

The Sword

a screenplay

by

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THE SWORD

UP ON - a starry night of such great clarity that it is almost possible to see the spiral arms of the 'milky way' as it traverses the sky - then SCROLLING from the bottom.

'1739 - Nadir Shah the ruler of Persia and forever known to history as the Great Marauder enters the plain of India through the Khyber Pass to invade the Mughal Empire.

Gone are the Mughal days of greatness; the likes of Akbar and Babur will never be seen again. The twin towers of Corruption and Cruelty have replaced the Taj Mahl's all encompassing beauteous might of love, the search for Truth and religious tolerance.

Suffering more than most having been driven out of their fertile homeland of the Punjab into the foothills of Himalayas the Sikh community bide their time waiting for a chance to strike at Mughal dominance.

Their dispersed communities keep in touch via messengers who risk their lives to keep the 'community of Nanak', the Khalsa, alive, one such man is Subeg - this is his story and the story of the women that love him.'

EXT. MOUNTAIN RIDGE. NIGHT.

The moon rises till it fills the `SCREEN`. Silhouetted in front of it, high on a ridge, a couple stand on craggy peaks.

The CPV slowly draws their image closer so that the light from the moon's backdrop makes a relief out of their faces.

She, VIDYAVANT, is almost as tall as he and has a strikingly noble face that matches her bearing. SUBEG has swashbuckling good looks, his wispy beard showing that he is not long into manhood.

VIDYAVANT

Must you go so soon my love for each time brings hurt and misgiving?

SUBEG

What choice do I have when the Mughals have such a special spite for our people. You know we must remain vigilant, for nothing

would bring greater joy to our enemies than
a weakening of our resolve.

VIDYAVANT

Then go you will if go you must.

She strokes his face.

SUBEG

My eagerness for our union boils my blood
with such an inviting touch.

He draws her close pressing her body to his.

VIDYAVANT

Three moons more till our wedding, then
dear heart, all your desires can have their
head.

He kisses her with a terrible passion and she has to
gently but firmly disengage herself from his embrace
turning so her back is towards him. He kisses her
neck while she looks longingly towards the moon.

TITLE SEQUENCE

EXT. MOUNTAIN TRACK. NIGHT.

CPV on moon.

PULL BACK TO:

The moon lights up the steep sided canyon that Subeg is
galloping down. Various CPVs of the lone rider winding his
way through narrow passes and over a fast flowing river.

End of TITLE SEQUENCE

EXT. MOUNTAIN TRACK. NIGHT.

Subeg swings his horse off from the main track rounding a
huge boulder that conceals a steep goat track that arrives at
a vantage point over looking the mouth of the canyon he has
just come down. He dismounts and climbs over a rock platform
gazing out onto the plain of India.

Far below he sees the light of a campfire where 3 men are
just finishing eating and settling down for what is left of
the night.

Subeg is puzzled so he slips over the edge and descends through a 'chimney' that scars the rock face.

EXT. OUTRIDERS CAMP. NIGHT

The 3 men are dressed all in black but with red turbans their black cloaks pulled tight around their bodies.

A disturbed Subeg lies in dense undergrowth some 20 metres from the camp.

One of the red-turbaned men draws his hands together and produces a realistic hoot of an owl that is answered by another far from the vicinity of the camp.

Slowly and delicately Subeg clears an area next to him then with painful precision he rolls onto his back. Raising his head he scouts the area behind him. Just in time. He sees a cloaked figure crouched on the ground not 10 metres away examining the very route he had taken.

The man's head looks up and for a moment they are looking strait at each other. But the man does not see Subeg in the darkness of his cover and turns and follows the track in the direction from which Subeg had come.

No sooner has the man disappeared from view than Subeg is out and after him but not along the same track.

He beats the man to the rock face he descended by a few precious moments - enough time to lay ambush.

The man, bent over tracking, arrives at the 'chimney' entrance. He looks up just in time to see Subeg like a bird of pray fall out of the air before his head is crushed by the boulder Subeg wealds.

Subeg quickly examines the body. The face distorted by the blow is swarthy and dark. Subeg sniffs the man's skin then licks it.

SUBEG

(a whisper)

Olive?

Then he examines under the man's cloak - all black clothing tightly bound at the waist, ankles and cuffs. Armed with two pistols, a scimitar and a straight knife. The scimitar Subeg examines with interest.

SUBEG (CONT'D)

Persian.

An owl hoots and Subeg looks towards the camp in the distance and a smile plays across his face. Cupping his hands he repeats the call.

EXT. OUTRIDERS CAMP. NIGHT

Now, dressed like the Persians, Subeg with the scimitar in his right hand enters the camp as if he owns it. One of the Persians sits up with a start then relaxes. Too late for a further change as Subeg marches right up to him and removes his head with a single blow. He's onto the second man driving the scimitar straight through the man's head. The third man leaps to his feet pulling out a pistol but Subeg takes him in the arm with the pistol he holds in his left hand and slashes the man's other arm with the scimitar - he wants him alive.

LATER**EXT. OUTRIDERS CAMP. DAY**

The Persian hangs by his fractured arms from a branch, his feet slowly roasting in the fire that Subeg is crouching beside eating food. Subeg talks between mouthfuls, to the Persian, but it is more to himself.

SUBEG

So ... Nadir Shah, The Great Persian Marauder, is already here in India and plans conquering the Mughals?

The Persian writhes in agony.

SUBEG (CONT'D)

He has already defeated the Afghans ... taken Kandahar ... and descended through the Khyber Pass ... No doubt he flies on the wings of eagles as well.

He gets up and holds a wooden spoon with food on it up to the man's mouth. The man looks at it and throws up. Subeg dodges the vomit then walks across to where the horses are linked, laden and lined up. He mounts his horse and returns to the man. Taking out his new scimitar he rests it on the man's head, tapping it as he talks.

SUBEG (CONT'D)

(reflective)

There is no point in me returning home as I would lose a good day perhaps a day and a half before I could let the Khalsa know. And know of this they must. (to man) What say you? The blood flows down the man's face from the cut that the weight of the scimitar is making in his head.

PERSIAN

(quietly)

In the name of Allah, kill me.

SUBEG

We should have been allies, for the Mughals are our enemy, yours and mine. So I will fulfil your wish instead of leaving you for the scavengers.

With this he slices the man's stomach open the contents of which fall into the fire.

One horrendous SCREAM rends the air.

EXT. MOUNTAIN PASS. DAY

A dying SCREAM echoes across the valley.

Subeg stands up on his stirrups and calls again with the voice of a kite. He has not long to wait for a band of Sikhs round the bend before him and another rides up behind him.

Subeg still dressed in Persian clothes rears up his horse.

SUBEG

Hold fast!! It is I, Subeg, do you not recognize me?

He laughs at the bewildered look on the faces of the men who now surround him. A BIG SIKH comes and feels Subeg's cloak as the others examine the horses; Arabian stallions a head bigger than the small mountain ponies of the Sikhs. They also pull out the booty of pistols and scimitars.

BIG SIKH

No doubt there is a story to go with this transformation.

SUBEG

No doubt there is and one that the entire Khalsa need to hear and as soon as possible.

BIG SIKH

Then let us not tarry.

With this they speed off down into the valley.

In the terraced fields the women working, stop and look at the riders winding their way down to the small-fortified town built partly into the mountain.

One of the women DESAN, small, lithe, and with a boy's impish face but not unpleasant for that, is driving a cart. She watches with excitement then can contain herself no longer and turns the cart around whipping the horse into a gallop towards the town.

EXT. TOWN SQUARE. DAY

More a shantytown than one of any substance yet it is clean and organized. The Elders having heard the commotion have come out of the main hall.

The riders come right up to them before reining in their horses. Subeg and the rest dismount and approach the Elders giving a traditional greeting.

SUBEG

We must convene a full council of the Khalsa for I have such news.

Desan arrives and leaps from the cart before it has even stopped and pushes her way through the throng that has already gathered to hear Subeg.

COUNCIL ELDER

And did you see his army with your own eyes?

EXT. HILLTOP. DAY. (FLASHBACK)

Subeg is high in a tree gazing at an entire army on the move in the distance. And not just any army but Nadir Shah's. Columns upon columns of men and canon all in black with red turbans and every single one mounted.

SUBEG (V.O.)

Indeed I did. And what a sight. And what a speed they did travel even their baggage train.

COUNCIL ELDER (V.O.)

(anxious)

And did they spot you?

Subeg hears horsemen near by and sees below him on a rough track some of Nadir's outriders not more than 200 metres from his position in the tree. But they are in a hurry and pass

without incident.

SUBEG (V.O.)

It was more by luck than skill that I avoided capture. His men were everywhere.

COUNCIL ELDER (V.O.)

And how many would you say?

Subeg having watched the outriders disappear scans the full extent of Nadir's army.

SUBEG (V.O.)

The army stretched from horizon to horizon.

A low collective SIGH of awe.

EXT. TOWN SQUARE. DAY

The SILENCE is finely broken by Desan who is standing in a defiant posture annoyed at the seaming lack of will.

DESAN

So, what is to be done?

The Elders glance in annoyance before looking away from her.

SUBEG

I must ride on and warn the other communities - would it not be best to convene a meeting here for the entire Khalsa.

MURMURS of approval.

DESAN

Now that's more like it. Subeg come with me, you must eat and rest before setting off.

SUBEG

Indeed, I would dearly love a few hours rest for I have not slept in 3 days.

COUNCIL ELDER

Then go now and rest, and after, perhaps you would go to our brethren in the East. It is difficult to go there through the mountains but with your Persian disguise you might have a better chance on the plain.

SUBEG

And with my Persian horse bred for speed I can cover the distance in half the time.

The Council Elder hugs Subeg.

COUNCIL ELDER

Go then and rest.

Subeg turns and seeing Desan enter the crowd he follows.

COUNCIL ELDER (CONT'D)

As for the rest of you, chose a village or community and send riders. Tell all to come. We must decided collectively what is to be done.

Subeg follows Desan through the crowd. He has a job keeping up with her as she makes her way up a narrow lane down which many people are hurrying on the way to the square. She finally turns off into a small courtyard and opens a door then enters. Subeg follows.

INT. ROOM. DAY

The room is sparsely furnished with a flock mattress on the floor in the corner. No sooner are they in the room and Subeg has pushed the wooden bolt into place barring the door then they both start stripping. She is naked in a trice and with a desperation almost boiling over into anger at the frustration of removing his Persian dress she finally can't wait any longer and pulls him onto the bed. They kiss passionately as she claws at his clothes.

DESAN

(laughing)

You will find little rest here my Subeg.

SUBEG

There will be enough time to rest when I'm dead my little vixen.

His flying black top covers the CPV.

EXT. TRACK. NIGHT

Out of the dark comes a lone rider. With the mountains to his left and the plain to the right, Subeg speeds with a terrible recklessness on what is little more than a farm track. He spots some riders off to his right also travelling with speed and he pulls up into some trees.

