling
 sinisterly)
 Of course, a Christian disguising
 himself as *Musulman* would be
 inappropriate and is discouraged.

WIDE SHOT

silhouette of Soane and the Sheikh sitting under the odd table, illuminated by the skylight. There is a curtain of smoke around the Sheikh.

We hear RAIN POURING INTENSELY.

EXT. PORT OF CONSTANTINOPLE - DAY

SUPERIMPOSE: "28 MONTHS LATER"

An almost empty dock on a cold and cloudy morning. The only docked ship is THE SAGHALIEN, an old steamer. A sign in front reads: "DESTINATION: BEYROUTH". There is a line of boarding PASSENGERS.

TWO ENGLISHMEN are on deck of The Saghalien, dressed in fancy tailored British suits. They are admiring the New Mosque (*Yeni Cami*) on the other side of the port.

On dock, we see SIX PORTERS, fierce-looking manly men, carry packs of stuffed leather on their backs. They shout and joke INCOMPREHENSIBLY. They are stared at contemptuously by TWO GENTLEMEN. The Six Porters turn to face them and feign moving at them with great strides; the Two Gentlemen turn pale and quickly face away.

Soane stands in the back of a short boarding queue, waiting to have his passport checked. He wears the same outfit he wore the day he arrived in Constantinople. He carries his own suitcases and holds a FEZ under his left arm.

Soane hands his passport to an unkempt TURKISH OFFICIAL, who browses through it quickly, stamps it, and hands it back to him.

Soane walks onto the ship's boarding plank. There, he stops to put his fez on before boarding...

EXT. THE SAGHALIEN - CONTINUOUS

The Two Englishman who were admiring the New Mosque earlier turn their backs and notice Soane:

ENGLISHMAN 1
(to Englishman 2)
Quite a civilized-looking Turk.

ENGLISHMAN 2
(exciting wonder)
I wonder 'ow many wives 'E's got

Soane hears, but knows not to look and not to react. he is in disguise.

The boarding plank is removed and the steamer is anchored off.

EXT. BAY OF BEYROUTH - DAY

The Saghalien sails into the Bay of Beyrouth; the city's hills are clearly visible on this bright sunny day. The bay is crowded with fisher boats and other steamers.

The Saghalien lets out a LOUD HORN to signal her arrival.

SUPERIMPOSE: "Beyrouth, March 1909"

EXT. PORT OF BEYROUTH - DAY

Dozens of steamers are docked at the port of Beyrouth's short wharfs. PORTERS are busy unloading, carrying goods into hovels and shacks that fill the quay. Dirty steam locomotives are BLOWING OFF STEAM from their noisy safety-valves as they come and go in front of the quay's sole stone building.

INT./EXT. THE SAGHALIEN - DAY

The Saghalien is docked and its Passengers are off-boarding. THREE PORTERS walk off The Saghalien; one carries multiple suitcases while the other two carry a large trunk. The Two Englishmen walk behind them, looking their most snobbish. They stop at the edge of the steamer. The sun shines in their faces. They are properly dressed for the hot weather and appear good-spirited despite their nagging:

ENGLISHMAN 1

I should have thought to bring an umbrella...

(wiping sweat off his forehead)

it's remarkably hot.

ENGLISHMAN 2

(rhetorically)

I wonder whether our hotel has a pool.

ENGLISHMAN 1

This will be an adventure of a lifetime!

They walk off The Saghalien - and directly behind them comes Soane, carrying his own luggage and wearing his black suit and fez.

He walks onto the crowded wharf where DOZENS OF LEVANTINES are SHOUTING, pushing, and pulling at each other to get through. Soane is not spared: he is but one of them. He adapts quickly and makes his way through the crowd with such determined force that we start to doubt his Englishness.

EXT. RAILROAD STATION - SUNSET

The Railroad Station is near the harbor. A sign adorning the building's entrance reads "COMPAGNIE DE LA VOIE FERRÉE ÉCONOMIQUE DE BEYROUTH".

PASSENGERS are boarding the train; WOMEN carrying heavy bags on their heads, MEN in regular civilian clothing, and an ORTHODOX PRIEST. There is SHOUTING, pushing, and pulling. Whilst this is going on, we hear the following announcement in various languages - English last.

OVER SPEAKER (V.O.)
 (in French, Arabic,
 Turkish, and English)
*Attention, passengers: the train to
 Riyaq, Baalbek, Homs, Hama and Final
 Destination Aleppo is about to
 depart. This is our final boarding
 call.*

Soane, ticket clutched in hands, hurries himself to the train. He is sweating bullets. A PORTER carries his suitcases and runs behind him.

Soane, out of breath, shows his ticket to an unamused FRENCH RAILROAD EMPLOYEE. He SNARLS something unintelligible at Soane, tears his ticket, and gives it back to him - allowing him to board. Soane takes the suitcases from the Porter, thanks and pays him quickly, and boards the train.

INT. TRAIN - MOMENTS LATER

Soane walks through the train's narrow corridors hastily, frantically looking for a cabin to settle himself in. All the cabins he passes and looks into are fully occupied. He continues his desperate search for some moments, and just when he looks defeated enough to settle for the floor, he stumbles back a step to take a closer look inside the last cabin he passed: A FREE SEAT! He slides the cabin door aside hard and enters.

INT. TRAIN, SOANE'S CABIN - CONTINUOUS

He places his luggage in the luggage rack above the empty seat and squishes himself between TWO FAT FRENCH RAILROAD EMPLOYEES, whom frown at him and look incredibly annoyed. As Soane settles in, glowing from relief and oblivious to the judgmental stares he's getting, he sees the passengers opposite him: THREE TURKISH OFFICERS. Soane smiles at them awkwardly, but he is too tired to care. He closes his eyes and falls asleep.

EXT. RAILROAD STATION - MOMENTS LATER

An empty railroad platform. The CONDUCTOR leans out of the train and blows his WHISTLE.

We hear the train's ENGINES STARTING and we see its wheels turning on the railroad tracks. The train slowly departs into the night, towards the black hills in the distance.

INT. TRAIN, SOANE'S CABIN - DAY

Soane is waking up to the sound of a NOISY CROWD. The Two Fat French Railroad Employees have already left his cabin; the Three Turkish Officers are exiting the cabin. Soane rubs his eyes and looks outside onto...

EXT. RIYAQ RAILROAD STATION - SAME

A small railroad station with a raised platform. There are a few stone buildings. The station is surrounded by woodland.

TWELVE PERSIAN MEN (from here on referred to as "Persians") dressed in white *ihram* garments are running up and down the platform in panic, SHOUTING INCOMPREHENSIBLY. They attempt to get into Soane's train, but are beaten with clubs and prevented from entering by the Three Turkish Officers.

INT./EXT. TRAIN, SOANE'S CABIN - SAME

Soane opens his cabin window to better see and hear what is going on outside:

PERSIANS
(subtitled, in
Persian)

*We will never reach Isfahan!/May God
curse them!/Aren't we muslims like
you!?*

Soane sticks his head out of the window and addresses the Persian Man closest to him:

SOANE
Excuse me, what is the trouble?

The Persian Man startles and looks at Soane as if he has seen a ghost. His confusion turns into a confident outburst mere seconds later:

PERSIAN MAN

(in Arabic)

Bah! La'nat ullah 'alaih!

(in English)

We have a long journey from Mecca behind us. From Damascus, we had second-class tickets. There, they put us in cattle-trucks. And now these offspring of Turkish prostitutes refuse us even that!

EXT. RIYAQ RAILROAD STATION - SAME

Other cabin windows open and TURKISH AND ARAB PASSENGERS stick their heads out, responding to the insult vehemently:

TURKISH PASSENGERS

(subtitled, in Turkish)

Get lost, sons of dogs!

ARAB PASSENGERS

(subtitled, in Arabic)

There is no place for Persians on this train!

The Persians respond with further UNINTELLIGIBLE OUTBURSTS, leading to a chaotic exchange of insults between the two groups.

One of the Fat French Railroad Employees we saw earlier runs out of the station's main building out of breath, holding a half-eaten sandwich. His face is red and he is sweating bullets.

FAT FRENCH RAILROAD EMPLOYEE

(in French)

Sac a merde!

He throws his sandwich on the ground, rolls up his sleeves, and draws out his club. He barges at the Persians and starts beating them, but not to injure - he is merely directing them inside the station building. The Persians are hesitant, but slowly back into the building while shooting back at the continuous RAY OF INSULTS from the cabins.

The Fat French Railroad Employee now turns his attention to the cabins. His eyes radiate with anger. He walks to the cabins and starts hitting the windows hard - and he means to injure.

FAT FRENCH RAILROAD EMPLOYEE (cont'd)

(subtitled, in French)

*I want to see closed windows and hear
shut beaks! Close!*

(hits window)

Close!

(hits window)

Close!

(hits a HEAD)

As he continues his furious walk, we hear the train's ENGINES STARTING and we see its wheels turning on the railroad tracks. As the train starts moving, the exhausted Fat French Railroad Employee stops and hurls an obscene insult at the train:

FAT FRENCH RAILROAD EMPLOYEE (cont'd)

Nique ta mères!

but the insult is half-way censored by the train's WHISTLE.

EXT. BEQAA VALLEY - DAY

The train is moving through the lush and fertile Beqaa Valley: Lebanon's Farm Country. The train passes through endless farms and wineries surrounded by the green Mount Lebanon Range to its West and the snow-capped tops of the Anti-Lebanon Mountains to its East.

As we see various shots of the train continuing its journey through this valley, the landscape's green color gradually fades and turns into a brownish yellow, until all we see is desert with infrequent patches of pathetic green.

INT. TRAIN, SOANE'S CABIN - DAY

Soane is slouching and gazing out of his window inattentively. Suddenly, his eyes widen and he adjusts his poor posture to sit up straight. He slides the cabin window open and sticks his head out to admire (in passing):

THE RUINS OF ANCIENT BAALBEK

INT. SOANE'S CABIN - MOMENTS LATER

The train is stationary. From inside Soane's cabin, we see a small yellowish stone building with a sign that reads "BAALBEK كبلع ب".

Soane's cabin door slides open. A GERMAN ENGINEER (30s, sharply dressed, wearing glasses) enters and slides the door shut. He acknowledges Soane with a nod and puts his suitcase on the luggage rack opposite Soane's and takes a seat beneath it. The train starts moving again.

Moments later, the door slides open again and TWO TURKISH OFFICIALS (both in their 40s, one fat, the other skinny as a stick) enter the cabin. The Fat Turkish Official takes a seat next to the German Engineer and the Skinny Turkish Official next to Soane.

The Fat Turkish Official produces a dirty ragged little notebook. He looks at the German Engineer rather seriously and starts sketching something rapidly. Once he is done, he holds his notebook out in front of himself and smiles at his sketch contentedly. He shows his sketch to his colleague, who beams and shouts out:

SKINNY TURKISH OFFICIAL
(subtitled, in
Turkish)
Excellent!

The Two Turkish Officials rise and leave the cabin. Soane and the German Engineer exchange some confused but humored looks.

EXT. TRAIN - SUNSET

VARIOUS LONG SHOTS

Of the train moving through the endless barren deserts of Lebanon's borderlands. The scenery slowly changes back to green fertile lands as the train passes a sign that reads "HOMS" (Syria) and sometime later a sign that reads "HAMA". In passing, WE SEE THE NORIAS (ancient water wheels) of that ancient city.

INT. TRAIN, SOANE'S CABIN - NIGHT

Soane and the German Engineer are sleeping.

The cabin door slides open hard and the Fat Turkish Official enters. Soane and the German Engineer awaken. The Fat Turkish Official takes a seat next to the German Engineer.

He produces an orange and starts peeling it, dropping the peel deliberately below the German Engineer's feet. He eats his orange like an animal, spilling juice all over his uniform.

Soane and the German Engineer look appalled. The German Engineer brings his feet closer together and backs away a little, but both remain tight-lipped: they are in no position to complain.

Without cleaning his sticky hands, the Fat Turkish Official produces an IDENTITY CARD and shows it to Soane and the German Engineer:

FAT TURKISH OFFICIAL

(stern)

My name is Memed and I am in service of the Sultan. It is my duty to ascertain whether you are allowed to enter Aleppo without danger of inciting political riots. The unity of the empire must be protected at all cost. Your full co-operation is expected and required. Failure to do so...

The Fat Turkish Official points at Soane and gives him a dirty look.

FAT TURKISH OFFICIAL (cont'd)

(subtitled, in
Turkish)

You. What is your name and what is your business in Aleppo.

(produces his little
notebook again)

Soane looks back sheepishly, feigning ignorance. He points to the east, then at himself, then to the east again and repeats:

SOANE

(in broken Turkish)

To Persia... To Persia...

FAT TURKISH OFFICIAL

(raising his voice)

Tell me what your name is. Show me your travel card, your ticket!

Soane doesn't break character and repeats what he said with a nervous slight smile:

SOANE

To Persia...

The Fat Turkish Official sighs deeply and turns his attention to the German Engineer, who has his passport ready in hand to present - but his passport is deliberately ignored.

FAT TURKISH OFFICIAL

(voice unchanged)

What is your name and what is your business in Aleppo!

The German Engineer's posture slags. He clears his throat.

GERMAN ENGINEER

(thick German accent)

My name is Sigmund Schmidt. I am a German Engineer and heading to Aleppo to design a factory for a local textile merchant.

While making a note of this in his notebook:

FAT TURKISH OFFICIAL

(confidently)

And tell me your profession, what is your profession!

The German Engineer moves back and forth nervously, perturbed.

GERMAN ENGINEER

I am an engineer...

He straightens his glasses and repeats in Arabic.

GERMAN ENGINEER (cont'd)

Muhandis. Muhandis.

The German Engineer smiles tremulously and presents his passport again, but the Fat Turkish Official slams it out of his hands and rises violently:

FAT TURKISH OFFICIAL

I will not accept being mocked by you! You will hear from me!

He yanks the cabin door open and puts one foot outside, but the cabin door slides back against his fat thighs before he

has exited. He slides the the door open with buttocks and steps out; the cabin door slides shut hard.

EXT. ALEPPO TRAIN STATION - DAY

Aleppo's dusty Railroad Station is located outside the Old Town and has multiple tracks. FREIGHT LOCOMOTIVES are constantly moving on and off: there is a lot of activity.

The train stands still in front of the main terminal, a large limestone building with red gable-roof and sign that reads "ALEP-CHEMIN DE FER."

Passengers are off-boarding the train onto a ground-level platform. They are immediately swarmed by DOZENS OF AGGRESSIVE HOTEL TOUTS. Getting through them without going with them is a futile effort.

Soane stands in the middle of the crowd with suitcases in hand when his arm is pulled by an aggressive HOTEL TOUT/COACHMAN:

HOTEL TOUT/COACHMAN

Haji! You shouldn't be carrying heavy luggage...

He takes the suitcases out of Soane's hands - Soane has no time to react and follows him without protest, looking rather dumb. He never stood a chance.

EXT. ALEPPO CITADEL ROAD - MOMENTS LATER

Soane rides shotgun in a stagecoach driven by the Hotel Tout/Coachman. As they career down a straight broad road lined with tall palm trees, ALEPPO'S CITADEL comes into our sight.

HOTEL TOUT/COACHMAN

(hyper)

How was your pilgrimage? Was it your first time to Mecca? I admire your restraint to show off! Look at them, (...)

They pass FOUR PILGRIMS who are on foot. They have all tied a white handkerchief around their heads or headgear.

HOTEL TOUT/COACHMAN (V.O.)

(disapprovingly)

I bet they tied the white
handkerchief the second they stepped
foot outside Mecca!

(beat)

How long do you intend to stay in
Aleppo?

Soane looks back at the Four Pilgrims rather mischievously -
as if they gave him a shrewd idea.

SOANE

Well, I --

HOTEL TOUT/COACHMAN

Oh, don't tell me! Once you settle in
at the excellent *Hotel de Syrie* and
get a taste of the eternal city, you
will never want to leave!

As they career down the road, we hear THE ADHAN (Muslim call
to prayer).

EXT. HOTEL DE SYRIE, ALEPPO - DAY

A rundown stone building flying French and Ottoman Flags.
MEN wearing ragged clothes and giant turbans sit out front
smoking their water pipes, probably the only thing they have
ever done.

A KID is pushing and beating a COW out of the building from
its basalt stone arched gate.

Soane, with WHITE HANDKERCHIEF tied around his fez, stares
at this queer sight with suitcases in hand, expressing both
wonder and disgust.

He scans the area and notices several parked stagecoaches on
the far right side of the building. He takes another look at
the hotel, as if mentally weighing his choices, but sneers
at it and strides to...

EXT. STAGECOACH STATION, ALEPPO - CONTINUOUS

the only manned stagecoach, which is like a punt on wheels:
a canvas-covered top shelters passenger and driver with
curtains that can be let down to guard the traveler from sun
and storm. SUREN, its coachman, is busy packing it, tying
water-pots and samovars outside. He is unaware of his
surroundings, completely focused on his job.

Soane looks at him working intently for a few moments before addressing him:

SOANE
Good evening.

Suren turns around and immediately steps down upon seeing Soane's WHITE HANDKERCHIEF-TIED FEZ.

SUREN
Good evening, haji! Peace be upon you.
(amiably)
How can I be of service?

SOANE
I am looking for a ride out of this town, towards Persia.

SUREN
(surprised)
To Persia? You are a long way from home, haji!

Soane gazes at him inquiringly.

SUREN (cont'd)
But that just happens to be on my route. I am going until Diyarbakir. But I am leaving soon. I have passengers waiting for me there.

Suren looks down shamefaced, as if he has insulted Soane with this semi-rejection.

SOANE
(insouciant)
I am not well provisioned for the journey. Could you wait until I pay a visit to the bazaar? It won't take long.

Suren straightens up and looks at Soane:

SUREN
(feigning insult)
What do you see me for? I take care of my guests!
(pounding on his chest)
This stagecoach is provisioned for a village!

Suren smiles and reaches for Soane's suitcases. Soane smiles back and hands them to him.

EXT. ALEPPO OUTSKIRTS - DAY

The stagecoach is leaving a trail of dust as it exits bustling Aleppo. In front of them is an endless barren desert; its yellow color enhanced by the blazing sun and contrasted by a deep blue sky.

EXT. DESERT NORTH OF ALEPPO - LATER

Suren glances at Soane from the corner of his eyes. He looks away when Soane catches him. He takes another look at Soane, smiling... and then bursts out joyfully:

SUREN
(subtitled, in
Kurdish)
I know Kurmanji!

Soane is startled and turns his body to face Suren, who has a big grin on his face. Soane puts a hand on his right shoulder and asks rhetorically:

SOANE
(surprised)
You know Kurdish?

Suren's grin gets even bigger: he is radiating happiness.

SUREN
(relishing)
I know Kurdish and I am Kurdish! I
knew you were too! Who are you trying
to fool with that silly hat?

Soane breaks eye contact with Suren and looks rather flustered. He reaches for his fez to take it off, but is prevented:

SUREN (cont'd)
Well don't take it off! There's Turks
on the road.
(smiling)
It won't hurt having one of us look
like them. At least, until Urfa.

We hear VAGUE CHALDEAN CHANTS coming from another stagecoach. Then, that stagecoach comes into our view.

It carries THREE MEN whom are singing out-of-sync: a baby-faced driver donning a blue turban, an old man with a crooked nose and two teeth sticking out the corners of his wide mouth, and an absurdly fat man wearing a tiny fez - kept on his head with a black string that goes around his face.

Soane stares at them unabashed in passing.

SOANE
(to Suren)
What language was that?

SUREN
Chaldean.

EXT. DESERTS - SUNSET

Their stagecoach rattles on towards the setting sun.

EXT. MANBIJ - DUSK

The stagecoach passes a field of ruined walls and piles of enormous carved stones: remnants of ancient buildings.

After some moments, A HILL appears. It stands out in the otherwise flat landscape. The silhouette of a MOSQUE on top of the hill. Around the mosque, the silhouette of FOUR PEOPLE wearing some kind of dress blowing in the wind.

SOANE (O.S.)
What is this place called?

SUREN (O.S.)
Manbij.

The stagecoach passes some mud buildings at the foot of the hill and stops in front of the hamlet's only stone building: a caravanserai.

EXT. CARAVANSERAI, MANBIJ - DAY

As the stagecoach leaves the dusty hamlet, they pass FOUR CIRCASSIAN MEN wearing long Cossack dresses and Russian fur caps. They have a gaunt appearance and vacant stare. Soane looks at them intriguingly, but they are ignored by Suren.

EXT. MANBIJ OUTSKIRTS - MOMENTS LATER

From here on, the landscape subtly changes into more fertile territory - yet, still flat, without much distinctive features apart from some lonely hills.

SOANE

(to Suren)

Who were those men?

SUREN

Circassians. Immigrants from the Caucasus. Were settled here by the government some time ago.

(contemptuously)

I can't imagine having to trade the Caucasus for this wasteland...

Soane's eyes brighten up as he recalls fond memories of home. He has an unfocused gaze and shows a slight smile.

SOANE

(in a quiet voice)

Is it not the thought of home that keeps you going? A tree has physical roots, and when it is uprooted, it dies. A man's roots can not be seen, even though they are tied to a place just like a tree. You can remove him from his land, displace him, exile him... whatever you want to call it... but that won't uproot him.

Suren sighs and his voice takes on a wistful tone:

SUREN

I feel you.

(beat)

My village is not far from Diyarbakir, and Diyarbakir is not very far from where we are now. Yet, even a day's journey from that place I call home feels like the other end of the world to me.

EXT. FERTILE HILLY PLAINS - LATER

As the stagecoach rattles on, we see the landscape has changed: it is less arid, and there are patches of plowed land. This is fertile territory: the heart of Mesopotamia.

SOANE (O.S.)

"Whenever I see a mountain, my heart throbs and rouses like on my first date. I stand astonished at its base and come to think that all the mountains in the world begin with my mountains."

SUREN (O.S.)

(shouting)

You have spoken the truth! You have spoken the truth!

We hear VIOLENTLY ROARING WATER. The stagecoach descends a small hill and into our sight comes...

THE EUPHRATES RIVER

EXT. EUPHRATES RIVER - MOMENTS LATER

Suren looks at Soane and points at the river:

SUREN

Across the Euphrates...

(beat)

Kurdistan!

Soane's eyes lit up as a broad smile spreads over his face.

EXT. EUPHRATES RIVER - LATER

The violently flowing Euphrates is in front of us. Snow capped mountains are visible in the far distance, while green hills are just across the river. There is no bridge.

A LARGE CRAFT is approaching from the opposite bank of the river. It looks like a high-prowed long-ship cut in half, powered by a FRONT MAN wielding an enormously long steering-roar and THREE OTHER MEN with poles and oars supplying propelling power. We see them struggle as they battle against nature.

EXT. EUPHRATES RIVER - SAME

BACK TO STAGECOACH

Soane looks bewildered; his eyes have widened and his posture has stiffened. He looks at Suren inquiringly.

SUREN

Yes.

(beat)

That is how we cross.

EXT. EUPHRATES RIVER (OTHER SIDE) - LATER

The stagecoach is ascending the hill across the river. The Euphrates is in the background, the craft making its way back again.

EXT. BEHIND THE HILL - MOMENTS LATER

The stagecoach is now descending the hill; the roaring of the Euphrates is no longer audible.

The scenery has changed dramatically: in front of us, endless ploughed land where the grain is beginning to send its green spikes above the earth. In the distance, tall snow-capped mountains obscured by rapidly approaching dark storm clouds.

SUDDEN SHOWERS start across the country, columns of dark rain descending on the land mercilessly.

The stagecoach stops at a small stone building near a muddy field. Soane and Suren descend and hasten themselves inside.

FADE TO:

We hear the RATTLING of the stagecoach followed by...

FOUR NAKED SOLDIERS (O.S.)

(subtitled, in
Turkish)

Stop! Stop!

EXT. WHEAT FIELDS NEAR URFA - DAY

We see the Four Naked Soldiers. They look terribly roughed up and are all bald from a recent bad shave.

Soane and Suren exchange perplexed looks, but pass them without stopping: they are not interested.

The Naked Soldiers skip after the stagecoach while shouting angrily:

NAKED SOLDIERS

Stop! We ordered you to stop!

Suren signals his horses to stop; the stagecoach comes to a quick halt.

The Naked Soldiers make a quick sprint to the stagecoach whilst looking their most pathetic and stop right in front of the stagecoach.

SUREN
 (disbelief)
 Order me?
 (pointing at them
 with a moving finger)
 And who are you...
 (pointing at himself)
 to order me?

One soldier steps forward. He thrusts out his chest and has a look that radiates superiority.

OTTOMAN CAPTAIN
 (officious, loud)
 My name is Alparslan Esad, I am a distinguished captain of the Ottoman Army. An unfortunate incident occurred. In order to safeguard the unity of the Empire, sacrifices must be made. I hereby confiscate your stagecoach. Please descend --

Suren gives Soane a wide-eyed look; both burst out laughing.

The Ottoman Captain's smugness fades. His eyes go wide and he appears haunted and frustrated at their contemptuous outburst. His voice breaks and becomes high pitched:

OTTOMAN CAPTAIN (cont'd)
 (exasperated)
 Descend immediately or your families will bare the consequences of your disobedience!

Soane and Suren are struggling to hold back their laughter, but Soane manages to get straight-faced.

SOANE
 (patronizing)
 Son, how do we know you are speaking the truth? What is this unfortunate incident you speak of?

SUREN

(smiling sardonically)

Does the unfortunate incident have a name? And is it the name of a man?

The Naked Soldiers shuffle in their place impatiently and restlessly and have a pained stare. Their jaws are clenched, some of them curse under their breath:

OTTOMAN CAPTAIN

We will not be mocked by Kurds!

