

MAJOR SOANE

Screenplay by

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Based on the book
"TO MESOPOTAMIA AND KURDISTAN IN DISGUISE (1912)"
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 Twelve 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 train 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, following the crowd into...

INT. THE CUSTOMS HALL - SAME

a small red-brick hall with high ceilings. The customs line moves fast and it soon becomes apparent 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. 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 hobble on, which is noticed by the Greek Coachman for 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 suspiciously.

GREEK COACHMAN (cont'd)

What is your business with those
Kurdish savages anyway? Why the
interest in their rough tongue?

Soane frowns disapprovingly. Hesitantly, he answers him
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...
(MORE)

SOANE (cont'd)
 (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!

GREEK COACHMAN
 (curiously)
 Know Greek?

SOANE
 I am afraid I don't.

The carriage hits another pothole.

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 hideous wharfs and port comes into our view.

SOANE (cont'd)
 Is it much farther?

The Greek Coachman points 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. PONTOON 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 we can make it out to be a mixture of Turkish, Italian, French, Greek, English, and Armenian.

Soane is standing and holds 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!

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 out to Soane:

GREEK COACHMAN
(in Turkish)
Para.

Soane tilts his head to the side, but quickly smiles understandingly. 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 WITH GALATA TOWER

EXT. A DOWNWARDS-SLOPING ROAD - DAY

A filthy, narrow, downwards-sloping road - but this doesn't stop 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 comes to a slow stop 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.

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; Soane 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 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 adorning its entrance reads "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. 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... is anyone 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:

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 Shiraz *Farsi*...
 (scratching at his temple)
 why would you don a fez?!

SOANE
 (smiling, pointing at his
 fez)
 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. A prideful smile crosses his face.

SHOPKEEPER
 I don't take offense from esteemed guests.
 (inquiringly)
 So... your *Farsi*?

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 of the Shirazi people, so I had to visit. I hope the sign isn't just an advertisement?

The Shopkeeper blinks rapidly, processing what he just heard.

SHOPKEEPER
 (insulted)
"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)
 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 Iran!
 (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 the Kurdish language. Have
 you ever been there?
 (beat)
 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:

SHOPKEEPER
 (excitedly)
 Have you been to *Takht-e Jamshid*?

SOANE
 (blase)
 Needless to say.

The Shopkeeper looks Soane straight in his eyes:

SHOPKEEPER

(melancholic)

We were a great empire once. We
rivalled Greece and Rome. Were
greater than Rome!

SOANE

(uncomfortable)

You still are great.

The Shopkeeper SLAMS his fists on the table and knocks over
the tea glasses.

SHOPKEEPER

(glowering)

Great? Ha! The present dynasty
traces its origins to an eunuch!

(beat)

Eunuch!

Soane glances at the SPILLED TEA expressionlessly and seems
to remember what he is there for. He crosses his arms and
bends over to address the Shopkeeper with a sharp yet
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 condescending laughter.

SHOPKEEPER

No, no... of course not. Try the
Persian Consulate, it is your best
shot.

Soane 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 Flag of Persia. 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 chirping from its walls. A flight of curving stairs goes up to the 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 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

which 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, 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 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 friend told me if anyone knows where to find them, it would be you. And that is why 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 brusquely blows the smoke into Soane's face.

Soane waves the smoke away. He smiles nervously, stunned.

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 leans back, but can't sit still. He makes rapid lip movements, searching 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 pulls his BRITISH PASSPORT out of his jettied pockets and 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.

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. With its barred windows, it looks more like a prison than an inn.

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...
 (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 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 will 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.)
 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 dark rectangular room. Wooden boxes and some earthen water pots are lined against the walls. The floor is covered with a long kilim leading to the far end of the room. There, below a skylight barely 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 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 Kurdish)
*How I wish I was in sunny
 Kurdistan, far away from this
 miserable city.*

The busy Servant turns, surprised. 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.

(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 sense 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.

(scornful)

The longer I stay in this filthy town of sharpening and guile, the more those memories fade. Until one day, they are but a vague memory of a distant past.

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)

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.

(beat)

I don't understand how --

The Sheikh points at his Servant:

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, a smoke curtain surrounding the Sheikh.

We hear INTENSE RAIN POURING

EXT. PORT OF CONSTANTINOPLE - DAY

SUPERIMPOSE: "28 MONTHS LATER"

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

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

On dock, SIX PORTERS: fierce-looking men, carrying packs of stuffed leather on their backs. They shout and joke INCOMPREHENSIBLY. They are stared at contemptuously by TWO GENTLEMEN. The Six Porters turn and frown at them; the Two Gentlemen 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 BOARDING OFFICIAL, who browses through it quickly, stamps it, and hands it back.

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
Quite a civilized-looking Turk.

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

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

The boarding plank is removed, the Saghalién anchored off.

EXT. BAY OF BEYROUTH - DAY

The Saghalién sails into the Bay of Beyrouth; the city's hills are clearly visible in the distance. The bay is crowded with fisher boats and other steamers.

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

SUPERIMPOSE: "Beyrouth, March 1909"

EXT. PORT OF BEYROUTH - DAY

PORTERS are busy unloading boats, 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 off sweat)

it's remarkably hot.

ENGLISHMAN 2

This will be a magnificent adventure!

They walk off the Salience. Directly behind them: Soane, carrying his own luggage, wearing his black suit and donning his 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:

OVER SPEAKER (V.O.)
(in French, Arabic,
Turkish, and English)
*Attention, passengers: the train to
Riyah, 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 passed cabin: A FREE SEAT. He enters the cabin.

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 surrounded by a few stone buildings and dense 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 Arabic)
*We will never reach Isfahan!/May
God curse them!*

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!
(subtitled, in Arabic)
*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!

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. He is sweating bullets.

FAT FRENCH RAILROAD EMPLOYEE
(subtitled, 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 coming 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 - and he means to injure.

FAT FRENCH RAILROAD EMPLOYEE (cont'd)
*I want to see closed windows and
hear shut beaks! Close!*
(hits window)
Close!
(hits window)
Close!

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 a final insult...

FAT FRENCH RAILROAD EMPLOYEE (cont'd)
Nique ta mères!

but the insult is half-way muffled 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".

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

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 it contentedly. He shows it to his colleague, who beams:

SKINNY TURKISH OFFICIAL
(subtitled, in Turkish)
Excellent!

The Two Turkish Officials rise and leave the cabin. Soane and the German Engineer exchange some confused yet 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 (WATER WHEELS) OF HAMA.

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 hastily, spilling juice all over his uniform.