It is then he realizes he is witness to a chase and one that is going to cross his path.

4 of Nadir`s outriders are being pursued by a dozen Mughal cavalry. Nadir`s men suddenly break right and left then drop from their horses. They open fire before the Mughals have comprehended what has happened and take out 6 before engaging the enemy hand to hand.

Subeg joins the fray shooting 2 of the Mughals before despatching a third with his scimitar. But he does not wait to find out the outcome but rides on leaving the now equally matched fight as a cover for his passing.

EXT. MOUNTAIN TRACK. NIGHT.

Subeg is leading his horse up a tiny track imbedded in a scree slope that rounds the mountain. He comes to a stop at a point where he can see before him a giant waterfall crashing down between twin peaks.

The track arrives nearly half way up the side of the waterfall and he has difficulty persuading the horse to clamber onto the ledge that winds behind the waterfall itself.

INT. CAVERN. NIGHT

Once behind the waterfall he stops and pulls out a wooden torch from the saddlebags on his horse. He lights up using the firing mechanism of one of his pistols then turns to look into the cavern behind him.

Half a dozen swords are at his throat.

SUBEG

Now is that anyway to greet your old friend?

The Sikhs with much relief cry out as one.

MEN

Subeg!

Lamps are quickly lit and the enormity of the cavern exposed as they BANTER good-heartedly.

A chain of lights winds its way ever up until the men emerge from the ground next to a log dam. This is holding the river back from descending into the cavern and forcing it instead along to the precipice.

EXT. HEADQUARTERS OF THE EASTERN KHALSA. NIGHT

Subeg turns his gaze up the valley; the headquarters of the Eastern Khalsa. A large town has been built either side of the river clinging to both of the steep sides of the valley.

The lights from the houses lighten Subeg's heart and he quickly makes his way to where a crowd of many torches await his arrival.

INT. MEETING HOUSE. NIGHT

Subeg is eating a lamb's leg with the appetite of a hungry wolf. He is sitting at a rough wooden table surrounded by questioning Sikhs in a large mud brick room filled with the light of many torches.

SIKH 1

(examining Persian pistol)

Such a weapon to be carried by an ordinary soldier?

SIKH 2

(to Subeg)

And you say they each had 2 of these and a musket?

Subeg nods.

SIKH 1

If only we had such weapons we could take on the Mughals ourselves.

SIKH 2

And you say Nadir's army was fully mounted?

SIKH 3

Perhaps we should go and join them.

SUBEG

You forget Nadir is a Mohammedan as well as a Persian, and as such, is likely to have as little love for us as the Mughals. No, we must see this as an opportunity to acquire as many weapons as we can. There are skirmishes taking place all along Nadir's route, and what's more, within striking distance of our mountains.

SIKH 3

While the dogs fight each other we can attack the survivors.

SUBEG

Precisely!

The crowds give way as a number of the Elders arrive. Subeg stands and makes his greeting.

ELDER 1

(with admiration)

What news you have brought and what an adventure for yourself Subeg.

Subeg gives a flourish with the lamb's leg which makes everyone laugh.

ELDER 1 (CONT'D)

Tonight we make a feast for tomorrow we have much work to do.

LATER - A PARTY IS UNDERWAY.

Subeg is admired and not only by the men, one young girl in particular, BIBI, exchanges furtive glances with the hero of the day.

However the talk is of immanent action of the violent kind.

ELDER 2

(booming voice)

Silence!

He waits until all are quiet.

ELDER 2 (CONT'D)

Go ahead and celebrate the coming slaughter of our enemies, it is your right. But before you act out young men's dreams we must consult with the rest of the Khalsa. For that, is the news that Subeg has brought us - if you have forgotten.

Grumbling amongst the young men is finally given voice.

SIKH 1

But this is our chance now, by the time the full council is convened we could easily have missed it.

He gets much approval then arguments break out.

SUBEG

(seizing the moment)

Surely it is possible to do both. Send representation to the supreme council and while you wait for their answer let those willing descend with me upon our enemies and acquire the weapons we so badly need.

A great cheer drowns what little opposition that greets this.

ELDER 2

This is your moment Subeg it will not be I who will stand in the way of your council.

He sits down.

ELDER 1

Indeed, it is your moment Subeg, and a rich reward you do so richly deserve. God has blessed me with a treasure of such uniqueness that I now wish to bestow upon you. Bishan, the jewel of her people, has recently returned from her kinfolk in the western mountains, and I offer her, my youngest daughter, to you in marriage.

He directs the attention of the audience to the most stunningly beautiful girl, BISHAN, as she steps up next to him. A head, gifted with the soft beauty of fine features and a rare elegance, mounts her perfect body. Her hair has fire in its darkness but it's the eyes that glisten and hold the audience captive for they are large and of a brilliant emerald green.

Subeg is struck dumb.

INT. HOUSE. NIGHT

Bibi is furious and is beating Bishan with a stick. Bishan is CRYING out.

BIBI

He's mine and I will never let you have him.

Elder 1, comes in and saves Bishan from her sister's wrath.

ELDER 1

(to Bibi)

What has come over you? It is I who make the decision in this family.

BIBI

(spitting venom)

I am the oldest and it is I who should marry first.

ELDER 1

Now listen to your father, then perhaps you will understand why I have chosen Subeg to be her husband!

BIBI

What possible reason could there be?

ELDER 1

Have you not seen how the young men gaze upon her? If I were to give her to any one of them it would cause nothing but trouble in our community.

(with sadness)

She has already caused trouble between two boys who were such good friends. That`s why I had to send her away and only for to cause the same trouble for her kinfolk in the west.

Bibi goes to strike Bishan again but their father gets in between holding both by their hair.

ELDER 1 (CONT'D)

If she marries Subeg she will join his community and the problems here will dissipate. And her beauty will never be a problem there for she will already be married.

Bibi understands her father`s reasoning and relaxes but the strength of her emotion is still palpable.

BISHAN

(to Bibi)

How can you hate me for something I never chose. Can I help the way I was born?

(to her father)

And how can you hate me so much to send me away for good, when you are my father? I hate you both.

And with this she flees the room.

EXT. TOWN. NIGHT

Bishan drops down from one flat rooftop to another gazing in at windows until finally she sees what she is looking for.

INT. HOUSE. NIGHT

Subeg is lying on a bed gazing out of a window when he hears footsteps on the roof which is soon followed by an upside down head looking at him.

He leaps up and swings himself out of the window and onto the roof.

EXT. HOUSE. NIGHT

He sees that Bishan is upset and sits on the wall next to her.

SUBEG

Are those tears for me or for your self?

BISHAN

As I am like a curse to my own family then my tears are for myself.

SUBEG

(amused)

And why, Bishan, are you a curse to your family?

She looks at him with suspicion.

BISHAN

I bring them nothing but trouble.

SUBEG

And will you bring me nothing but trouble?

BISHAN

(dismissive)

They already plan the wedding.

SUBEG

But I have not yet accepted your father`s most generous offer.

Bishan is taken by surprise. Subeg is nonchalant.

BISHAN

Is it that you love another?

SUBEG

Perhaps.

BISHAN

But you must marry me for I can`t stay here where I am a curse to my family and my community.

SUBEG

But do you love me?

BISHAN

How do I know for I have never loved before?

SUBEG

(standing)

There is one way that a woman can tell and it is the same way that a woman can show a man if she loves him.

He offers her his hand. She looks at it then takes it. He pulls her up and grasps her to him kissing her passionately.

INT. SUBEGS ROOM. DAY.

CLOSE ON SUBEG`S FACE.

A hand runs tenderly around his features.

He slowly wakes, a contented smile emerges as he gazes at Bishan who is looking at him with affection.

SUBEG

So, do you know now?

BISHAN

I think you know that I do.

SUBEG

(with a little sadness)

What a strange fate I suffer - born no doubt from the times in which we live.

BISHAN

But why do you speak of your fate in such a tone?

Subeg gets up and starts dressing.

SUBEG

Because one acts so differently when one doesn't know if one will be alive the next day.

BISHAN

(concerned)

Do you speak in riddles? Or truly of your own death. I understand not what you say.

He drops down onto the bed next to her.

SUBEG (CONT'D)

What can I promise anyone when death stalks me, and I he. Bishan, I cannot promise that I will marry you for I fear that I may never be able to carry

out that promise. Love is an end in itself to me at this moment, for I love life and all things in it. I`m in love with love, as only those under a sentence of death can know. So don`t judge me harshly no matter what the future brings.

And with that he leaves.

She wraps a blanket around herself and goes out onto the roof terrace and watches as he rides down through the town.

EXT. TRACK. DAY

Subeg and a group of Sikhs are preparing an ambush amongst a circle of huge boulders - the track comes in one end and where it leaves they have blocked the way . Sikhs are spread out on the boulders waiting.

SUBEG

Now wait till they are all in then take out the last ones first.

Subeg lies down and the rest follow. Subeg talks to the Sikh LEADER who is lying next to him.

SUBEG (CONT'D)

(concerned)

There are not many with raiding experience.

LEADER

They sent the young and inexperienced with you Subeg to benefit from your genius for this.

SUBEG

Alas that I can give them only this one ambush. I must return to my own community for they still have no knowledge of Nadir, or of me for that matter.

SIKH 1 riding fast comes into the circle.

SIKH 1

They are upon us!

A small group of Nadir`s outriders enter at pace coming to a stop in front of the blocked passage.

The Sikhs open up and take down 4 with their first volley. Subeg jumps onto another and the rest of the Sikhs make relatively light work of the rest.

All but one young teenage BOY is now down in the trap. The

Boy sees something and shouts to the Sikhs but only Subeg takes notice as the others are too engrossed in acquiring the martial booty at hand.

Too late, a large group of soldiers dressed in the flamboyant colours of Rao of Rewari enter at pace. The Sikhs are taken by surprise and have little chance against the mounted men who far outnumber them.

Subeg sees that all is lost and slips away. He clammers up trying to reach the Boy and is nearly along side him,

SUBEG

Go quickly, hide....

when a shot RINGS out and blood flows down Subeg`s face. He touches his face then examines the blood on his fingers with a little bewilderment before collapsing.

The Boy needs no more prompting.

EXT. RAO S CAMP. NIGHT

The ambush site now makes a perfect campsite and this unit of Rao of Rewari`s cavalry is highly organized. Several fires with the men sitting eating dinner around them and with their muskets stacked in pyramids near by, tells of their discipline.

The CAPTAIN in charge is wandering through checking that all is well with his men then he joins a group of his fellow officers. As he sits down he is handed a bowl of food. Two Lieutenants are already having a heated debate.

LIEUTENANT 1

... and I say to you that he was with the Sikhs, and just look at his hair.

LIEUTENANT 2

But he would never have had time to change clothes. When we arrived they had just finished fighting.

LIEUTENANT 1

I tell you he`s a Sikh he had uncut hair, a steel bracelet ...

LIEUTENANT 3

(interrupting)

a Kara ... and a Kanga ...