SUREN

(mockingly)

It looks like you already were. How was your meeting with Ibrahim Pasha?

(to Soane)

Ibrahim Pasha is a brigand leader. He and his band of outlaws rule the area between Urfa and Siverek mercilessly. They are a headache to the Sultan himself!

SOANE

(understanding)

I see...

Is he telling the truth? He can't be telling the truth. Your empire rules continents with iron fist... surely a brigand could not pose a threat?

The Ottoman Captain's eyes are bulging and cold and hard.

Suren signals his horses to move. As they leave the Naked Soldiers behind, they shout after them:

SUREN

(wryly)

Goodbye, Alparslan Esad!

SOANE

(wryly)

So long, happiest, most lucky, most fortunate courageous lion!

EXT. URFA OUTSKIRTS - LATER

The stagecoach is rolling down a well-paved road and passes some rock-hewn caves. In front of them lies the ancient city of Urfa (Edessa). Its citadel and two massive stone pillars can be seen in the distance.

SOANE
Coachman, what did you say your name
was?

Suren does a double take at Soane.

SUREN
Suren! You already forgot? It hasn't
been five days since we left Aleppo!
(beat; suspiciously)
Why this regenerated interest in my
name?

SOANE
Suren, have you ever heard of Surena?

SUREN
(wondering)
Surena?
(beat)
Never heard of him!
(energetic)
Why? Who was he?!

The stagecoach moves on for a few seconds and then we get:

SERIES OF SHOTS

- 1) The barren desert fields around Urfa. In the distance, a flock of sheep and a HERDSMAN.
- 2) Urfa's biblical rock-hewn caves and the silhouette of a VEILED WOMAN moving inside one of the caves.
- 3) KURDISH MEN in bright purple headscarves sipping tea in the courtyard of an old caravanserai.

Over these series of shots, this narration:

SOANE (V.O.)
"When the Shahanshah gave his orders,
it was Surena who rushed to the
borders. With him, ten thousand
selfless Parthians - for each of them
stood four Praetorians. Courageous
they invaded these lands, with
Crassus giving them commands. Glory
over Spartacus still had them high,
they did not know...
(beat)
they were about to die."

- 4) As the sun slowly sets between the COLUMNS OF EDESSA:

SOANE (V.O.) (cont'd)
 Surena asked them: "Slavers, why did
 your thirst not still? You came to do
 what, to loot and kill? Your skulls
 now gilded in gold... oh, to all who
 doubt us..."

5) With the sun now in the death-center of the columns, we
 see a GOLDEN BUST OF CRASSUS flashing in the setting sun:

SOANE (V.O.) (cont'd)
behold!"

The sun set accelerates.

FADE TO:

EXT. FERTILE HILLS PAST URFA - DAY

The stagecoach is passing through immensely fertile green
 hill country. Gray mountains rise in the distance, half
 hidden in pitch black ominous clouds. A desolated landscape.

EXT. FERTILE HILLS PAST SIVEREK - SAME

The NEIGHING horses have tremendous difficulty progressing
 against a strong SHRIEKING WIND. Soane and Suren wear thick
 coats, their faces covered with scarves. They are shivering.

SUREN
 (muffled voice)
 The last stretch is hardest, haji.
 (beat)
 Tomorrow night, we will be having
 boiling hot Kurdish coffee in
 Diyarbakir!

We see more of the stagecoach moving through hauntingly
 beautiful yet desolated landscapes: we must feel humbled in
 nature's mystical grandeur. Over this, the following:

SUREN (V.O.)
 (melancholic)
 "You always seem to get into my mind;
 Dark at night, or at sunrise - right
 in the bright sunlight. Even if pitch
 black becomes my sight, even if my
 love for you turns me blind...
 Memories of you will make me wonder
 off to you, so I can relive those
 memories through and through. I will
 (MORE)

SUREN (V.O.) (cont'd)
 pay a visit to you tonight. I will
 cross the Tigris, alone. And I will
 not knock on your gates.

(beat)

I know you are expecting me."

EXT. DIYARBAKIR OUTSKIRTS - DAY

KHORASAN MAN (50s, wears the distinct red and black costume of Khorasan's Kurds). He is walking fast-paced on the right side of a downwards-sloping dirt road.

The stagecoach slows down to drive next to him. Khorasan Man gazes ahead and continues his fast-paced walk uninterrupted.

As they continue their descending path in a left bend, the SOFT ROARING OF THE TIGRIS grows louder gradually:

SOANE

(to Khorasan Man)

Greetings, haji.

KHORASAN MAN

(blasé)

Greetings.

Soane looks at Suren questioningly. Suren shrugs, then bends over to address Khorasan Man:

SUREN

Do you need a ride, haji?

SOANE

We are almost in Diyarbakir, you can ride with us.

KHORASAN MAN

(unchanged in
 character and
 attitude)

I went to Mecca on foot and I will
 return to Khorasan on foot.

The roaring of the Tigris is now at its zenith. The stagecoach starts rattling as it enters the cobble-stoned road of a bridge.

SUREN

(bewildered)

To Khorasan!?

SOANE
That will take months!

Khorasan Man walks on, unmoved.

Suren shakes his head in disbelief as they overtake him.

EXT. PIRA DEHDERÎ BRIDGE - SAME

They cross turn right at the end of the bridge and ascend a road lined with poplar trees.

As the stagecoach ascends this road, we see Diyarbakir's massive CITY WALLS rise on the horizon, and over this:

SUREN (O.S.)
Haji!
(beat)
Diyarbakir!

Diyarbakir stands on a fine bluff overlooking the Tigris and the Hevsel Gardens, now dressed in delicate hues of blossom and new leaf. The scenery is magnificent.

EXT. MARDIN GATE - LATER

A large arched basalt stone gate is in front of us, its gates are open and through it we see the broad straight road into town.

As the stagecoach slows down:

SUREN
Get your passport ready.

Soane's eyes widen, he rubs the back of his neck and mumbles softly to himself:

SOANE
Passport?

SUREN
I will buy some cigarettes while your passport is checked. Shouldn't take long.

The stagecoach stops in front of the gate and they are approached by the gate's sole GUARD (not the brightest looking fellow, early 20s).

Suren jumps off the stagecoach and walks towards a small shed/improvised shop in front of a massive circular tower.

The Guard walks to Soane's side of the stagecoach and reaches out his hand:

GUARD
Pasaport, please.

Soane cocks his head at the Guard and blinks rapidly; he is feigning ignorance - but not very convincingly.

GUARD (cont'd)
(gesturing with his hand)
Pasaport... ?

Soane's facial expression changes into one of sudden understanding. He swallows and reaches into his pockets nervously, pretending to be looking for his passport (he knows very well where it is). After some moments, he takes it out. His hands are visibly shaking as he hands it to the Guard.

SOANE
(trembling voice)
I am going to Persian Kurdistan.

The Guard looks up at Soane with squinting eyes for the sun is shining directly in his face.

GUARD
What is your final destination?

SOANE
Kermanshah.

GUARD
You have a long journey ahead, haji.

The Guard opens Soane's passport and browses through it.

SOANE
A very long road...

CLOSE SHOT

of the Guard holding Soane's passport upside down. He pretends to be browsing and reading it carefully.

CLOSE SHOT OF SOANE

SOANE (cont'd)
(overly confident,
relieved)
But nothing can break my spirit!
Thank God for the strength he gave
me!

The Guard returns Soane's passport. Suren ascends the stagecoach. The Guard moves aside and allows them passage.

GUARD
Welcome to Diyarbakir.

Soane nods at the guard and smiles.

They drive through the city's gate.

EXT. DIYARBAKIR OLD TOWN - CONTINUOUS

A long broad road that goes straight through the middle of town to the opposite end. Both sides of the road are lined with beautiful basalt stone buildings in the city's distinct architectural style. The city is bustling with activity so associated with the Orient, but it is, in contrast with the cities previously seen, remarkably clean. It is mainly populated by...

CLOSE UP

KURDS: wild men of great stature wearing high felt hats, suave jackets of sheepskin, and scarlet shoes. They look fierce with their hawkish eyes and long narrow faces. They walk with long strides, always with a hand on rifle and dagger.

EXT. DELÎLAN CARAVANSERAI - MOMENTS LATER

The stagecoach stops in front of a large two-storied caravanserai with alternating layers of black basalt and yellow limestone. The arched gate is adorned with a gable-stone depicting four camels. Squatting in front of the entrance is a GAUNT KURD who is at least seven feet tall.

EXT. DELÎLAN CARAVANSERAI, COURTYARD - DAY

The caravanserai's spacious inner courtyard with its tall mature trees offers shade from the hot midday sun. It is built in the city's distinct architectural style. The tranquil sound of a cooling fountain enhances the courtyard's relaxed atmosphere.

SIX MEN sit around on an old ARAB SAYYID (70s, wearing a long black cloak and green turban; a sign that he is a descendant of the Prophet Mohammad). Soane sits next to him, and Suren sits next to Soane. HAJI VALI (50s, blue-eyed, wearing a felt waistcoat and black-and-white turban) sits alone, behind Soane.

We hear the faint sound of DENG BÊJ (traditional Kurdish musical storytelling) being performed in the background. The sound is not intrusive; it is rather mystical and should leave much to the imagination.

Everyone is sipping their tea as they observe a silence in respect of the Arab Sayyid. Then, the Arab Sayyid turns his attention to Soane:

ARAB SAYYID
(patronizing)
Whence do you come, my son?

SOANE
(with deference)
From Mecca, via Aleppo returning to
Persian Kurdistan.

ARAB SAYYID
(sincere)
May God bless you.

Everyone repeats the Arab Sayyid because it is custom and appropriate, but not in a perfunctorily manner: it is meant.

SIX MEN
May God bless you./May the gates of
paradise open for you.

SOANE
Inshallah.

ARAB SAYYID
Are you returning via Mosul?

SOANE
(matter-of-factly,
but in a polite tone)
It is the only way.

ARAB SAYYID
You will love Mosul. It is my native
town... But I live here now. Earned
myself a decent livelihood as a
lawyer.

(MORE)

ARAB SAYYID (cont'd)

(boastful)

Studied at the University of Baghdad.

(humble)

But it is the school of life that
thought me my profession. I settle
disputes, you know.

The Arab Sayyid looks up at Soane bright-eyed and in childlike anticipation; he expects praise and curiosity, but all he gets from Soane is a slight smile.

SIX MEN

(to Arab Sayyid)

May God bless you.

The Arab Sayyid breaks eye contact with Soane and lowers his head in disappointment. Soane and the others glance at the Arab Sayyid rather uneasily.

After some moments, the Arab Sayyid bends over and takes a burlap sack from under his chair. He takes a tin cigarette box out and places it on a side table in front of him.

ARAB SAYYID

(to Soane)

Good and evil are opposites of each
other, but at the same time within

(pointing at the Six
Men)

each and everyone of us. Similarly,
both poison and cure are often from
the same source.

The Six Men look rather confused. They put their tea glasses down and slide their chairs closer to the Arab Sayyid's table to gaze over his tin cigarette box.

CLOSE ON CIGARETTE BOX

The Arab Sayyid opens it: two large black scorpions, the sting of their tails cut off, are writhing within and scraping their horny legs and claws against its tin sides.

ARAB SAYYID (O.S.)

I extract their oil. With it, I
remedy wounds caused by their
poisonous bites.

The Arab Sayyid lifts one scorpion out and lets it crawl up his arm, picks it off, and places it back in the box. He gives Soane a toothless sinister smile, picks his box up, and stands up to leave.

Even though they have not yet processed what they have just seen, everyone knows to rise immediately.

SIX MEN, SOANE, & SUREN
(simultaneously)
Peace be upon you.

They stare after the Arab Sayyid as he shuffles away.

Haji Vali takes the Arab Sayyid's seat next to Soane.

HAJI VALI
(to Soane)
Excuse my rude interruption... I overheard your conversation with the Arab Sayyid... You are going to Persian Kurdistan, uh, via Mosul?

SOANE
As a matter of fact, I am. To whom do I owe this question?

HAJI VALI
Apologies, my son, I should have introduced myself. My name is Haji Vali, a native of Erbil. I am returning from my 17th pilgrimage and looking for a companion to join me on the journey home. I was hoping I could find that companion in you.
(beat)
A fellow haji, you know?

SOANE
17 pilgrimages? *Mashallah*, may God bless you and extend his blessings to your relatives.

Haji Vali nods and smiles at this sought-after validation.

SOANE (cont'd)
My name is Ghulam Hussain. I just returned from my first pilgrimage, and, as you already overheard, also on my way back home. What do you propose?

HAJI VALI
Travel by *kalak* would be our best option. At least, the most comfortable.

Haji Vali takes a map out of his felt waistcoat. He pushes some empty tea glass aside and folds it out on the side table. He stands up and gestures for Soane to look at the map with him.

CLOSE ON MAP

As we see how Haji Vali maps out the route:

HAJI VALI (O.S.)
 We will travel via the River Tigris,
 passing through the gorges of
 Hasankeyf. If we survive, we will go
 through Jazira Botan, and finally:
 Mosul. From there, by way of mules...
 to Erbil.

Soane nods, but with a tight expression to show he is not fully convinced yet.

SOANE
 How long would the journey take?

HAJI VALI
 By God's grace,
 (shaking his head, a
 bit too confident)
 five days.

SOANE
 (eyes narrowing)
 I see. What about the kalak?

Haji Vali folds the map and puts it back in his pockets.

HAJI VALI
 My son... come, follow me.

Haji Vali walks and expects Soane to follow, but Soane hesitates and looks at Suren enquiringly: Suren shrugs and takes a sip from his tea - it is not his business. Haji Vali stops and looks back at Soane:

HAJI VALI (cont'd)
 (patronizing)
 Are you coming, my son?

Soane glances around uneasily, but then takes the necessary hesitant steps and follows Haji Vali, who leads him to...

EXT. DELÎLAN CARAVANSERAI - MOMENTS LATER

Soane and Haji Vali stand in front of the Gaunt Kurd we saw earlier.

HAJI VALI
 (to Gaunt Kurd)
 I have found a companion.
 (pointing at Soane)
 Ghulam Hussain will join me on my
 journey to Erbil.
 (beat)
 The kalak... is it ready?

The Gaunt Kurd, a cadaverous-looking giant, rises from his squatting position and towers over both men.

GAUNT KURD
 (low voice)
 It will depart tomorrow morning. You
 must transport yourself to the Tigris
 Bridge. As for the abandoned tent...
 you may use it, but it will be mine
 if you arrive in Mosul.

HAJI VALI
 Excellent... excellent...
 (to Soane)
 Two *mejidies*, my beloved son... It is
 your share for the ride.

Soane produces two coins and hands it to Haji Vali, who produces two coins of his own and hands everything to the Gaunt Kurd. The Gaunt Kurd returns to his squatting position.

EXT. FISKAYA CLIFF - SUNSET

We are looking at the backs of Soane and Haji Vali. They sit below some trees on a narrow ledge overlooking the Tigris and endless fertile plains in front of them. Rising on the horizon are the ever so ominous dark mountains.

The silence is broken by a sudden, powerful exclamation:

HAJI VALI
 God is great!

Soane looks at him and then looks back at river and plains. He repeats affirmatively, but not very convincingly - he just accepts whatever is going on:

SOANE

God is great.

Haji Vali points at the Tigris and starts an almost poetic monologue with great passion and intensity:

HAJI VALI

(pointing at the
river)

It has roared since the beginning of time, and since its inception, it has witnessed the emergence and downfall of history's greatest empires. Whomever passed through, good or bad, it fed, for as a source of life, it does not discriminate. It does not belong to us; we belong to it...

SOANE

And as we belong to it, it belongs to Him.

HAJI VALI

The magnificence of His creations manifest themselves in the details of His great monuments; the vivid coloring of the river's yellow banks, the light green of the groves of trees below, the delicate transitions between day and night...

(beat)

God! and God! and God! He, the Indivisible, His glories are manifest to our eyes, and His mercies our hearts and minds.

(pointing at the
mountains, avuncular
towards Soane)

Yet my son, think not that these mountains are His masterpiece. For verily, as these mighty hills are the greatest of His works here, yet they are but as the pebble upon their flanks compared to His works in Heaven.

SERIES OF SHOTS

- 1) Diyarbakir's city walls
- 2) Diyarbakir's towers

3) Diyarbakir's city gates

HAJI VALI (V.O.)

(over SERIES OF SHOTS)

See these city walls? The great among us made them, and they shall fall in a space of time incalculably small in His sight, yet the stones of them are His handiwork, and long enduring, have endured, even as those hills. And when the walls shall sink, one, building the sign of his ambition with the ruin of another's, shall use these same stones, remembering the former builder of walls. Who are we to boast of the power He gave us?

BACK TO SCENE

SOANE

That he forget not the Maker of the stones that last, and the hills that endure.

The sun sets beyond the dark mountains.

EXT. EMBARKATION POINT - DAY

The Tigris is flowing gracefully. The Tigris Bridge is directly behind us, while Diyarbakir's city walls rise on its bluff in the far distance. The banks of the Tigris are grassy, but lack other natural features.

EXT. TIGRIS RIVER - LATER

Soane, Haji Vali, an ARAB MERCHANT (50s, leathered face), and Mehmed (an unarmed Turkish soldier in his 20s), are aboard the kalak, which is a rectangular wooden raft with inflated goatskin bound to poplar trunks above them, a layer of bales forming its deck. From here on, "kalak" and "raft" are used interchangeably.

The raft is controlled by a pair of enormous sweeps, wielded standing by its SKIPPER (30s, short stature, wearing a high felt cap and long-toed shoes). A small tent is wedged between two walls of bales.

The kalak floats away from the Tigris Bridge at a slow pace.

EXT. TIGRIS RIVER - SUNSET

A broad section of the river surrounded by endless fertile plains with high grass along its banks. The kalak is running at a steady pace, turning round and round slowly, giving us a good impression of the landscape.

The Skipper stands at helm peacefully, steering the queer raft with ease.

Soane and Haji Vali are squatting in front of their tent, cooking rice over a small open fire.

The Arab Merchant lays on his side smoking a cigarette; Mehmed sits on the far end of the kalak, staring greedily at Soane & Haji Vali's meal. Haji Vali takes notice of his stares and returns a dirty look.

SOANE

(to Skipper, Arab Merchant, and Mehmed)

Come, please join us.

The Mehmed rushes to them and sits down cross-legged. He licks his lips and stares at the pot: he is ready to be served.

Haji Vali looks at him with contempt.

SKIPPER

Enjoy your meal without me, I will eat later.

ARAB MERCHANT

(to Soane & Haji Vali)

Thank you, but I couldn't.

HAJI VALI

(to Skipper and Arab Merchant)

Nonsense! We won't touch our meal unless you join us.

The Skipper raises his right hand to the corner of his eyes.

SKIPPER

(humbled)

Your offer is generous, but I couldn't. Please don't inconvenience yourselves on my account.

Soane and Haji Vali shake their heads in frustration and look pleadingly at the Arab Merchant.

SOANE

(coaxing)

You have to join us. It would be blasphemy not to share our meal with you.

Mehmed wobbles in his place impatiently. The Skipper looks at him with disesteem; he shakes his head and spits in the river.

HAJI VALI

(also coaxing, to Arab Merchant)

The Skipper won't join us. If you won't either, it would be a disgrace.

(hanging his head in despair)

Is our food not good enough?

The Arab Merchant looks up at Haji Vali disapprovingly. He puts out his cigarette and puts it in his pocket. He stands up with some difficulty and moves over to Soane and Haji Vali.

Mehmed has a sly grin on his face and reaches for the rice pot, but his hand is beaten away by the Arab Merchant.

MEHMED

(furiously)

What did you do that for!?

The Arab Merchant remains unmoved.

Haji Vali tilts his head away from Mehmed.

HAJI VALI

(to Mehmed, contemptuous)

You eat later.

Mehmed looks at Soane pleadingly, but Soane shrugs him off.

ARAB MERCHANT

(to Mehmed, also avoiding eye contact)

You are not of our class.

Mehmed stands up in a rage of fury and retreats back to his spot at the far end of the raft. He sits cross-legged and produces a filthy cigarette, which he lights up with difficulty.

The Skipper smiles contently as the kalak moves on, going round and round over the peaceful Tigris River.

EXT. TIGRIS RIVER, GORGE - DAY

The raft is going with tremendous speed over the violently roaring Tigris between an ever narrowing gorge - its yellow cliffs rising over two-hundred feet high. Huge hills rise up beyond, the lower slopes covered with trees, and rising above all in the far distance are snow-capped peaks.

The river pursues a remarkably violent course, the current sweeping at every turn and roaring against the vicious-looking rocks.

CLOSE ON HANDS AT ROARS

trying keep the raft from smashing against the rocks and being torn to pieces.

As the current doubles its speed, Haji Vali and the Arab Merchant start shouting in horrific distress:

HAJI VALI & ARAB MERCHANT
(subtitled, in
Arabic)
*Oh God, help!/Oh God, the Merciful,
help us!*

They use all their strength to keep the raft in the center of converging ridges of waves, shooting through between them at great velocity.

The raft is undulated and everyone and everything is drenched from the waves.

SKIPPER
(shouting)
Beyond this turn, safety. Brace
yourselves!

Everyone braces for one last impact, more violent than the the others.

HAJI VALI & ARAB MERCHANT
(subtitled, in
Arabic)
*Praise be to God./Curse upon Satan!/
Gold help us, God is great!/God is
great!*

The raft passes this last hurdle, beyond which the river broadens and the pace of its current decreases.

Everyone sighs in relief. Their postures slump and they drop themselves on the raft's floor.

ARAB MERCHANT

All praise is due to God.

HAJI VALI

All praise is due to God, Lord of all the worlds.

Haji Vali looks heavenward, the Arab Merchant closes his eyes and nods compulsively, and Mehmed starts laughing nervously and distressed. The Skipper stands tall and erect, gazing ahead as if he has conquered the river.

Soane wraps his arms around himself; his eyes are shining and a slow smile spreads over his face as he looks at the magnificent scenery before them in awe:

Hills and cliffs ever increasing in height and great mountain sides rising at impossible slopes.

ARAB MERCHANT (O.S.)

(astonished)

God is great!

BANG! SPLASH! BANG! SPLASH!

Everyone gets up at once and they start looking around frantically, but see nothing of interest. They turn their attention to the unmoved Skipper. He turns his head back in the direction of a cliff rising far behind them, indicating for them to look at a...

LOOP-HOLED TOWER

crowning that cliff.

SKIPPER

Guard tower. We are near Hasankeyf. These lands belong to the Kurdish Al-i-Ayub tribe.

SOANE

Al-i-Ayub?

Haji Vali places a hand on Soane's shoulders.

HAJI VALI

My son, what are you asking?

(MORE)

HAJI VALI (cont'd)
(dramatic, looking up)
Here live the descendants of the
greatest Kurd who ever lived: Sultan
Saladin, liberator of Jerusalem.

ARAB MERCHANT
(warm tone of voice)
Blessed is his memory.

EXT. TIGRIS RIVER, HASANKEYF - SUNSET

On the right bank a vertical cliff continuation rising to a great height. Opposite, a rising green plain with a single ancient domed tomb.

As the kalak floats on, the ancient town of

HASANKEYF

comes into our view, rising upon the summit of the right cliff with its thin towering minarets and citadel.

The kalak passes between two gigantic piers: the remains of an ancient colossal bridge. The kalak seems minute in comparison. Everyone stares at the piers in awe; Soane takes a step closer and runs his hands over one.

Then, everyone looks at the left bank, where a lower cliff honeycombed with man-made cave-dwellings appears. Even greater and rougher gorges rise in the horizon and behind the town.

The raft slows down and moves towards the left bank.

SKIPPER
We will go ashore here.

EXT. TIGRIS RIVER, SIRNAK - DAY

The kalak is floating down the river, which now runs through a valley surrounded by lush farmland. Pitch-black mountains with snow-capped peaks are visible in the far distance.

Soane is sleeping in his tent.

Haji Vali and Mehmed sit opposite each other.

The Arab merchant is performing *Dhikr* with his prayer beads and is in a trance-like state:

ARAB MERCHANT
 (counting beads, in
 Arabic)
*Al-hamdu lillah, Al-hamdu lillah, Al-
 hamdu lillah, Al-hamdu lillah...*

Mehmed rises, looks at the Skipper angrily, and stamps hard with his right foot. The Skipper ignores him and continues steering while gazing ahead.

MEHMED
 (shouting, querulous)
 We have been floating down this God
 forsaken river for six days and are
 only half-way there!

At this, Haji Vali rises and bursts out:

HAJI VALI
 Now you watch your filthy blasphemous
 mouth before I stuff it with that
 boot of yours!

Haji Vali makes a fist. Anger radiates from his eyes as he moves at Mehmed all the while repeating:

HAJI VALI (cont'd)
 Repent sinner, repent!

Mehmed's face turns pale, he presses his elbows into his sides. He takes a few steps back and raises his hands defensively as Haji Vali gets closer.

The Arab Merchant quits his *Dhikr*, winds his prayer beads around his wrists, and pulls a DAGGER out of his *thawb*. He stands up and walks to Mehmed.

ARAB MERCHANT
 (vehemently)
 From the second you boarded, you have
 shown nothing but disrespect and
 contempt! Who do you think you are,
 you dog, son of a dog!?

Mehmed falls on his back. The Arab Merchant bends over him and grabs him by his collar, ready to stab him. And just before he does...

BANG! BANG!

SIX KURDISH ASSAILANTS are running down the valley to the river. They pause to kneel and take aim at the passing kalak:

BANG! BANG!

Mehmed breaks away from the Arab Merchant and jumps in the river, holding himself on to the raft.

BANG! BANG!