Soane and the German Engineer look appalled. The German Engineer brings his feet closer together and backs away, but both remain nervously tight-lipped.

Without cleaning his sticky hands, the Fat Turkish Official produces an IDENTITY CARD and presents it to both:

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 produces his little notebook:

FAT TURKISH OFFICIAL (cont'd)

(subtitled, in Turkish)

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

Soane looks back sheepishly, feigning ignorance. He points to the east 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
Persia. Iran.

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

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

GERMAN ENGINEER
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, 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 his exit.

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.

The train is stationary in front of the main terminal, a large red gable-roofed building with an adorning sign reading "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 ARAB COACHMAN:

ARAB 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 Arab Coachman. As they career down a straight, broad road lined with tall palm trees, ALEPPO'S CITADEL comes into our view.

ARAB COACHMAN
 How was your pilgrimage? Was it your
 first time to Mecca? I admire your
 restraint not to show off! Look at
 them, (...)

They pass FOUR PILGRIMS who have all tied a white handkerchief around their heads.

ARAB COACHMAN (V.O.)

(disapprovingly)

I bet they tied the 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 mischievously.

SOANE

Well, I --

ARAB 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 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 a COW out of the building.

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 (late 20s, well-built, dark), its coachman, is busy packing, tying water-pots and samovars outside. He is unaware of his surroundings, completely focused on his job.

Soane stares at him intently for a few moments.

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.

SOANE
(insouciant)
I am not well provisioned for the journey. Could you wait until I pay a visit to the bazaar?

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 his stare. He takes another look at Soane, grins, and bursts out:

SUREN
(subtitled, in Kurdish)
I know Kurmanji!

Soane and puts a hand on Suren's shoulder:

SOANE
(rhetorically)
You know Kurdish?

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

SUREN
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, looking flustered. He reaches for his fez to take it off.

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.

EXT. DESERT - SUNSET

The 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. Silhouette of a MOSQUE on top of

the hill. Around the mosque, the silhouettes 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.

TIME LAPSE - dusk till day

EXT. CARAVANSERAI, MANBIJ - DAY

As the stagecoach leaves the dusty hamlet, they pass FOUR CIRCASSIAN MEN wearing red 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:

SOANE
(unfocused gaze, quietly)
Is it not the memory of home that
keeps you going? A tree has physical
roots, and when it is uprooted, it
dies. A man's roots are not physical
yet still tied to a place. You can
remove him from his land, displace
him, exile him... whatever you want
to call it... but that won't
(MORE)

SOANE (cont'd)
 permanently uproot him, for as long
 as the memory of home is alive, the
 desire to return is as well.

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 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: Mesopotamia's breadbasket.

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!

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.

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 generating propelling power with poles and oars. We see them struggle as they battle against nature.

EXT. EUPHRATES RIVER - SAME

BACK TO STAGECOACH

Soane looks bewildered; he looks at Suren inquiringly.

SUREN

Yes.

(beat)

That is how we cross.

EXT. EUPHRATES RIVER (OTHER SIDE) - LATER

We see the stagecoach ascend the hill from a frontal view (with the Euphrates in the background). The craft is making its way back again.

EXT. BEHIND THE HILL - MOMENTS LATER

The stagecoach is now descending the hill; the roaring of the Euphrates is only faintly 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.

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,
(MORE)

SOANE (V.O.) (cont'd)
 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 Surena 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 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

The SOFT ROARING OF THE TIGRIS RIVER gradually grows louder as the stagecoach continues down a descending dirt path in a left bend.

EXT. PIRA DEHDERI BRIDGE - SAME

As the stagecoach turns right, PIRA DEHDERI BRIDGE comes into our view. The stagecoach crosses the bridge and turns right at the end of it, ascending 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 HERSELF 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. Through it, we see a 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:

SOANE

Passport?

SUREN

I will buy some cigarettes while
your passport is checked.

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 and reaches his hand out:

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 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.

CLOSE UP ON 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 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
(sincerely)
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)
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 curious enquiry, but all he gets from Soane is a slight smile.

SIX MEN
 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 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 rises to leave.

Even though they have not yet processed what they have just witnessed, 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. And you
 are?

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
 heading 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

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... 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,
 (beat)
 five days.

EXT. DELÎLAN CARAVANSERAI - MOMENTS LATER

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

HAJI VALI
 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 son... Your fair
 share.

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 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 a 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
(MORE)

HAJI VALI (cont'd)
 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 (moving forward, "kalak" and "raft" will be 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 solid 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 this.

SOANE

(to Skipper, Arab Merchant,
and Mehmed)

Come, please join us.

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

Haji Vali looks at him contemptuously.

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

Mehmed wobbles impatiently. The Skipper looks at him with
 disesteem.

HAJI VALI
 (coaxing, to Arab Merchant)
 The Skipper won't join us. If you
 won't either, it would be a
 disgrace.
 (desperately)
 Is our food not good enough?

The Arab Merchant looks up 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
 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, lighting it 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: 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 to 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 distress:

HAJI VALI & ARAB MERCHANT

(subtitled, in Arabic)

*Oh God, help!/Oh God, the Merciful,
have mercy!*

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.

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. 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?
 (dramatic, looking up)
 Here live the descendants of the
 greatest Kurd who ever lived: Sultan
 Saladin, liberator of *Al-Quds*.

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.

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.

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
 Watch your blasphemous mouth before
 I stuff it with that boot of yours!

Anger radiates from his eyes. 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, 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.

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.

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.

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
 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:

SOANE
 He is not worth it.

The Arab Merchant's eyes are cold, yet understanding.

Mehmed relishes and laughs 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!
 (MORE)

MEHMED (cont'd)
 (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

(tear-eyed)

Come with me my 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 intensely 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

(surrendering)

Ok, ok.

Haji Vali looks back to make strong eye contact:

HAJI VALI (cont'd)

(concerned)

But please be careful on the road. The HAMAVAND make no distinction between creed or race, between good or evil. They have cut all communications on the road to Slemani. 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. They are fat men with drooping mustaches. Both wear comically 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... Slemani, right?

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

Soane leans back and folds his arms across his chest.

SOANE
(feigning ignorance)
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 Slemani.

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
Slemani; 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 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
(stabbing his index finger
at Soane's chest)
can take the military escort to
Slemani.

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 at 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?

(MORE)

TURKOMAN #1 (cont'd)
 ("Sleman" is said with
 contempt)
 We are not going to Sleman!
 (raising his chin
 arrogantly)
 We go as far as Kirkuk.

TURKOMAN #2
 (sly smile)
 And we want you to join us to share
 in 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 takes a sip from his
 (almost empty) glass of tea.