CAPTAIN

(interrupting)

And what`s that.

LIEUTENANT 3

A wooden comb.

LIEUTENANT 1

And a knife.

LIEUTENANT 3

A Kirpan.

CAPTAIN

(to Lieutenant 3)

Come - show me this man.

They leave the others still arguing and walk quickly through the camp.

CAPTAIN (CONT'D)

It`s a good job that Rao sent us up here to scout for ourselves because what I`ve seen of the Mughal Army it is as decadent as the Emperor himself.

LIEUTENANT 3

Worse, for they pretend to be warriors. (with irony) At least our Emperor, Muhammed Shah, is honest, which all can see by his exemplary life style.

CAPTAIN

Be careful what you say, for decadent though he is he has many spies ... yes, even in Rao`s army. Now these Sikhs, are they bandits?

LIEUTENANT 3

They are followers of the Guru Nanak and have been driven out of the plains and into the mountains by the greed of our Mughal overlord. They did inhabit a very fertile region but were sorely persecuted for their beliefs as a means of dispossessing them of their land.

CAPTAIN

Long gone are the days of Akbar and religious tolerance and look what it leads to.

The 2 men arrive at a small tree and there tied and propped up against it is Subeg. He has a bandage wrapped around his

head replacing his turban.

CAPTAIN (CONT'D)

Has he recovered consciousness?

LIEUTENANT 3

Not that I know.

The Captain takes out his knife and pierces Subeg in the shoulder - nothing, no movement at all.

EXT. MOUNTAIN RIDGE. DAY

Vidyavant sits silhouetted against a matchless sky at the place of her last embrace with Subeg. She gazes down the valley towards the plains a pensive look upon her face that suddenly changes to one of released hope.

A man rides at speed up the valley.

Vidyavant pulls her skirts up and hurls herself down the mountainside to intercept his *path*.

The RIDER has all he can do to stop his horse from careering into her.

RIDER

(angry)

What madness is this?

VIDYAVANTI

I cannot say but - I thought you were another.

He can see that she is in distress and takes pity.

RIDER

I have been sent to find out why your community has not joined us for the general council of the Khalsa.

VIDYAVANT

We have had no news of such an event.

RIDER

Has Subeg not...

VIDYAVANT

Subeg! Tis he that I prayed was you.

RIDER

Then he has not returned?

VIDYAVANT

(more to herself)

Oh would I be in such distress if he had.

RIDER

I must go on.

He puts out his hand.

RIDER (CONT'D)

Come, I have much to tell and you must hear it also.

She takes his arm and swings up behind him and they ride off up the valley.

EXT. VILLAGE. DAY

A crowded meeting is just breaking up. The Rider is talking to the village Elders.

RIDER

But we must ride at once.

ELDER 1

(to Elder 2)

Who then is to go?

ELDER 2

I will go.

VIDYAVANT (O.S.)

And I will go father.

They all turn to see Vidyavant now dressed in pants and padded jacket.

ELDER 1

(distressed)

Your place is ...

VIDYAVANT

(with grim determination)

Where my betrothed is. I cannot stay here father it would rack me and I would be of no use to you or our community.

ELDER 1

But the dangers are too ...

VIDYAVANT

great? Too great to bear are my feelings that no one - not even you will stop me.

(to Rider)

And if you wont take me I will go alone.

The Rider looks to her father.

ELDER 1

(with sadness)

Then go you will if go you must.

He turns away and walks into the crowd.

INT. GENERAL MEETING OF THE KHALSA. NIGHT

The hall is filled with torchlight. A heavy haze hovers over the gathering that imparts an atmosphere of foreboding. At one end of the hall is a raised section and on it all the Elders from all of the communities are sat cross-legged before a long low table. The rest of the community sit cross-legged on the floor talking in low tones amongst each other.

The great door at one end opens and a group enter four of which are steadying a massive book, the Sri - Guru Granth Sahib which is balanced on the head of a fifth man. Those in the hall rise, falling silent as they do. They make way for those carrying the holy book that is placed on a throne in the centre of the room that has a canopy above it.

Those gathered make salutations as a 40 something woman, MATA, makes her way through a respectful crowd. She opens the great book and the congregation sit.

MATA

(reading)

God is One. All victory is of the Wondrous Guru.

(pause)

May the respected Sword help us!

(pause)

Ode of the respected Sword recited by the Tenth Guru.

(pause)

First remember the Sword; then remember and meditate upon Guru Nanak.

(pause)

Then remember and meditate upon Guru Angad, Guru Amar Das and Guru Ram Das: May they help us!

(pause)

Remember and meditate upon Guru Arjan, Guru Hargobind and Respected Guru Har Rai.

(pause)

Remember and meditate upon respected Guru Har Krishan, by having the sight of whom, all pains vanish.

(pause)

Remember and meditate upon Guru Tegh Bahadur; and then nine sources of wealth will come hastening to your home.

(pause)

Oh Respected Gurus! Kindly help us everywhere.

(pause)

May the kind, the respected Tenth Guru Gobind Singh assist us everywhere.

(pause)

Think and meditate upon the divine light of the Ten Kings contained in the respected Guru Granth Sahib and turn your thoughts to the divine teachings of and get pleasure by the sight of Guru Granth Sahib; Utter Wahe Guru (Wondrous God)!

(pause)

The Khalsa belongs to God; all victory is the victory of God.

Those GATHERED recite as one.

GATHERED

The Khalsa belongs to God; all victory is the victory of God.

Mata joins those on the raised section at the end of the hall. As soon as she sits down all HELL beaks loose - hundreds of voices wishing to be heard. Finally the HEAD GIANI (priest) stands up.

HEAD GIANI

(shouting)

That our strength lies in that we have but one God and one voice is not obvious in this gathering of the Khalsa!

Slowly the voices die down.

HEAD GIANI (CONT'D)

We are set a problem in that we can have no direct effect on present circumstances concerning The Marauder`s invasion of the Mughal Empire, and as such, I say we should just let the Mohammedans

slaughter themselves.

MAN in crowd.

MAN

See you not this as a great opportunity to wreak destruction on our enemies?

HEAD GIANI

No.

The crowd burst out into arguments.

In the crowd is Vidyavant looking puzzled at the disorder around her.

Then up jumps Desan and mounts 2 of the 3 steps up to where the Elders are sitting. She swings around with fire in her eyes.

DESAN

Our Giani is right! We are fractured by discord. But he is wrong, when he says we should do nothing! Have not the Mohammedans slaughtered our people with every opportunity given them. So now we have a chance to act out our rightful revenge with the sword.

(quoting)

"May the respected Sword help us!" Why is our Lord represented in our faith as a sword?

She looks around at all those gathered who well know what it means.

DESAN (CONT'D)

God in the form of the destroyer of evildoers. And have these Mohammedans not proved beyond any doubt that they are evildoers of the worst kind?

Silence reigns as Desan warms to her theme.

DESAN (CONT'D)

And what will our God think of us, if we like cowards, sit and watch evildoers kill evildoers and ourselves do nothing!

Silence.

DESAN (CONT'D)

Shame upon you all for even hesitating to act when we have the chance. If only we had more men like Subeg who rides out every day and battles with the enemy.

Vidyavant is taken aback to hear this woman talk about her betrothed. Looking about she realizes that he is well known and respected by these people.

DESAN (CONT'D)

Like Mai Bhago before me I will shame you all until you, like the 40 martyrs, return to the battle and find salvation in death.

Desan has gone too far and a number of men jump up.

MAN 1

(sarcastically)

And will you, like Mai Bhago, lead us?

Desan pulls her small dagger from her belt and raises it in the air.

DESAN

I will lead you to the very gates of Hell! if that is what it takes.

She has now gone way too far and the crowd shout her down.

She storms out of the hall in disgust and Vidyavant slips out after her.

EXT. HALL. NIGHT

Vidyavant is hard pressed to catch up to her as Desan winds her way through 100s of horses gathered outside. But Desan is not going far for she mounts some stairs to the building next to the hall.

When Vidyavant reaches the flat roof she sees Desan gazing down into the hall. Desan gives her only a cursory glance as she approaches.

DESAN

(without looking)

What is it you want?

VIDYAVANT

I admire your courage.

DESAN

(with condescension)

Huh.

VIDYAVANT

But if we are not strong enough to defeat the Mughals how can we defeat the Mughals and Nadir Shah together?

Desan turns and looks at Vidyavant full on.

DESAN

This is no time for inaction. Subeg was right we should descend upon them all and take their arms and horses and what ever we can while they are at each other`s throats.

VIDYAVANT

(curious)

So you knew Subeg`s mind on these things.

DESAN

(knowingly)

I know Subeg`s mind on many things.

VIDYAVANT

You and he are friends?

Desan laughs and relaxes.

DESAN

Friends?

Then with a certain amount of arrogance.

DESAN (CONT'D)

We were lovers. Does that shock you?

Shock does not describe the emotion that Vidyavant is now experiencing - horror is more appropriate.

DESAN (CONT'D)

These are difficult times to remain chaste. He deserves his head, don`t you think, when he could die tomorrow. And I would be proud to bear a child with his blood coursing through its veins.

VIDYAVANT

(confused emotion)

You would talk to me - his betrothed - of bearing his child?

DESAN

(confused)

His betrothed?

VIDYAVANT

You lie and are confused with the situation. Subeg would never betray me with another.

DESAN

(mean)

Subeg has ridden me like I ride a horse.

VIDYAVANT

(desperate)

You lie!

DESAN

I lie not! You lie!

Desan smacks Vidyavant across the face and sends her staggering back. But to Vidyavant this is a wake-up call.

VIDYAVANT

You talk of great blood coursing through veins - well I have the blood of Gobind coursing through mine.

And with this she attacks Desan with great force. Vidyavant is taller and if not stronger then of equal strength. The two go sprawling tearing at each other.

MATA (O.S.)

What is the meaning of this? Stop in the name of the 10 Gurus!

Vidyavant and Desan stop and turn to face a woman deeply respected in the Khalsa.

MATA (CONT'D)

I came to council you Desan and now I`m forced to chastise you. How dare you fight with your sister and show such disrespect. Get to your feet!

Desan reluctantly obeys and Vidyavant follows.

MATA (CONT'D)

Well? What is the meaning of this?

Desan looks to Vidyavant putting her in the position to reveal the source of their fight. Vidyavant looks one to the other then turns away and descends the stairs.

INT. HALL. DAY

Desan passes a man going out as she is going into the hall. He has a smirk on his face that Desan does not like. She walks passed the empty throne and up to the raised section at the end of the hall where Mata and 2 Elders are sitting. Standing in front of them is Elder 1 that came with Vidyavant. Her haute demeanour immediately rankles.

DESAN

You wish to see me?

MATA

Your fight last night with Vidyavant, was this anything to do with Subeg?

DESAN

(furious)

Where is the bitch that I may rip out her lying tongue.

The Elders are shocked and remonstrate with her.