The Arab Merchant and Haji Vali look at the the Six Kurdish Assailants and take their time to find cover behind some bales. The Skipper keeps rowing fearlessly, completely unruffled.

Soane barges out of his tent and looks around in panic: he is on edge. Haji Vali sticks his head out over the bales and signals with his hand for Soane to come over - as Soane quickly does.

They look at the valley from behind their cover when suddenly FOUR KURDISH HORSEMEN appear on high from behind the valley.

The Kurdish Horsemen open a lively fusillade on the Kurdish Assailants, chasing them back over the hill they descended from.

As the kalak floats around a corner away from this skirmish, another KURDISH HORSEMAN appears on top of a hill: he holds his rifle over his head and shouts at the kalak:

KURDISH HORSEMAN

(in Kurdish)

God be with you!

Mehmed crawls back onto the raft; he is wet, muddy, and his eyes are vacant: he is defeated.

SKIPPER

We have over-won the journey's greatest challenges. Jazira Botan is not far from here. From there, God willing, two more days until Mosul.

EXT. TIGRIS RIVER, JAZIRA BOTAN - DAY

The raft is passing through arid landscape at a slow pace. The hot midday sun is shining in everyone's faces. They are sweating bullets and their clothes are soaked and muddy.

Haji Vali and the Arab Merchant are trying hopelessly to cool themselves with a paper fan. Soane sits bent over, his head covered with a blanket.

Mehmed MUMBLES to himself at the far end of the kalak.
 We hear distant MARCHING, which gradually grows louder.
 Mehmed jumps up and looks ahead:

MEHMED
 (subtitled, to
 himself in Turkish)
I am saved!

He starts waving and jumping in his place...

MEHMED (cont'd)
Hey! Hey! Over here!

to attract the attention of a COMMANDER AND SIX OTTOMAN SOLDIERS marching ahead on the right river bank. The Ottoman Soldiers slow down and look around, searching.

The Commander spots the kalak and points at it while shouting inaudibly; the soldiers turn around and see it too.

The Skipper looks at Mehmed contemptuously and spits in the river.

Soane, Haji Vali, and the Arab Merchant slowly rise from their dull positions.

MEHMED (cont'd)
 (shouting at Ottoman
 Soldiers)
*They want to murder me! Make them
 stop! I am in service of the Sultan!
 These infidels want to murder me!
 Help! Help!*

HAJI VALI
 Why you little cockroach!

The Arab Merchant radiates anger. He places his hand on his dagger and moves at Mehmed, but Soane grabs his arm and stops him. The Arab Merchant turns to face Soane, who stares him right in his eyes:

SOANE
 He is not worth it.

The Arab Merchant's eyes are cold and hard - but understanding.

Mehmed relishes and laughs in their faces manically. Haji Vali and the Arab Merchant are showing extreme restraint.

MEHMED

(fearlessly)

You will feel the wrath of the Ottoman, you will feel the power of the Turk!

(subtitled, to

soldiers, in Turkish)

Help! Do something! For the love of God, in the name of the Sultan!

The Ottoman Soldiers look both alarmed and confused and take their rifles off their shoulders.

COMMANDER

(at kalak)

I order you to stop in the name of the Sultan! I will not repeat this order!

(to soldiers)

Ready.

The Ottoman Soldiers raise their rifles and take aim at the kalak.

The kalak slows down and moves to the river's right bank.

COMMANDER (cont'd)

(to soldiers)

Lower your rifles.

The Ottoman Soldiers lower their rifles.

Mehmed jumps in the river and pushes the raft away from him.

MEHMED

Get lost! Get lost you dogs!

He wades his way to the river bank.

Then, the raft returns to its course and drifts away.

EXT. TIGRIS RIVER, MOSUL - SUNSET

The kalak floats over the river peacefully. Mosul's splendid green gardens are on its left bank. The old BASHTABYA CASTLE rises on top of a rock on the river's right bank, which is also lined with traditional houses with *shanasheels* (finely crafted bay windows complete with intricate wooden

latticework and ornate stained glass reflecting on the water). Imagine the *Arabian Nights*.

EXT. HAMAD QADU CARAVANSERAI, MOSUL - DAY

A simple caravanserai made of stone and plaster. It has few windows and an arched gate. MEN are squatting out front sipping tea and smoking water pipes.

Soane and Haji Vali stand in front of the caravanserai's open gates. We hear RATTLING CARRIAGES and GROWLING CAR ENGINES in the background.

Haji Vali's eyes are wet and dull. He is holding Soane by his shoulders.

HAJI VALI

Why don't you reconsider? Come with me son, stay with us for a night, what's the hurry? The journey already delayed us seven days... what is a day more?

SOANE

I can not thank you enough for your generosity and hospitality. I still have a long journey ahead and want to get home as soon as possible.

Haji Vali looks at Soane intently with a shy departing smile.

HAJI VALI

I can not convince you, can I?

SOANE

(with deference)
You are not indebted to me.

HAJI VALI

(face cast-down,
disappointed)
Ok, ok.

Haji Vali looks back up and makes strong eye contact with Soane:

HAJI VALI (cont'd)

(concerned)
But please be careful on the road.
The HAMAVAND make no distinction
between creed or race, between good
(MORE)

HAJI VALI (cont'd)
 or evil. They have cut all
 communications on the road to
 Sulaimania. If they get you, your
 fate is in God's hands, for not even
 the mighty Ottoman Army dares cross
 their path.

(disconcerted)
 My son, give me your promise. Promise
 me you will be at your utmost alert!

Soane takes Haji Vali's right hand and kisses it.

SOANE
 Don't worry about me, uncle.

Haji Vali wraps his hands around Soane's and kisses him on
 his forehead.

INT. HAMAD QADU CARAVANSERAI, MOSUL - LATER

Soane sits in the center of a wooden bench. The wall behind
 him is adorned with wall carpets. His table is covered with
 empty tea glasses - except for one, which is filled to the
 brim and cupped tightly by him. He has a blank gaze.

TURKOMAN 1 (O.S.)
 Pardon our disruption... we overheard
 your conversation --

TURKOMAN 2 (O.S.)
 we may be able to help you.
 (beat)
 You see, we are going to Kirkuk.

The Turkomans slide next to Soane, each to one side of him.
 They are big, fat men with drooping mustaches. Both wear a
 tiny fez.

Soane looks back and forth between the Turkomans. He raises
 one eyebrow and gives both of them a glassy stare.

SOANE
 (irritated)
 Kirkuk? I am not going to Kirkuk!

TURKOMAN 1
 Yes, yes... Sulaimania, right?

TURKOMAN 2
 (excited revelation)
 And to get there, you have to go via
 Kirkuk!

Soane leans back and folds his arms across his chest.

SOANE
 (feigning ignorance,
 sarcastic)
 Is that so? And why is that?!

TURKOMAN 2
 You know why. Your friend told you.
 The Hamavand control all the land
 between Erbil and Sulaimania.

TURKOMAN 1
 (matter-of-factly,
 wagging his index
 finger)
 And you don't want to cross Hamavand
 country!

Soane sits up straight and looks at him sternly:

SOANE
 What do you see me for, a fool!?
 Kirkuk lies between Erbil and
 Sulaimania; there is no way but
 through Hamavand territory!

TURKOMAN 2
 Well, yes --

SOANE
 (rhetorical, insulted)
 You do see me for a fool!?

Turkoman 2's eyes go wide; he starts blinking rapidly.

TURKOMAN 2
 (stuttering)
 No, no, I --

TURKOMAN 1
 (coaxing)
 What that fool
 (looking at Turkoman
 2 angrily)
 meant is that, yes, indeed, there is
 no way but through Hamavand
 territory. However, everyone goes via
 Kirkuk because it is the safest
 route. From there, you
 (MORE)

TURKOMAN 1 (cont'd)
 (stabbing his index
 finger at Soane's
 chest without
 touching him)
 can take the military escort to
 Sulaimania.

Soane looks at Turkoman 1's finger and smiles at him mirthlessly. Turkoman 1 returns a sly smile, perhaps ignorant of his own rudeness.

SOANE
I can take the military escort? What
 about
 (stabbing in Turkoman
 1's chest with his
 index finger)
you?

Soane's eyes are cold and hard. Turkoman 1 returns a sheepish look.

TURKOMAN 1
 (feigning innocence)
 We?
 ("Sulaimania" is said
 with contempt)
 We are not going to Sulaimania!
 (raising his chin
 arrogantly)
 We go as far as Kirkuk.

TURKOMAN 2
 (sly smile)
 And we want you...

Turkoman 2 gazes at Soane's chest intensely. He readies his index finger to point in Soane's chest, but Soane beats it away with a stern, no-nonsense look on his face. Turkoman 2's sly smile disappears and he turns grumpy instantly:

TURKOMAN 2 (cont'd)
 (faintly)
 ...to join us to share expenses.

Soane slams his fists on the table; tea glasses fly all over the place and SHATTER.

SOANE
 Get lost! The both of you!

The Turkomans shuffle away in bad grace.

Soane's direct stare lacks warmth, he looks rather sour. He takes a sip from his now half-full tea glass.

RASHID, a sorrowful-looking Kurdish muleteer, slides clumsily next to Soane. He crosses his arms and rests them on the the table. He gives Soane a side glance, but quickly looks away when Soane catches him.

Soane, still holding his tea glass, gives him another side glance and sighs, at which Rashid gathers all his courage and initiates the conversation:

RASHID
 Pardon my rude interruption, uh...
 (rhetorically)
 I overheard your conversation with
 the obese red hats?

SOANE
 (grumpy)
 What do you want from me? Tell me
 your business or leave me alone.

Rashid leans back, his shoulders slumped.

RASHID
 (stunned)
 What, what, what!?
 (mumbling to himself,
 loud enough for
 Soane to hear)
 Looks like someone has shit stuck up
 his ass.

SOANE
 Is that how you talk to a haji?

Rashid swallows and bites his lips.

RASHID
 (muttering tearfully
 to himself)
 Haji?
 (with exaggerated
 deference)
 Haji... you are my soul, my body. I
 offer my sincere apologies, I kiss
 your hand and feet.

Rashid reaches for Soane's right hand...

RASHID (cont'd)
 Let me kiss your hand!

but Soane beats his hands away and assures him on a friendly note:

SOANE

It is alright... Tell me your business, I have a long journey ahead.

RASHID

God bless your soul.

(beat)

My name is Rashid. I am from Sulaimania and returning there tomorrow together with four others.

Soane cocks his head to the side and narrows his eyes in confusion.

SOANE

What about the Hamavand?

Rashid looks brooding.

RASHID

If God wills it, we will arrive unharmed. We will of course go via Kirkuk... and with military escort.

(smiling thinly)

God's will is powerful, but some worldly assistance is no excessive luxury.

Soane takes in a cleansing breath and mumbles to himself, as if accepting the situation:

SOANE

It seems to be the only way...

(eyes brightening)

At least you are going to Sulaimania. I will continue my way to Persian Kurdistan from there. How long will the journey take? And how much will it cost?

At the last question, Rashid initiates *taarof*; the art of etiquette that emphasizes both deference and social rank. This etiquette is meant to level the playing field and promote equality in a hierarchical culture and pretends to emphasize the value of friendship over anything else; in this case, over the cost of the journey. Soane is familiar with this practice and plays along.

RASHID

(feigning insult)

Cost?! Haji, what do you see me for?
An infidel? I couldn't take your
money.

SOANE

(surpassing Rashid in
his exaggeration)

I won't hear such nonsense! Do you
see me for an infidel? I won't take
advantage of a fellow *Musulman*! Tell
me the cost of the journey, or I will
find someone else.

RASHID

(toning down)

Your presence among us is the
greatest payment. We are blessed to
have a haji with us. God sent you to
ensure our safe passage.

SOANE

(avuncular)

You are offending me, brother.

(pleadingly)

Please, for the sake of God, tell me
my fair share of the burden.

RASHID

If you insist...

All pretentiousness vanishes and Rashid spews out the facts:

RASHID (cont'd)

It will be four mejidies. To be paid
in advance. I swear to God I make no
profit. If God wills it, we will be
in Kirkuk in five days.

A big smile grows on Soane's face; he is more than contend,
for even for an Englishman, he is relieved the indirectness
of *taarof* is over.

SOANE

Very good. Lets shake hands on that.

They seal the deal with a firm handshake.

EXT. THICKET FIELD - DAY

A dense rustling thicket field. We hear a mule's WHINNY and HEE-HAW. Then, we see the mule's head. Rashid rides this mule, which is equipped with a saddle scabbard holding a rifle, and leads leads the PARTY through the thicket field:

Soane and the SULAIMANIAN TEACHER (30s, wearing a white suit, dignified) ride abreast behind Rashid.

Behind them and also abreast; the SULAIMANIAN MERCHANT (20s, wearing a long green overcoat and black sharwal trousers) and the HALABJA MULETEER (30s, sporting a *faranji* coat of goat skin and wool).

RASHID'S SERVANT (late 70s, mean-looking, wearing a long black overcoat and donning a white skull cup) rides alone in the back.

Every mule is loaded with two boxes slung at either side upon which bedding is laid. They sit on this bedding and wobble as they slowly make their way through the field.

SULAIMANIAN TEACHER
(to Soane, pointing
ahead)
Over there. Do you see that over
there?

The Party emerges onto a little plain where the grass grows high and green. In front of them:

THE ANCIENT RUINS OF NINEVEH

with its crumbling walls and archaeological dig sites largely covered in weed. To untrained eyes but piles of worthless mud-brick, stone, and dirt.

SULAIMANIAN TEACHER (cont'd)
This was once the capital of ancient
Assyria. Ashurbanipal, its last great
King, had his palace here.

RASHID'S SERVANT
(mockingly)
Ha! King of a pile of dirt!

SULAIMANIAN TEACHER
Listening is free, old man. Listen,
and you may learn a thing or two.

RASHID'S SERVANT
 (mischievously)
 I just want to know one thing. Tell me, and I won't bother you anymore.

SULAIMANIAN TEACHER
 (reluctantly)
 What is it you want to know?

RASHID'S SERVANT
 Tell me the location of
 Ashurparnital --

SULAIMANIAN MERCHANT
 Ashurbarnipal. Bar-ni-pal.

Rashid's Servant looks at the Sulaimanian Merchant furtively and frowns at him, annoyed his intelligence is undermined.

RASHID'S SERVANT
 (raising his voice)
 Ashurparnital. Par-ni-tal! Tell me the location of his and his mother's grave, so I can fuck the both of them!

Everyone bursts out laughing.

SULAIMANIAN TEACHER
 (shaking his head
 playfully)
 Crazy old man!

Rashid's Servant squints, his eyes lit with an inner glow of mischief.

EXT. EZIDKHAN PLAINS - DAY

A clear blue sky with the blazing sun hanging at its zenith. The sunshine reflects on the HELÉL (a golden tip with sun) that adorns the ribbed conical-shaped roof of a TEMPLE, which is located on top of a small rocky hill. The temple is surrounded by meticulously carved tombstones. There is but a single tree and its trunk is painted white. Colorful cloths are tied around its branches.

As we get a wider view of the rocky but grassy landscape, we see that it is dotted with more of these conical-shaped sun temples; this is the heartland of the Yezidi's (we don't see any of them, and if we do, merely the silhouettes of some gathered around a temple).

We hear a GRUNTING VULTURE. Then, we see the VULTURE circling over the Party as it makes its way through this mythical yet eerie landscape.

EXT. EZIDKHAN PLAINS - MOMENTS LATER

SULAIMANIAN MERCHANT
Hey, red hat!

RASHID'S SERVANT
Red hat! He is talking to you!

The Sulaimanian Teacher gives Soane a probing gaze; Soane tilts his head to the side and returns an uneasy smile.

SULAIMANIAN MERCHANT
(brusquely)
Why are you ignoring us? You wish to pimp us out?!

SOANE
(whispering to
Sulaimanian Teacher,
perturbed)
Are they talking to me?

HALABJA MULETEER
Who else, imbecile! Aren't you the only one donning a Turkish hat?

Rashid's Servant chest caves in as he slaps his own head.

RASHID'S SERVANT
(dramatically)
Mud on our heads, this red hat will be our death!

The Sulaimanian Teacher touches Soane's shoulder:

SULAIMANIAN TEACHER
(a shaking emotion-
choked voice,
imploring)
My brother, for the sake of our lives, get rid of that fez. I kiss your eyes, you are my soul and body, but I beg you, I besiege you, do us a favor and get rid of it at once.

Soane leans away from the Sulaimanian Teacher and raises his voice in a defensive manner:

SOANE

What is wrong with it? It is the sign
of a great effendi!

The Sulaimanian Teacher tips his head heavenward, then flops it forward. He looks at Soane gravely and forces a smile:

SULAIMANIAN TEACHER

You are right, you are a great
effendi, but we will soon enter
Hamavand territory, and they are not
keen on...

(scornful)

effendis.

(beat)

I kiss your feet, get rid off it.

RASHID'S SERVANT

Don't bother with sweet talk with
creatures like him!

(to Soane)

If you don't get rid off it at once,
it won't be Hamavand you have to
worry about!

Rashid's Servant and the Sulaimanian Merchant exchange some mischievous glances, then move their mules to ride next to Soane. Rashid's Servant reaches into his jacket and holds his hand there, which is noticed by Soane.

Everyone is sweating. Soane glances around uneasily; the Sulaimanian Merchant squeezes his eyebrows together and looks at Rashid's Servant suggestively, who is twitching nervously.

Soane slowly raises his hand and reaches for his fez and puts it in a burlap sack tied to his mule.

Soane looks at the Sulaimanian Teacher questioningly; he shakes his head at Soane with apprehension.

The Sulaimanian Merchant grinds his teeth while glowering at Soane.

Soane looks back indignantly but understands. He takes the fez out of the burlap sack and throws the fez, with white handkerchief still tied around it, on the dusty road behind them.

CLOSE ON FEZ

RASHID'S SERVANT (O.S.)
 (to Soane, insincere)
 May I be your sacrifice, bless your
 righteous heart!

EXT. PLAINS OF ERBIL - SUNSET

A featureless desert plain stretching for miles in each direction. It is entirely flat, except for ERBIL'S CITADEL, which rises on top of a gigantic mound that sticks out like a thumb.

In the far distance, far beyond Erbil's Citadel, heavy clouds drive along and by over black snow-capped mountains. Descending rain shrouds the landscape with brilliant lighting flashes. A forming rainbow attempts to form an arch over this remarkable scene.

SULAIMANIAN TEACHER (O.S.)
 Arbela! The eternal city of Ishtar,
 the goddess of war!

We hear a LOUD THUNDERCLAP.

EXT. ERBIL - NIGHT

It is POURING.

Rashid is on foot, guiding the Party through Erbil's dark and muddy alleyways with crumbling brick walls; the silhouette of Erbil's Citadel towers over them.

RASHID
 (faintly)
 We will depart early in the morning,
 make sure to get your rest.

EXT. DESERT PLAIN - DAY

A flat desert plain of dust and rock, not a tree in sight. The only features are some dry bushes and tumbleweeds. Little dust storms here and there. The scorching sun looks bigger here than anywhere else on earth.

In the far distance and through the heat refraction, we see the rough shape of the Party moving... very slowly.

EXT. DESERT PLAIN - LATER

The Party is spread out and slowly makes its way through a desert wasteland. Sweat is dropping from everyone's foreheads, their lips are dry, and they hang bent over their mules. Soane has a white cloth thrown over his head; his face is sun-burned. His dusty jacket hangs half over his shoulders; he looks exhausted - but not defeated.

EXT. CARAVANSERAI RUINS - SUNSET

The Party moves in closer assembly as they pass the ruins of an old mud-brick caravanserai. Some of them are drinking water from their field bottles; everyone looks a bit more energized than in the previous scene.

SULAIMANIAN TEACHER

(to Soane)

It was built by Shah Abbas of Persia some 300 years ago. He had 999 like it built on the Silk Road.

SOANE

Why not 1000?

SULAIMANIAN TEACHER

(shrugs, dismissive)

How should I know?

RASHID'S SERVANT

(mischievous)

Teacher, can I ask you a question?

SULAIMANIAN TEACHER

Of course.

RASHID'S SERVANT

(wryly)

Where is Shah Abbas' grave?

Everyone raises a slight smile, but their smiles quickly fade - except Soane's, whose slight smile turns into a tremulous one on hearing a loud GASP.

The Sulaimanian Teacher slams his own head; the Halabja Muleteer takes his turban off in dramatic fashion and presses it to his chest.

RASHID'S SERVANT (cont'd)

(frightened)

Mud on our heads!

CLOSE ON BLACK NOMAD TENTS

We hear TROTting HORSES.

Rashid takes his rifle out of his saddle scabbard and slides a cartridge in with great celerity. His Servant puts a hand on his dagger and clutches it tightly as he starts chewing the inside of his cheeks.

TWO HAMAVAND HORSEMEN approach the Party from the rear and adjust their pace to ride right next to them.

The Two Hamavand Horsemen wear spotless black jackets tucked inside their black shalwar trousers tied with a white belt made of cloth, leather scarlet boots, and black turbans tied tightly around their heads. Both carry a rifle on their shoulders. They MURMUR UNINTELLIGIBLY and turn their horses to full galop, leaving the Party behind them.

RASHID'S SERVANT (cont'd)

(insouciant)

I swear on my mother's grave they were Hamavand!

SULAIMANIAN TEACHER

(to Servant,
mischievous)

Uncle, may I ask you a question?

Rashid's Servant lifts his chin and shoulders pridefully:

RASHID'S SERVANT

Ask away my son.

SULAIMANIAN TEACHER

Where is your mother's grave?

Everyone bursts out in laughter, except Soane, who is wiping excessive sweat from his forehead.

EXT. KIRKUK OIL FIELDS - SAME

A brilliant red and orange sunset over Kirkuk's date palm covered desert landscape, which has turned black from oil gushers. The area is dotted with PUMPJACKS.

The silhouette of the Party moving over a ridge. At the foot of the ridge: the glowing of the FIELD OF ETERNAL FIRE.

EXT. KIRKUK - MOMENTS LATER

RASHID
God willed it! We have arrived.

HALABJA MULETEER
Thank God.

RASHID
I hope the military escort is ready.

SULAIMANIAN MERCHANT
Last time, we had to wait twenty days
for an army escort!

SOANE
Twenty days!?

RASHID'S SERVANT
(mockingly)
What is it red hat, are you in a
hurry?

Soane turns his head and looks at Rashid's Servant
furtively.

RASHID'S SERVANT (cont'd)
What?
(shaky voice)
What!?

SULAIMANIAN TEACHER
(to Soane)
Let him be, he is not worth your
energy. As for the delay... It can
take twenty days. The Ottomans aren't
too eager on passing through Hamavand
territory. Most are conscripts who'd
rather extort civilians.

RASHID'S SERVANT
Cockroaches!

HALABJA MULETEER
They are not worth a Hamavand's
toenail! I kiss the birgands' hands
and feet! At least they are Kurds,
like us!

RASHID'S SERVANT
Cockroaches!

INT. KIRKUK'S BAZAAR - DAY

A short-arched bazaar of extraordinary height is lined with small shops selling colorful fabrics. The place is bustling with a DIVERSE CROWD OF KURDS, TURKOMANS, ARABS, JEWS, and CHALDEANS - all wearing their distinct native dress.

CLOSEUP ON HAND RECEIVING A BAG OF FABRICS

SHOPKEEPER (O.S.)
(subtitled, in
Kurdish)
Congratulations.

SOANE (O.S.)
May God bring you business.

CLOSE ON SOANE SMILING

Soane has the bag in his hands near the bazaar's exit, where a high arched-gate exiting upon a small square is visible from where he stands.

We hear COMMOTION coming from the small square and see PEOPLE gathering there.

Suddenly, the BAZAAR CROWD rushes outside onto the square. Some run into Soane - Soane, looking curious, follows them suit.

EXT. SMALL SQUARE - CONTINUOUS

Opposite the small square is KIRDAR CARAVANSERAI. Other buildings surrounding the small square are made of solid yellow stone and without ornamentation.

The Crowd have gathered around an OTTOMAN COMMANDER (40s, swarthy-looking fellow wearing a brown uniform and red fez) who stands on a crate, rising above everyone. He airs superiority.

Soane slowly makes his way forward through the Crowd.

CROWD
(yelling, chaotic)
What news do you have!/We have been
waiting for weeks!/Cowards!/How large
is the escort!?

The Ottoman Commander motions his arm down while moving his head back and forth to ease them:

OTTOMAN COMMANDER
 Quiet! Quiet! Be quiet and I will
 answer your questions!

The Crowd calms down. The Ottoman Commander thrusts his chest out and raises his right eyebrow while looking down on The Crowd. Then, he produces a document from his pockets and holds it out in front of him with both his hands. He clears his throat and starts reading out loud:

OTTOMAN COMMANDER (cont'd)
 (officious)
 Sultan Mehmed Reshad Han, the Fifth
 of His Name, Sovereign of The Sublime
 House of Osman, Sultan of Sultans,
 Khan of the Khans, Commander of the
 faithful and Successor of the Prophet
 of the lord of the Universe,
 Custodian of --

We hear someone blow a LOUD RASPBERRY.

The Ottoman Commander lowers his document.

OTTOMAN COMMANDER (cont'd)
 (eyes bulging,
 exasperated)
 Who was that! Reveal yourself, you
 cretin!

The Ottoman Commander looks around angrily, but doesn't get a response. He shakes his head and squeezes his eyebrows together, then resumes reading from his document:

OTTOMAN COMMANDER (cont'd)
 Custodian of the Holy Cities of
 Mecca, Medina, and Kouds (Jerusalem),
 Caesar of Rome, Padishah of The Three
 Cities of Istanbul, Edirne and Bursa,
 and of the Cities --

We hear another LOUD RASPBERRY being blown.