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.

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

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)
 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!

Soane beats his hands away and assures him friendly:

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 Slemani
 and returning there tomorrow
 together with four others.

SOANE
 What about the Hamavand?

Rashid looks brooding.

RASHID
 If God wills it, we will arrive
 unharmed. We will, of course, go via
 Kirkuk. With military escort.
 (smiling thinly)
 God's will is divine, 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 Slemani. 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 is the greatest
reward. 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 reach Kirkuk in five days.

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

SOANE

Very well.

CLOSE ON 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 the PARTY through the thicket field:

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

Behind them and also abreast; a SLEMANIAN MERCHANT (20s, wearing a long green overcoat and black sharwal trousers) and a 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 thicket field.

From here on, Soane and his travel companions will be referred to as "the Party" in action lines.

SLEMANIAN 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 ignorant eyes but piles of mud-brick, stone, and dirt.

SLEMANIAN 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!

SLEMANIAN 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.

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

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

SLEMANIAN MERCHANT
Ashurbarnipal. Bar-ni-pal.

Rashid's Servant looks at the Slemanian 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 rob them both!

Everyone bursts out in laughter.

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

Rashid's Servant's eyes are lit with an inner glow of
mischievousness.

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 YEZIDI
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, grassy landscape, we see
that it is dotted with more of these conical-shaped sun
temples; this is the heartland of the Yezidi Kurds.

Silhouettes of Yezidi Kurds gathered around a temple.

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

EXT. EZIDKHAN PLAINS - MOMENTS LATER

SLEMANIAN MERCHANT
Hey, red hat!

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

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

SLEMANIAN MERCHANT
(brusquely)
You wish to pimp us out?

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

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

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 Slemanian Teacher touches Soane's shoulder:

SLEMANIAN TEACHER
(imploring)
Brother, for the sake of our lives,
get rid of that hat. I kiss your
hand and feet, I beg and besiege
you, do us a favor and get rid of it
at once.

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

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

The Slemanian Teacher tips his head heavenward. He looks at Soane gravely, forcing a smile:

SLEMANIAN TEACHER

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

(scornful)

effendis.

(beat)

I kiss your hands, 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 Slemanian 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.

Soane glances around uneasily; the Slemanian 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 Slemanian Teacher questioningly.

The Slemanian Merchant glowers 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 road behind them.

CLOSE ON FEZ

RASHID'S SERVANT (O.S.)

(insincere)

Bless your righteous heart!

EXT. PLAINS OF ERBIL - SUNSET

A featureless desert plain stretching for miles in each direction.

In the distance, ERBIL'S CITADEL rises on top of a gigantic mound, sticking out like a thumb.

And 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 rainbow forms an arch over this remarkable scene.

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

LOUD THUNDERCLAP

EXT. ERBIL - NIGHT, RAINING

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.

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. They are sweating bullets. Their lips are dry, and they hang 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.

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 from their field bottles.

SLEMANIAN 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?

SLEMANIAN TEACHER

(shrugs, dismissive)

How should I know?

RASHID'S SERVANT

(mischievous)

Teacher, can I ask you a question?

SLEMANIAN TEACHER

Of course.

RASHID'S SERVANT

(wryly)

Where is Shah Abbas' grave?

Everyone raises a slight smile.

LOUD GASP

The Slemanian Teacher slams his head; the Halabja Muleteer
takes his turban off dramatically, pressing it to his chest.

RASHID'S SERVANT (cont'd)

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 celerity. His Servant puts a hand on his
dagger and clutches it tightly.

TWO HAMAVAND HORSEMEN approach the Party from the rear and
quickly 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
waistband, rocking leather scarlet boots, and black turbans
tied tightly around their heads. They carry rifles.

They MURMUR UNINTELLIGIBLY and turn their horses to full
galop, leaving the Party behind them.

RASHID'S SERVANT (cont'd)
 (insouciant)
 Hamavand!

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 landscape 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.

SLEMANIAN 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, in a hurry?

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

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

SLEMANIAN TEACHER
 Ignore him. As for the delay... It can take twenty days. The Ottomans aren't too eager on escorting civilians through Hamavand territory. They'd rather extort.

RASHID'S SERVANT
 Cockroaches!

HALABJA MULETEER

They are not worth a Hamavand's
toenail! I kiss the brigands' hands
and feet, they are the Kurds' honor!

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 distinct native outfits.

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

We hear COMMOTION coming from the square.

The BAZAAR CROWD rushes outside, to 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 Bazaar 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.

BAZAAR 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! Be quiet and I will answer
 all your questions!

The Bazaar Crowd calms down.

The Ottoman Commander thrusts his chest out and raises his right eyebrow while looking down on the Bazaar Crowd. He produces a document from his pockets and holds it out in front of him and starts reading:

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)
 (exasperated)
 Who was that! Reveal yourself,
 cretin!

The Ottoman Commander looks around angrily, doesn't get a response, and quickly resumes reading:

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

We hear another LOUD RASPBERRY.

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

BAZAAR CROWD
 (at Commander)
 We don't have all day!/Move on!

The Ottoman Commander is boiling; his red fez and his face are one and the same color. He puts his document away.

COMMANDER

Ungrateful dogs! An escort of 100 soldiers has been prepared for Slemani. The Caravan, lead by SHEFIQ EFFENDI, will depart tomorrow morning. Be at the gathering place 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. In its center, a bed with long mirror opposite. An open leather-bound suitcase and dusty black jacket lie on top of the bed.

We hear APPROACHING FOOTSTEPS

SOMEONE walks to and stops in front of the bed with his back turned to us. He SLAMS the suitcase shut and turns to face the mirror: we see Soane's reflection in the mirror.

He is wearing a white undershirt, baggy cotton trousers, and red leather shoes of which the toe turns up in a point. Over this, he wears a long striped cotton tunic, all tied 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. Then, he puts his hand back on the dagger even faster, draws it, and makes a stabbing movement at his own reflection. He relaxes and smiles, slowly tucking the dagger back.

We hear KNOCKING ON THE DOOR

SOANE

(murmuring to himself)
I am not expecting anyone...
(beat)
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 shuffles to the door and opens it ajar to see Ziriyab: a young man with dark complexion.

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?

Ziriyab produces a small note and reads from it:

ZIRYAB

"A Persian in these lands is truly a rare sight indeed. I would be delighted to make your acquaintance. Would you grace me with your visit?"

SOANE

(smiling)

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

ZIRYAB

If you would follow me, sir.

Ziriyab steps aside and gestures for 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 hat 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 him.