DESAN (CONT'D)

What has she been saying?

ELDER 1

That is the problem, she has said nothing.

MATA

There are times young girl that you push too far the bounds of our culture and this may well be one of them. Tell us with honesty what has been going on?

DESAN

(to Elder 1)

Is she really betrothed to Subeg?

ELDER 1

Indeed.

DESAN

(suppresses her anger)

Where is she then so that I may apologize for not believing her?

The Elders look at Desan with concerned relief but Mata detects the wily look in Desan`s eyes.

MATA

You do not know?

DESAN

(defensive)

Why should I know?

The Elders exchange glances.

MATA

Because she is missing.

They can all see the genuine surprise on Desan`s face.

ELDER 1

The man that passed you on the way in was from the eastern headquarters of the Khalsa. He said that Subeg and a band of men set out at the same time as he set out here, to raid for arms, and that Subeg was to return to his own village after. But as we all now know, he never arrived.

Desan`s mind works out the consequences as she plots her course.

The Elders watch as she paces in thought.

DESAN

Perhaps she has returned to her village hoping that Subeg has turned up.

She offers this but it sounds like what it is; a sop.

ELDER 1

(probing)

Or perhaps she has gone in search of her betrothed.

Desan fixes the man with a steely stare then glances at Mata before turning away not wishing to hold her gaze. Desan walks nonchalantly out.

DESAN

If she turns up let me know so that I may apologize for my lack of .. honour.

The Elders look to Mata who has a countenance filled with suspicion as she watches Desan leave.

EXT. HALL. DAY

Once outside Desan runs like the wind.

EXT. MOUNTAIN PASS. DAY

Vidyavant arrives at the top walking her horse. She sits down on a rock overlooking the valley she has just come up. Far below she can see a rider pressing their horse hard and coming her way.

Vidyavant looks about her then leads the horse quickly over to the other side of the pass. Far below she can see scattered farms clinging to the mountainside.

She looks at her horse whose weary head hangs down. She rubs his head then leads him off the track and hides.

LATER

Desan mounts the pass and travels on her horse lathered by his exertions. Once she`s passed, Vidyavant leads her horse back onto the track and walks down the valley.

LATER

A dead horse lies on the side of the track the steam still rising from the body.

Vidyavant, now mounted, stops only for a moment then walks her horse on.

As she rounds a bend on the track she sees Desan carrying her saddle and a bag.

Desan, on hearing the horse, stops and turns until she recognizes Vidyavant, then carries on.

Vidyavant pulls up along side Desan who "looks daggers" at her.

VIDYAVANT

Let me take the saddle.

Desan in a fury casts the saddle over the side of the track and is immediately regretful.

Vidyavant, with not a little amusement, presses her horse on at a light trot, leaving Desan cursing her name and her family and ...

EXT. RIVER. DAY

Vidyavant is washing her hair in the river.

Some other women are washing clothes down stream and obviously talking about her.

A number of small farms are either side of the river and further down stream is the headquarters of the Eastern Khalsa.

Her horse is chomping the grass by the rivers edge then wanders down and nudges Vidyavant.

The women laugh as Vidyavant is almost pushed into the river.

WOMAN 1

(to Vidyavant)

He`s worse than an amorous man.

The other women laugh.

Vidyavant stands, the water dripping down from her hair, and looks at the horse as the WOMAN walks across to her with some material.

WOMAN 1 (CONT`D)

Here use this.

VIDYAVANT

(taking it)

Thanks.

WOMAN 1

So where are you from?

Vidyavant tells her while rapping her hair in the material.

WOMAN 1 (CONT`D)

(surprised)

Have you been to the meeting?

VIDYAVANT

Yes.

WOMAN 1

And what have they decided?

VIDYAVANT

I don't know I left before they made a decision.

WOMAN 1

(sarcastic)

You obviously have more important things to do.

VIDYAVANT

I came looking for Subeg. Do you know him?

At this the other women come across - amongst them is Bishan's sister Bibi.

BIBI

(knowingly)

We all know Subeg.

The women laugh.

VIDYAVANT

And do you know where he is?

BIBI

He left to go on a raid.

VIDYAVANT

And then was he not supposed to return to his village?

BIBI

(curious)

That was his plan but we have neither news of him nor of the others with whom he left.

Vidyavant follows the gaze of the women and her eyes light upon Desan carrying her saddle coming down the track from the road.

BIBI (CONT'D)

A friend of yours?

VIDYAVANT

No, but she claims to be a friend of Subeg's.

The women gathered titter amongst themselves as Desan throws down her saddle and drops to her knees soaking her head in the river.

DESAN

(turning angry)

Haven't you seen a weary traveller before.

BIBI

Not one so full of bile as you.

The women laugh.

Desan is on her feet in an instant only Vidyavant steps in to restrain her.

VIDYAVANT

Have you not even common curtesy.

Before she can answer a HORSEMAN arrives at the top of the track.

HORSEMAN

Bibi, where is Bishan? There is news of Subeg.

A mad scramble ensues as the women run up the track followed by Desan.

Vidyavant quickly mounts her horse and follows.

BIBI

What news?

HORSEMAN

Not good. Now where is Bishan?

BIBI

(shocked)

At home.

The Horseman rides off at pace.

The women including Bibi run down towards the town.

Desan doesn't know which way to go, tempted to follow the Horseman until Vidyavant mounts the road and follows the women. Furious, she stamps her feet and curses, then she follows.

INT. GURDWARA. DAY

The BOY, dirty and dishevelled, the Boy that was with Subeg at the ambush is surrounded by questioning men when Vidyavant arrives. She has to push her way through the crowd to get to him.

VIDYAVANT

(desperate)

And what news of Subeg?

The Boy`s head drops. A number of voices tell her to let him be but she can`t.

VIDYAVANT (CONT`D)

Please, I must know, for he is my betrothed.

The crowd are taken aback. The Boy looks up uncomprehending.

VIDYAVANT (CONT`D)

I have travelled from my village, his village, to have news of him so please tell me.

The women arrive and force their way through the crowd. They demand news of loved ones but the Boy is now as emotionally drained as he is physically. He tries to stand but then collapses.

EXT. ROOF TOP. NIGHT

The Boy is fast asleep on a mattress with his parents in attendance.

The CPV descends from this scene until it comes to a window into which it extends.

INT. ROOM. NIGHT

Bishan`s father stands perplexed in front of Vidyavant, regal in her pain, Desan, defiant in her anger, Bishan, tearful in her sorrow, and Bibi, watchful as a cobra eyeing her pray.

FATHER

What am I to say. You have added pain upon pain to this situation. You all claim Subeg`s affection and yet what purpose does it serve when he is most likely dead with the rest. What can I say?

FOOTSTEPS can be heard coming down from the roof and the attention in the room turns to greet the BOY`S FATHER as he enters.

BOY`S FATHER

He is awake now but please I beg you do not spend long with him for he is still so very weak.

EXT. ROOF TOP. NIGHT

The Boy sits now with a shawl round his shoulders leaning against the balustrade. His mother leaves after Vidyavant, Desan, Bishan, Bibi and Bishan`s father take up positions around the boy.

BOY

(tranquil)

He saved my life but he could not save the rest. It was not his fault.

BISHAN

Was he killed too?

BOY

I don`t think so.

EXT. RAO S MENS CAMP. NIGHT (FLASHBACK)

The Captain thrusts the knife into Subeg.

CAPTAIN

What say you, Sikh?

The blood flows freely from the knife wound in Subeg`s shoulder but he is not disturbed as he is `dead to the world`.

CAPTAIN (CONT`D)

(to the Lieutenant)

Take him to Rao in Delhi. If we are to have enemies within the empire then Rao should know.

LIEUTENANT 3

Indeed, for they could prove a real problem if the war with Nadir goes badly.

The 2 men look at each other.

CAPTAIN

And what do you think of The Great Marauder?

LIEUTENANT 3

Never have I seen an army travel with so many canon or proceed with such speed and daring.

CAPTAIN

(looking at Subeg)

These are very dark days for the empire.

The 2 men walk away. After they have disappeared amongst the fires the Sikh BOY crawls from a crevice between 2 of the giant boulders to Subeg.

BOY

(whispering)

Subeg .. Subeg .. wake up .. please wake up.

He is distraught and tries shaking him but in the end can see that Subeg is not to be roused. He slips back into his crevice.

EXT. ROOF TOP. NIGHT

The tears flow freely down the Boy`s face.

DESAN

Then he is captive of the Mughals. Better he were dead.

Bishan bursts into tears then gets up and hurries down the stairs followed by her sister.

Desan also gets up giving Vidyavant a steely look then also leaves. The Boy heaves.

BOY

I`m sorry .. I`m so sorry ..

Bishan`s father looks at Vidyavant who raises slowly and then places her hand upon the boy`s shoulder.

VIDYAVANT

Blame yourself not but take heart in that God allowed you to live to tell this story. Perhaps there may be great purpose in it.

She strokes his hair and he looks into her eyes. She smiles through the brimming tears.

EXT. TOWN. NIGHT

The streets are deserted and filled with shadows from the half moon`s bright gaze. Vidyavant walks in sadness until rounding a corner she comes across Bishan, Bibi and Desan in hushed conversation. She tries to avoid them but Desan wont let her dragging her by the arm into their circle.

VIDYAVANT

(whispering through clenched teeth)
Let go! There is no longer an object between us.
Let us all grieve in our own way.

BISHAN

(barely audible)
You are right. It is time to forget what has gone
between us like we must forget him.

She walks away and Vidyavant pulls her arm free from Desan's
weakening grip and follows.

Desan is frustrated but surrenders to the moment and for the
first time cries. She half stumbles as the grief takes hold.

Only Bibi's cool detached voice gives contrast to the
mounting atmosphere of despair.

BIBI

What cowards you are.

The words are spoken loud and clear and cut the night air
with piercing clarity.

Bishan, Vidyavant and Desan are all brought up sharp. Each
turning to look at their tormentor.

BIBI (CONT'D)

You would have us believe that you love this man,
(with derision)
then give up on this great love at the first moment
of truth.

(pause)

He is not dead! Merely captive.

Bishan, Vidyavant and Desan look one to the other.

DESAN

(regaining her composure)
And what would you have us do - rescue him from the
Mughals.

Bibi walks past Desan then Vidyavant and up to her sister.

BIBI

You were happy enough to take him when he was
rightfully mine. Now do your duty!

Bibi brushes past a shocked Bishan.

Bishan looks to the others, who shocked as herself, wait for her reply.

She turns from them and shouts after her sister.

BISHAN

(in anger)

Then go I will if go I must!

The words strike hard echoing down the valley.

EXT. WATERFALL. NIGHT

Out of the sound of rushing water emerges an echo of metal hooves on granite.

Bishan leads her horse from out of the waterfall followed by Desan and Vidyavant leading theirs.

They make their way onto the track across the scree slope picking their way down the mountain.