ANGLE ON Rashid's Servant as he blows another one out.

CROWD
 (at Commander)
 We don't have all day!/Cut to the
 chase!

The Ottoman Commander is boiling; his red fez and his face are one and the same color. He folds his document carelessly and stuffs it in his pockets.

COMMANDER

Alright, ungrateful bastards! An escort of 100 soldiers has been prepared for Sulaimania. The Caravan, lead by SHEFIQ EFFENDI, will depart tomorrow morning. Be at the gathering place outside town on time, or you will be left behind!

The Ottoman Commander steps off the crate and disappears.

CHAOS ensues; everyone SHOUTS through and over each other.

Soane makes his way through towards Kirdar Caravanserai.

INT. KIRDAR CARAVANSERAI, SOANE'S ROOM - LATER

A tiny, windowless room with yellow walls. In its center, a single bed with a long mirror opposite. An open leather-bound suitcase lies on top of the bed. A worn-out dusty black jacket lies on top of the suitcase's contents.

We hear APPROACHING FOOTSTEPS; then, we see SOMEONE walk and pause in front of the bed with his back turned to us. He SLAMS the suitcase shut and turns: Soane's reflection in the mirror. He wears a white undershirt, baggy cotton trousers, and red leather shoes with laces, of which the toe turns up in a point. He wears a long striped cotton tunic over these garments (open at the front and reaching to the heels), all brought together by a colorful waistband with a KURDISH DAGGER tucked between.

A childlike smile slowly spreads over his face. Then, his smile slowly fades. Soane draws a long face and gazes at himself defiantly. He puts his hand on the dagger with a quick movement and leaves it there for a second before pulling his hand away. He cocks his head and pauses. Then, he puts his hand back on the dagger even faster, draws it, and makes a stabbing movement at his own reflection. Soane relaxes. He smiles at himself and tucks the dagger back.

KNOCKING on the door.

SOANE

(murmuring to himself)

I am not expecting anyone...

(directed at door)

Who is it?

ZIRYAB (O.S.)

(faintly)

Ziryab, the Persian CONSUL's servant.

(MORE)

ZIRYAB (O.S.) (cont'd)

(beat)

I was sent to deliver a message.

Soane freezes in his place and clenches his jaws.

ZIRYAB

Sir?

Soane swallows. He shuffles to the door and opens it ajar to see Ziryab: a young, kind-looking man with dark complexion. Soane glances at him uneasily.

SOANE

(shaky voice)

The consul... from Constantinople?

ZIRYAB

(confused)

Constantinople?

(smiling)

No sir. Kirkuk's consul!

Soane opens the door completely.

SOANE

What does he want from me?

Ziryab produces a small note and reads it delicately, almost as if he is reciting poetry:

ZIRYAB

"A Persian in these lands is truly a rare sight indeed. I am very anxious to make your acquaintance. Would you come and see me on a friendly visit?"

A relaxed smile crosses Soane's face as he adjusts his body posture to be more open.

SOANE

(voice going soft and gentle)

I could not reject such a kind invitation. When would he like to see me?

ZIRYAB

If you would follow me, sir.

Ziryab steps aside and gestures Soane to follow him. Soane steps out of his room and follows.

INT. KIRDAR CARAVANSERAI, CONSUL'S ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Soane enters the room behind Ziriyab and sees the Consul (50s, tall, fierce-looking, wearing the felt had and dress of Kermanshah's Kurds) seated at the upper end of the room upon a small carpet. An OLD MAN (thick-set and bushy-bearded) stands next to the him.

The most beautiful snow-white PERSIAN CAT (wearing an evil eye necklace) roams around the room.

FIFTEEN KURDS sit on carpets along the room's left wall. They wear distinct head-dresses of colorful handkerchiefs to denote their place of origin (Sanandaj, Kermanshah, Hawraman). The room's right wall is taken up by tables upon which stand vessels filled with all kinds of produce.

SOANE
Salamum 'alaikum.

The Consul rises - everyone else follows.

EVERYONE
(sonorously)
Alaikum as salam.

OLD MAN
Wa rahmatullah wa barikatah.

The Consul smiles broadly and opens his arms to welcome Soane:

CONSUL
Welcome, welcome! A thousand times
welcome, mirza!

The Consul sits - and so does everyone else. The Consul taps on a cushion next to his.

CONSUL (cont'd)
Come and sit next to me, mirza!

Soane walks over fast-paced and takes the seat.

The Consul's eyes gleam from excitement, he can not sit still as he gesticulates with his hands, sometimes touching Soane.

CONSUL (cont'd)
When I heard a Persian had arrived in
Kirkuk, no less a Shirazi, I resolved
(MORE)

CONSUL (cont'd)
 to meeting him. So I told my
 Servant...
 (looking at Ziriyab)
 to look for you.

OLD MAN
 (wide grin)
 And not long after, he found you!

CONSUL
 I told Ziriyab: "You will deliver a
 message to this mysterious mirza for
 me."

OLD MAN
 (excitedly reciting
 from memory)
 "A Persian in these lands is truly a
 rare sight indeed. A Shirazi, no
 less? I am very anxious to make your
 acquaintance --

CONSUL
 (finishing the
 recitation)
 would you come and see me on a
 friendly visit?"

The Consul bounces in his place and shouts out excitedly:

CONSUL (cont'd)
 And so you came!

Soane's face is beaming from happiness.

SOANE
 (with esteem)
 The honor is all mine.

The Consul looks at Ziriyab and holds up three fingers.

The Kurds sitting against the wall are playing with the Persian Cat, stroking its arching little back with the lightest of touches, all the while talking to it in their rough tongue, which, combined with their tough appearance, stands in stark contrast with their soft playfulness.

Soane and the Consul smile while admiring this sight. Then, the Consul places a hand on Soane's thigh:

CONSUL
 So, tell me mirza, what brings you to
 this desert wasteland?

SOANE

I am returning from pilgrimage and merely passing through. If God wills it, my stay here won't be long.

OLD MAN

(mouth falling open)
Pilgrimage?

The Consul jerks his head back in surprise.

CONSUL

So you are a haji, then! God bless you!

Ziryab puts three glasses of tea in front of them. The Consul empties the boiling tea in one big gulp, which Soane watches with amazement.

CONSUL (cont'd)

Tell me, mirza, how come a Shirazi speaks Kurdish so well?

Soane takes a sip from his tea, careful not to burn his tongue.

SOANE

While I am a native of Shiraz, it is not my destination. I learned Kurdish while living among the Kurds of Kermanshah, the city I am returning to.

CONSUL

(incredulous gasp)
Kermanshah!? I am from Kermanshah!
(in Kurdish, melodic)
"Kermanshah shahr-e shiranim --

Soane reciprocates the Consul's enthusiasm and finishes the lyrics in the same manner:

SOANE

shahr-e jwan u Kurd nishanim!"

Everyone starts LAUGHING convivially. The Consul and Soane maintain strong eye contact and smile at each other approvingly.

CONSUL

Will you go with the Caravan that leaves for Sulaimania tomorrow?

SOANE

I am.

CONSUL

(vehemently)

Then you will have to join us tonight! We will eat, sing, and dance till dawn! You will be our honored guest!

Soane smiles and raises his tea glass to this invitation.

EXT. KIRKDAR CARAVANSERAI, COURTYARD - NIGHT

TWELVE KURDS dance in a semi-circle around a fire, holding hands while moving rapidly to the ever-increasing fury of the POWERFUL DAHOL BEATS and the LOUD STRIDENT ZURNA, instruments played by TWO MUSICIANS around whom everyone dances. The semi-circle's Leading and Trailing Men wave colorful handkerchiefs in elaborate motions.

Soane, the Consul, Ziriyab, and the Old Man sit next to each other and admire the festivities. Half empty bottles of red wine cover the table in front of them.

CONSUL

My heart is delighted with your acquaintance, mirza. It is a shame you are leaving us so soon.

The Consul sighs. Soane places a hand on the Consul's thigh and smiles:

SOANE

If God wills it, our paths will cross again.

To this, they raise their wine glasses.

CONSUL & SOANE

(SUBTITLE)

Nosh!

Cheers!

But before they can drink... a FAINT SCREAM.

The Consul rises and turn: a WOUNDED MAN (20s, handsome) lays on his back with his right hand pressed on his bleeding left shoulder. He looks up at Rashid's Servant, who is bent over him with a bloody dagger in hand.

RASHID'S SERVANT (CRAZY RASUL)

(glowering)

Nobody makes fun of Crazy Rasul!

WOUNDED MAN
 (terrified,
 whimpering)
 You are out of your mind... you are
 expired, old man!

The sound of the dahol and zurna stops abruptly.

The Consul and Soane hasten themselves towards Rashid's Servant and pull him away from his victim. The Old Man rushes to the Wounded Man and kneels to look at his wound.

RED ALI (O.S.)
 (subtitled, in
 Kurdish)
Fuck your pimp dad's honor!

KURDISH MAN (O.S.)
Porkeater!

KURDISH MEN (O.S.)
*Red Ali, ruin his legacy!/Everyone
 for himself!/Your blood is on your
 own hands!*

The sound of the dahol and zurna resumes.

The Kurds, whom were dancing together moments earlier, are now engaged in a vicious brawl: everyone is wrestling each other and casting one another about the yard while the Two Musicians play around them uninterrupted.

Red Ali, a redhead, is pushed to the ground by a KURDISH MAN. Red Ali gets back up and draws a dagger. He stares at Kurdish Man fearlessly, challenging him. Kurdish Man draws his dagger and moves at Red Ali to danger, but Red Ali jumps away before being stabbed.

The Consul barges into the brawl and yells:

CONSUL
Enough! Enough!

The sound of the dahol and zurna stops abruptly - as does the brawl.

CONSUL (cont'd)
 (crestfallen)
 Curse those who raised you!
 (MORE)

CONSUL (cont'd)
 (extending arm
 towards Soane)
 We have an honored guest among us.
 Settle your disputes tomorrow,
 tonight is not the night for
 (holding back a smile)
games.

Everyone's eyes are cast down. Some of the Kurds are shuffling in their place, others rub the back of their necks. They act innocent, but it's feigned - they are not even slightly ashamed.

The Consul walks over to Soane.

CONSUL (cont'd)
 (to Soane)
 I offer my sincere apologies. This
 God forsaken desert's terrible heat
 rises to their heads, and when it
 gets cold at night, their little
 brains get confused...
 (smiling)
 and then they explode.

SOANE
 There is no need for an apology, you
 have given me a wonderful night.

CONSUL
 (joyously)
 And the night is not over yet!
 (looking around)
 Ziriyab! Ziriyab, where are you?

Ziriyab steps forward.

ZIRYAB
 Yes sir?

CONSUL
 (to Soane)
 Did I tell you Ziriyab has a golden
 voice?

Soane cocks his head at the Consul.

KURDS (O.S.)
 (subtitled, in
 Kurdish)
*Ask him to recite us a poem!/Please
 sing us a song!/For the love of God!*

CONSUL
Ziryab, our attention is yours.

Ziryab walks to the center of the courtyard. Everyone gathers to sit around him in a U-shaped formation. They look up at Ziryab in childlike anticipation.

FAINT CRACKLING OF FIRE

Ziryab clears his throat.

ZIRYAB
In 1692, the great Kurdish Poet
Ehmedê Xanî sat down and wrote a
poem... "Our Troubles".

ANGLE ON ZIRYAB

as he starts reciting the poem from memory passionately while making elaborate motions with his hands:

ZIRYAB (cont'd)
(subtitled, in
Kurdish)
*"Whoever took the mighty sword in his
hand, established in manly manner a
state. Because the world is like a
prize bride, Its fate, too,
determined by the mighty sword.*

DOLLY OUT FROM ZIRYAB AS HE CONTINUES RECITING

ZIRYAB (cont'd)
*But its dowry, trousseau, jewels and
wedding presents Are goodness,
generosity, kindness and forgiveness.*

*I asked the world, "What is your
dowry?" "Benevolence", it said to me.*

*In short, "With the sword and
goodness, The world submits and bows
its head to man.*

FIRE CRACKLING INTENSIFIES as we get closer to the fire, while Ziryab's melancholic voice goes softer:

ZIRYAB (cont'd)
*I am puzzled by God's wisdom:
In this world of states,

Why have the Kurds remained
stateless, dispossessed?*
(MORE)

ZIRYAB (cont'd)
*For what crime have they become
 fugitives, condemned?*

*Like a great wall, the Kurds stand
 between the Turks and the
 Persians..."*

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. CARAVAN GATHERING PLACE - DAY

A featureless desert plain just outside Kirkuk. A dusty road runs straight through it.

Waiting on the dusty road in CARAVAN FORMATION: 100 CIVILIANS (some with with or on mules), a GREEK ARMY CHEMIST AND HIS WIFE, FOUR TURKISH OFFICERS, and 100 TURKISH SOLDIERS on foot: half in front of the Caravan, half in the rear.

Soane and his Party from Mosul are somewhere in the center of this formation. Their mules carry some extra boxes.

Leading on horseback are Shefiq Effendi (30s, wearing a completely white Kurdish costume, carrying binoculars, and donning a red fez), the Ottoman Commander who delivered the announcement, a TURKISH COLONEL and a TURKISH MAJOR.

Behind them, an OTTOMAN BAND consisting of SIX MEN; Two carry drums, Two carry trumpets, and Two carry Ottoman banners.

Alongside the dusty road are FRIENDS AND RELATIVES of the departing, busy saying their farewells.

An ancient ARAB MULLAH (wearing a long black garment and mullah cap) stands erect on a crate. He does not move, he does not flinch, and he looks incredibly grave.

Shefiq Effendi turns his head and raises his right hand.

CLOSE ON HORSE HOOFS MOVING

CLOSE ON DRUMS BEING BEATEN

CLOSE ON TRUMPETS BEING PLAYED

Friends and Relatives start WEEPING and some of them chase the Caravan - but they are beaten back by Turkish Soldiers.

The Arab Mullah shouts after the Caravan with intense apprehension:

ARAB MULLAH
 (subtitled, in Arabic)
*The Kurds are a race of Jinn from
 whom God drew back the curtain and
 revealed them! (2x)*

WEeping INTENSIFIES, but is eventually drowned by the sound
 of the Ottoman Band's EVER-INCREASING DRUMS AND TRUMPETS.

WIDE ON CARAVAN

as it moves away towards and into the endless barren desert.

EXT. OUTSKIRTS OF KIRKUK - DAY

Red barren hills devoid of anything resembling life...
 except for the Caravan... kinda. The Caravan is moving
 slowly, everyone looks drowsy and dried out from the
 scorching sun. Imagine the biblical exodus - except the
 destination isn't the promised land.

SOANE
 (to Rashid, irritated)
 Why did they force these boxes on us?
 What is in them anyway?

RASHID
 Ammunition and instructions of
 parliament for the regulation of
 rental contracts.

RASHID'S SERVANT
 (surprised, mouth
 falling open)
 Regulations?
 (exasperated)
 Where we go regulations don't exist!
 Rashid... lets dump these boxes, this
 nonsense is too heavy a burden!

Soane gives Rashid's Servant a reproving glance.

SOANE
 Lets keep their bestial manners far
 away from us... it is bad as it is.

RASHID
 (insouciant)
 We will carry the boxes.

Rashid's Servant snarks at this. He takes out a cigarette packet, lights one up, and offers one to Soane. Soane declines.

SOANE

(to Rashid)

Say, what do you know about Shefiq Effendi? Who is he?

RASHID

He is a chief of the Shuan tribe. They are on friendly terms with the Hamavand, so he is our best chance at getting through the country unmolested.

(apprehensive)

Except, of course...

RASHID'S SERVANT

Except of course the hundred red hats we have with us!

(shaking his head,
wryly)

That sure won't amuse the Hamavand!

SOANE

What are you saying?

RASHID'S SERVANT

I am saying the red hats are a liability, not an assurance!

SOANE

(consternated)

Then of what use are they?!

RASHID

They are replenishing the garrison at Sulaimania. It has dwindled from 500 to 34 soldiers. In any case, most prefer the the army's firepower over the word of the Hamavand.

SHEFIQ EFFENDI (O.S.)

Halt!

The Caravan comes to an abrupt stop, followed by INDISTINCT CHATTER coming from front.

SOANE

Why did we stop?

RASHID

I know as much as you.

INDISTINCT CHATTER grows louder as the gossip slowly makes its way towards Soane. As it does, we hear women and children start SOBBING.

GREEK ARMY CHEMIST

(heavy Greek accent)

I should have stayed in Crete! Curse this land!

His Wife sobs and kisses her necklace cross.

Soane taps the Greek Army Chemist on his shoulders and asks:

SOANE

What is the commotion about?

GREEK ARMY CHEMIST

(dejected)

A small caravan was attacked in the Bazian Plain a few days ago. There were only TWO SURVIVORS. They didn't even have an army escort!

The Greek Army Chemist turns his attention back to his wife and consoles her.

Soane's face turns pale. Rashid passes the gossip on to those behind them.

Rashid's Servant calls Soane to attention and gestures him to look at...

THE SIDE OF THE ROAD

as the Two Survivors (20s, dirty, ragged, and exhausted) walk past them with their faces cast-down. They are defeated. Soane grabs and shakes Survivor 1 by his shoulders:

SOANE

Hey, hey!

Survivor 1 looks up and, with soulless and terror-stricken eyes, stares right into Soane's. Soane's face turns pale - he quickly lets go of his shoulders.

The Two Survivors proceed in the opposite direction of the Caravan while being gazed at by everyone.

Shefiq Effendi gallops along the Caravan and calls for everyone's attention:

SHEFIQ EFFENDI

Listen to me! Listen to me and look at me!

He goes up and down along the Caravan several times without getting the desired attention. Then, he stops, draws his revolver, and fires:

BANG! BANG!

The Caravan goes silent.

SHEFIQ EFFENDI (cont'd)

There is a change of plans. As we can no longer rely on the friendly relations between my tribe and the Hamavand, we will take a detour. We will go North, through Shuan Country, and turn the flank of the Bazian Hills. From there, we won't have any other course but to go through the Bazian Valley.

(reassuringly)

However, once at Bogd Castle, I will have a letter delivered to the HAMAVAND CHIEF to alert him of our Caravan and of the presence of...

Shefiq Effendi looks down on the Ottoman Officers with a downturned mouth. They return the same contemptuous looks but know to remain silent: their fate lies in his hands.

SHEFIQ EFFENDI (cont'd)

(to Caravan)

That may convince him to allow us safe passage. So now then: prepare, for this detour will lengthen our journey considerably... and be conservative with your water!

Shefiq Effendi throws his fez away and ties a KURDISH HANDKERCHIEF around his head.

MOVING CARAVAN MONTAGE:

--WE SEE the Caravan slowly rising over barren red hills in the blazing sun.

--WE SEE the Caravan passing by a remote village; KURDISH WOMEN with bright colored robes and turbans stand on the flat rooftops of their homes, gazing at the miserable sight that passes in front of them.

--WE SEE the Caravan enter a valley; a small flat plain between red hills. The Turkish Soldiers look sick and weary; they empty the last drops of water into their mouths. Myriads of flies buzz about everyone's heads.

--WE SEE the Caravan move through an even more desolate part of the plain that consists of just rocks and sand. Rows and rows of VULTURES sit on the edge of cliffs that surround the plain.

--WE SEE a woman faint and fall off her mule. Men spread their handkerchiefs to cover their faces from the sun. Many are burned from the sun, their lips dry.

--WE SEE Turkish Soldiers force elderly women off their mules and beat protesting men. Other Turkish Soldiers are confiscating water flasks at gun point.

--WE SEE the Caravan struggle making its way through a VIOLENT SANDSTORM. People are falling off their mules and collapse where they walk.

--WE SEE the Caravan struggle to make its way up a zigzagging STONY PATH at the end of the valley.

END MOVING CARAVAN MONTAGE

EXT. STONY PATH - DAWN

Soane is sweating and covered in dust as he nears the top of the zigzagging stony path. When he does, all tensions seems to leave his body: he stops, takes in a deep breath, and slowly releases it as his eyes fall upon:

EXT. THE SHUAN VALLEY - CONTINUOUS

Its great green ridges and hill sides, waving long grass bright with flowers, and deep steep valleys in between stand in stark contrast with the desert wasteland they came through. The snow peaks of the ZAGROS MOUNTAINS are visible in the distance, enhancing the sight's grandeur.

A fresh water stream runs in the valley below. EVERYONE already on Soane's side of the ridge look at the stream in disbelief, their eyes widened. Rashid's Servant MUMBLES to himself:

RASHID'S SERVANT
 (subtitled, in
 Arabic)
Allahu Akbar.

Rashid's Servant shouts from the top of his lungs:

RASHID'S SERVANT (cont'd)
 (subtitled, in Arabic)
Allahu Akbar!

Rashid's Servant drops everything he has on him and runs down the valley, to the water stream.

Everyone, except Soane, follows his example: they run, stroll, and fall down the valley while shouting ecstatically:

EVERYONE
 (subtitled, in
 Kurdish, Arabic,
 Persian, and Turkish)
*God is great!/God is great!/God is
 great!/God is great!/God is great!*

Soane remains alone on top of the ridge. He looks at the people rushing to the stream and at those already relishing at it. A smile spreads over his face.

SOANE
 (softly)
God is great.

Soane rushes down the valley like everybody else. Nobody is a pretender here: all are thirsty; all are human.

EXT. BOGD CASTLE - DAY

The revived Caravan is coming upon a steep decline. As the Caravan moves down, we see a beautiful VILLAGE below them. It is protected by Bogd Castle, which stands mightily upon a mound.

Shefiq Effendi turns his horse and addresses the Caravan:

SHEFIQ EFFENDI
 (shouting)
 Tomorrow, we will go through Hamavand territory. TWENTY HORSEMEN will accompany us to their borders. I will retreat to the castle to make
 (MORE)

SHEFIQ EFFENDI (cont'd)
 preparations and have a MESSENGER
 send out. Take your rest...
 you will need it!

He gallops towards Bogd Castle.

EXT. CASTLE MOUND - LATER

The Caravan is scattered at the foot of the mound, where the village lies. Some people sleep in tall grass under mulberry trees while others are drinking tea. There is a light breeze. We hear BIRDS SINGING and HORSES NEIGHING.

EXT. VILLAGE - MOMENTS LATER

The village has no conventional streets: it consists of mud-brick houses with broken courtyard walls that connect each other. Soane is walking through these "streets", poking his head into several courtyards until he sees a FEMALE VILLAGER (50s, pale, with blond locks and well-set) pouring *du* (yoghurt drink) into a wooden bowl.

SOANE
 (subtitled, in
 Kurdish)
*By God, it would be charity if you
 poured me some...*

The Female Villager hands Soane a tin bucket and fills it to the brim with a wooden spoon and leaves the spoon in. She also hands him a handful of fresh bread and resumes her duties without taking further notice of him.

SOANE (cont'd)
God bless you.

FEMALE VILLAGER
May it be pleasant to you.

EXT. CASTLE MOUND - DAWN

We hear SNORING.

Then, we see the tin bucket. It is empty and lies besides Soane, who is sleeping under one of the mulberry trees.

EXT. SHUAN HILLS - DAY

The Caravan is moving between the hills of the lush Shuan Hills.

Shefiq Effendi's Twenty Horseman are far ahead of the Caravan covering all sides, galloping up narrow gullies to impossibly steep hill-tops and making other such moves that are testimony of their extraordinary horsemanship. HORSEMAN 1 stops on top of a hill and raises a RED HANDKERCHIEF, which prompts Shefiq Effendi to halt the Caravan.

Shefiq Effendi raises his binoculars to look at Horseman 1.

THROUGH SHEFIQ EFFENDI'S BINOCULARS:

We see Horseman 1 pointing at something in the opposite direction. The binoculars moves so we see what he pointed at: another hill-top - occupied by the Two Hamavand Horsemen who passed Soane's Party on the way to Kirkuk.

CLOSE ON THEIR FACES

To reveal their dark and fierce eyes staring right into the binoculars.

Shefiq Effendi lowers his binoculars and presses it against his chest. His eyes are bulging with terror.

SHEFIQ EFFENDI
(shouting at the
Turks)

Conceal your uniforms and ditch the
fez! Hamavand horsemen have been
keeping parallel with our course - we
are entering their territory!

None of the Turkish Soldiers hesitate to ditch their fez. Some harass women and force their *abas* (black cloaks) from them. Men rush to the women's defense, but they are beaten back with rifle buttstocks.

The Turkish Colonel canters along the Caravan and shouts:

TURKISH COLONEL
(reprimanding)

Stop it! Stop it at once! Return the
cloaks and put on your fez! We are
soldiers of the Ottoman Empire and we
will not be intimidated by some
savages! Anyone who disobeys will be
court martialed!

The Turkish Soldiers glance at each other uneasily. One of them steps forward hesitantly and picks up his fez - other Turkish Soldiers follow.

Shefiq Effendi canters to the Turkish Colonel and addresses him furiously:

SHEFIQ EFFENDI

Are you mad!? You will have us all killed!

(to Turkish Soldiers)

Put your fez on and it will be death, not the court martial, that you will face!

One Turkish Soldier glances at the Turkish Colonel uneasily, who returns cold, hard looks. The Turkish Soldier's hands are shaking. He reaches for his fez and throws it away.

BANG!

The Turkish Soldier drops dead.

TURKISH COLONEL

(glowering from anger)

Drop your fez and you will die right here and now!

CARAVAN CROWD

(subtitled, in
Kurdish, Greek,
Arabic, Turkish,
Persian)

Are you out of your mind!/?You will be our death!/Damn your arrogance, damn your bestial manners!/Mud on our heads!

Shefiq Effendi flashes an apprehensive smile at the Turkish Colonel.

SHEFIQ EFFENDI

(reproving)

You will regret this.