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

FIFTEEN KURDS sit on carpets lined against the room's left wall. They wear head-dresses of colorful handkerchiefs to denote their places 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 follows his example.

EVERYONE

(sonorously)

Alaikum as salam.

OLD MAN

Wa rahmatullah wa barikatah.

The Consul smiles broadly and opens his arms:

CONSUL

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

The Consul sits - everyone follows suit. 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 with 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 to meeting him. So I told
my Servant...

(looking at Ziriyab)
to look for you.

OLD MAN

(wide grin)

And soon, he found you!

CONSUL

I told Ziriyab: "You will deliver a
message to this *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 anxious to make your acquaintance --

CONSUL

(finishing recitation)

would you grace me with your visit?"

CONSUL (cont'd)

And so you came!

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 gently and MUMBLING BABY TALK to it: soft playfulness that stands in an stark contrast with their rugged manly appearance.

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

CONSUL

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 last long.

OLD MAN

(mouth falling open)

Pilgrimage?

The Consul jerks his head back in surprise.

CONSUL

A haji! God bless you!

Ziriyab puts three glasses of tea in front of them; the Consul empties his boiling tea in one big gulp.

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 shirinim --

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

SOANE

shahr-e jwan u Kurd nishinim!"

CONVIVIAL LAUGHING ensues.

Soane and the Consul smile at each other contently

CONSUL

Will you depart with the Caravan that leaves for Slemani tomorrow?

SOANE

I will.

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!

CONSUL

(looking around)

Ziriyab! Ziriyab, where are you?

Ziriyab steps forward.

ZIRYAB

Yes, mirza?

CONSUL

(to Soane)

Did I tell you Ziriyab has the voice of a nightingale?

Soane cocks his head.

KURDS (O.S.)

(subtitled, in Kurdish)

Ask him to recite us a poem!/Please sing us a song!/Ziriyab!

CONSUL

Ziriyab, our attention is yours.

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

FAINT CRACKLING OF FIRE

Ziriyab 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.*

As the camera gets closer to the fire, CRACKLING FIRE
INTENSIFIES, while Ziriyab'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?
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 mules), a GREEK ARMY CHEMIST AND HIS GREEK WIFE, FOUR OTTOMAN OFFICERS, and 100 OTTOMAN SOLDIERS on foot: half in front of the Caravan, half in 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 fez), the Ottoman Commander who delivered the announcement, an OTTOMAN COLONEL and an OTTOMAN MAJOR.

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

FRIENDS AND RELATIVES of the departing are saying farewells.

An ancient ARAB MULLAH (wearing a long black garment and mullah cap) stands erect on a crate. 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 OTTOMAN BANNERS

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

The Arab Mullah shouts after the Caravan with apprehension:

ARAB MULLAH
(subtitled, in Arabic)
*The Kurds are a race of Jinn
(demon) 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.

WIDE ON CARAVAN

as it heads into the endless, barren desert.

EXT. OUTSKIRTS OF KIRKUK - DAY

Red barren hills devoid of anything resembling life.

The Caravan is moving slowly. Everyone looks drowsy and dried out from the scorching sun. Imagine the Exodus - except this pitiful party's 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

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. He takes out a cigarette packet, lights one up, and offers one to Soane. Soane declines.

SOANE

(to Rashid)

Who is Shefiq Effendi?

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 unmolested.

(apprehensive)

Except, of course...

RASHID'S SERVANT

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

(MORE)

RASHID'S SERVANT (cont'd)
 (wryly)
 The Hamavand won't be amused!

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 Slemani. It has dwindled from 500 to 34 soldiers. In any case, most prefer the army's firepower over the word of a 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 SOBBING.

GREEK ARMY CHEMIST
 I should have stayed in Crete! Curse this land!

The Greek Wife sobs and kisses her necklace cross.

Soane taps the Greek Army Chemist on his shoulders:

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!

The Greek Army Chemist turns his attention to his wife.

Rashid passes the gossip on to those behind them.

Rashid's Servant gestures for Soane 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 quickly lets go of him.

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!

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

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 down-turned 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 Caravan;

--WE SEE the Caravan enter a valley; a small flat plain between red hills. The OTTOMAN SOLDIERS look sick and weary; they empty the last drops of water into their mouths. Myriads of flies buzz about their heads;

--WE SEE the Caravan move through an even more desolate plain, consisting of just rocks and sand. Rows of VULTURES sit on edges of cliffs enclosing the plain;

--WE SEE WOMEN faint and fall off their mulen. MEN are spreading handkerchiefs to cover their burned faces;

--WE SEE OTTOMAN SOLDIERS forcing ELDERLY WOMEN off their mules and beating their protesting HUSBANDS. Other OTTOMAN SOLDIERS are confiscating water flasks at gun point;

--WE SEE the Caravan struggle making its way through a VIOLENT SANDSTORM. PEOPLE are collapsing 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. ZIGZAGGING 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

Great green ridges and hill sides, waving long grass bright with flowers, and with deep steep valleys in between. 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.

Soane marvels at this sight in relief and disbelief.

RASHID'S SERVANT
 (subtitled, in Arabic)
Allahu Akbar.
 (beat, shouting)
Allahu Akbar!

Rashid's Servant drops everything and runs down the valley.

Men, women, and soldiers all follow 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.

EXT. BOGD CASTLE - DAY

The revived Caravan is coming upon a steep decline. As it moves down, we see a beautiful VILLAGE below, protected by Bogd Castle, which stands mightily upon a mound.

Shefiq Effendi turns his horse to address 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 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) 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 nourish your soul.

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 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 TWO HORSEMEN;

CLOSE ON THEIR FACES

To reveal they are the Hamavand Horsemen who passed Soane's Party on the road to Kirkuk. They stare right into the binoculars with their fierce, dark eyes.

Shefiq Effendi lowers his binoculars and presses it against his chest; his eyes are bulging with terror.

SHEFIQ EFFENDI
(shouting at the Ottomans)
Conceal your uniforms and ditch your
fez! Hamavand horsemen have been
keeping up with us. We are about to
cross their territory!

None of the Ottoman Soldiers hesitate to ditch their fez.

Some Ottoman Soldiers force the *abas* (black cloaks) from women to put it on themselves.

The Ottoman Colonel canters along the Caravan and shouts:

OTTOMAN COLONEL
(reprimanding)
Stop it! Stop it at once! Return the
cloaks and put on your fez! We are
soldiers of the Sultan and we will
not be intimidated by savages! Those
who disobey will be court martialed!

The Ottoman Soldiers glance at each other uneasily. OTTOMAN SOLDIER #1 steps forward hesitantly and picks up his fez.