Out from behind the waterfall steps Bibi and watches them for a moment - a moment of reflection ending in a bitten lip of doubt. She turns and hurries back.

EXT. CAMPSITE. DAY

The first thing that Vidyavant notices are the first rays of light brushing the tops of the trees.

She sits up with a start and sees Bishan making chapattis on a hot stone in the middle of a fire. Desan appears carrying a water jar and gives her a `dirty look`. She joins them at the fire. Bishan throws her a chappati.

BISHAN

Hurry, for Saharanpur is a 1/4 of a moon`s ride from here and we cannot tarry.

DESAN AND VIDYAVANT (TOGETHER)

Saharanpur!

DESAN

We do not need to go as far as Saharanpur. We only need to go as far east as Panchkula and then it's directly south to Delhi.

BISHAN

That way we will ride down the entire length of the Mughals` defence. We must get behind them and approach Delhi from the northeast.

VIDYAVANT

(laughing ironically)

And by the time we get to Delhi we might just be in time to collect Subeg`s remains.

BISHAN

(angry)

And so which way will you have us go?

VIDYAVANT

Straight to Delhi through Gurdaspur - Jalandhar - Sangrur - Kaithal and .. Karnal.

The other two look at her as if she is mad.

BISHAN

You would have us ride through Nadir Shah`s outriders then through his army only to face the Mughal`s army.

VIDYAVANT

It matters not. The Mughals have had Subeg for a 1/4 of a moon already, if we don`t get to Subeg which means getting to Delhi in another 1/4 of a moon then *he will* be dead. Tortured to death. The only way we can reach him in time is through Karnal.

DESAN AND BISHAN

You`re mad!

VIDYAVANT

Then it is a wonderful madness.

Vidyavant gets up and picks up her things then saddles her horse. Desan and Bishan join her.

DESAN

I will not join you in this wonderful madness.

BISHAN

Nor I, for it is certain death.

VIDYAVANT

I put my trust in the Sword. And I would rather put my trust in God than in either of you.

Desan is furious.

DESAN

And the Sword would ask us to act so foolishly?!

BISHAN

How can you use such blasphemy to justify an act of stupidity.

Vidyavant mounts her horse.

VIDYAVANT

We will see.

DESAN

(with derision)

And how will we see?

VIDYAVANT

When I was a child I visited Delhi to see my aunt who is married to a Hindu. He has a chi shop, the Black Kettle, in the Sarafa Bazaar. If you survive then Subeg and I will see you there - when you eventually arrive that is.

She kicks her horse and he jumps away.

Desan is beside herself with rage and Bishan watches, but only for a moment, as Desan beats and kicks at the things around her.

Bishan quickly gathers her things and saddles her horse. Seeing Bishan leave Desan stops her destruction and calls out after her.

DESAN

And where are you running to - your father's hearth!

Bishan pulls her horse around.

BISHAN

You may well have been Subeg's lover but you will never be his wife!

Bishan spurs her horse on and rides into the rising sun.

Desan simmers in a rage of darkness that has vent only through her mouth.

DESAN

(between gritted teeth)

We`ll see about that.

EXT. ROAD. DAY

A PASTICHE OF INTERCUT SCENCES

Vidyavant rides down the road from Jalanphur through Sangrur and Kaithal where she passes through crowded roads thick with refugees.

Nadir`s outriders now travel in company size units and Vidyavant is witness to the swift dark fear they engender on their Arabian steeds, as they appear out of no where and are gone like the wind.

One company crosses her path not more than 200 metres from where she has brought her small mountain horse to a stand. A lone outrider flanking the main group stops on the road not more than 20 metres from where she is and looks down the road towards her. Dressed all in black, his eyes and hands the only flesh visible, he quickly assesses the situation and finding Vidyavant little more than a curiosity rears his horse on its hind legs and then speeds it on its way.

She is also witness to the Mughals plundering of their own people, as well as Hindus, in a line of fleeing refugees.

KAITHAL

She finally arrives to find the town in total chaos. Refugees heading in all directions have ground the main crossroads to a stand still.

Vidyavant dismounts and pulls her horse to the side looking for an alley in which to escape the mayhem.

Cries of dismay spread from the southern road and people start scattering as a large contingent of Nadir`s men scythe their way through the crowds. Vidyavant is mesmerized as the Persians pull up into the centre of the crossroads.

PERSIAN

(shouting)

This town is now under the control of Nadir Shah. Any man found travelling on the surrounding roads will be taken for a spy and executed. If you stay here you will all be safe. Nadir has no quarrel

with you as long as you do not interfere with our quest.

With this he speeds his horse on, the crowd breaking in front of him like the waters before the bow of a ship.

Vidyavant comes out of her trance and sees her chance remounting then dashing her horse forward into the space left by Nadir`s men and makes good progress going in the direction they have come from.

She`s surprised to find the road leaving the town clear but then thinks better of continuing and dismounts, leading her horse off the road to cut across country following only a path between the fields.

As night descends the lamplights of the farms become sirens of an appealing proposition.

She makes her way to the courtyard of a particularly inviting farm only to find all the lamps damped on her arrival. As she stands in the darkness with only the sound of the water buffalo ruminating she knows not what to do.

FARMER (O.S.)

(in fear)

We have no money and little food but what we have to spare is next to the well. In the name of Allah spare our lives.

Vidyavant, at first surprised, soon realizes her position and for the first time smiles.

VIDYAVANT

(to horse)

What say you - that these are better times for travellers.

She picks up the food and some water and leads her horse across to an open stable to let her horse feed. Soon she is fast asleep amongst the straw.

EXT. COUNTRY SIDE. DAY

Vidyavant`s horse pulls up and she dismounts. She`s on a path between villages but she has spotted a group of Nadir`s men off to her right. The SOUND of hooves makes her turn quickly and another group of horsemen are crossing the path behind her. She walks on and passes through a small deserted village then follows the small road out of the village to her left.

It soon joins the main road.

Looking left back down the road to Kaithal she sees encamped a large troop of Nadir`s men and to her right down the road to Karnal she sees a roadblock. She`s surrounded by Persians.

The men on the roadblock have spotted her and after only a minute of debate she mounts her horse and walks him towards them.

EXT. ROADBLOCK. DAY

These are the first Persian faces she has seen, the long end of their black turbans hanging down beside their faces. Faces filled with humour. One steps forward and holds her horse`s head another steps up along side of her and holds out his hand to help her dismount. Vidyavant`s regal bearing makes a fine setting for the look of disdain that she gives the man.

VIDYAVANT

I wish to pass as I have business in Delhi.

The men burst out laughing which brings the situation to the attention of a man, ZAND, taking refreshment with the Lieutenant in charge of the roadblock. The Lieutenant joins his men as Zand watches with interest.

LIEUTENANT

You have business with his Royal Highness the Mughal Emperor no doubt.

VIDYAVANT

In a way.

The men`s mirth is contagious.

LIEUTENANT

(suppressing laughter)

And in what way would that be?

VIDYAVANT

It need not concern you as indeed it does not.

A moment of silence at the insolence of her reply but the Lieutenant is up for fun and his men are soon laughing out loud.

LIEUTENANT

It may have slipped your attention my good Lady, but you are at the very gates of Nadir Shah`s headquarters, and I`m sure, that you can

understand, that we cannot just allow anyone to enter.

VIDYAVANT

I have no interest in Nadir Shah as I am sure he has no interest in me. So show me the way around and I will trouble you no more.

This is too much for the men and Vidyavant watches as they descend into uproarious hilarity.

LIEUTENANT

My dear Lady, how do I know you are not one of Muhammad Shah`s famous female bodyguard? And as such, you may well be spying on our positions.

VIDYAVANT

I am neither a spy nor one of Muhammad Shah`s .. bodyguard.

More laughter but Vidyavant rises to the occasion.

VIDYAVANT (CONT'D)

(with fire)

I am a Sikh, a devotee of the 10 gurus and as such have been persecuted by the Mughals for generations.

The men humorously respond to her statement with OOHS and ARRHS.

VIDYAVANT (CONT'D)

We were fighting the Mughals while you were still children and when your parents and grandparents were children. Do not associate me with my most bitter enemy, whom even as we speak, holds my betrothed captive.

LIEUTENANT

Can we safely say then, my good Lady, that you are still a virgin?

Surrounded by silent expectation Vidyavant`s tongue is frozen. Zand steps forward.

ZAND

Excuse my men`s exuberance and accept our hospitality.

To the man holding her horse.

ZAND (CONT'D)

Take her to the woman`s quarters so that she may bathe and refresh herself.

The man obeys immediately and Vidyavant is led through the roadblock. She glances but once at Zand but his poker face is unreadable.

Zand is joined by the Lieutenant and they watch as she is led through the defensive outer perimeter of Nadir Shah`s headquarters.

EXT. SKIRMISH. DAY

Desan`s boyish face peeps over the top of a big boulder, the excited expression and quick head movements mimicking that of a cat watching a group of mice at play.

Below her, a battle scene between the Persians and the Mughals, with the Persians getting the upper hand very quickly. Surrounded, the Mughals try a break out only to be cut down by the better-armed Persians using their long barrelled pistols at close range with devastating effect. Nadir`s men are obviously in no mood for taking prisoners and slaughter the Mughals to a man.

No sooner have they finished off the last man then they are on their way. No gloating, no celebration, no compromise to their goal that so obviously lies else where - they head east.

Once they have gone Desan sits up on the boulder and looks down at the devastation. She`s overjoyed at the Mughals` demise looking after the departing Persians in awe.

Then she descends into the heart of the Mughals` destruction her knife in her hand. She soon liberates a dead man of a short sword which she practices wielding, using the dead bodies as the brunt of her hatred. A noise behind her makes her jump and twist into a defensive stance until she sees the threat is a man with a terrible head wound. He tries to stand and eventually staggers to his feet. His arms are outstretched and he gazes out through blind eyes.

WOUNDED MAN

Ali, Mohammad, Mustapher. Is anyone there? In the name of Allah give answer for I am blind.

Desan moves towards the man preparing to strike.

WOUNDED MAN (CONT'D)

(hearing movement)

Who is that!? Is that you Ali?

Desan clears her throat and spits.

WOUNDED MAN (CONT'D)

You must take this message to Sa`adat Khan.

He brings out a parchment from inside his tunic and holds it out.

WOUNDED MAN (CONT'D)

But please don`t leave me here, take me with you,
for surely I will die if I am left.

She leaps like a cat and with one slash removes his head. The headless corpse collapses back onto another body the blood gushing out over its uniform. Desan looks down at the fallen man and notices his uniform is different from the others. He has a breastplate with a crest on it and she notices his clothes are a different colour and on closer inspection that they are of a finer quality.

DESAN

Sa`adat Khan. Now I wonder who he is?

She kicks the body angry with herself.

DESAN (CONT'D)

I was far too hasty in despatching you!

She quickly looks about, and reassured that she is the only living person, she starts stripping the decapitated man`s body after pocketing the parchment.