He gallops back to the front of the Caravan and shouts:

SHEFIQ EFFENDI (cont'd)

March!

TURKISH COLONEL
 (subtitled, in
 Turkish)
Beat the drums!

The demoralized Ottoman Band starts PLAYING OUT OF TUNE as the cowering, dreadful Caravan starts moving.

EXT. BAZIAN VALLEY ENTRANCE - DAY

Soane's Party is at the back of the Caravan. They are ascending a narrow v-shaped break. As Soane passes the outcrop of rock that forms the break, we see...

THE BAZIAN VALLEY

with its lush hillsides carpeted with flowers, trees, and deep grass. There is an extraordinary abundance of water in the form of small lakes and streams pouring into the valley. SHEEP AND COW are grazing in every place, herded by young BOYS AND GIRLS.

SOANE
 (astonished)
 This is paradise!

RASHID
 I can not wait to leave this...
 (sarcastic)
paradise!

We see a LARGE VILLAGE on a hillside by a river in the distance. VILLAGERS are standing on the rooftops of their little houses, their clothes glistening in the bright sun.

A HAMAVAND MESSENGER gallops out of the village and races towards the Caravan; Shefiq Effendi halts the Caravan.

The Turkish Colonel eyes grow wide as he addresses Shefiq Effendi insolently:

TURKISH COLONEL
 What is this!?

The Hamavand Messenger stops at a good distance from them.

Shefiq Effendi remains unruffled, ignoring the increasingly frustrated Turkish Colonel and Turkish Major next to him.

SHEFIQ EFFENDI
 (to Turkish Colonel)
 Keep quiet and don't move a finger.

The Turkish Colonel grimaces at him.

The Hamavand Messenger removes the rifle from his shoulders and fires a single shot.

BANG!

BANG!

That shot came from behind Shefiq Effendi.

The Hamavand Messenger rears his horse, turns, and sprints away from them.

Shefiq Effendi turns his head and we see a TREMBLING TURKISH SOLDIER trying to reload his smoking rifle.

SHEFIQ EFFENDI (cont'd)
(furious)
Idiot!

BANG!

The Turkish Major has his hands pressed on his heart in dramatic fashion: he has been shot... and falls off his horse.

The valley's hillsides are ringing with WAR CRIES. TWENTY HAMAVAND HORSEMEN come racing down helter-skelter from every gully, their silk head handkerchiefs streaming behind them while their long black uniform-like tunics rise and fall with their horses' action as they commence SHOOTING.

The Turkish Soldiers in front panic and return aimless fire; the Turkish Colonel SHOUTS commands while TWELVE TURKISH SOLDIERS hurry to form a defensive line in front of him. They kneel and fire a volley of shots.

The Hamavand Horsemen are getting closer from each side while their WAR CRIES intensify and their shooting gets deadlier: a KNEELING TURKISH SOLDIER is shot in his head while reloading his rifle, while ANOTHER TURKISH SOLDIER is shot in his back as he flees the battlefield.

MULES are fleeing and run up the hillsides, where they fall right into the hands of FOUR HAMAVAND WOMEN who unexpectedly appear from behind rocks.

Complete pandemonium ensues among the civilians. We hear WAILING women and children.

Soane and SIX CIVILIANS are rushing to the valley's entrance, where they are confronted by FOUR HAMAVAND

HORSEMEN blocking the gap, rearing their horses in front of them.

Soane is sweating bullets. He looks all around him and runs back to the battlefield. As he does, we see a CHASING HAMAVAND HORSEMAN approach (oblivious) Soane from behind. He grabs Soane by his collar and throws him on the ground:

HAMAVAND HORSEMAN
(subtitled, in
Kurdish)
Don't move!

The Chasing Hamavand Horseman gallops away, leaving a cloud of dust in Soane's bruised and scratched face. Soane wipes the dust off his face. He looks at his attacker as he barges towards an UNAWARE TURKISH SOLDIER; the Chasing Hamavand Horseman draws his SABER and slashes his neck.

TWENTY-FOUR TURKISH SOLDIERS have formed a defensive circle around the Turkish Colonel, who is firing his revolver at SIX HAMAVAND HORSEMEN who have encircled them. Then, one of the Hamavand Horsemen is hit in his shoulders and falls off his horse.

The other Hamavand Horsemen ("Retreating Hamavand") rear their horses and retreat to the village. Halfway, they turn their backs on horseback and fire a lethal volley: THREE TURKISH SOLDIERS are hit: one in his eye, two others in their chests. A perfect execution of the Parthian Shot.

As the Retreating Hamavand get closer to the village, we see SIX HAMAVAND HORSEWOMEN and FOUR HAMAVAND HORSEMEN ("REINFORCEMENTS") rush to the battlefield from the village. At their meeting point, the Retreating Hamavand turn their horses around join the Reinforcements in a V-shaped assault formation, which is headed by a HAMAVAND HORSEWOMAN.

The Hamavand Horsemen scream WAR CRIES and the Hamavand Horsewomen yell ULULATIONS as they race towards the battlefield and commence shooting. Their eyes are dark and fierce with an intense vengeful gaze: one of their comrades was hurt - and they won't let that pass!

TWELVE TURKISH SOLDIERS ("Deserters") back away from the Turkish Colonel's defensive circle; they drop their rifles and make a run for it.

The Turkish Colonel draws his revolver and shoots one of the Deserters in his back.

TURKISH COLONEL
 (subtitled, in
 Turkish)

Cowards!

The Deserters are confronted by Two Hamavand Horsemen, who rear their horses in front of them and round them up like cattle.

The Hamavand's continuous and ever-intensifying SHOUTING and ULULATIONS encourages the refraction of TEN TURKISH SOLDIERS ("Surrendering Soldiers"), who drop their weapons, fall on their knees, and raise their hands in cowering fear.

Two Hamavand Horsewomen approach the Surrendering Soldiers and jump off their horses. They move at the Surrendering Soldiers and beat them into submission with the buttstock of their rifles.

Quick-moving Hamavand Horsemen are wheeling around the remaining Turkish Soldiers, whom are completely encircled - and not just by the Hamavand...

CLOSE ON HOOVES

As the hooves create a CLOUD OF DUST around the disintegrated remaining Turkish Soldiers.

The remaining Turkish Soldiers have formed a protective circle around the Turkish Colonel. There is great confusion among the Turkish Soldiers; their eyes are darting everywhere as they fire in all directions, hitting nothing.

BANG!

The Turkish Colonel is hit in his head. His body leans back over his horse, but he remains in the saddle - his horse takes off, going straight through the defensive line and dust cloud. A Hamavand Horseman chases the horse while YELLING victoriously.

The dust cloud settles.

The remaining Turkish Soldiers drop their rifles and raise their hands. Hamavand Horsemen descend from their horses and take purposeful, vengeful strides towards them.

HAMAVAND RIDERS
 (subtitled, in
 Kurdish)
*Who are you to resist the Hamavand!/
 We will bring shame upon your*
 (MORE)

HAMAVAND RIDERS (cont'd)
*ancestors!/Take your clothes off!/
 Take it all off!*

Some soldiers are beaten with rifle butts and forced into a fetal position while others are forced to strip naked.

Civilians are scattered all over the valley; some sitting where they were grabbed and dropped in similar fashion to Soane, while others appear from behind the rocks and trees where they took cover.

The battlefield is scattered with BODIES OF KILLED AND WOUNDED TURKISH SOLDIERS. We hear CRIES OF AGONY.

Shefiq Effendi is crawling over dead and wounded bodies.

We hear a NEIGHING HORSE.

CLOSE ON HORSE HOOVES

Shefiq Effendi looks up and sees before him the Hamavand Chief, a handsome 20 year old lad gorgeous in silk raiment with long sleeves almost touching the ground. Behind him and also on horseback are TWO HAMAVAND GUARDS, both wearing suave jackets with gold thread ornamenting the pale blue cloth. They are clean shaven, their clothes spotless.

SHEFIQ EFFENDI
 (faintly, in a
 cowering voice)
 Effendi...

HAMAVAND CHIEF
 (parroting him
 effeminately)
 Effendi! Effendi!

Both Hamavand Guards laugh menacingly.

Shefiq Effendi slowly crawls back up.

The Hamavand Chief produces a letter from his pocket, clears his throat, and reads out loud:

HAMAVAND CHIEF (cont'd)
 "...one of our chiefs, Shefiq Effendi, will soon pass through your territory with a large Caravan escorted by the Ottoman Army. Do not be alarmed; we intend no harm and merely wish to pass through. Our tribes have enjoyed friendly relations for centuries and we wish
 (MORE)

HAMAVAND CHIEF (cont'd)
to maintain these friendly relations.
However, any raid on the Caravan
would arouse great displeasure among
us."

The Hamavand Chief lowers the letter.

HAMAVAND CHIEF (cont'd)
Are you... Shefiq Effendi?

SHEFIQ EFFENDI
(stuttering)
I... I am...

HAMAVAND CHIEF
And who do you think you are, Shefiq
Effendi? You sent us this
(holding the letter
up)
deceptive letter, but intended to
ambush us? Intended to fuck us?!

SHEFIQ EFFENDI
Your Excellence, that was in no way
my intention, nor was any of what
happened triggered by me. You see,
these ignorant red hats,
(spitting on bodies)
don't know the ways of our country.
When your Messenger fired, one of
them panicked and returned fire. They
don't know that means hostility...
(imploring on his
knees)
I besiege you, spare our Caravan, do
what you wish with the Turks, but
don't harm the civilians.

The Hamavand Chief caresses his well-kept mustache and takes
a good look at Shefiq Effendi, who is trembling with his
eyes cast down.

HAMAVAND CHIEF
(benevolent)
I see... Well then, mistakes happen.
I will see to that the Caravan, Turks
included, is escorted to Sulaimania's
borders safely.

Shefiq Effendi looks up and smiles at him:

SHEFIQ EFFENDI
 (subtitled, in
 Kurdish)
*May God bless you with greater
 prospects and loot!*

EXT. SARCHINAR PLAIN - DAY

The Caravan, escorted by Hamavand Horsemen, moves through a lush plain with abandoned fruit and vegetable gardens. The Turkish Soldiers shuffle forward in their underwear.

CLOSE ON WATCH

CHASING HAMAVAND HORSEMAN (O.S.)
 (exaggerated)
 Wow! What a beautiful watch!

Soane walks next the Chasing Hamavand Horseman. Soane hurriedly takes off his watch and hands it to him.

CHASING HAMAVAND HORSEMAN
 (feigning innocence)
 What? Are you giving it to me?

SOANE
 (mumbling)
 Yes...

The Chasing Hamavand Horseman puts the watch around his wrist and admires it.

CHASING HAMAVAND HORSEMAN
 (condescending)
 Because you are such a good man, I will tell you a story.
 (pointing at a spot ahead)
 You see that spot? We looted a caravan there just a few weeks ago. Massacred the military escort and even some effendis!
 (taking rifle off his shoulders)
 You see this rifle? Got it from a Turk!

Soane forces a tremulous smile.

CHASING HAMAVAND HORSEMAN (cont'd)

(relishing)

I will tell you another story! In 1879, our leaders were trapped in this very plain. A large section of our tribe was deported to Tripoli in Africa, but in just six months, we returned to Kurdistan on foot... and looted Turk and Arab alike on the journey home!

Soane avoids eye contact.

HAMAVAND HORSEMAN

What are you, Turk or Arab?

SOANE

(softly)

Persian.

CHASING HAMAVAND HORSEMAN

(incredulous gasp)

Persian!? Why didn't you say so! We are originally from Persian Kurdistan... Qasr-i-Shirin!

The Chasing Hamavand Horseman takes the watch off and gives it back to Soane, who shoots some suspicious glances at him before taking it back.

CHASING HAMAVAND HORSEMAN (cont'd)

Here. I haven't seen a Persian in twenty years, your memory of a Kurd shouldn't be an unpleasant one!

The Chasing Hamavand Horseman gallops away.

EXT. SULAIMANIA OUTSKIRTS - DAWN

Sulaimania's outskirts appear deserted with relics of once splendid edifices. What remains are mostly one-storied brick buildings, some with a bay window.

Through broken courtyard walls, we see TWO SULAIMANIAN WOMEN in elaborate Kurdish dresses smoking cigarettes in the verandas of their homes, not even slightly intrigued or moved at the pathetic sight of the Caravan moving past them: they have seen it before.

EXT. GHAFUR AGHA CARAVANSERAI - LATER

A simple two-storied brick caravanserai; its stained glass windows reflect on the cobblestone square in front, creating a serene atmosphere.

Soane, exhausted, is about to cross the caravanserai's threshold through an arched gate when he is tapped on his shoulders. He turns and we see...

CLOSE ON RASHID

RASHID
 (exacting, with a
 smile on his face)
 A present? For the safe passage from
 Mosul.

CLOSE ON SOANE

SOANE
 (disbelief)
 Safe passage?!

Soane turns his back to him and enters the caravanserai.

INT. GHAFUR AGHA CARAVANSERAI, HALLWAY - LATER

Soane stands in a simple hallway and about to open the door to enter his room when MUSTAFA BEG (70s, clean shaven, wearing a white nightgown) walks out of a room next to his:

MUSTAFA BEG
 Praise God, I am no longer alone in
 this miserable place!

Mustafa Beg shuffles to Soane excitedly:

SOANE
 (tired voice)
 Good evening, haji.

MUSTAFA BEG
 (still shuffling)
 Good evening my son! Good evening
 indeed!

Mustafa Beg grabs Soane's hands and shakes them firmly with both of his while smiling at him.

MUSTAFA BEG (cont'd)
 I just set some coffee.

INT. GHAFUR AGHA CARAVANSERAI, MUSTAFA BEG'S ROOM - LATER

A miserable windowless square room. It is furnished with an old trunk, a stove, a coffee boiler, very clean bedding, and a broken palanquin.

Soane stands in front of the door while Mustafa Beg stands at the stove, pouring boiling hot coffee into two small tin cups.

Mustafa Beg looks at Soane and points at the palanquin:

MUSTAFA BEG
Take a seat, make yourself
comfortable.

Soane takes a seat and glances around the room uneasily.

Mustafa Beg shuffles to Soane with both cups in hands, hands one to Soane, and sits next to him.

MUSTAFA BEG (cont'd)
(utmost deferential)
I must ask for your forgiveness... I
don't have any milk or sugar.

SOANE
(slight smile)
That is alright.

There is a moment of awkward silence. Mustafa Beg blows at his coffee, takes a sip, and gives Soane several shy side-glances, looking away swiftly whenever Soane catches him.

SOANE (cont'd)
Uh... my name is Ghulam Hussain. I am
from Shiraz.

Mustafa Beg's body posture perks up as he turns to face Soane directly.

MUSTAFA BEG
I am Mustafa Beg, from Tripoli! So
you are a Persian, huh? That is very
curious.

A slow smile builds on Mustafa Beg's face as he pauses to examine Soane, who smiles back uncomfortably. Mustafa Beg lays a hand on Soane's thigh:

MUSTAFA BEG (cont'd)
Tell me, what brings you to this
miserable place?

SOANE

Oh... Sulaimania is just a logical
stop on my journey home.

(raising eyebrows,
inquiringly)

But Tripoli?

(beat)

How did you strand here?

A grave look overtakes Mustafa Beg's face as his posture slumps. He takes a deep sigh and casts his eyes down in shame.

MUSTAFA BEG

Ill fate brought me here...

Mustafa Beg is struck by nostalgia. As he talks of the past, he slowly raises his head.

MUSTAFA BEG (cont'd)

I had a beautiful life in Tripoli,
would spent the summers by the
Mediterranean Sea and talk of the
finer things in life with civilized
men...

(turning head quickly
at Soane)

Men like you and I!

Mustafa Beg slowly turns his head away from Soane. He sighs melancholically, looking far-off.

MUSTAFA BEG (cont'd)

How I long for those summer nights,
how I long for Tripoli's busy sea-
coasts and fresh fruits... My only
wish is to see the Mediterranean one
last time.

Soane places a hand on Mustafa Beg's thigh.

SOANE

We are both strangers in strange
lands. All we have is each other and
God. And if He wills it, your last
wish will come true.

Mustafa Beg's eyes are with tears. He drops his chin to his chest and mumbles uncontrollably:

MUSTAFA BEG

Old fool that I am! Holding up a
tired traveler at this ungodly hour!

SOANE
(smiling, reassuring)
A friend is never an inconvenience.

Mustafa Beg lifts his chin and raises a sappy smile at Soane.

INT. GHAFUR AGHA CARAVANSERAI, LOBBY - DAY

Soane is having a simple breakfast of tea with flatbread and yogurt at a table with two chairs in the caravanserai's lobby. A yellow-brick staircase leads to the first floor directly behind him.

As Soane dips his bread in the yogurt, he is approached by GHAFUR AGHA, a gorgeous looking male in his 30s wearing a fabulous cloak of camel's hair, a prominent turquoise ring, and a gold-handed dagger tugged between his cloth waist-belt.

Ghafur Agha joins Soane's table without invitation. Soane puts his bread down and looks up with a pinched expression. Soane produces a cigarette packet and offers Ghafur Agha one, who accepts with a nod and puts it behind his ears.

GHAFUR AGHA
(smiling)
I will save it for later.

Soane returns a cheesy smile and picks up his bread. Just when he is about to dip his bread, he is once again interrupted - leaving us to wonder whether Ghafur Agha's rude manners are intentional or just ignorance.

GHAFUR AGHA (cont'd)
Where are you traveling from?

Soane looks up, frowns, and answers rapidly in a monotone voice with the piece of bread still in his hands:

SOANE
Constantinople.

GHAFUR AGHA
And where is your native country

SOANE
Persia.

GHAFUR AGHA
Which town?

SOANE

Shiraz.

GHAFUR AGHA

Are there any Sulaimanians in Shiraz?

Soane drops his bread, pushes his tea glass aside, and answers the question scornfully, which escapes Ghafur Agha.

SOANE

No, nor ever were.

GHAFUR AGHA

(unruffled)

Stay here, it is the best place - good water, good air, and a kindly population. What are you by trade? Are you a doctor?

The following questions are answered perfunctorily, but with each question, Soane's voice and mannerisms gets slightly more irritated, building up towards anger. During all this, Ghafur Agha remains unruffled and brusque - oblivious to his rude inquisitiveness.

SOANE

No, why?

GHAFUR AGHA

A Persian traveling from Constantinople to Shiraz must be a doctor. Are you a merchant?

SOANE

(prevaricating)

Yes, I might be.

GHAFUR AGHA

What are your wares?

SOANE

Cloths and such like.

GHAFUR AGHA

(with a reproving glance)

Have you also scented soap?

We hear a SQUEAKING DOOR.

SOANE

No, why would you ask that?

GHAFUR AGHA

Because a merchant came from Mosul twenty years ago with scented soap, but it is an impropriety here.

SOANE

Why?

GHAFUR AGHA

Because the children always die when they smell it.

SOANE

(dryly)

Then do the children of Sulaimania fear sweet smells?

GHAFUR AGHA

Yes. Where did you buy those shoes?

CLOSE ON SHOES

SOANE

In Kirkuk.

GHAFUR AGHA

They have laces, it is improper here. Why did you go to Constantinople?

SOANE

I had business there.

GHAFUR AGHA

What business?

Soane is looking increasingly taut.

SOANE

(indignantly)

My own business; every man has his own business and affairs.

Soane loses his composure and looks mischievous.

GHAFUR AGHA

(reprimanding)

Quite true, but I came here to tell you, as a friend, that you should not sit in a caravanserai; it is not proper.

SOANE

Why do you wear a turquoise ring?!

GHAFUR AGHA
(sheepishly)

What?

SOANE

I said, why do you wear a turquoise ring? It is improper in my country!

GHAFUR AGHA
(in a hurtful voice,
placating)

I came here as a friend, why do you ask such unkind and ridiculous questions?

SOANE
(glowering, but
relishing as he says
this)

Because in my country there is a saying: "He who annoys the stranger by inquisitiveness, seeks after such abuse and ridicule that ill-manners may call forth from the tormented!"

Ghafur Agha frowns with indignation. He gathers his gay cloak and rises briskly and bargs out of the caravanserai without saying another word. Soane yells after him:

SOANE (cont'd)
(enraptured, as in:
"good riddance!")
Farewell!

Ghafur Agha throws the gate shut behind him.

Soane rolls his eyes at him.

We hear another DOOR SHUT CLOSE.

Soane turns to look behind him and sees on top of the stairs a terror-struck, shaking Mustafa Beg.

SOANE (cont'd)

Mustafa Beg... why do you look so pale?

MUSTAFA BEG
(unsettled)

My son... do you know who that was?

Soane gives him an insouciant shrug.

MUSTAFA BEG (cont'd)
That was Ghafur Agha, the owner of
this caravanserai.

SOANE
(incredulously)
What?

Mustafa Beg walks down the stairs while talking:

MUSTAFA BEG
Come, lets go to a tea house. You
need a change of scenery.

INT. TEA HOUSE - LATER

INDISTINCT CHATTER and CLINGING OF TEA GLASSES AND SAUCERS.

A yellow-brick building with high domes and heavy stone pillars. Wooden benches are lined up against its carpet-covered walls; all benches are occupied by KURDISH MEN ("TEA HOUSE CROWD"). Soane and Mustafa Beg sit between some of them. There is a small wooden stage made of crates in the middle of the tea house.

The TEA HOUSE OWNER (60s, fragile-looking, slightly hunched) gets up the stage and BEATS A DAF DRUM WITH METAL BANGLES to gain everyone's attention. Instant silence. He gets off the stage and a POEM RECITER (50s, well-dressed, holding a book) takes to the stage. He opens his book and starts reciting from it passionately whilst elaborately gesticulating with his hands. Everyone listens attentively, looking wistful. Apart from his talking and CLINGING TEA GLASSES... not a sound.

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POEM RECITER

(in Kurdish)

Le Biyrim d'ê Slemaniy ke
Dar-ul-Mulk y Baban bu; Ne
mehkuwm y Ecem, ne suxrekêsh
y Al y Usman bu.

Leber qapiy' sera sefyan
debest shêx u mela w zahyd;
Mutaf y kabe bo erbab y
hacet Gird y Seywan bu.

Leber tabuwr y esker rhê
nebu bo meclys y Pasha; Seda
y moziyqe w neqqare ta eywan
y Keywan bu. Drêgh bo ew
zeman, ew deme, ew esre, ew
rhjoje, ke meydan y
criydbaziy le desht y
Kaniyaskan bu.

Be zerb y hemleyê Beghday
tesxiyr kird u têt helh da;
Slêman y zeman, rhastit
d'ewê, bawk y Slê bu.

Ereb! Inkar y fezl y êwe
nakem; ezelin; emm.
Selaheddiyn, ke dinyay girt,
le nesl y Kurd y Baban bu.

Qubuwr y pirh le nuwr y Al y
Baban pirh le rrehmet bê; Ke
baran y kef y ihsanyan wek
hewr y Niysan bu.

Ke Ebdullah Pasha leshkir y
Waliy'--

We hear the GATE BEING THROWN OPEN--followed by a GUNSHOT.

BANG!

The Poem Reciter ducks.

SAYYID NURI (20s, tall, rustled in silk, wearing a suave
jacket, a dagger tucked between his belt), holding a smoking
revolver in his right hand, barges into the tea house.

POEM RECITER (SUBTITLE)

I remember Sulaimani when it
was the haven of the Babans;
Not ruled by the Persians,
nor was under the Ottomans.

In front of Sara's Gate, all
gathered: sheikhs, ascetics,
mullahs; the Saywan Hill for
the needy was like the
Ka'aba for the pilgrims.

The King's Council was
crowded by the marching of
soldiers; The sound of music
and timpani reached Kaywan's
Palace. Nostalgia for those
times, those instants, those
moments, those days, when
Kaniyaskan Square was full
of archery and horse-racing.

With only one assault, he
conquered and tore Baghdad
down; Sulaimani, you want
the truth! It was Sulaiman's
father.

Arabs! I won't judge your
ascendance, you are
transcendent, but Saladin,
who conquered the world, was
the descendant of the
Babans.

The lightened graves of the
Baban's descendants be
blessed: the rain of their
good deeds was like April's
clouds.

When Abdulla Pasha defeated
the Governor of --

NURI'S SERVANT (80s, hideous-looking with a permanent sinister smile exposing his three yellow teeth) and Ghafur Agha follow behind him.

Soane and Ghafur Agha acknowledge each other with a quick glance. Soane tenses up, while Ghafur Agha has an air of arrogant confidence around him, his head held up high.

SAYYID NURI
(parroting mockingly)
*Le Biyrim d'ê Slemaniy ke
Dar-ul-Mulk y Baban bu!*

SAYYID NURI (SUBTITLE)
I remember Sulaimani when it
was the haven of the Babans!

Sayyid Nuri walks around the place arrogantly and ostentatiously, as if he owns the place. His servant follows him wherever he goes. The tea house's atmosphere has changed from pleasant to tense, nobody even dares to take a sip from their tea or a puff from their cigarette.

Sayyid Nuri stops in front of the terrified looking Poem Reciter; Sayyid Nuri towers over him despite the Poem Reciter's elevated position. He grabs the Poem Reciter's chin and lifts it up, staring in the his watery, fearful eyes.

SAYYID NURI
(deadpan)
So, you long for the Baban Princes?

POEM RECITER
(stuttering)
Sheikh... I... We meant no
disrespect.

Sayyid Nuri looks even sterner now, and then bursts out laughing erratically:

SAYYID NURI
Why so serious? I was only joking!

The Poem Reciter blinks rapidly and raises a nervous smile.

Sayyid Nuri pretends to walk away from the Poem Reciter. His servant does not follow him this time around; he remains where he stands and smiles mischievously at the Poem Reciter. After a few steps, Sayyid Nuri swiftly turns in his place and points at the Poem Reciter:

SAYYID NURI (cont'd)
(rhetorically)
But... do you know who wrote that
poem?