Shefiq Effendi canters to the Ottoman Colonel and addresses him furiously:

SHEFIQ EFFENDI
Are you mad? You will have us all
killed!

(MORE)

SHEFIQ EFFENDI (cont'd)
 (to Ottoman Soldiers)
 Put on your fez and you will face
 death, not court martial!

Ottoman Soldier #1 glances at the Ottoman Colonel uneasily;
 Ottoman Soldier #1 reaches for his fez and throws it away.

BANG!

Ottoman Soldier #1 drops dead.

OTTOMAN COLONEL
 (smoking revolver in hand)
 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!/
 Mud on our heads!*

Shefiq Effendi smiles at the Ottoman Colonel apprehensively:

SHEFIQ EFFENDI
 You will regret this.

He gallops back to the front of the Caravan.

SHEFIQ EFFENDI (cont'd)
 March!

OTTOMAN 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
(softly)
Paradise.

We see a VILLAGE 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.

OTTOMAN COLONEL
(insolently)
What is this!?

The Hamavand Messenger stops at a good distance from them.

Shefiq Effendi remains unruffled, ignoring the increasingly frustrated Ottoman Colonel and Ottoman Major next to him.

SHEFIQ EFFENDI
(to Ottoman Colonel)
Keep quiet and don't move.

The Ottoman Colonel grimaces.

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 and sprints away.

Shefiq Effendi turns his head and we see a trembling OTTOMAN SOLDIER #2 trying to reload his smoking rifle.

SHEFIQ EFFENDI (cont'd)
Idiot!

BANG!

The Ottoman 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 Ottoman Soldiers in front panic and return aimless fire; the Ottoman Colonel SHOUTS COMMANDS while TWELVE OTTOMAN 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 OTTOMAN SOLDIER #3 is shot in his head while reloading his rifle; another OTTOMAN SOLDIER #4 is shot in his back as he tries to flee the battlefield.

MULES are fleeing up hillsides, where they run into the hands of FOUR HAMAVAND WOMEN who appear from behind rocks.

Complete pandemonium; we hear WAILING of 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 looks all around him and runs back to the battlefield. As he runs, we see a chasing HAMAVAND HORSEMAN #1 approach him from behind; he grabs Soane by his collar and throws him:

HAMAVAND HORSEMAN
(subtitled, in Kurdish)
Don't move!

Hamavand Horseman #1 gallops away, leaving a cloud of dust in Soane's bruised and scratched face. Soane wipes the dust off his face and watches his assailant barge into an unaware OTTOMAN SOLDIER #5; Hamavand Horseman 1 draws his SABER and slashes Ottoman Soldier #5's neck.

TWENTY-FOUR OTTOMAN SOLDIERS have formed a defensive circle around the Ottoman Colonel, who is firing his revolver at SIX HAMAVAND HORSEMEN; Hamavand Horsemen #2 is hit and falls.

The five remaining 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 OTTOMAN SOLDIERS are hit: one in his eye, two others in their chests: a perfection execution of the "Parthian Shot".

As the Retreating Hamavand get closer to their village, we see SIX HAMAVAND HORSEWOMEN and FOUR HAMAVAND HORSEMEN ("REINFORCEMENTS") rush to the battlefield. 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 reinforcement Hamavand Horsemen scream WAR CRIES and the Hamavand Horsewomen yell ULULATIONS as they race towards the battlefield and commence SHOOTING.

TWELVE OTTOMAN SOLDIERS ("Ottoman Deserters") drop their files and abandon the Ottoman Colonel's defensive circle.

The Ottoman Colonel draws his revolver and shoots OTTOMAN DESERTER #1 in his back.

OTTOMAN COLONEL
(subtitled, in Turkish)
Cowards!

The Ottoman Deserters are confronted by Hamavand Horsemen, who rear their horses in front and round them up like cattle.

The Hamavands' continuous and ever-intensifying SHOUTING and ULULATIONS encourages the refraction of TEN OTTOMAN SOLDIERS ("Surrendering Ottomans"), 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 their rifles.

Quick-moving Hamavand Horsemen are wheeling around Ottoman Soldiers, whom are completely encircled...

CLOSE ON HOOVES

as they create a CLOUD OF DUST around the Ottoman Soldiers.

The remaining Ottoman Soldiers and Ottoman Colonel are completely disintegrated; they fire aimlessly.

BANG!

The Ottoman Colonel is hit in his head. His body leans back over his horse, but he remains in saddle - his horse takes off, going straight through the defensive circle and dust cloud. Hamavand Horseman #1 chases the horse, yelling victoriously.

The dust cloud settles.

The surviving Ottoman Soldiers drop their rifles and raise their hands.

Hamavand Horsemen descend from their horses and take purposeful, vengeful strides towards them.

HAMAVAND HORSEMEN
 (subtitled, in Kurdish)
*Who are you to resist the
 Hamavand!/We will bring shame upon
 your ancestors!/Strip naked!*

Ottoman Soldiers are beaten with rifle butts and 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 OTTOMAN SOLDIERS. We hear CRIES OF AGONY.

Shefiq Effendi is crawling over the wounded and DEAD 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)
 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?

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 soldiers, but
don't harm the civilians.

The Hamavand Chief caresses his well-kept mustache and takes
a good look at trembling Shefiq Effendi.

HAMAVAND CHIEF
(benevolent)
I see... Well then, mistakes happen.
I will ensure the Caravan's safe
passage to Alemanni.

Shefiq Effendi looks up and smiles at him:

SHEFIQ EFFENDI
(subtitled, in Kurdish)
*May God bless you with greater
loot!*

EXT. SARCHINAR PLAIN - DAY

The Caravan, escorted by Hamavand Horsemen, moves through a lush plain with abandoned fruit and vegetable gardens. The Ottoman Soldiers shuffle forward in their underwear.

EXT. SLEMANI OUTSKIRTS - DAWN

Slemanian's outskirts appear deserted with relics of once splendid edifices. What remains are mostly one-storied brick buildings, some adorned with bay windows.

Through broken courtyard walls, we see TWO SLEMANIAN WOMEN in elaborate Kurdish dresses, smoking cigarettes in the verandas of their homes. They are not even slightly intrigued at the pathetic sight of the Caravan moving past them.

EXT. GHAFUR AGHA CARAVANSERAI - LATER

A simple two-storied brick caravanserai; its stained glass windows reflect on the cobblestones-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)
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
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 windowless room, furnished with an old trunk, a stove, a coffee boiler, and a broken palanquin.

Soane watches as Mustafa Beg pours coffee into two tin cups.