LATER

Dressed in the courier`s clothes and with her hair up inside of a turban she looks just like a boy.

She sidles up to a large horse with the same crest on its livery that is on her newly acquired breastplate. And having captured the beast she dances in mischief before struggling to mount her new horse. She puts it through a series of movements to get the feel of the beast then kicks it off into a gallop heading south.

EXT. ROAD. DAY

Desan`s lathered horse careers into a contingent of the Mughal`s cavalry crossing the road from the cover of forest. She sends one man sprawling from his horse before reining in her own.

MUGHAL CAPTAIN

And what is ..

DESAN

Get out of my way fool I have an urgent despatch for Sa`adat Khan!

The Captain is none too pleased but seeing her insignia directs his men to give way. She`s just about to charge off when she swings her horse around and guides it amongst the cavalry until she comes across a horse she fancies.

DESAN (CONT`D)

(to rider)

Dismount, I want your horse.

She dismounts and looks up at the surrounding men.

DESAN (CONT`D)

Water and food - well quickly then!

A number offer her their provisions and she chooses.

CAPTAIN

What news from the north?

DESAN

Not good and its only going to get worse.

The men don`t like what they are hearing. A man offers her his horse.

DESAN (CONT`D)

You idiot! Change the saddle!

CAPTAIN

Are they encircling us?

Desan goes to put her hands on her hips then changes her mind and confronts him by pointing an accusing finger at him.

DESAN

That, I cannot reveal, but what I can tell is that they are taking no prisoners and giving no quarter.

Looking about her with disdain.

DESAN (CONT'D)

They'll eat you lot for breakfast.

She laughs at their fear but the action dislodges her turban end and reveals her face.

CAPTAIN

You're just a boy!?

DESAN

More man than you.

And she draws her sword.

DESAN (CONT'D)

Want to try me.

The Captain is saved by the rider handing her the new horse newly saddled.

DESAN (CONT'D)

(to rider)

Down on your knees so that I may mount.

The rider drops down and she springs off his back into the saddle.

CAPTAIN

(concerned)

I have no doubt of your bravery but it would be best if we escorted you for there has been action further south.

Desan ponders while fixing her turban.

DESAN

If you wish but I wait for no man.

And with this she kicks her horse off straight into a gallop. The Captain looks at his fearful men then they all charge after her.

EXT. TOWN. DAY

Desan slows her horse as she enters the town for in front of her is chaos. Mughal soldiers are trying to unload artillery munitions from wagons as others are trying to push canon down streets to the west. Gunfire can be heard in the near distance. Her escort come up around her as a rider comes charging up the street between the canon and wagons.

HORSEMAN

Are you the cavalry reinforcements?

CAPTAIN

No, we are but an escort for this courier.

HORSEMAN

(to Desan)

I will have to relieve you of your escort for we need every man we can get.

Just then a canon shell whistles into town exploding amongst the houses.

DESAN

No problem. But I must get on to Delhi ..

HORSEMAN AND CAPTAIN

(surprised)

Delhi?

DESAN

(angry)

This message must get through to Sa`adat!

HORSEMAN

But Sa`adat is in Karnal.

The Horseman looks confused and turns to the Captain who is looking at Desan with suspicion.

DESAN

Then I must get to Karnal!

CAPTAIN

Let me see your parchment.

DESAN

I have no time for this - show me the way!

The Captain and the Horseman look at each other then at Desan who is circling her horse.

CAPTAIN

You do not know the way?

Desan knows she has blundered and kicks her horse off as a shell whistles in and hits an ammunition wagon which EXPLODES with terrific force.

The blast throws the Captain off his horse, and the Horseman, who was directly in front of him, is shredded by shrapnel.

Desan barely holds onto her seat but quickly rights herself and gallops off towards the east.

The Captain is disoriented and staggers about aimlessly until one of his men comes up to him.

SOLDIER

Captain what must we do?

CAPTAIN

Do?

(looking for Desan)

Where did he go?

SOLDIER

Who?

CAPTAIN

The courier.

The man points east.

CAPTAIN (CONT'D)

Follow him .. for I d ..

The Captain collapses, and the Soldier is just in time to slow his fall.

CPV pulls back to a scene of utter devastation. Human parts and animal parts are scattered everywhere. The buildings shredded or collapsed. It is unrecognisable from but a few seconds before.

The Man lays the Captain down and looks around and sees only one other of his colleagues still standing.

SURVIVOR 1

Come with me we must go after the Courier.

SOLDIER 2 needs no more encouragement and they head off in pursuit of Desan as a wave of shells whistle in to mark their departure.

EXT. JUNGLE. NIGHT.

Bishan is on a small road trotting her horse. To one side there are fields to the other Jungle. She is all awareness, the slightest sound or movement making her pull up and strain her senses.

Something 'big' is going on in the distance off to her right.

A group of cavalry break cover from the jungle on the left 200-300 metres further down the road.

Bishan doesn't hesitate but turns her horse around and is just about to set off back down the track when another unit of cavalry breaks cover in that direction but this less than a hundred metres away. She plunges into the jungle.

Abandoning good sense she gallops on crashing through dense undergrowth in a panic until her horse pulls up so sharp that she flies nearly over its head.

Bishan dismounts from the horses neck and looks at the horse's front leg - it is badly gashed around the joint.

She looks about her into the dark forest with a deepening sense of foreboding.

Then walks on, leading her lame horse into thickening forest, until she comes across what is nothing more than a jungle track.

She heads away from the distant noise until she sees a glimmer of light through foliage its flickering nature fills her with a deepening dread. She debates whether to go on but the way back and the enclosing forest have little welcome.

Moving on she sees a village lit up by fire. Fear is present and she can feel it. She's just about to make a detour when a WOMAN'S voice calls out in utter despair.

WOMAN (O.S.)

Help me - help my poor child!

Bishan debates as the woman`s cries insinuate their plea on to her very soul. She ties the horse and approaches the village. It is small, not more than 10 buildings, a third of which are on fire - it seems deserted.

WOMAN (O.S.)

Help me - help my poor child.

The pitiful cry weakens but doesn`t loose its potency.

Bishan sneaks between the buildings until she comes to where the voice is coming from - a small barn.

INT. SMALL BARN. NIGHT.

The flickering light brings forth a terrible sight.

A naked teenage girl is tied to a wooden hayrack - catatonic. Her mother is at her feet reaching out but unable to touch her as she is tethered by the neck.

Bishan approaches with increasing horror.

MAN (O.S.)

And where have you been hiding my beauty?

Swinging around Bishan faces a semi-naked MAN.

She turns to flee but the entrance is blocked by another man, MAN 2 then a third man, MAN 3 steps along side him.

MAN 2

This one`s mine.

Man 3 pushes Man 2 aside.

MAN 3

You can have her after I`ve finished.

Bishan retreats into a corner as Man 3 strides up to her and starts ripping her clothes off. Her struggles only produce violent reaction as she is beaten into submission.

CLOSE ON the Teenage Girl`s catatonic face as it MELDS in the flickering firelight into Bishan`s.

INT. SMALL BARN. DAY.

CLOSE ON Bishan`s face.

The cockerel`s SCREAM of welcome to the dawn brings a flicker of life back to Bishan`s eyes.

She begins to tremble uncontrollably and sits up with a start. The place is deserted.

Grabbing her torn garments up in front of her she trembles her way to the entrance and peers outside. Smouldering ruins in the half-light are all that greet her beside the cockerel.

He stands in all his magnificence VENTING his lungs and his ego.

Bishan unconsciously scratches her trembling head and body while looking at him. Then terror over comes her and she flees through the village, then into the fields and finally into the forest.

EXT. FOREST. DAY.

A movement brings her up sharp but it is only her lame horse. She walks across to him and places a trembling hand on his body to make sure he`s real. Then grabs him around the neck and weeps uncontrollably.

LATER

Bishan, tired and dirty, walks in torn rags wearily alongside her lame horse on the jungle track.

She stops when she sees a small group of refugees comprising several carts on what must be a road a couple of hundred metres in front.

She frees her horse from its saddle and sends it on its way weeping with a great sadness.

She runs up to the road but as she draws near she hesitates before plunging out amongst strangers. She hides and tries to see what kind of people they are.

Some disturbance behind them has everyone looking back which gives Bishan the chance to jump into a pile of hay on a cart and she buries herself deep. She relaxes and closes her eyes as the refugee group hurries on.

The SCREAMS of the refugees wake Bishan and she peers out of the straw to see Nadir`s outriders forcing the refugees from the road.

She can`t stand it and worms her way out of the hay and on hitting the ground is immediately spotted by a Persian. She dives into the jungle and runs crouched for most of the time

through dense undergrowth.

In one small clearing she stops and listens. She hears a SOUND off to her right and sees a Persian searching for her. She runs with abandon driven by fear - her clothes and skin shredded by dense vegetation. She finds herself in a pocket and stops to listen in the direction she has come from. Silence.

She turns her head slowly around sensing something more than hearing something.

Silence. And what a terrible silence. No wind rustles through the leaves, no bird speaks, no animal cries out - it is the silence of dread.

Then she sees an entrance to a clearance in the forest. She looks behind her and listens. Still silence. Then back to those legs viewed through the entrance to the clearance. Were those legs there before? Are they there now? Lying twisted, it seems impossible that they are not in motion.

She moves quietly towards those legs moving out into the clearance itself. When the whole body of one of Nadir Shah's dark riders is fully revealed before her, she is uncomprehending of space. Having viewed the entire body her eyes slowly move beyond until she sees striped legs. Her eyes follow the markings up until she is confronted by a head a metre across and eyes that stare with intent upon her being. She is faced with a tiger 2 metres at the shoulder.

Frozen, she almost welcomes the voice inside of her head.

VOICE (V.O.)

Do not move - do not breathe - you are not her quarry.

Bishan remains frozen. The tiger loses interest in her presence and picks the Persian body up in her mouth and saunters across the clearing into the jungle on the other side.

Behind where the tiger stood is a naked man, with hair piled up on the crown and with a sickle blade sticking part way out. His smile, a thing of beauty in itself, is housed in mushroom purple skin that rounds features of such delicacy usually reserved for women of great beauty.

His countenance makes her self-conscious and she feels the knotted tresses on her face. In stroking these aside she sees

blood on her hands from the many cuts on her face. Her hands tremble and she looks at them as if they were foreign objects to her.

Strong but soft hands grasp them firmly and the trembling stops.

She looks deep into black eyes that contain the night. In them she sees/WE SEE, the stars EXPLODING in death then IMPLODING into life. Sees worlds born, die and reborn in an endless cycle. She/WE drift into the Void of total black emptiness when a pinprick of light beams out these words.

VOICE (CONT'D)

Come back devotee of The Sword for this is not your time - you have far to travel and much to do.

The pinprick silently explodes into blinding light that coalesces first into stars then into galaxies. A star passes US and the journey slows to a stop as the Earth passes in its blue beauty.

A hand caresses her face and her freed hand grasps it like a child grasping at a departing parent. She opens her eyes.