The Poem Reciter is sweating bullets. He drops his quivering chin to avoid eye contact.

POEM RECITER
(stuttering)
Uh... I...

SAYYID NURI
You wrote it?!

Sayyid Nuri walks back to the Poem Reciter.

Nuri's Servant takes to the stage and lifts the Poem Reciter's chin.

NURI'S SERVANT
(in Kurdish)
Aferîn. Aferîn!

The Poem Reciter's eyes appear haunted.

POEM RECITER
(shaky voice)
Sheikh Raza wrote it.

Sayyid Nuri's capricious personality becomes more and more evident as he bursts out again:

SAYYID NURI
(glowering)
Sheikh Raza? You long for the Princes
of Baban and detest the sheikhs, yet,
you recite a sheikh's poetry?

Sayyid Nuri snatches the book out of the Poem Reciter's hands and browses through it, stops, and looks attentively at the page he is on - then hands the book back to him.

SAYYID NURI (cont'd)
Recite this for us.

The Poem Reciter starts breathing heavily, his eyebrows pull together with the crease deep and evident.

POEM RECITER
(voice breaking)
Effendi, I besiege you... it would
be... indecent.

SOANE
(whispering, to
Mustafa Beg)
What is going on?

Mustafa Beg shrugs, but not in a way that indicates ignorance - he shrugs because he has seen this happen before, and there is nothing anyone can do about it.

Sayyid Nuri looks the Poem Reciter in his eyes:

SAYYID NURI
(menacing)
Recite.
(beat)
It!

The Poem Reciter glances around the room uneasily; everyone looks away from him - they know what is to come. He gives Sayyid Nuri a final imploring glance, and, not getting any reaction, starts reciting:

POEM RECITER
"The Bulgarian Boy."
(clearing throat)
"When my dick got hard, he didn't ask, 'Relative or stranger?' He slugged away at whatever he had from the front or the back. Though large --

Nuri's Servant starts GIGGLING nosily, which prompts the Poem Reciter to pause. Sayyid Nuri grimaces at him, so he resumes reciting.

As his recitation continues, Sayyid Nuri walks around the tea house arrogantly, judging people's facial expressions. Everyone's eyes are cast-down, looking terribly shamefaced.

POEM RECITER (O.S.)
"...though large, I have fit him into so many tight holes that his face is bruised, his ribs cracked, his neck sunk into leather, like the mullah's *sewak*, his hair loose and flowing down his neck, like a dervish. He was a hero, wrestling with strong biceps. The beard at his roots was set as the horns of a wild bull."
(clears throat)

SAYYID NURI
(laughing menacingly)
The great poet Sheikh Raza Talabani!

The Poem Reciter casts his head down in shame.

Sayyid Nuri walks up to him, forcefully takes the book out of his hands, tears it apart, and throws it on the ground.

He takes to the stage and grabs the Poem Reciter by his crotch. The Poem Reciter lets out a strangled cry of frustration, but manages to hold most of it back. His eyes have turned red - his facial expression is one of shame, anger, disgust, and hatred all at once.

Sayyid Nuri stares in his eyes and smiles at him. Then, he gets off the stage... as if nothing happened. And everyone plays along.

SAYYID NURI (cont'd)
 (feigning ignorance;
 he knows the answer)
 I heard a PERSIAN DOCTOR has arrived
 from Shiraz. Anyone know who he is?

The Poem Reciter gets off the stage and shuffles out of sight.

Sayyid Nuri walks to THREE MEN sitting close to Soane and addresses them:

SAYYID NURI (cont'd)
 Do any of you know who this Persian
 Doctor may be?

They shake their heads whilst avoiding eye contact out of fear of becoming his next victim.

SAYYID NURI (cont'd)
 None of you?
 (beat)
 You are all very ill-informed for men
 styling themselves...
 (sardonic)
intellectuals!

GHAFUR AGHA (O.S.)
 I do, Sheikh Nuri. I know who he is!

Sayyid Nuri turns around swiftly. He looks intrigued, but this too is clearly feigned:

SAYYID NURI
 You do?

GHAFUR AGHA
 (obsequious)
 I do, my great sheikh.

SAYYID NURI

Can you identify him for me, Ghafur
effendi?

Ghafur Agha smiles and points at Soane, who looks taken by surprise. He does a double take to make sure all eyes are, indeed, pointed at him.

SAYYID NURI (cont'd)

Huh.

Sayyid Nuri walks to Soane's table and addresses him stern and inquisitively:

SAYYID NURI (cont'd)

Are you Ghulam Hussain, the Persian
Doctor traveling from Constantinople
to Shiraz?

Soane draws himself up to sit up with a strong, confident posture.

SOANE

(confidently)

I am Ghulam Hussain, but I am not a
doctor.

Nuri's Servant moves to stand next to Sayyid Nuri:

NURI'S SERVANT

(avuncular, to Soane)

There is no need to be alarmed my
son. We are here to make you a
proposition.

Soane tilts his head to the side and raises his eyebrows.

Nuri's Servant produces an OLD BOOK, SOME OLD DOCUMENTS,
and a BAG FULL OF HERBS and spreads it all out over Soane's
table.

NURI'S SERVANT (cont'd)

(pointing at book)

This here is an old Arab medicine
book, written in the 10th century...

(pointing at
documents)

those documents describe ancient
Greek medicine...

(pointing at herbs)

and those herbs I bought from a Jew.
They have healing properties, you
know.

Soane feigns interest, but remains polite:

SOANE
(perfunctorily)
Very interesting.

Nuri's Servant mistakes this for genuine interest. He leans forward and makes strong eye contact with Soane. His speech becomes more confident using excitable language:

NURI'S SERVANT
The combination of ancient European
and Oriental skill will cure all
diseases. With your help, and
(looking at Sayyid
Nuri submissively)
Sheikh Nuri's blessing, we will write
a new book... God willing, our pants
will rip from the weight of our coin-
filled pockets.

Nuri's Servant smiles at Soane, anticipating his excitement. Soane feigns studying the material, then looks up at him:

SOANE
That is a very promising proposition,
and God bless the fortunate person
who can help you, but it is not I,
for I am not a doctor.

Ghafur Agha slams his fist on the table: tea glasses and saucers shatter and fly around.

GHAFUR AGHA
(furiously)
Stop this charade! We have seen the
bottles in your room!

SOANE
(confused)
Bottles?

Soane looks disconcerted; he rises and bursts out:

SOANE (cont'd)
And what were you doing in my room!?

GHAFUR AGHA
Yes, bottles! You had them lined up
on your side-table!

NURI'S SERVANT

You think we are stupid? Those were obviously medicinal!

SOANE

Have you ever thought those medicine could be mine, for my own illnesses? And why did you enter my room! Is this the famous Sulaimanian hospitality?!

Everyone in the tea house turns shame-faced at this criticism. After a moment of silence, the Tea House Owner bursts out with great passion:

TEA HOUSE OWNER

I will say it! Everyone is too afraid to say it, but I will say it! Damned be the day our princes fell, damned be the day the sheikhs occupied town and forced their backward ways on us!

(beat)

You

(pointing at Sayyid Nuri)

sold us out to the Turks!

(spits in his direction)

Sayyid Nuri stares at intimidatingly, but the Tea House Owner does not flinch - he stares back defiantly. Yet, his trembling body and sweaty palms tell a different story: he is terrified.

This stare-off lasts for some moments when it is broken by Sayyid Nuri with one of his capricious moves. He feigns a smile (his eyes still radiating hatred) and breaks the silence in an equally dishonest cheerful manner:

SAYYID NURI

Why so tense? Can't we take a joke? I wouldn't be Sheikh Ahmad's son if I allowed Sulaimania's good name to be tarnished!

He turns his attention to Soane, and now, in addition to his capriciousness, also his unscrupulousness becomes evident:

SAYYID NURI (cont'd)

I apologize for their
(MORE)

SAYYID NURI (cont'd)
 (looking at his
 servant and Ghafur
 Agha)

bad manners, they should know better.
 I told them: "he is not a doctor,
 people carry medicinal bottles for
 their own illnesses all the time."
 But they insisted on confronting you,
 and as a thirsty heart is not easily
 stilled, I let them under the
 condition that I were with them...
 for you have aroused my curiosity
 in --

We hear the GATE BEING BEING THROWN OPEN.

TWO POLICEMEN (30s, both in uniform) enter the place.

POLICEMAN 1
 What is going on in here?!

TEA HOUSE OWNER
 Sayyid --

SAYYID NURI
 Nothing at all! Just having a
 friendly chat with a stranger,
 welcoming him into town.

The Two Policemen walk towards Soane's table and begin
 inquisiting him brusquely. Soane, by now used to this style
 of inquisition, accepts it with equanimity:

POLICEMAN 2
 Are you Ghulam Hussain?

SOANE
 I am.

POLICEMAN 2
 Do you have a passport?

SOANE
 Yes.

POLICEMAN 2
 Why have you not submitted it to us?

SOANE
 Because so far you have not asked for
 it.

POLICEMAN 2
Quit the games and hand it over.

Soane takes his travel passport out of his pocket and hands it to Policeman 2. Policeman 2 takes a quick look and dismisses it:

POLICEMAN 2 (cont'd)
NO! NO! This is not it, this is a travel passport! Where is the passport you were given when you had completed your time in the army?

Policeman 2 throws the travel passport at Soane. Soane maintains strong composure.

POLICEMAN 2 (cont'd)
We need real identification!

SOANE
Well, that I do not possess --

POLICEMAN 1
Oh! Oh!? Why not!?

SOANE
(vehemently)
Simply because we have the honor not to be Turkish subjects and do not have to serve in the army unless we please, and are not called upon to carry passports of identification everywhere with us; for we are not subject to the inquisition and annoyance enjoyed under Turkish rule, and as we, unlike you, have too much to do, we do not waste our time and money on paying ornaments like yourself to harass us!

The Tea House Crowd starts WHISPERING LOUDLY.

Sayyid Nuri, Nuri's Servant, and Ghafur Agha look around disoriented: their arrogance has faded. Sayyid Nuri looks at Policeman 2 suggestively (to drown the whispering):

POLICEMAN 2
(shouting at Soane)
Watch your mouth, Ajam!

POLICEMAN 1
What are you doing here? Why did you come here?!

POLICEMAN 2

Why do you not go? What is your name?!

Soane remains unusually calm, agitating the Two Policemen further:

SOANE

I already told you my name. What is the reason for this rude inquisition? What have I done to deserve this treatment?

POLICEMAN 2

We are the ones asking the questions!

SOANE

I am not going to volunteer details as to whence I came from or what my business is, for it is not your business. As to why I do not go; I am hoping to leave very soon, and would have arrived and left sooner if your bold Turkish Army could induce the Hamavand to leave a road open!

The Tea House Crowd bursts out with confidence and speak their hearts:

TEA HOUSE CROWD

(subtitled, in
Kurdish)

We know what the Hamavand did!/Only they can protect the honor and dignity of Kurds!/8000 Turks in Chamchamal can not stand 250 Hamavand!/Shame on you!

The Tea House Crowd starts CHEERING for Soane; some rise in a forceful manner and move at Sayyid Nuri and his cronies threateningly, but without clear intention.

POLICEMAN 2

(to Soane)

You are going to the *Sarai* to meet the GOVERNOR!

Soane slams his fists on the table.

SOANE

Alright!

Mustafa Beg takes Soane's arm and looks at him with terrified eyes.

SOANE (cont'd)
 (smiling)
 I will be fine.

EXT. SARAI SQUARE - DAY

Sulaimania's *Sarai* (municipal building) is a large two-storied building made of good brick and stone. The Tea House Crowd have gathered on Sarai Square and watch Soane being walked into the building by the Two Policemen.

INT. SARAI, GOVERNOR'S OFFICE - MOMENTS LATER

A little room with two square windows opening onto Sarai Square. A solid desk stands in its center, which is occupied by the Governor, a sweaty fat man with a drooling mustache. Despite that, he has the friendly appearance of a someone you can reason with. A KURDISH CLERK stands behind him.

GOVERNOR
 (convivial, smiling)
 So, what seems to be the trouble?

POLICEMAN 2
 This man, who calls himself
 (with cadence)
Ghulam Hussain... does not cooperate. We asked him standard questions about his visit, which he answered with utmost ridicule.

Soane looks at him indignantly.

GOVERNOR
 I see.
 (to Soane)
 Do you have a travel passport?

SOANE
 I have.

Soane takes it out of his jacket and hands it to the Governor.

The Governor inspects Soane's travel passport for a brief moment, clearly knowing what he is looking at and for.

GOVERNOR

This is indeed an *ubur tezkere*, but your name, religion, and place of birth are illegible!

(slamming passport in his palms)

Can you explain this?!

The Two Policemen exchange sly grins with each other. Soane remains unmoved and explains himself confidently, and with each of his following arguments, the Two Policemen's sly grins fade and slowly transform into mean grimaces.

SOANE

As you can see, my passport has received unfortunate ill-use, but through no fault of my own. I have traveled from Constantinople to Lebanon by ferry, and from there to Aleppo by train through deserts. The road through Kurdistan, as you well know, is a monumentally treacherous one: I have crossed the wild Tigris and Euphrates rivers - the former by ways of the infamous kalak - taken a stagecoach over the Mesopotamian Plains, and I survived the most recent...

(beat)

Hamavand Raid.

The Governor's cheeks burn. He is unable to meet Soane's gaze and looks up and down rapidly whilst frowning disapprovingly at Soane.

SOANE (cont'd)

The weather elements have not been kind, either. Thank God, for it is a miracle that the

(sarcastically)

glorious visé of the Turkish consul is still visible.

Soane smiles at the Governor ingratiatingly; the Governor feigns impression and smiles back at him disarmingly.

The Governor hands the travel passport to the Kurdish Clerk, who starts examining it rigorously.

The Governor pours water in a tin bowl and offers it to Soane, who accepts and drinks from it. He smiles at the Governor gratefully. The Governor nods in acknowledgment and

rises to look out of a window onto Sarai Square. He starts addressing Soane with his back turned at him:

GOVERNOR

(coaxing)

I am afraid you are not telling the truth about your past, my brother; were it not better to tell me at once why you are here? Your passport is defective. I have no personal animosity against you, and should like to see you often, but there are strong suspicions, and if we cannot be satisfied of your harmlessness, we shall have to deport you to Mosul.

The Governor turns to see Soane's reaction, whose calm composure has not changed one bit, to a degree that it has clearly infuriated and frustrated the Two Policemen, whose eyes are burning and their jaws and fists clenched. Soane takes notice of this and loses some of his feigned calm composure; his forehead furrows as he glances at them from the corner of his eyes. A few drops of sweat appear on his forehead. He struggles to maintain his composure, but has some strength left to feign confidence and fearlessness by prevaricating around the Governor's valid arguments with his head held up high:

SOANE

(prevaricating
insolently)

Good. I am not enchanted with Sulaimania, and such a step would put me in your debt. But rest assured I shall, with the assistance of the Persian consul of Constantinople, who is a dear friend of mine, complain about you and your methods to your superiors in the capital!

The Governor loses his strong composure and his arm fall loosely at his sides. His mouth falls open, his facial muscles going slack. He looks at Soane both gravely and stunned, clearly not amused by this threat. And just as he is about to respond, he is interrupted by the Kurdish Clerk who has discovered something of note:

KURDISH CLERK

Governor, you have to look at this.

The Governor's grave look fades. He squints at Soane suspiciously as his body angles away from him to take the travel passport out of the the Kurdish Clerk's hands.

Soane draws himself up to full height with a challenging gaze, but he avoids direct eye contact with the Governor - Soane feigns defiance, but really dreads what is to come.

The Kurdish Clerk points at something in the travel passport while the Governor keeps shooting glances at Soane, who looks frozen.

KURDISH CLERK (cont'd)

Sir?

The Governor snaps back into his element and looks at the travel passport.

CLOSE ON TRAVEL PASSPORT

KURDISH CLERK (cont'd)

(pointing)

It is the Kirkuk Police's Seal... he is telling the truth.

The Governor takes a closer look at the travel passport. Then, he looks up and lashes out at the Two Policemen with sweeping arm gestures:

GOVERNOR

(shouting)

How could you have missed this? A Kurd can read Turkish, but you can't?

(subtitled, in Turkish)

Mannerless! Sons of dogs! Ignorant creatures! Get out!

The Two Policemen lower their heads in humiliation, but make sure to give Soane a final menacing glance on their way out.

The Policemen's grave looks have faded. They have bowed their heads in humiliation. They give Soane a final menacing glance as they walk out of the office.

The Governor hands Soane, now grinning contently, his travel passport back.

GOVERNOR (cont'd)

(exculpating)

My sincere apologies. You are free to go.

EXT. SARAI SQUARE - LATER

The sympathetic Tea House Crowd have gathered in front of the Sarai building, waiting for Soane to walk out.

As Soane walks out, all gaze and grin at him. Soane shuffles back a step or two and does a double-take, but manages to conjure a nervous, uneasy smile at the reception.

As Soane takes his first steps forward, they slowly move out of his way and create a passage for him. Soane walks through this passage, gazed at from both sides.

CHEERING ensues:

TEA HOUSE CROWD

(subtitled, in
Kurdish)

*Curse all policemen and government
officials!/Behold, for here walks a
real man!/May you live a thousand
years!*

The CHEERING INTENSIFIES; Soane's uneasy smile grows more confident the longer it goes on, until he becomes one with his sympathizers - he laughs with them and shakes hands with them as he makes his way through while reciprocating their genuine enthusiasm.

Then, Soane's eyes grow larger.

We see Mustafa Beg at the end of the passage. He stands there shyly and terribly worried-looking.

SOANE

Mustafa! Haji Mustafa!

Soane hastes himself towards Mustafa Beg. Mustafa Beg gasps in relief and a smile spreads over his face. Soane throws himself at him and hugs him firmly, then leans back while holding Mustafa Beg's shoulders.

Mustafa Beg is tear eyed, his voice shaky.

MUSTAFA BEG

How glad am I to see you! Thank
God... Thank God!

SOANE

I am alright, I am alright.

BANG!

Soane and Mustafa Beg let go of each other and exchange apprehensive glances.

CROWD (O.S.)
 (subtitled, in
 Kurdish)
*They got him!/Who was it?/
 (whispering)
 It was the sheikh's men!/Curse them!/
 The sheikh's men have raised their
 hands! Mud on our heads!*

We see another Crowd where the Sarai Square starts. They have gathered around each other in a circle and are looking down on something which we can not yet see. We hear INDISTINCT MURMUR, but it is clearly ominous in nature.

Soane, with a fixed of concentration, takes several uneven strides towards that Crowd, then accelerates and rushes to the gathering with great celerity, leaving trembling Mustafa Beg behind.

Soane thrusts his way through the Crowd, whom move aside when they see it is him.

Soane stands above a VICTIM, whom we can not yet see because the view is obstructed by a KURDISH DOCTOR looking over the Victim. The Kurdish Doctor turns and looks up at Soane gravely. He shakes his head and rises.

Soane takes a step forward. Now, we see the...

CLOSE ON CORPSE OF THE TEA HOUSE OWNER

with a dagger thrust in his throat.

SOANE (O.S.)
 (to himself)
 I have to get out of here.

EXT. GHAFUR AGHA CARAVANSERAI - DAY

Soane, the HALABJA MERCHANT (20s, tall, swarthy-looking - and in action lines simply referred to as "the Merchant"), and a ROUMANIAN (70s, fragile and kind-looking) have gathered in front of the caravanserai, all mounted on their steeds.

Mustafa Beg is there too and he is tear-eyed; he isn't just mourning Soane's departure, he is also mourning his own fate. His words are hopeful and kind, but his thick emotional voice tells us he knows this is a final goodbye:

MUSTAFA BEG

(wistful)

I didn't only find a friend in you,
but also a memory of what I have left
behind.

(swallowing, letting
out a held-back tear)

God be with you.

Mustafa Beg reaches out his hands; Soane grabs and clasps
them while reassuring him:

SOANE

Stop worrying, uncle. You know there
are no Hamavand on the road to
Halabja. If God wills it, we shall
see each other again. And if not in
this life, in the other.

Mustafa Beg shows a weak, pensive smile. Tears start pouring
down his face as he quotes melancholicly:

MUSTAFA BEG

(in Arabic)

*"The stranger shall be merciful to
the stranger."*

HALABJA MERCHANT (O.S.)

We have to go, I have business in
Halabja!

Soane smiles back and repeats the quote in English:

SOANE

"The stranger shall be merciful to
the stranger."

EXT. SHAHR-I-ZUR PLAIN - DAY

A broad green valley dotted with black tent encampments of
NOMADS. The valley is dotted with unnatural mounds -
remnants of ancient settlements. Deserted villages lay in
ruin and are overgrown with tall grass. Burned trees are
witness to a recent terrible war, but blossoming ones here
and there evidence of the circle of life.

Great mountains rise in the far distance. Also in the
distance but closer: the town of Halabja, a small speck on a
far-rising slope.

The Roumanian and Soane ride abreast. The Merchant is right
behind them, his steed packed with merchandise.

ROUMANIAN
Curse Satan... what happened here?

HALABJA MERCHANT
(mockingly)
What happened here? Does not the
entire world know what happened
here?!

ROUMANIAN
(ashamed)
I... I...

The Merchant looks at the Roumanian judgmentally.

SOANE
(to Roumanian)
Where are you from, uncle?

ROUMANIAN
(uneasily)
Roumania.

HALABJA MERCHANT
(snarking)
That explains it!

Soane ignores the Merchant and smiles amiably at the
Roumanian.

SOANE
Roumania? What business does a
Roumanian have in this forgotten
corner of the world?

ROUMANIAN
While on pilgrimage in Mecca --

The Merchant's eyes widen:

HALABJA MERCHANT
I ask for your forgiveness!

ROUMANIAN
(humble, but witty)
It is alright... Although common
decency should not be exclusive.

Soane smiles at the Roumanian, who raises a half-smile
himself. The Merchant casts his head down in shame.

ROUMANIAN (cont'd)

Anyway, while in Mecca, I met an ancient man speaking a curious tongue which I could not place despite all my travels. This intrigued me greatly, and to make a long story short, we became good friends. He told me he was a Kurd from Hawraman, and he spoke greatly of all the little shrines in his country. I have made it my mission to visit each and every one of them... and, if God wills it, that old friend.

SOANE

I admire your dedication and curiosity. A man's thirst for knowledge should be stilled, so I will tell you what happened here. The plain you see before you is called *Shahr-I-Zur*, which means Strong City. It was part of the province of *Gulambar*, or the Amber Flower. That province no longer exists, for nowadays, this place is known as --

The Merchant looks at Soane with both suspicion and intrigue and completes him with a fitting tone of voice:

HALABJA MERCHANT

Kwholmur.

ROUMANIAN

(inquiringly)

Kwholmur?

Soane maintains his previous tone of voice, unaware of the Merchant's body language (he is still riding behind them).

SOANE

It means the *Dead Land*. This used to be one of Kurdistan's most beautiful provinces, possessing innumerable fruit and flower lands, a fine supply of sweet water, and well-stocked villages with an educated population. Everything changed after the province was lost to the Ottomans. They killed and destroyed everything; the Kurds fled to Persia. The land has laid like this, abandoned and neglected, ever since.

(MORE)

SOANE (cont'd)

(beat)

Only the Nomads pass here every
spring and autumn, as they have done
for millennia.

The Merchant looks at Soane admiringly: Soane has won his trust. A slight smile grows on the his face as he moves his steed to ride abreast with Soane and the Roumanian.

HALABJA MERCHANT

(light tone of voice)

The only bright spot is Halabja,
which has grown to become a beautiful
little town under LADY ADELA's rule.

ROUMANIAN

(raising his eyebrows)

Lady Adela?

HALABJA MERCHANT

(passionately)

What a fine lady she is! We would
have been lost if not for her. She
brought rule of law to this decaying
corner of the empire. Built us
merchants a fine bazaar, a prison,
splendid gardens, and, in a way,
restored the ways of our old Princes!

(apprehensive)

The Turks... they have grown jealous.

The Merchant points at some BROKEN TELEGRAPH POLES in the distance:

HALABJA MERCHANT (cont'd)

See that? They are trying to obtain
Halabja by building telegraph wires,
but Lady Adela had them cut down...

(gleaming)

and warned the Turks not to try it
again!

(to Soane, seeking
validation)

We aren't wrong, are we? You have
seen the ruinous state of the cities
under their rule!

(rhetorically)

Would Halabja's fate be any
different?

SOANE

It certainly would not.

ROUMANIAN

What you have told me is
remarkable... and this Lady Adela,
(hesitating)
she is a woman?

HALABJA MERCHANT

Of course! What does lady mean in
Roumania?

The Roumanian looks hurt and shakes his head in disbelief.

HALABJA MERCHANT (cont'd)

(to Soane)

Where are from you anyway? How come
you know you know so much about
Kurdistan? You speak the language the
same way I would speak Persian...
with an accent!

SOANE

I am a Persian from Shiraz.

HALABJA MERCHANT

(wondrous)

A Persian from Shiraz? That explains
it!

ROUMANIAN

Explains what?

HALABJA MERCHANT

This province used to be part of
Persia before the catastrophe.

(to Soane, excitedly)

Your knowledge will gain you a warm
welcome and a place to stay from Lady
Adela. I will introduce you to her
when we get there!

Soane eyes glow; he is eager, but he can not show it.

SOANE

I appreciate your kindness, but I
could not impose myself.

HALABJA MERCHANT

(feigning insult)

Nonsense! All she talks about is the
pureness of Shirazi Farsi, something
so rare in these lands. This is not
up for discussion.