Mustafa Beg looks at Soane and points at the palanquin:

MUSTAFA BEG
Make yourself comfortable.

Soane takes a seat and glances around the room uneasily.

Mustafa Beg sits next to Soane and hands him one of the cups.

MUSTAFA BEG (cont'd)
(deferential)
I must ask for your forgiveness, I
don't have any milk or sugar.

SOANE
That is alright.

Moment of 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)
My name is Ghulam Hussain. I am from
Shiraz.

Mustafa Beg's body posture perks up to face Soane directly.

MUSTAFA BEG
I am Mustafa Beg, from Tripoli! So
you are a Persian!

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... Slemani 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 face down.

MUSTAFA BEG
Ill fate brought me here.

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 to Soane)
Men like you and I!

Mustafa Beg 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 final wish is to see the Mediterranean again.

SOANE
We are both strangers in strange lands. All we have is each other, and God. And if God wills it, your final 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.

INT. GHAFUR AGHA CARAVANSERAI, LOBBY - DAY

Soane is having a simple breakfast of tea with flatbread and yogurt 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-handled 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.

GHA Fur AGHA

Are there any Slemanians 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.

GHA Fur 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?

GHA Fur AGHA

A Persian traveling from Constantinople to Shiraz must be a doctor. Are you a merchant?

SOANE

(prevaricating)

Yes, I might be.

GHA Fur AGHA

What are your wares?

SOANE

Cloths and such like.

GHA Fur 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 Slemani 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
 (placating)
 I came here as a friend, why do you
 ask such unkind questions?

SOANE
 (glowering and relishing)
 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 barges out of the caravanserai.

SOANE (cont'd)
 (enraptured, as in: "good
 riddance!")
 Farewell!

We hear a GATE SHUT CLOSE

Soane turns to look behind him and sees on top of the stairs
 a terror-struck Mustafa Beg.

SOANE (cont'd)
 Mustafa Beg... why are you so pale?

MUSTAFA BEG
 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)
 The owner?

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, 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.

A POEM RECITER (50s, well-dressed, holding a book) takes to the stage. He opens his book and starts reciting from it passionately whilst gesticulating with his hands elaborately. Apart from his talking and CLINGING TEA GLASSES, not a sound.

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
zemanê, ew deme, ew esre, ew
rhjoje, ke meydan y
criydbaziy le desht y
Kaniyaskan bu.

Be zerb y hemleyê Beghday
tesxiyr kird u têy helh da;
Slêman y zeman, rhastit
d'ewê, bawk y Slê bu.

Ereb! Inkar y fezl y êwe
nakem; efzelin; emm.
Selaheddiyn, ke dinyay girt,
le nesl y Kurd y Baban bu.

Qubuwr y pirh le nuwr y Al y
Baban pirh le rhehmet bê; Ke
baran y kef y ihsanyan wek
hewr y Niysan bu.

Ke Ebdullah Pasha leshkir y
Waliy'--

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 --

We hear the GATE BEING THROWN OPEN--followed by a...

BANG!

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. NURI'S
SERVANT (80s, hideous with a permanent sinister smile
exposing his three 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 Slemani ke
Dar-ul-Mulk y Baban bu!"*

SAYYID NURI (SUBTITLE)
"I remember Slemani 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 wherever he goes. The atmosphere has changed from pleasant to tense; nobody touches their tea or cigarette.

Sayyid Nuri stops in front of the Poem Reciter; Sayyid Nuri towers over him despite the Poem Reciter's elevated position. He lifts the Poem's Reciter chin up and stares at him:

SAYYID NURI
(deadpan)
So, you long for the Baban Princes?

POEM RECITER
Sheikh... I... We meant no
disrespect.

Sayyid Nuri bursts out in erratic laughter.

SAYYID NURI
Why so serious? I was only joking!

The Poem Reciter 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?

POEM RECITER
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.

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.

Sayyid Nuri grimaces at the Poem Reciter, who resumes.

As his recitation continues, Sayyid Nuri walks around the tea house arrogantly, judging people's facial expressions.

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

(sarcastically)

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.

Sayyid Nuri stares in the Poem Reciter's eyes, smiles at him, and gets off the stage.

SAYYID NURI (cont'd)

(feigning ignorance)

I heard a PERSIAN DOCTOR from Shiraz
has arrived. Anyone know who he is?

The Poem Reciter gets off the stage and shuffles away.

Sayyid Nuri addresses THREE MEN sitting close to Soane:

SAYYID NURI (cont'd)

Do any of you know who this Persian
Doctor may be?

They shake their heads, avoiding eye contact.

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 erect:

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)
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, 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
 (feigning interest)
 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
 Bottles?

Soane looks disconcerted; he rises and bursts out:

SOANE (cont'd)
You were 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 Slemanian
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 sold us out!
(spits in his direction)

Sayyid Nuri stares at him intimidatingly, but the Tea House Owner does not flinch - he stares back defiantly, but his trembling body betrays his fright.

This stare-off lasts for some moments when it is broken by Sayyid Nuri with one of his capricious moves. He feigns a smile and breaks the silence in dishonest comedic fashion:

SAYYID NURI
Why so tense? Can't we take a joke?
I wouldn't be Sheikh Ahmad's son if
I allowed Slemani'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. Sayyid Nuri looks at Policeman #2 suggestively.

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 both policemen:

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:

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.

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 grabs Soane's arm and looks at him terrified:

SOANE (cont'd)

(smiling)

I will be fine.

EXT. SARAI SQUARE - DAY

Slemani'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 someone you could reason with. A KURDISH CLERK stands behind him.

GOVERNOR
(convivial)
What seems to be the trouble?

POLICEMAN #2
This man, who calls himself
(with cadence)
Ghulam Hussain does not co-operate.
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 palms)
Can you explain?

The Two Policemen exchange sly grins.

Soane remains unmoved and explains himself confidently.

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 is unable to meet Soane's gaze and looks up and down rapidly whilst frowning disapprovingly at the policemen.

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, to a degree that it has clearly frustrated the Two Policemen.

Soane takes notice of this and loses some of his calm composure; his forehead furrows as he glances at them from the corner of his eyes. He struggles to maintain his composure, but has some strength left to feign fearlessness by prevaricating around the Governor's valid arguments:

SOANE

(insolently)

Good. I am not enchanted with Slemani, 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 looks at Soane gravely, clearly not amused by this threat. And just as he is about to respond, he is interrupted by the Kurdish Clerk:

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.

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)

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 gesutres:

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 Governor hands Soane 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 smile at this reception.

As Soane takes his first steps forward, everyone moves out of his way to create a passage for him. Soane walks through this passage, gazed at from all sides.