BISHAN

Don't leave me.

VOICE

I will never leave you.

Her trembling stopped he leads her gently down into a small valley where a stream has been dammed.

VOICE (CONT'D)

Cleanse yourself while I swim.

He enters the water and swims a little way out - turning he waves.

And assured, Bishan drops to her knees on a washing stone at the edge and gazes at her reflected face now torn and bloody. She washes with vigour as if trying to remove the bloody scars themselves.

She stops, realizing the uselessness of her act and sits gazing at the reflection of her torn face.

VOICE (V.O.)

Great beauty is a great deception - use this knowledge well.

She looks back up and sees the Naked Man laughing. He does not wait but swims into rushes. Once he is out of sight she strips to the waist and starts washing her hair.

LATER

Bishan, clean and her wet hair piled on her head, walks around to where the Naked Man sits meditating under a tree. The great cat lying by his side is fast asleep.

VOICE (V.O.)

Come, I have made you a bed of grace for it is time for you to sleep in the Mystic so you may dream of the world anew.

She lies on the grassy bed and gazes up at the Naked Man long lost in meditation. She sleeps.

VOICE (CONT'D)

What is seen is not the Truth
 What is cannot be said
 Trust comes not without seeing
 Nor understanding without words
 The wise comprehends with knowledge
 To the ignorant it is but a wonder
 Some worship the formless God
 Some worship His various forms
 In what way is He beyond these attributes?
 Only the Knower knows
 That music cannot be written
 How can then be the notes?
 Awareness alone will overcome illusion.

Bishan sleeps.

Bishan brushes the hay from her face - a face now devoid of scars.

VOICE

(echoing)

Awareness alone will overcome illusion.

Her green eyes open and awareness of her surrounding brings consternation.

EXT. CART. NIGHT

She awakes fully and pokes her head out of the hay into the breeze of the night.

A giant sickle moon stands out against a sky embroidered with glistening stars. She relaxes back and pays homage to the sickle moon. As if in recognition a shooting star traverses the sky.

BISHAN (V.O.)

"Great beauty is a great deception."

She thinks for a moment then a wry smile comes to her face.

The cart rumbles on and she sees that three men are up front but that there is no sign of the rest of the refugees. She ponders the situation but only for a moment.

BISHAN (CONT'D)

(with authority)

And what happened to the others?

The 3 men turn while reaching inside their shirts. Bishan notes their action and gets a glimpse of long pistols. She looks about her as if searching for these 'others'.

MAN 1

(looking to his friends)

The Persians massacred them all.

BISHAN

And how did you escape their wrath?

MAN 1

We fled into the jungle.

MAN 2

Aye .. and long did we play hide and seek with Nadir`s men.

MAN 1

But how come you are here?

BISHAN

I have hid here many a long while for I am a spy for Muhammed Shah and need get to Delhi to tell my story.

The three men look at each other.

MAN 1

Then lucky you be to have survived their tireless gaze.

Bishan gets up and joins them on the plank that makes for a seat.

BISHAN

Carry me to Delhi and you will be rewarded well.

MAN 1

In gold?

BISHAN

(with disdain)

In gold? If that is payment for your loss then so be it.

MAN 1

I did not ..

MAN 2

What other currency did you have in mind?

BISHAN

(sounding indignant)

The honour of his Mughal blessing.

MAN 2

But we are simple peasants and have lost everything.

BISHAN

(conciliatory)

I will see what I can do.

MAN 2

And can you see us through to Delhi? There are roadblocks and one not too far off by the looks on it.

He nods in the direction of a line of carts drawn up in front of him.

BISHAN

(with authority)

Leave that to me.

The three men exchange glances that Bishan is not unaware of.

EXT. ROADBLOCK - OUTSKIRTS OF DELHI. NIGHT.

A cockfight that has the big crowd watching close to hysteria. The blood runs free and finally there is a winner.

The young LIEUTENANT is furious having lost his bet. He finally turns away in disgust after he pays off his debtors.

A MAN runs up to him.

MAN

Come quick, there is a woman who claims to be a spy of Muhammed Shah.

The Lieutenant glad for release from his situation waves the Man on.

INT. ROADBLOCK POST. NIGHT

Bishan looks at herself in the small mirror on the wall. She practices a number of expressions while arranging her hair.

The Lieutenant storms into the room but confronted by this vision of beauty in rags is brought up sharp.

Bishan takes control.

BISHAN

So, you have finally returned to your post. Wish you well that I have bigger things to attend to or your life would be forfeit!

LIEUTENANT

I .. I .. I..

BISHAN

(mimicking)

I .. I .. I am a fool, perhaps?

LIEUTENANT

I ..

BISHAN

Don't bother! Outside on the cart that I arrived in are 3 of Nadir Shah's spies. Go see for yourself and you will find Persian pistols, Persian daggers and no doubt .. Persians!!

The Lieutenant stands uncomprehending.

BISHAN (CONT'D)

Well!!!

The lieutenant is shocked into action and with only a glance back returns outside.

EXT. ROAD BLOCK. NIGHT

The place is crowded and busy. The excitement in the atmosphere is as much carnival as one of fear. The few soldiers there are chatting with friends.

The young Lieutenant looks first at the three men on the cart then to the man that brought him the news.

LIEUTENANT

See those men on the cart
(he nods)
they are Nadir`s spies. Fetch the guard and take them prisoner.

The Man looks to the men on the cart then back to the Lieutenant. His actions don`t go unnoticed by the 3 men on the cart. The man quickly disappears around the back as the Lieutenant slowly walks towards the cart.

The 3 Persians jump from the cart and flee towards the crowds gathered at the entrance to the town.

LIEUTENANT (CONT'D)

Stop them!!

Two of the soldiers push past those around them and raise their muskets but the Persians spin and drop to their knees with pistols raised and fire before the soldiers fire - taking both of them down. Then they are up and off brandishing their weapons to panic the crowd.

Bishan walks along side the Lieutenant as more soldiers appear with the Man.

BISHAN

Well! What are you waiting for?

LIEUTENANT

(to his men)
Don`t just stand there, get after them!!

BISHAN

I`d better come and hold your hand.

LIEUTENANT

(furious)
That will not be necessary.

BISHAN

Fool! I can identify them.

She runs after the soldiers and finally the Lieutenant sets off in pursuit grabbing a musket from one of his men.

INT. TOWN. NIGHT

Bishan and the Lieutenant catch up to his soldiers and find out that 2 of the Persians have run down an alley and the third has gone the other way across to the market. Bishan doesn't wait.

BISHAN

(to 2 soldiers)

You come with me.

The soldiers look to the Lieutenant.

LIEUTENANT

Go!

(then to the rest)

Follow the other two!

Bishan has already set off and the 2 soldiers go to catch up followed by the Lieutenant. The market is busy and Bishan tries jumping up now and then to see if she can see him.

The Persian sees her at the same time she sees him and he flees through the narrow street filled with people, knocking them over creating a diversion. Then he dives between the marketer's carts and up an alley.

Bishan gets to the place with the soldiers just behind her. She points up the alley and the two soldiers quickly follow her directions. She's just about to follow them when the Lieutenant stops her.

BISHAN

Good of you to join us.

The Lieutenant thinks better of saying anything and follows his men with Bishan bringing up the rear.

The Persian rounds a corner and goes straight to a door that is locked. He tries banging on it until he is disturbed by the arrival of the soldiers. He pulls out a pistol and takes one down then throws himself at the door dodging a musket ball on

the way. The door gives and he enters a

WAREHOUSE

The warehouse is filled with large bails of cotton. Only a weak light through slatted windows high up falls into the well of darkness. The soldier and the Lieutenant enter at a crouch and search around in the dark trying to make out where they are.

Bishan slips in and hides next to the door.

The Lieutenant hears something and looks at the bails of cotton stacked to a height of 4 metres. He signals to the soldier to go down one of the walkways between the bails while he slings his musket over his shoulder and climbs onto the top. As he puts his head over the top he sees the Persian pouring liquid onto the cotton down at the other end of the warehouse. He tries slinging his musket on top but in doing so alerts the Persian who throws the container down and sets fire to the liquid using his pistol's firing mechanism. Flames immediately jump up and he immediately jumps across the walkway between the bails.

A SHOT rings out as the soldier fires at the Persian. But the Persian lands safely and turns and leaps onto the soldier stabbing him before he hits the ground.

The Lieutenant is finally on the top of the bails and runs along with his musket cocked. He peers over the edge and sees the soldier dead on the floor but no sign of the Persian.

The fire has taken hold and the warehouse is fast filling with smoke.

The Lieutenant stealthily makes his way back and checking that the Persian isn't waiting for him drops down to where he started.

He backs up towards the door only backing towards the Persian. In a moment of awareness he quickly turns around as the Persian stabs at him wounding him in the arm. He drops the musket as the Persian hurls himself at him. They fight in desperation until Bishan swinging the musket with all her strength knocks the Persian out.

BISHAN (CONT'D)

(leaning on the musket)

At least you make a good decoy.

Soldiers come in behind her and stare at the Lieutenant's discomfort.

INT. ROADBLOCK POST. NIGHT

Bishan, back in front of the mirror, is listening to the Captain talking to the Lieutenant who is having his wound dressed.

CAPTAIN

The bails of cotton would appear to have been bought by Afghans a few weeks ago and were waiting for shipment. The warehouse owner has identified the captured man as one of them.

LIEUTENANT

Then they laid this plan to bring chaos to Delhi just as battle is about to be joined at Karnal.

CAPTAIN

But thanks to our - friend.

They both look to Bishan. She turns and gives them a radiant smile.

BISHAN

If the battle is about to begin I have no time to lose. Perhaps you would be good enough to give me an escort so that I may bring my news to the Emperor.

CAPTAIN

Indeed.

BISHAN

And I would have the good Lieutenant accompany me for I will feel safe with his bravery as my shield.

She turns from the Captain to smile at the Lieutenant who doesn't know where to look.

CAPTAIN

Are you well enough to travel?

LIEUTENANT

Well enough.

BISHAN

Then let us sup and be off.

OUTSIDE

She walks out and looks at the flames playing against the relief of rising smoke in the near distance. The Captain and the Lieutenant join her.

BISHAN (CONT'D)

What times these are for devotees of The Sword.

The double meaning is lost on both of them.

INT. HAREM TENT. NIGHT

Vidyavant is bathing in a round wooden bath when 2 maids come in. One places some clothes down on a cushion then removes Vidyavant's dirty clothes. The other takes Vidyavant's wet hair and wraps it in a towel then holds up another so that she may dry her. Vidyavant gets out of the bath and the woman wraps the towel around her then starts rubbing her down.

VIDYAVANT

There is no need. I am quite capable of drying myself, thank you.

(seeing the maid taking her clothes)

Where are you taking them?

MAID

To clean them, of course. You have new ones here.