The Merchant puts his steed in gallop as to not give Soane a chance to respond. This, to Soane's relief: a smirk spreads over his face. This time, he escaped *taarof*.

EXT. SHAHR-I-ZUR PLAIN - LATER

A lush valley with many ridges. The great mountain wall in the distance is getting closer.

FOUR TURKISH SOLDIERS (sunburned, sweating, all shaved clean apart from a LITTLE SOLDIER with a nasty hanging mustache) approach Soane's Party, whom are moving on one of the ridges. They exchange some uneasy glances and nod at each other in passing. The Merchant looks back at them and murmurs softly:

HALABJA MERCHANT

(to Soane)

I don't trust them.

Soane clenches his his jaws and looks straight ahead:

SOANE

(grinding teeth;
strained voice)

Just keep moving.

Soane, the Merchant, and the Roumanian increase their speed.

BANG!

A bullet WHISTLES over Soane's head.

Soane turns to look behind them and we see the Little Soldier running after them whilst reloading his rifle.

ROUMANIAN (O.S.)

We are ruined!

All three beat their steeds to go faster, but to no avail.

LITTLE SOLDIER

(subtitled,
everything he says
in Turkish)

Halt, or I will kill you!

They stop and hurriedly get off their steeds. They raise their hands and turn around. The Little Soldier approaches them and orders them to...

LITTLE SOLDIER (cont'd)
 (brusquely)
Empty your pockets!

The Roumanian and the Merchant start fumbling in their pockets looking for valuables. Soane looks at them for a second, and now understanding the situation at hand, does the same.

LITTLE SOLDIER (cont'd)
 (impatient snort)
Quick! I don't have all day!

The Little Soldier makes stabbing moves with his rifle to scare them.

They throw their valuables on the ground in front of him: A FEW COINS, a PRAYER BEAD, and a PIECE OF BREAD.

LITTLE SOLDIER (cont'd)
 (querulous)
Is that all!?

The Little Soldier puts his rifle on his shoulders and walks to the steeds and searches the saddlebags; he finds nothing of interest in Soane's and the Roumanian's.

He walks over to the Merchant's steed and starts thrashing his saddlebags, throwing all kinds of CLOTHS and COPPERWARE on the ground in anger. Then, a nasty smile spreads over his face. He takes out a BAG OF SUGAR and looks at it greedily.

HALABJA MERCHANT
 (subtitled, in
 Turkish)
Those are for the Sheikh of Biara.

The Little Soldier snarks at him and puts the sugar back. He turns his attention back to Soane and the Roumanian. Then, his eyes widen.

CLOSE ON SOANE'S WATCH

LITTLE SOLDIER
Take it off! Quick!

He moves at Soane forcefully. He grabs Soane's wrist and starts yanking at it.

LITTLE SOLDIER (cont'd)
Off! Take it off!

Soane resists and pushes him on the ground.

SOANE

(intensely)

I am not intimidated by you, nasty
little creature!

The Little Soldier is fuming with anger. He gets back up, takes his rifle from his shoulder, and fixes his bayonet. He moves at Soane violently and stabs him in his arm, leaving a nasty wound.

SOANE (cont'd)

(to soldier)

Bastard!

The Roumanian falls on his knees and starts repenting repetitively, which we will continue to hear in the background:

ROUMANIAN (O.S.)

(in Arabic)

I seek forgiveness from Allah. There is no deity but Him, the Living, the Eternal. And I repent unto him. Glory be to You, Oh Allah, and all Praise! I testify that there is no deity but You. I seek Your forgiveness and to You I do repent...

Soane struggles but manages to take his watch off with his injured arm and throws it on the ground in front of the Little Soldier.

The Little Soldier squats and puts his rifle down. He picks up the watch and admires it. His nasty smile reappears as he puts the watch around his little wrist; the watch does not fit properly and dangles from his weak wrist pathetically, but he couldn't care less.

The Merchant makes a swift leap and throws himself over the Little Soldier. He punches his face repeatedly; BLOOD SPATTERS everywhere.

HALABJA MERCHANT

(subtitled, in
Kurdish)

Son of a whore! Dog, son of a dog!

The Little Soldier is being beaten to pulp, but manages, with difficulty, to reach for a HIDDEN KNIFE in his boot. He draws it and stabs the Merchant's shoulders. The Merchant lets out a PIERCING SCREAM and backs away.

Soane quickly steps on the hand holding the knife and pulverizes; the Little Soldier SCREAMS.

The Merchant is back on his feet: the wound was not serious. He walks over to the Little Soldier...

HALABJA MERCHANT (cont'd)
You just wait for me...

and kicks him in his head. The Little Soldier goes unconscious.

Soane squats next to the Little Soldier and removes the watch from his wrist. Then, he ties his own wound with the handkerchief around his head.

The Merchant grimaces at the Little Soldier's unconscious body and spits in his face. Then, he looks around:

HALABJA MERCHANT (cont'd)
Where is the Roumanian?

Soane rises and also looks around for him until he sees the Roumanian crawling over the brow of a hill in the distance:

SOANE
(shouting at the
Roumanian)
Hey! Hey!

The Roumanian keeps climbing fervently, not looking back. Soane looks worried, but the Merchant's casual lack of concern eases him:

HALABJA MERCHANT
(insouciant)
Leave him be, he is lost. How is your hand?

SOANE
It's a nasty wound, but I will survive. Your shoulder?

HALABJA MERCHANT
'Tis but a scratch. We'll take care of your hand in Halabja, we should arrive there by dawn.

EXT. HALABJA - DAWN

Soane and the Merchant are moving over a paved road surrounded by thickly treed gardens with beautiful flower-

beds in their shady depths. The road leads to a large yellow-brick edifice with stained glass in its bay windows.

INT. LADY ADELA'S MANSION, SOANE'S ROOM - DAY

A square room with whitened and recessed walls with two open double doors opening onto a small balcony. The room is well carpeted and furnished with a bed, two chairs, and a table.

Soane stands on the balcony with his back to us and gazes over garden, plain, and mountain when we hear the SOUND OF CLINKING TEA-GLASSES coming from outside of his room.

He turns his back and raises his eyebrow in wonder. He walks to the door and opens it to be greeted by a RETAINER carrying a big brass samovar and the Merchant, who is carrying a basin with Persian saucers and tea-glasses.

RETAINER & HALABJA MERCHANT

Good morning.

SOANE

Good morning.

Soane moves aside and observes them with some curiosity as they enter his room and put their wares on the table. The Retainer pours tea in two tea glasses and leaves the room.

The Merchant turns to Soane and makes a slight bow:

HALABJA MERCHANT

Please, be my guest.

SOANE

(slight smile)

Thank you.

They sit down opposite each other and take a sip from their teas.

The Merchant looks at Soane as if he has something to tell; Soane looks back, as if asking him "do you have something to tell?"

The Merchant leans over. Soane imitates him.

HALABJA MERCHANT

Lady Adela will receive you after tea.

SOANE

(smiling)

I am very grateful to her.

HALABJA MERCHANT

(looking down)

I have also told her about...

(looking up)

the incident. She has sent some scouts to retrieve the culprit before the army does... Eh.. How is your hand?

SOANE

Better, but it needs to be cleaned.

HALABJA MERCHANT

Don't worry. AMIN EFFENDI, Lady Adela's personal doctor, will take care of it.

The Merchant finishes his tea in one big gulp and rises; Soane rises with him.

HALABJA MERCHANT (cont'd)

I will see you later.

Soane smiles and nods at him contentedly.

INT. LADY ADELA'S MANSION, CORRIDOR - LATER

Soane stands in the corridor, waiting. Then, the gate is opened from inside by the GATEKEEPER. Soane enters...

INT. LADY ADELA'S MANSION, RECEPTION HALL - CONTINUOUS

a long narrow room, two walls pierced with 8 double-doors opening on to a veranda. There are large stained glass windows. The room is covered with the finest Sina rugs. A huge brass bedstead stands at the far end of the room.

Before and at the foot of that bedstead sits Lady Adela, a 62-year-old scrawny -and shrewd-looking dignified lady. She is thin with a narrow oval face and fierce black shining eyes. She wears a skull-cap smothered with gold coins and the finest silk-wear. She sits erect, though barefooted, and has an air of authority around her without looking intimidating, but, in fact, rather inviting. She smokes a cigarette elegantly like only a lady can, but this is not an ordinary lady: this lady tamed a masculine population - and they love and respect her for it!

Her THREE MAIDS stand next to her - MAID ONE is fanning her, MAID TWO is holding her cigarettes, and maid FIRUZA is holding a tray of *sherbet* and rose water. There is a definite mother-daughter vibe between the four of them.

Lady Adela WHISPERS something to Firuza; her Maids start GIGGLING. Lady Adela shows a half-smile herself. She WHISPERS something else and the giggling stops.

Also in the room; Amin Effendi (tall, broad face with tiny blue eyes and brown hair, dressed in a white suit). He sits in a corner, holding a doctor's suitcase.

LADY ADELA

(to Soane, subtitled,
in Kurdish)

*You are welcome; your service is upon
my eyes; your health is good, please
God.*

Soane takes a few steps forward, makes a slight bow, and reciprocates the best wishes with a slightly anxious tone of voice.

SOANE

The honor is all mine, may God bless
you and grant you good health.

LADY ADELA

I heard your journey was not a
pleasant one, for which I offer my
sincere apologies.

SOANE

(extreme deference)

Apologies are out of place, Adela
Khanum. It was not your fault.

Lady Adela raises her voice as if insulted, but she clearly means well:

LADY ADELA

Sure it was! And if it was not mine,
than it was my husband's, for I am
the wife of Uthman Pasha, the head of
the Jaf Kurds, and as these are the
Jaf Lands, we carry and assume all
responsibility for all who travel it!

Soane smiles tremulously; Lady Adela senses Soane's nervousness. She cocks her head and adjusts her tone of voice to sound inviting, more like a concerned mother:

LADY ADELA (cont'd)
Tell me, how is your hand?

Soane raises his wounded hand; the handkerchief is stained with dried blood.

SOANE
I am afraid it will inflame.

Lady Adela looks at Amin Effendi and nods up at him in a commandeering, almost apprehensive manner.

LADY ADELA
(stern)
Get up and take care of him!

Amin Effendi rises quickly, picks up his suitcase, and hastes himself towards Soane with some jerky movements. He kneels before Soane, takes a look at his wounded hand, and slowly unwinds the bloody handkerchief.

SOANE
(moaning, in pain)
Aaah...

Amin Effendi looks up at Soane wild-eyed and menacing:

AMIN EFFENDI
(German accent)
Does it hurt?

Soane's head slightly flinches back as his eyebrows squish together:

SOANE
(quizzical)
It is alright...

Amin Effendi disposes of the handkerchief and opens his suitcase. He takes out wound disinfectant, applies it to a piece of cotton, and cleans the wound. Soane MOANS some more.

LADY ADELA
(to Soane)
I heard you are a doctor yourself. Is it true?

Amin Effendi brooding eyes dart at Soane.

SOANE

(smiling dismissively)

No, I am afraid I am not... Rumors spread fast around here.

Amin Effendi applies adhesive strips to Soane's wound and bandages it.

Soane looks at Amin Effendi in wonder, unsure what to make of his inhospitable behavior.

Lady Adela is oblivious to their exchange and continues her inquiry, questions which Soane has answered many times before, but which he now seems to be at peace with answering a thousand times more if necessary.

LADY ADELA

I see... It is not important anyway. I was told you are a Persian from Shiraz. Is that true?

Soane glances at Amin Effendi bandaging his hand and then looks up at Lady Adela:

SOANE

It is.

Lady Adela throws her arms up in excitement:

LADY ADELA

(relishing)

How wonderful! You are the first Shirazi in Halabja! You will have to tell me about Shiraz and teach me your dialect, for it is the true Persian speech, the sweetest of all God's languages!

Amin Effendi closes his suitcase and gets up. He gives Soane a final wolfish glance, but this escapes Soane's attention for he is gleaming because of Lady Adela's excitement.

SOANE

It is the least I could do to repay you for your hospitality and generosity.

Lady Adela smiles mysteriously and signals Maid One to stop fanning her. She rises and hardens her voice:

LADY ADELA
 (glaring at Amin
 Effendi)
 Are you done?

Amin Effendi nods nervously and then addresses Soane:

AMIN EFFENDI
 (taut)
 Your wound should heal well. I will
 replace your bandage in a week. Take
 it easy in the meantime.

SOANE
 Thank you.

LADY ADELA
 (to Soane)
 I have important matters to attend
 to...
 (smiling at Piruza)
 Piruza is getting married.

Piruza blushes; Maid One and Maid Two resume their GIGGLING.

LADY ADELA (cont'd)
 (to Soane)
 You are, of course, invited to the
 wedding.

Soane smiles and pays obeisance to Lady Adela and Piruza:

SOANE
 It would be an honor.

LADY ADELA
 My son TAHIR BEG wishes to speak to
 you. He is a learned man like
 yourself, and I am sure you will
 enjoy each others company. Now, if
 you will excuse me.

Lady Adela rises and walks towards the exit. Her Maids
 follow her like ducklings. Soane smiles at them in passing,
 but is suddenly interrupted by...

AMIN EFFENDI
 (worried, leaning
 onto Soane)
 You really aren't a doctor?

INT./EXT. TAHIR BEG'S MANSION, ROOFTOP ROOM - DAY

A three-sided room opening onto the mansion's roof. Two ornamented wooden pillars stand in the room's open section. The room is well-carpeted and its walls are lined with high benches. TWO ARMED MEN stand guard on the roof.

Soane sits next to Tahir Beg, a well-built man in his 40s with piercing blue eyes and a fair mustache. Soane, a bug-eyed TURKISH DEPUTY in full uniform, the Merchant, and Amin Effendi observe silence as they watch Tahir Beg read a book attentively. We do not know what he is reading, but it has clearly captivated him. He is lost in his thoughts.

After some moments, he closes it and puts it on the table in front of him. He turns his attention to Soane:

TAHIR BEG

Hafez! The greatest Persian poet.
Have you been to this tomb?

Soane cracks a smile and nods in acknowledgment.

SOANE

Naturally.

Tahir Beg has a poker face. His forehead puckers as he takes a hard look at Soane:

TAHIR BEG

Shiraz is no minor place, and there are many roads leading to it, but few get there via Halabja. So I wonder; where did you come from, and why did you take this...

(raising his eyebrows)

unconventional route?

Soane has a hunted look in his eyes; this is the first time someone questions not his presence, but his choice of route. He does not have an answer ready and forces a smile to alleviate suspicion:

SOANE

My journey started in
Constantinople --

The Turkish Deputy turns his body to Soane excitedly:

TURKISH DEPUTY

(perplexed)

Constantinople!?

TAHIR BEG
 (stern, to Turkish
 Deputy)
 Let the man speak!

The Turkish Deputy gives Tahir Beg a dirty look.

Soane's tense posture slumps at this relieving interruption. His levelheadedness allows him to quickly think of something plausible, which he delivers calmly and confidently:

SOANE

Well, my first destination was Beirut. From there, I had two viable options to get to Shiraz; to cross the unbearable heat and great nothingness of the Syrian and Iraqi Deserts, or from Aleppo via Kurdistan... The choice was easily made. Besides, I have fond memories of Kermanshah's Kurds, and God willing, I will see some of those old acquaintances in a few weeks.

Soane stares at Tahir Beg quizzically, waiting for a reaction, waiting for his unreadable face to change... and slowly, a broad smile creeps onto Tahir Beg's face. Tahir Beg slams his fists on the table in excitement:

TAHIR BEG

That explains your knowledge of Kurdish!

The Turkish Deputy moves closer to Soane and claps him on his shoulders. Soane turns - his smile vanishes at the sight of the intrusive Turkish Deputy.

TURKISH DEPUTY

So you have been to Constantinople?
 Why did you leave the world's bride?

Soane glazes at him disdainfully, but remains polite and attempts to dismiss him and his questions:

SOANE

Oh, I could never stay in the same place for long. If it was not for Lady Adela's insistence, I would have already left Halabja.

Soane turns his back, but is pat on his shoulders again:

TURKISH DEPUTY

There is no need for politeness or etiquette. These are not princes and princesses, although they imagine themselves to be! The era of Kurdish Kings and Queens is long gone and this...

(looking at Tahir Beg
disdainfully)

these pretensions...are but temporary renovations of what is permanently lost.

(beating his chest)

Turkish might shall crush and take what is left here, too!

Tahir Beg doesn't disturb his solid composure, but glazes ahead and juts his chin.

SOAN

(sarcastically)

I believe you, I experienced Turkish might first hand en-route to Sulaimania.

Tahir Beg and the Merchant raise a satisfactory half-smile.

The Turkish Deputy adjusts his posture to sit up straight. He looks stern and proud, for Soane's sarcasm clearly escaped him:

TURKISH DEPUTY

(to the others)

You see? What have I been telling you!

(to Soane)

Don't spend a second longer than necessary in this cesspool. If I were you --

TAHIR BEG

(scowling)

Why did you not stay in Constantinople? It would have conduced to everybody's comfort!

The Turkish Deputy rises with celerity. He has a face like thunder and leaves the room without saying another word.

HALABJA MERCHANT

Finally!

Tahir Beg produces a cigar box and offers Soane one; Soane accepts and puts it in his pocket. Tahir Beg puts the cigar box away, rises, and invites Soane to follow him on to the rooftop. Soane does and follows him, and as they walk:

TAHIR BEG
So, Ghulam Hussain, what other languages do you speak?

SOANE
(cocking his head)
Well, I also know some Turkish, Arabic, and French.

TAHIR BEG
(pleasantly surprised)
French?

Tahir Beg stops walking. Soane stops a second later. Then, Tahir Beg turns to face Soane:

TAHIR BEG (cont'd)
(in French)
Et moi aussi, je sais un peu.

SOANE
(subtitled, in French)
Everything has humble beginnings.

They smile at each other and continue walking with their hands clasped behind their backs.

TAHIR BEG
(nonchalantly)
So, what are your thoughts on the Bosnian Crisis? It seems like the Empire's days are counted...

Tahir Beg turns to look at the room; we see that Amin Effendi has left.

SOANE
Oh, I don't follow politics that closely, I don't think --

TAHIR BEG
I just wanted to lead you away from Amin Effendi. He believes you are an accomplished doctor and is afraid you will take his place. He is deceitful and may try to discomfit you.

They stop walking. Soane laughs, as if to brush it off:

SOANE
Oh, that's alright. I already told
him I am not.

TAHIR BEG
(probing gaze)
Just be on your guard.

INT. SOANE'S ROOM - NIGHT

Soane is quietly smoking Tahir Beg's cigar in his room, he looks absent and deep in thought.

We hear KNOCKING on his door.

Soane remains unmoved.

KNOCK KNOCK

This time, Soane registers it. He raises his eyebrows and whispers to himself in wonder:

SOANE
At this hour?

He puts his cigar out and unlatches the door; we see Amin Effendi. He wears an *abba* (black cape) over his head and acts surreptitiously:

SOANE (cont'd)
(surprised, strained
voice)
Amin Effendi?!

AMIN EFFENDI
(whispering, in
French)
*Che voulez un... un ... wurd, petit,
peu de nitrtate d'argent pour des
darman... medecang, c'est tres
necessaire.*

SOANE
You need nitrate silver? I am sorry,
I --

Amin Effendi looks over his shoulders and enters Soane's room without invitation. Soane looks completely taken away, lost for words. Amin Effendi lowers his *abba*; he looks wanly, but it somehow seems feigned. He holds Soane by his shoulders and starts half-whispering to him:

AMIN EFFENDI

You are, sir, a civilized man; I too am a civilized man, for I was not always thus;-my father was a distinguished doctor in Constantinople, and I was educated in the best schools and colleges. It was ill-fortune that sent me to the East, and an execrable stroke of bad luck that landed me here among the savages of Kurdistan. It is now thirteen years that I languish here, and I have lost the power, even if I had the means, to return to the Vaterland, whose customs and language I only remember as one remembers a beautiful dream.

(shaking Soane)

Ah, sir, why did you ever leave civilization and comfort and trust yourself among these cut-throats, these brigands?!

Soane removes Amin Effendi's hands from his shoulders and looks unconcerned by Amin Effendi's worries.

SOANE

My country lies much farther yet, and as you well know this is but a stage upon the way there, but I am well content to stay wherever I find kindness, as I do from those whom you call...

(frowning)

savages.

Amin Effendi pouts his lips and his wanly look slowly transforms into an annoyed wolfish one:

AMIN EFFENDI

(accidentally raising his voice)

You know not the depths of duplicity and insincerity in which the life of this place is sunk!

(correcting tone of voice, whispering)

Even those who smile upon your face, frown at your back and seek to destroy you, and it is for that I come to warn you.

Amin Effendi takes Soane's shoulders and leans onto him:

AMIN EFFENDI (cont'd)
 You see, there is a feeling against you. Last year, a foreigner came here under pretenses similar to yours. He turned out to be a Russian spy, and Tahir Beg had him shot. He suspects you of being a Persian spy, which is why he examined you this morning.

SOANE
 Examined?!

A sly, hopeful smile creeps onto Amin Effendi's face:

AMIN EFFENDI
 Yes... yes... and he was for having you shot! But I, knowing your excellence, pleaded and gave my own guarantee that you were but what you professed to be. He relinquished the subject, but if you will take my advice, you will not extend your stay.

He draws Soane even closer to him:

AMIN EFFENDI (cont'd)
 Forget about the wedding.

Soane lets out an INCREDULOUS GASP and leans away from Amin Effendi:

SOANE
 I... what I don't understand, you came here as fugitive thirteen years ago, and by Lady Adela's beneficence, you possess house, clothes, wife, children, and the means to keep them all. What you say does not --

AMIN EFFENDI
 (raising his voice
 again)
 Ah, sir!

He takes a quick look behind him and corrects his voice once more while remaining secretive and evasive in both tone and language:

AMIN EFFENDI (cont'd)
 You know the old German proverb: the mountain looks fine from afar, but how disappointing when under it. Such
 (MORE)

AMIN EFFENDI (cont'd)
 is but too true of this place! Take
 my advice, my friend, flee from this
 nest of scorpions before they sting
 you to death; quit this town of
 hungry vultures while the flesh
 remains upon your bones and before it
 grows on theirs.

Amin Effendi throws the abba over his head and leaves.

INT. LADY ADELA'S MANSION, RECEPTION HALL - DAY

TWENTY MERCHANTS, a PRIEST, a KURDISH MULLAH, a RABBI, and
 FOUR HAMAVANDS (from here on referred to as "Reception
 Crowd") occupy benches lined against the walls. All are
 dressed in their finest outfits and all carry daggers - the
 Clergy included. Stacks of rifles rest against free walls.

Lady Adela sits on a raised chair. Her Maids are fanning her
 and carrying her cigarettes and drinks. Sitting next to Lady
 Adela are her sons Tahir Beg and MAJID BEG, a 45-year-old
 stern-looking man with a grave face and fair complexion. You
 wouldn't tell him apart from a Scottish Highlander. Both her
 sons sit erect with a strong posture and with an unreadable
 gaze in their fierce eyes.

The atmosphere is convivial; the Reception Crowd are
 chatting and laughing among themselves.

Lady Adela's attention is focused on a beautiful GOLDEN SILK
 HANDKERCHIEF, which she inspects with great care. MORE
 CLOTHS are spread out before her, all brought by a JEWISH
 MERCHANT.

LADY ADELA
 (to Piruza)
 What do you think of this
 handkerchief?

PIRUZA
 I like it a lot.

Lady Adela smiles.

LADY ADELA
 We will take this and
 (pointing at cloths
 spread out before
 her)
 everything else you presented.

The Jewish Merchant smiles contentedly and writes her order down on a...

CLOSE ON BROWN PIECE OF PAPER WITH HEBREW WRITING

JEWISH MERCHANT (O.S.)
 Excellent choices, Adela Khanum,
 excellent choices! All of the best
 silk from Kashan!

The Jewish Merchant puts his paper away and walks to the gate. As he approaches it, the Gatekeeper opens the gate and we see Soane stand in the corridor.

The Jewish Merchant walks out of the Reception Hall as Soane enters it - the gate is immediately shut behind them.

LADY ADELA
 (jerking her head
 back in surprise)
 Ghulam Hussain?

The gate is kicked open.

TWO RIDERS (RIDER 1 and RIDER 2; rough-looking armed men in scarlet boots) stump in, leading between them an ARAB ROBBER (20s, skinny, wearing a single dirty garment, barefooted, and carrying a rusty chain around his neck). Soane moves aside for them.

The Two Riders continue to thrust the Arab Robber forward forcefully, then push him on the ground in front of Lady Adela's feet. She looks down on him fiercely.

Everyone gives the Arab Robber cold stares. Except Soane. He has gone completely still.

The Arab Robber shrinks and shivers while rasping breaths. His eyes bulge out, unable to blink. He looks around in complete terror; never has he seen so wild and fierce-looking a gathering.

Lady Adela cocks her head and flashes her ferocious eyes at him from under her turban with hanging tassels.

The Reception Crowd BURSTS OUT IN LAUGHTER.

The Arab Robber's entire body is trembling; he looks sick with apprehension and stares into Lady Adela's eyes pleadingly.

LADY ADELA (cont'd)
 (stern)
 Quiet!

And it is quiet before she has even finished the word.

LADY ADELA (cont'd)
 (to The Riders)
 What is the cause of this man's
 apparition?

Rider 1 steps forward.

RIDER 1
 Adela Khanum, you see the chain
 around his neck?

LADY ADELA
 I see it. What of it?

Rider 1 slaps the Arab Robber on the back of his head;
 LAUGHING ensues. The Arab Robber CRIES, which is met with
 repetitive and mischievous replies:

RECEPTION CROWD
 (subtitled, in Arabic)
Be quiet!/Be quiet!/Be quiet!