CHEERING ensues

TEA HOUSE CROWD

(subtitled, in Kurdish)

Curse all policemen and government officials!/May you live a thousand years!

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

(tear-eyed)

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!

A CROWD has gathered in a circle at the end of Sara Square. They are looking down on something which we can not see yet. We hear INDISTINCT OMINOUS MURMUR.

Soane, with a fixed of concentration, takes several strides towards them, then accelerates and rushes to the gathering with great celerity, leaving Mustafa Beg behind.

Soane thrusts his way through the Crowd.

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.

EXT. GHAFUR AGHA CARAVANSERAI - DAY

Soane, a HALABJA MERCHANT (20s, tall, swarthy - in action lines simply "the Merchant"), and a ROUMANIAN (70s, fragile-

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 found a good friend in you.

(beat)

God be with you.

Mustafa Beg grabs Soane's hands; Soane clasps his.

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. If not in this life, in the other.

Mustafa Beg shows a weak, pensive smile.

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

(in English)

"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?!

The Merchant looks at the Roumanian judgmentally.

SOANE
(to Roumanian)
Where are you from, uncle?

ROUMANIAN
Roumania.

HALABJA MERCHANT
That explains it!

SOANE
(amiably)
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
(MORE)

ROUMANIAN (cont'd)

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

Kwholmur?

Soane maintains his previous tone of voice, unaware of the Merchant's body language, who is still 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. 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.

(beat)

Only the nomads remain, who return here every spring and autumn to set up their encampments.

The Merchant looks at Soane admiringly: Soane has won his trust. A slight smile grows on 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 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?

HALABJA MERCHANT (cont'd)

(to Soane)

Where are you from you anyway? How come 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, all clean-shaven except for LITTLE SOLDIER, who has a nasty hanging mustache) approach Soane's Party, whom are moving on one of those ridges.

The Turkish Soldiers and Soane's Party nod at each other in passing.

After passing, the Merchant looks back at the Turkish Soldiers and murmurs softly:

HALABJA MERCHANT

I don't trust them.

SOANE

(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, in Turkish)

Halt, or I will kill you!

Soane, the Romanian, and the Merchant stop and hurriedly get off their steeds. They raise their hands above their heads.

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 does the same.

LITTLE SOLDIER (cont'd)

Quick! I don't have all day!

The Little Soldier makes stabbing moves with his rifle.

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
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 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, back to English)
 I am not intimidated by you, nasty little creature!

The Little Soldier is fuming with anger. He gets back up, takes his rifle off 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 will continue 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
 (MORE)*

ROUMANIAN (O.S.) (cont'd)
 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 Little Soldier's hand holding the knife and pulverizes it; the Little Soldier SCREAMS IN AGONY.

The Merchant is back on his feet: his wound appearing minor. He walks over to the Little Soldier...

HALABJA MERCHANT (cont'd)
You just wait for me...

and KICKS the Little Soldier 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 at the Merchant worriedly.

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
 Don't worry about me. We will 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 flowerbeds 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 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
Thank you.

They sit down opposite each other and drink their tea.

The Merchant looks at Soane as if he has something to tell; Soane looks back, as if asking "do you have something to tell?"

The Merchant leans over; Soane imitates him.

HALABJA MERCHANT
Lady Adela will receive you after tea.

SOANE
I am very grateful.

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.
(beat)
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 rather inviting. She is smoking a cigarette elegantly - as only a lady can. This lady tamed the local patriarchy - and they love her for it!

Her THREE MAIDS stand next to her - MAID #1 is fanning her, MAID #2 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-faced with tiny blue eyes and brown hair, dressed in a white suit). He sits in a corner, holding a doctor's suitcase.

LADY ADELA

(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 an 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

Apologies are out of place, Adela *Khanum*. It was not your fault.

LADY ADELA

(raising voice)

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 and adjusts her tone of voice accordingly.

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 picks up his suitcase and hastes himself towards Soane. He kneels before Soane, takes a look at his wound, and slowly unwinds the bloody handkerchief.

Soane MOANS.

AMIN EFFENDI

(German accent, menacing)

Does it hurt?

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's brooding eyes dart at Soane.

SOANE
 (smiling dismissively)
 I am not.
 (beat)
 Rumors spread fast.

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
 That is true.

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
 That would be an honor.

Lady Adela smiles mysteriously and signals Maid #1 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 #1 and Maid #2 resume their GIGGLING.

LADY ADELA (cont'd)

You are 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, softly)

You really are not 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

Constantinople!?

TAHIR BEG

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
(MORE)

SOANE (cont'd)
 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)
 Ottoman 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 Ottoman
might first hand en-route to
Slemani.

Tahir Beg and the Merchant raise a satisfactory half-smile.

The Turkish Deputy adjusts his posture to sit up straight. He looks proud, for Soane's sarcasm clearly escaped him:

TURKISH DEPUTY
You see? Is that not what I have
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 and 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 resume walking.

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
 (bushing it off)
 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

Soane registers the knocking and looks at the door.

SOANE
(to himself, wondrous)
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
(MORE)

AMIN EFFENDI (cont'd)
 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
 (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)
 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
 (MORE)

AMIN EFFENDI (cont'd)
 advice, you will not extend your
 stay.

He draws Soane even closer to him:

AMIN EFFENDI (cont'd)
 Forget about the wedding.

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:

AMIN EFFENDI (cont'd)
 You know the old German proverb: the
 mountain looks fine from afar, but
 how disappointing when under it.
 Such 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. Stacks
 of rifles rest against the 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 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 smiles.

LADY ADELA (cont'd)
We will take this and
everything else you presented.

The Jewish Merchant smiles contentedly and writes on...

CLOSE ON BROWN PIECE OF PAPER WITH HEBREW WRITING

JEWISH MERCHANT (O.S.)
Excellent choices, Adela Khanum! 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; the gate is shut behind Soane.

LADY ADELA
(surprised)
Ghulam Hussain?

The gate is kicked open.

TWO RIDERS (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.

The Two Riders continue to thrust the Arab Robber forward forcefully and push him on the ground in front of Lady Adela.

The Arab Robber shrinks while rasping breaths. He looks terror-struck at the sight of the fierce-looking gathering.

Lady Adela flashes her ferocious eyes at him.

The Reception Crowd BURSTS OUT IN LAUGHTER.

The Arab Robber is trembling; he looks sick with apprehension and stares at Lady Adela 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!

SILENCE

LADY ADELA (cont'd)
Proceed.

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:

RECEPTION CROWD
(subtitled, in Arabic)
Coward!/Shame on you!/Honorless!

We see FLASHING EYES, BUGGED OUT EYES, and TERRIFIED EYES - and finally the face of those terrified eyes: the Arab Robber's.

LADY ADELA
(sternly)
Let the man speak!

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 pulls at his hair in desperation.

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 it 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.

KURDISH PEASANT
You can stay here tonight.

The Arab Robber reaches for the Kurdish Peasant's right hand to kiss; the Kurdish Peasant pulls his hand away and leaves.

E) INT. SHED - DUSK - we see a 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 narrows fast; the Arab Robber unwinds and drops the chain from his waist, but falls over his ankles.

The Kurdish Peasant gets off his donkey and hastes himself towards the Arab Robber; he picks up the rusty chain en-route and lashes out at him:

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 teeth;
- 4) Soane, with a broad smile, and;

5) The Arab Robber with a tremulous smile.

Laughter subdues, smiles disappear.

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.

The Arab Robber looks terrified and confused.

The Two Riders haul him to his feet and drag him out of the
room; the Arab Robber's WAILING INTENSIFIES. He puts up a
futile struggle as he is dragged out.

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.

Lady Adela and her sons exchange puzzled glances.

LADY ADELA

Leave?

TAHIR BEG

Why would you leave?

MAJID BEG

What is the rush?
(concerned)
Did something happen?

SOANE

(at Majid Beg)

You should ask him...
(looking at Tahir Beg)
I am not accustomed to receiving
night messengers of evil...

(MORE)

SOANE (cont'd)
 (direct stare 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 postures have loosened. They look
 lost for words, whereas Lady Adela looks pained:

LADY ADELA
 What is he talking about? What have
 you done, you imbecile!?

TAHIR BEG
 I swear to God I have no idea what
 he is talking about!
 (to Soane)
 I demand an explanation for 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.

Soane hardens his voice.

SOANE
 Alright... Yesterday night, Amin
 Effendi paid me a visit. He told me
 of Tahir Beg's intentions of
 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 processed it)
 BURSTS OUT LAUGHING.

SOANE
 What is so funny?

TAHIR BEG

(relieved)

Don't you know this foolish creature
Amin Effendi?

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

What did we not do for him?

LADY ADELA

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. 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 pales 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 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.)

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. 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
 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?
 (face cast down in shame)
 What shall be the fate of poor
 Amin Effendi?*

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
 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)
Go away then, leave us alone.

Amin Effendi shuffles in his place, eyes still cast down.

LADY ADELA (cont'd)
What is it? Do you want to say
something? Speak up!

AMIN EFFENDI
I saw the invitation list for
tonight's wedding. And I discovered
that...
(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
I thought I had.

LADY ADELA
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 WEDDING ATTENDEES
(men, women, and children) dressed in their finest clothes.

THIRTY-SIX YARSAN KURDS (mixed gender, all ages) have
gathered around a rectangular fountain in the courtyard's
center. They are playing the Kurdish *tembûr* (fretted string
instrument) in unison. Over their MYSTICAL 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 kiss their tembûr, and hold it above their heads.

CHEERING AND APPLAUDING

LADY ADELA
 Bravo! Bravo! That is the true
 Persian speech, the sweetest of all
 God's languages!

An ELDERLY YARSAN KURD steps forward and makes a slight bow:

<p>ELDERLY YARSAN KURD (subtitled, in Kurdish) <i>We are always at your service, Adela Khanum.</i></p>	<p>SOANE (whispering to Halabja Merchant) Who are they?</p>
---	--

HALABJA MERCHANT
 Yarsan Kurds, the People of the
 Truth.

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
 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. I
 wish you both a long and happy life
 together... and with many, many
 beautiful children!

Hasan and Piruza hold hands and smile.

Lady Adela gives Piruza a motherly smile and rises:

LADY ADELA
 Let us hear the sound of the *dahol*
 and *zurna* and dance until 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 Wedding 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.

Lady Adela notices and smiles at him contentedly:

LADY ADELA (cont'd)
Do you regret attending?

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 continues watching the tirelessly DANCING KURDS.

His smile fades; Soane squints his eyes and we see...

ZOOM ON COURTYARD'S NORTHERN ENTRANCE

Where we see Tahir Beg inaudibly lash out at at Amin Effendi. Tahir Beg makes threatening moves with his hands at him.

Soane's smile has faltered completely. He 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.

SOANE
(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)
I... I...

Tahir Beg and Lady Adela smile at Soane reassuringly.
Everyone else is oblivious to what is going on; the music and
dancing goes on uninterrupted in the background.

TAHIR BEG
Mister Soane, you are among
friends.

Soane's looks shame-faced and cast his face down.

SOANE
How...
(slowly raising his head)
how did you...

Tahir Beg makes a half-turn towards the northern building and
points at the lit room. A MAN's side profile appears in the
window. We can not yet make out who it is. The Man slowly
turns his head towards us to reveal his full face...

CLOSE ON SHEIKH FROM SINA

He smiles the same sinister smile as on the day he met Soane.

BACKGROUND MUSIC FADING

Soane gazes at him in consternation, unaware he is addressed.

LADY ADELA (O.S.)
Ghulam Hussain? Mister Soane?

Tahir Beg ticks Soane on his shoulders; Soane's eyes flicker a few times, he startles and looks around frantically.

SOANE
I apologize.

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

But in disguise. For as hospitable as you are, as treacherous is the road, and a thousand times more so for an Englishman.

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 smiles broadly at Lady Adela; his appreciation does not need to be voiced - it is known.

Tahir Beg sighs deeply. He looks at Soane shame-faced, and addresses him with some reluctance:

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

(MORE)

TAHIR BEG (cont'd)
and remembrances of Kurdistan, nor
let our names slip from your memory.

SOANE

I promise.

Lady Adela walks to the edge of the iwan and shouts out:

LADY ADELA
(subtitled, in Kurdish)
Dance, my Kurds! Dance!

The sound of the *dahol* and *zurna* and SHOUTING and ULULATIONS are at their zenith; the two semi-circles of dancing Kurds are merging to form a single circle while moving their bodies forwards and backwards passionately in rapid sideways-motions, the LEADING MAN is waving his colorful handkerchief in elaborate motions. If anything evokes the most 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 view

FREEZE FRAME

of MAJID BEG 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 Saghalién) 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, 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 well,
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 astonishingly
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 at the Bugler, who raises his bugle:

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
betoken, perhaps, a partiality to
the Kurds ; and I must admit, that
having met from them more genuine
kindness than from any other
collection of strangers met
elsewhere, I owe them a large debt

(MORE)

SOANE (V.O.) (cont'd)
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