LADY ADELA
 Alright, enough!

The Reception Crowd stops.

LADY ADELA (cont'd)
 (to Rider 1)
 Go ahead.

RIDER 1
 You see, he stole this chain
 (gently pulls it)
 from a poor KURDISH PEASANT who saved
 his life and opened his home to him.

The menacing Reception Crowd lashes out at the Arab Robber:

CONGREGATION
 (subtitled, in Arabic)
*Coward!/Tfuu/Tfuu/Shame on you!/
 Honorless!*

We see FLASHING EYES, BUGGED OUT EYES, and TERRIFIED EYES -
 and finally the face those terrified eyes belong to: the
 Arab Robber's.

LADY ADELA

(sternly)

Let the man speak!

(nods up at Rider 1)

RIDER 1

In any case, although a sad and cowardice act, the full story is worth to be told for I am sure it will amuse you as much as it amused us. You see...

MONTAGE - VARIOUS

A) EXT. SHAHR-I-ZUR PLAIN - DAY - The Arab Robber is dragging himself across rocky hills; his mouth is dry, his eyes feverish and over-bright, and he has lost one of his shoes. He grabs fistfuls of his hair and pulls it in desperation. It is boiling hot... and he is lost.

B) EXT. SHAHR-I-ZUR PLAIN, HAMLET - SAME - we see a HOUSE AND SHED on top of a lonely hill. The Arab Robber's hopeless gaze turns into an alert one as he hastes himself towards with determination, crawling over the hill.

C) EXT. HOUSE - SAME - The Arab Robber knocks on the door and windows furiously. The Kurdish Peasant (a tiny man in his 60s with long gray hair and beard) opens the door and is dramatically embraced by the Arab Robber.

ARAB ROBBER

(subtitled, in Arabic)

Water... Water...

The Kurdish Peasant steps out, takes the Arab Robber's hand, and leads him into...

D) INT. THE SHED - CONTINUOUS - and provides him with water and bread. The Kurdish Peasant tilts his head and makes strong eye contact with the Arab Robber; he is concerned for him.

KURDISH PEASANT

(subtitled, in
Kurdish)

You can stay here tonight.

The Arab Robber reaches for the Kurdish Peasant's right hand to kiss it, but he withdraws his hand and leaves without saying a word.

E) INT. SHED - DUSK - we see a heavy RUSTY CHAIN hanging onto the shed's wall. There is also an OLD BICYCLE, an AXE,

and a SAW. The Arab Robber takes the rusty chain off the wall and winds it around his waist under his shirt. He opens the shed's door, scans the area to make sure it is clear, and runs out.

F) EXT. SHAHR-I-ZUR PLAIN - DAY - The Kurdish Peasant is on his donkey and in pursuit of the Arab Robber. The Kurdish Peasant holds a cane and waves it threateningly while SHOUTING at the Arab Robber.

The distance between them gets closer and closer; the Arab Robber unwinds and drops the chain from his waist, but falls over his ankles in the process. The Kurdish Peasant gets off his donkey and hastes himself towards him; he picks up the rusty chain en-route and lashes out at the Arab Robber:

KURDISH PEASANT (cont'd)
*I opened my home to you, and to thank
 me, you robbed me?! I will take care
 of your ills!*

He beats the Arab Robber with his cane.

The Arab Robber starts CRYING and throws his arms up in defense as he pathetically crawls away on his back.

The Kurdish Peasant uses this opportunity to grab the Arab Robber's legs. He swiftly ties the chain around his ankles, rendering him immobile.

KURDISH PEASANT (cont'd)
Get cooked!

The Kurdish Peasant vamooses.

G) EXT. SHAHR-I-ZUR PLAIN - DAY - The Arab Robber lies in the plain, motionless. His face is burned and his clothes are soaked from sweat. Then, his EYES START BLINKING.

We see the silhouette of the Two Riders approach from far.

END OF MONTAGE

BACK TO SCENE

RIDER 1
 ...and that is how we found him.

LAUGHTER OVER SERIES OF SHOTS

- 1) The Priest, laughing manically;
- 2) A Hamavand, with a brittle smile;

3) The Rabbi, with a gummy smile exposing his three precious teeth;

4) Soane, with a broad smile, and;

5) The Arab Robber with a tremulous smile, tears pouring down his pitiful face.

The laughter subdues and the smiles vanish.

All eyes are expectantly on Lady Adela:

LADY ADELA

What shall be the fate of him who would steal from a Kurd? Are not the Kurds supposed to be the worst robbers on earth?

(throwing her hand at
the Arab Robber
dismissively)

Take him away and loose him!

The Gatekeeper opens the gate.

Terror overtakes the Arab Robber's face: he looks confused, terrified, and desperate all at once. The Two Riders haul him to his feet and drag him out of the room when his WAILING intensifies. He puts up a struggle as he is hauled out, but he is no match for the rough riders. Just before he is dragged out of the room, he shoots a last pleading glance at Lady Adela, and then the gate is shut behind them.

LADY ADELA (cont'd)

(to Soane)

Apologies for the disruption. How can I be of your service?

Soane, who was laughing moments ago, looks dejected.

SOANE

I have come to bid you all farewell... I am leaving for Shiraz at once.

Tahir Beg, Majid Beg, and Lady Adela exchange puzzled glances. They address Soane quickly after each other:

LADY ADELA

Leaving?

TAHIR BEG

Why would you leave?

MAJID BEG
 What is the rush?
 (concerned)
 Did something happen?

Soane looks wry.

SOANE
 (at Majid Beg)
 You should ask him...
 (looking at Tahir Beg)
 I am not accustomed to receiving
 night messengers of evil...
 (direct stare that
 lacks warmth at Lady
 Adela)
 and it is clear that I am not wanted
 here, for the ancient Kurdish law of
 hospitality is not so easily
 violated.

Tahir Beg and Majid Beg's erect body postures have loosened.
 They look puzzled and lost for words, whereas Lady Adela
 looks pained:

LADY ADELA
 (at Tahir Beg)
 What is he talking about? What have
 you done, you imbecile!?

Tahir Beg glowers and jumps up.

TAHIR BEG
 (to Lady Adela)
 I swear to God I have no idea what he
 is talking about!
 (to Soane)
 I demand an explanation for these...
 these outrageous accusations! I have
 been nothing but good to you!

MAJID BEG
 (placating)
 Ghulam Hussain, tell us what
 happened, for we are all puzzled at
 these serious accusations.

Soane hardens his voice.

SOANE
 Alright... Yesterday night, Amin
 Effendi paid me a visit. He told me
 of Tahir Beg's intentions of
 (MORE)

SOANE (cont'd)
 executing me, and that if I were to
 live, I should leave Halabja at once.

Lady Adela nods up at the Gatekeeper:

LADY ADELA
 Go fetch Amin Effendi.

The Gatekeeper nods affirmatively and leaves at once.

Tahir Beg looks quizzical (as if still processing what he
 just heard) and then (as if he has finally registered it)
 BURSTS OUT LAUGHING.

SOANE
 (looking grave)
 What is so funny?

TAHIR BEG
 (relieved)
 Don't you know this foolish creature
 Amin Effendi?

Tahir Beg sits down.

Lady Adela looks wild-eyed.

LADY ADELA
 (to herself)
 He has ruined our name and
 reputation.
 (to Soane)
 Take no notice of Amin Effendi. He is
 a mean man among the meanest, and an
 incompetent fool. He fears you will
 replace him, for he firmly believes
 you to be a doctor.

TAHIR BEG
 Ignore that vile creature. He is a
 renegade, just like his father.

MAJID BEG
 (to himself, shaking
 his head)
 What did we not do for him?

LADY ADELA
 (to Soane)
 You must know, and you must believe
 us when we say we had nothing to do
 with it. We took Amin Effendi in and
 took care of him like one of our own.

(MORE)

LADY ADELA (cont'd)
Only a deceitful, little-minded individual could disgrace those who support him like he did.

Soane's flat look does not change, neither does his determined tone of voice:

SOANE
I am afraid my comfort has been affected to such an extent that there is no other option than to shorten my stay.

Tahir Beg's face crumples as he sighs dejectedly. Lady Adela makes a long face, but her voice is calm and understanding:

LADY ADELA
Normally, I would try to persuade you to stay, but I can hear a strong conviction in your voice, and I will respect that.

MAJID BEG
Four of our best horsemen will accompany and guard you on your way to Khanaqin.

Soane makes a slight bow and places his right hand to his heart.

SOANE
I am very grateful.

TAHIR BEG
And don't you worry about Amin Effendi. He will get his due!

LADY ADELA
There is but one thing... the wedding. I would be terribly hurt if you did not attend it. It is tonight; what is a day's delay on a journey as long as yours?

SOANE
(smiling)
Alright.

Soane walks to the gate when it is thrown open. Amin Effendi is pushed forward by the Gatekeeper. Amin Effendi and Soane exchange serious glances as they walk past each other. Soane exits the Reception Hall and enters...

INT. LADY ADELA'S MANSION, CORRIDOR - CONTINUOUS

and the gate is closed behind him.

LADY ADELA (O.S.)
 (subtitled, in
 Kurdish)
*What did we not do for you? You
 animal, you ingrate, you son of a
 pimp!*

Soane looks back at the gate with a mischievous smile.

AMIN EFFENDI (O.S.)
Adela Khanum, I --

LADY ADELA (O.S.)
*What? What? May Khanum's fate be
 black!*

EXT. HALABJA TOWN SQUARE - DAY

A little square with some trees offering shade. On one side is the bazaar, on another side some houses, and on another side a row of booths where MERCHANTS are busy roasting kebabs. A raised platform stands in the square's center. There are no more than TWENTY HALABJAEES.

A sorrowful-looking Amin Effendi takes to the platform.

HALABJAE 1
 (subtitled, in
 Kurdish)
You again, Amin Effendi?

Amin Effendi's posture is slumped, his shoulders hunched. He cups his hands around his mouth and starts shouting to attract attention:

AMIN EFFENDI
 Oh people of Halabja, oh good people
 of Halabja! Gather around me, for I
 have sinned! Gather around me, for I
 have to confess! Gather around me...

The Halabjaees slowly gather around Amin Effendi. Some of them smile, others look curious, but no one looks surprised.

AMIN EFFENDI (cont'd)
 for I long for your condescension,
 and, if I may be worthy, your
 forgiveness. My crime is as such: I
 (MORE)

AMIN EFFENDI (cont'd)
 brought shame and disgrace upon the
 good name of Lady Adela, and thus by
 extension on the House of Jaff. I did
 this knowingly and willingly and my
 only aim was self-enrichment. Lady
 Adela said: "You shall confess to the
 people of Halabja, for your insults
 extend to them, and I will lay your
 fate in their hands." Oh Good people
 of Halabja, what shall be my fate?

(looking haunted,
 face cast down in
 shame)

What shall be the fate of poor Amin
 Effendi?

The Halabjaees look at him with pity, some giving him
 clenched half-smiles, while others start laughing:

HALABJAEES

Get down, you fool!/How much
 forgiveness do you need?/You are
 lucky there is a wedding tonight!

He has been pardoned, but also humiliated - vengeance and
 resentment radiates from his eyes.

INT. LADY ADELA'S MANSION, RECEPTION HALL - LATER

Lady Adela, Tahir Beg, and Soane are having tea when Amin
 Effendi enters the room.

LADY ADELA

(stern)

What is it? What do you want?

Amin Effendi looks down, but darts his eyes at Soane:

AMIN EFFENDI

I have been forgiven.

LADY ADELA

(sarcastically)

Congratulations.

(motions at the gate

with her hand)

Go away then, leave us alone.

Amin Effendi shuffles in his place, eyes still cast down.

LADY ADELA (cont'd)
 (brusquely)
 What is it? Do you want to say
 something? Speak up!

AMIN EFFENDI
 I... I saw the invitation list for
 tonight's wedding. And I discovered
 that...
 (looking up, smiling
 nervously)
 you forgot to invite the Sheikh of
 Biara. I believe he should be
 present, he always is.

Lady Adela looks at Tahir Beg inquiringly.

TAHIR BEG
 (shrugging)
 I guess so?

LADY ADELA
 (nodding up)
 Go ahead, make yourself useful!

Amin Effendi genuflects.

AMIN EFFENDI
 Thank you, Adela Khanum.

EXT. LADY ADELA'S MANSION, COURTYARD - NIGHT

A large enclosed courtyard crowded with ATTENDEES (men and women) dressed in their finest outfits.

THIRTY-SIX YARSAN KURDS (adult men and women and boys and girls; all dressed in their finest clothes) have gathered around a rectangular fountain in the courtyard's center. They are all playing the Kurdish *tembûr* (fretted string instrument) in unison. Over their MYSTICAL INSTRUMENTAL MUSIC, we see:

Lady Adela's mansion with an *iwan* (a vaulted space with one open side) opening onto the courtyard. Lady Adela, Soane, Majid Beg, the Merchant, the bride Piruza, the groom HASAN (20s, handsome with a stubble beard), the Kurdish Mullah, and Lady Adela look enchanted by the music.

The table at which they are seated is decorated with large fruit bowls; APPLES displayed prominently.

At the foot of the raised iwan are TWO WEDDING MUSICIANS; one holds a dahol drum, the other a zurna hornpipe. From their position, we see a two-story brick building (lights turned off) and a wall with a gate opening onto the street on the northern-end of the courtyard.

Now, the Yarsan Kurds START SINGING:

YARSAN KURDS

(in Persian)

*Yeh shabi zar o parishan
dare meykhaneh zadam; Ze
ghame hejr o faghanash
misuzad jan o tanam.*

*Goftamash: "Baz kon, saghie
man!*

*Manam an motrebe khosh keh
shekaste saze delam."*

*Goftamash: "Mey bedeh! Jame
payapey bedeh!" Ze gharar
rafteh az dast, amadeh ast
jan beh labam.*

*To bebin kasehye chashmam,
benegar sorkhiye ashkam;
Benegar beh hale mastam, beh
ghame hejr o faraghash.*

Yar paak ast, tireh manam.

*Goftamash: "Saghie man,
benavaz in dele man! Beh
saram shoor nava."*

Beh fadayat jan o tanam.

YARSAN KURDS (SUBTITLE)

One night, wailing and mourning, I knocked the winehouse's door; The pain of our separation is burning my heart and body alike.

I said to him: "Open up, oh, dear wine-bearer! For I am that merry bard who has broken his heart's instrument!"

I said to him: "Give me wine! Let it flow continuously!" This unrest of mine has my very soul overflowing.

You, see this cup that is my eye, look at the scarlet of my tears; Look at my drunkenness, at the pain of his distance, our separation."

The friend is pure and I am dark.

I said to him: "Dear wine-bearer, soothe this heart of mine! My head is brimming with passion."

To you I offer my soul and body.

The Yarsan Kurds rise, kiss their tembûr, and hold it above their heads.

Everyone starts CHEERING and APPLAUDING.

Lady Adela rises - and everyone goes quiet.

LADY ADELA

Bravo! Bravo! That is the true
Persian speech! Combined with your
Kurdish throats, it truly is the
sweetest of all God's languages!

An ELDERLY YARSAN KURD steps forward and makes a slight bow:

ELDERLY YARSAN KURD
(subtitled, in Kurdish)
*We are always at your
service, Adela Khanum.*

SOANE
(whispering to Halabja
Merchant)
Who are they?

HALABJA MERCHANT

Adherents of our old Yarsan Religion.

The Yarsan Kurds clear the courtyard.

Lady Adela sits down and the Kurdish Mullah rises. He half-
turns to Piruza and Hasan and announces:

KURDISH MULLAH

We are gathered here tonight to
celebrate the marriage of Hasan and
(smiling at her)
Piruza. Of course, this comes as no
surprise to any of us!

The Attendees laugh.

KURDISH MULLAH (cont'd)

Piruza and Hasan *can*, I already
married you and this is but your
wedding celebration. I am not here to
renew your vows, but to announce in
front of everyone the legality and
approval of your marriage, for we all
know some *evil eyes* were set to make
you our *Mem and Zin*. They did not
succeed, for your marriage is one of
love, and our queen
(looking at Lady
Adela)

is a righteous one, and not a petty
lord set to destroy what makes life
worth living. I wish you both a long
and happy life together... and with
many, many beautiful children!

Hasan and Piruza blush.

Lady Adela gives Piruza a motherly smile and rises:

LADY ADELA

Let us hear the sound of the dahol
and zurna, and lets dance until the
break of dawn!

The Wedding Musicians move forward and slowly make their way to the courtyard's center while playing their instruments in an ever increasing rhythm of hilarious up-beat melodies.

Majid Beg and many Attendees hop and skip to the courtyard's center; they hold hands and form two semi-circles around the Wedding Musicians while dancing to the captivating and joyous sounds of their instruments. Throughout, we hear men SHOUT cheerfully and women let out ULULATIONS.

Soane looks radiant and beatific with a bright twinkle in his eyes.

Lady Adela notices and smiles at him contentedly:

LADY ADELA (cont'd)

(to Soane,
rhetorically)

Do you regret waiting the extra day?

SOANE

I wouldn't have missed it for
anything!

(beat)

I just wonder... where is Tahir Beg?

LADY ADELA

He had some important business to
attend to, but will join us shortly.

SOANE

(smiling)

I am glad to hear that.

We see some more of Soane watching the tirelessly dancing Kurds.

Then, slowly, his smile fades. Soane squints his eyes and we see the...

ZOOM ON COURTYARD'S NORTHERN ENTRANCE

Where we see Tahir Beg lash out (inaudibly) at a terrified Amin Effendi. Tahir Beg makes threatening moves with his hands - as if to hit him, but he refrains from actually doing so.

Soane's smile has faltered completely. He looks worried and nudges the Merchant, who is moving his upper body to the sound of the music while snapping his fingers; he is in his element and completely oblivious to what Soane has seen.

The Merchant looks at Soane, slightly irritated...

SOANE (cont'd)
(nodding at Tahir Beg
and Amin Effendi)

Look!

HALABJA MERCHANT
Don't you mind Amin Effendi!

The Merchant resumes his quirky dance.

We see Tahir Beg calm down. Then, he looks up and locks eyes with Soane. Tahir Beg walks towards the iwan.

As he does, we see LIGHT TURN ON in one of the upper rooms of the courtyard's northern building.

Tahir Beg ascends the few steps leading to the iwan and everyone (except Lady Adela) rises to greet him, but before they have fully risen...

TAHIR BEG
Please sit, don't inconvenience
yourselves.

and they comply.

LADY ADELA
(subtitled, to Tahir
Beg, in Kurdish)
Did he speak the truth?

Tahir Beg looks crestfallen. He nods and lights a cigarette. He offers Soane one as well, who accepts.

SOANE
Thank you.

Tahir Beg offers to light his cigarette; Soane presents it to be lit. As Tahir Beg lights it for him:

TAHIR BEG
So, Mister Soane, do you enjoy the
wedding?

SOANE
Yes, very much so --

Soane's eyes widen. He freezes in his place. His hands start trembling and he drops his cigarette:

SOANE (cont'd)
 (stuttering)
 I... I...

Tahir Beg and Lady Adela smile at Soane reassuringly, as if they have known all along. Everyone else is oblivious to what is going on; the music and dancing goes on uninterruptedly in the background.

TAHIR BEG
 Relax, Mister Soane. You are among
 friends.

LADY ADELA
 Always have been.

Soane's grave face slowly transforms into a shameful one. He looks down to avoid eye contact with Lady Adela and Tahir Beg.

SOANE
 How...
 (slowly raising his
 head)
 how did you...

Soane has a curious gleam in his eyes.

Tahir Beg makes a half-turn towards the northern building and points at the lit room. A MAN's side-face appears in the window. We can not yet make out who it is. The Man slowly turns his head towards us, and then we see...

CLOSE ON SHEIKH FROM SINA

He smiles the same sinister smile as on the day he met Soane.

The music slowly fades.

Soane, absent and unaware of being addressed, gazes back at him in consternation for.

LADY ADELA (O.S.)
 Mister Soane? Ghulam Hussain? Ghulam
 Hussain?

Tahir Beg ticks Soane on his shoulders; Soane's eyes flicker a few times, he startles and looks around frantically.

SOANE

I am sorry...

LADY ADELA

Out of curiosity... what brings an Englishman to this forgotten corner of Kurdistan?

Soane looks at her judiciously. Lady Adela and Tahir Beg smile back reassuringly, as if to tell him he can talk freely. They have an air of serenity around them. Soane's tense posture eases. Lady Adela and Tahir Beg look at him expectantly. Soane looks up, and calmly explains:

SOANE

As you know by now, I am neither Persian nor Kurd, but an Englishman, born of English parents in England, and brought up in that land... and that fact will perhaps in itself explain my presence here, for you must know that my people are given to wandering over the face of the earth with no other reason than to see it and the people it supports. I spent nine years of my life in Persia, two of which in Kermanshah of South-Eastern Kurdistan, where I developed a strong liking for its people and language, and resolved to studying it whenever possible. In Constantinople, I made acquaintance with --

TAHIR BEG

Sheikh ul-Islam. You know him as the Sheikh from Sina... a very curious character, to say the least.

Tahir Beg takes a puff from his cigarette.

LADY ADELA

He fled Sina and came to me to raise an army to burn that city to the ground... not knowing it is my native town. I banished him and he left for Constantinople... unfortunately, he returned some time ago. Hearing his desperate pleas to die in his beloved lands, I felt for him, and him posing no real threat, had him retire to Biara, where he lives as a hermit.

SOANE

And it was his passionate speech that convinced me to return to Kurdistan!

TAHIR BEG

But in disguise...

Soane looks Tahir Beg in his eyes. He repeats him, slowly...

SOANE

But in disguise... For as hospitable as you are, as treacherous is the road, and a thousand times more so for an European.

TAHIR BEG

And how tremendous your disguise was!

LADY ADELA

Your secret is safe with us and only you shall tell of its tale. And as long as we have a say in your journey, it shall be the least treacherous of all the world's roads.

Soane swallows and smiles broadly at Lady Adela; he does not need to voice his appreciation - it is known.

Tahir Beg sighs deeply. He looks at Soane shame-faced, and addresses him with obvious reluctance. He keeps looking up and down, so untypical for his confident character.

TAHIR BEG

Mister Soane... Our ways are not yours, and if we are savages, it is not because we refuse to emerge from it... the circumstances of the land shape us, and you have seen what they are in. But promise me, Mister Soane, when you return to Europe, that you do not put off the thoughts and remembrances of Kurdistan, nor let our names slip from your memory...

(strong eye contact
with Soane)

Promise me.

Soane stares right back at him, and, with tremendous conviction:

SOANE

I promise.

Lady Adela walks to the edge of the iwan and shouts out:

LADY ADELA
(subtitled, in
Kurdish)
Dance, dance my Kurds! Dance!

The dahol and zurna are now at their loudest; the two semi-circles of dancing Kurds merge to form a single circle while moving their bodies forwards and backwards passionately in rapid sideways-motions, the LEADING MAN waves his colorful handkerchief in elaborate motions. SHOUTING and ULULATIONS have reached their zenith. If there is anything that can evoke the most vivid and fantastic imagination of ancient Mesopotamia, than this is it.

CLOSE SHOT

of the circle as the dancing Kurds move sideways until the TRAILING MAN comes into our: Majid Beg.

FREEZE FRAME

of him smiling and waving his handkerchief in the air. The drums fade and the STRIDENT ZURNA SOUND overflows into...

PRE-LAP: the BLARING sound of a steamer horn.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. CAPE ST. VINCENT - DAY

SUPERIMPOSE: "Cape St. Vincent, 1923"

A STEAMER (not unlike The Saghalien) flying the British Flag half-mast is near Cape St. Vincent, Europe's south-westernmost point - the vast open North Atlantic Ocean stands in stark contrast with the wild and isolated mountains of Kurdistan.

ELEVEN MEN have gathered on deck: a COOK, SIX CREWMEN, FOUR BRITISH SOLDIERS (unarmed), a BUGLER, and a BRITISH OFFICER.

A COFFIN covered with a British flag rests on a table near the deck's railing.

The British Officer starts announcing, sometimes half-reading from a piece of paper:

BRITISH OFFICER

None of us knew Major Soane closely,
but every one of us know what a
remarkable career he had...

(looking up)

what a remarkable character he was.

(reading again)

Soane was a man of remarkably wide
interests. He was proficient in
subjects so diverse as engineering,
music, and philology. His work on the
Kurdish language should be of lasting
value. He wrote two Kurdish grammars,
and planned to follow them up with a
dictionary, which occupied the last
two years of his life.

(looking up)

We did not see him much aboard, for
even though he was in great pain, he
continued working on his manuscript
tirelessly-sometimes tens hours a
day. This is typical of a man who
loved good work and despised
advertisement - an example for all of
us. His contributions to the
Mesopotamian Campaign shall not be
forgotten.

The British Officer folds his paper and puts it away.

BRITISH OFFICER (cont'd)

God save the Queen!

MEN ON DECK

God save the Queen!

The British Officer nods up at the Bugler, who raises his
bugle and starts blowing it.

BUGLE PLAYING

The Four British Soldiers move towards Soane's coffin and
push it into the sea.

ZOOM OUT FROM THE STEAMER

SOANE (V.O.)

(over ZOOM OUT)

"The tone of this narrative may have
betokened, perhaps, a partiality to the
Kurds ; and I must admit, that having
met from them more genuine kindness
than from any other collection of

(MORE)

SOANE (V.O.) (cont'd)
strangers met elsewhere, I owe them a
large debt of gratitude, the least
return for which is to throw some
light upon a national character
hitherto represented as being but an
epitome of all that is savage,
treacherous, and inhuman."
- Ely Bannister Soane.

FADE OUT

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