The two maids leave tittering. Vidyavant examines her new clothes and her suspicions increase as she squeezes her large proud breasts into a silk bodice top that is edged with jewels. The matching pants are so fine they are virtually see-through - the matching belt and shoes so studded with large jewels that they have real weight. She can't resist trying them on and instinctively looks around for a mirror, of which there is none.

She looks in the bath to see herself but quickly reaches her hand in pulling out her small dagger and slips it inside her waistband.

VIDYAVANT

(to herself)

If I am to be dressed like a lamb for the slaughter then they will find this lamb has teeth.

A group of tittering maids enter 2 carrying a mirror, the others toiletries. Vidyavant allows herself to be prepared

while still keeping her dignity. The effect on the women is noticeable for none can hold her eye.

INT. LARGE TENT. NIGHT

The space is circular and over 15 metres in diameter. A central pole 10 metres in height is supported by many others outside. The space is lined with cloth and floored with carpet. Opposite the entrance a 1/3rd of the circle is taken up with rich cushions and in front of these are large circular metal plates covered with exotic dishes.

Several of Nadir`s Generals are eating and talking they are all men in their 30s and are filled with exuberance and mirth providing a relaxed atmosphere.

Between these and the central pole a large map is laid out on the floor - the battlefield. Between the pole and the entrance the space is empty apart from Nadir`s body guard of 10 men and a number of richly dressed maids coming and going with dishes and wine. There are dozens of lanterns, hanging from ropes that support the cloth interior of the dome, so that the place is filled with brilliant light. The overall IMAGE is one of exotic minimalism.

Behind the cloth lining the walls stands a man dressed in black. His muscular frame emphasized by the tight belt around the waist out of which sticks a battleaxe. His feet and legs to the knee are covered in sheepskin and bound tight. The hair, oiled to a shine, is knotted at the back with its own length. The dark greasy skin of the face is pock marked and the beard sparse though strong. The eyes are almost Mongolian in shape and black in all but the brightest light when they are the colour of burnt wood. The features are severe almost ugly only the full mouth hints of beauty. If his demeanour reflects the power of his body, it`s his attention, which can instil fear with a single glance that gives animation to this man, this Great Marauder, this, NADIR SHAH.

He listens as Zand banter in good humour with General TEYMOUR.

TEYMOUR

So you would swap me places for tomorrow`s battle?

ZAND

A change is as good as a rest they say and looking after Sa`adat`s harem would make a pleasant change from looking after our own.

General ROSTAM joins in.

ROSTAM

And what makes you think that Teymour will get to Sa`adat`s harem first.

ZAND

Because you will have to ride up hill while he down.

TEYMOUR (V.O.)

(laughing)

Now I see the strength of your tactics I will make a wager for the finest beauty in his harem for that black stallion you stole from under Shahkam`s nose in Peshawar.

General SHAHKAM joins in.

SHAHKAM

(cunning smile)

And as I will have Sa`adat`s harem first
(Rostam and Teymour throw things at Shahkam)
I wager the 10 beauties of his harem for that virgin you are having prepared right now.

Rostam and Teymour look immediately at Zand who tries to hide his mirth behind his hand.

TEYMOUR

(to Shahkam)

What virgin?

SHAHKAM

The one that strolled in here but last evening.

ZAND

I must remember your spies are everywhere.

ROSTAM

Well tell us then Zand.

Zand sighs and tries changing the subject.

ZAND

More wine?

They all throw things at him.

ZAND (CONT'D)

Alright, alright. She walked her horse up to the north gate and demanded leave to pass through our camp as she was on her way to Delhi to rescue her betrothed.

They laugh while they banter then start throwing things at Zand once more.

ZAND (CONT'D)

(laughing)

Stop, stop. It`s true. A magnificent creature if somewhat mad.

The faintest of smiles emerges on Nadir`s face and he steps through a gap in the material and joins his men. They salute Nadir with hands to heart, head and Allah but without rising.

NADIR

Is this another of your stories or can we see her in the flesh?

Zand holds his head in his hand and tries to wipe the smile from his face.

He glances up at Nadir and has difficulty suppressing his laughter.

NADIR (CONT'D)

(to the maids)

Fetch the virgin.

A maid goes out giggling.

NADIR (CONT'D)

And while we wait let us examine the field of battle.

He walks over to the map and is joined by his men.

NADIR (CONT'D)

Shahkam, what news of their disposition.

SHAHKAM

They have not moved in 3 days and I am of the opinion that they have no intention of moving.

Nadir takes a deep breath and slowly lets it out.

TEYMOUR

They must expect us to attack them even though we are barely half their number.

ROSTAM

Then they are doomed.

They all agree. Then Nadir expounds his view as he points out relevant positions.

NADIR

They sit on the high ground in the centre with the bulk of Muhammed Shah`s army. Their right flank is a mishmash of Mughal Princes, Maharajas and whatever who will have to attack up hill if they are to encircle us. And their left flank, controlled by the Nazim of Hyderabad,

He shakes his head in disbelief.

NADIR (CONT`D)

sits on a hill in full army strength totally detached from the rest.

ROSTAM

We could drive our entire army through that gap in an hour.

ZAND

Perhaps that`s their plan - to simply let us strait through to Delhi and save the slaughter.

They all laugh even Nadir.

NADIR

(giving commands)

Place all our long-range artillery at the very front of our centre. Move them into position an hour before dawn. We will decimate them where they sit until they are forced to attack.

He looks at his generals and they all nod agreement.

NADIR (CONT`D)

Widen our right flank with short-range artillery so if the Nazim wishes to out flank us he must detour by several kilometres.

He looks at Rostam who agrees.

NADIR (CONT`D)

Have 5 columns draw up to the left of our left flank but behind so they cannot be seen. Make sure there is a good mix of cavalry and mobile artillery. He looks to Teymour who agrees.

NADIR (CONT'D)

(to Shahkam)

Take your outriders and have them 2, no, 3, kilometres beyond our left flank. I want them to spearhead an attack when their right flank commits.

SHAHKAM

We are positioned at this moment some 5-kilo metres beyond our left flank in heavily wooded cover. And we have already secured the north so our enemy threatens us not from there.

NADIR

Excellent.

(he turns back to the map)

Have 10 columns of mixed stand behind the centre and 10 columns split into cavalry and artillery stand behind them.

He looks at his Generals.

NADIR (CONT'D)

Speak now or forever hold your peace.

But they are all in agreement.

NADIR (CONT'D)

(turning to Zand)

And what say you that normally has a word of caution that befits the Captain of my bodyguard?

Zand's eyes are not on the map but on Vidyavant who has just been ushered in.

All eyes turn to Vidyavant whose presence is more of a Queen than that of concubine. They stand in awe as she approaches the centre of the tent.

VIDYAVANT

You have wish to see me?

The silent moment is broken by nervous laughter from the maids. Nadir, in particular, is struck by her confidence.

ZAND

Indeed. We wish that you entertain us on this night before battle.

VIDYAVANT

And how so?

ZAND

(enjoying the moment)

Perhaps you could dance for us.

VIDYAVANT

I am not a dancer.

ZAND

Then perhaps a song.

VIDYAVANT

I am not a singer.

ZAND

Then entertainment of some kind for all the generosity that we have bestowed upon you.

VIDYAVANT

I thank you for your generosity but generosity it cannot be

(pause)

when payment is asked.

The Generals gasp at her audacity.

ROSTAM

Will you not at least thank Nadir for his hospitality?

VIDYAVANT

If I knew who he was then perhaps I could, but as I don't, it makes the task impossible.

NADIR

I am he.

Their eyes meet, but nervous as she is, she does not flinch.

VIDYAVANT

I thank you for your hospitality and kindness towards me and would beg you to let me continue my

journey for I am sorely grieved. My betrothed is held captive by the Emperor of the Mughals and I wish to rescue him.

The Generals fall about laughing. Nadir is amused but also fascinated.

NADIR

Perhaps I would be more generous still if you would provide us with some distraction before the battle.

(seeing her confusion)

You cannot carry on for between you and your betrothed is the entire might of the Mughal Empire.

Vidyavant feels foolish but then rebounds.

VIDYAVANT

I can only give you what I have to give. It may not be entertainment but may be an inspiration .. especially before battle.

NADIR

Then let us hear it.

Vidyavant prepares herself mentally as the men take their seats.

VIDYAVANT

Bainti Chaupai Sahib is one of the five prayers that are recited by all Sikhs.

(seeing their confusion)

That is the name of the faith I hold dear. This prayer is recited in the early hours of the morning, so it is fitting that I recite it now.

Bainti Chaupai was composed by Guru Gobind Singh Ji - one of the 10 Sikh Gurus.

Bainti Chaupai Sahib

Protect me O Lord, with thine own hands

All the desires of my heart are fulfilled.

Let my mind rest under Thy Feet sustain me considering me Thine Own.

Destroy, O Lord, all my enemies. And protect me with Thine Own Hands.

Let my family live in comfort and ease.

Along with all my servants and disciples.

Protect me O Lord, with Thine Own Hands

And destroy this day all my enemies.

May all my aspirations be fulfilled.

Let my thirst for Thine name remain afresh.
 I may remember none else except Thee.
 And obtain all the boons from Thee.
 Let my servants and disciples cross the world
 ocean.
 All my enemies be singled out and killed.
 Protect me, O Lord with Thine Own Hands.
 And relieve me from the fear of Death.
 May thou ever bestow Thy favours on my side.
 Protect me, O Lord, the Supreme Destroyer.
 Protect me, O Lord, the Protector.
 O Lord, most dear, and protector of the saints.
 Friend of the poor, Destroyer of the enemies.
 Thou art the Master of the fourteen worlds.
 In due time Brahma appeared in physical form.
 In due time Shiva incarnated.
 In due time Vishnu manifested himself.
 All this is the play of the Temporal Lord.
 The Temporal Lord, who created Shiva, the yogi.
 Who created Brahma, the Master of the Vedas.
 The Temporal Lord, who fashioned the entire world.
 I salute the same Lord.
 The Temporal Lord who created the whole world.
 Who created gods, demons and Yakshas.
 He is the only one from the beginning to the end.
 Consider Him only - my Guru.
 I salute Him, none else but Him.
 Who has created Himself and all His subjects.
 He bestows Divine virtues and happiness on his
 servants.
 He destroys the enemies instantly.
 He knows the inner feelings of every heart.
 He knows the anguish of both good and bad.
 From the ant to the solid elephant.
 He casts His Graceful Glance on all and feels
 pleased.
 He is painful when he sees his saints in grief.
 He is happy when he sees his saints happy.
 He knows the agony of everyone.
 He knows the innermost secrets of every heart.
 When the creator projected himself.
 His creation manifested itself in innumerable
 forms.
 When at anytime he withdraws his creation,
 All the physical forms are merged in him.
 All the bodies of living beings created in the
 world
 Speak about Him according to their understanding.
 But Thou, O Lord, live quite apart from everything.

This fact is known to the Vedas and the learned.
 The Lord is formless, Sinless and Shelterless.
 He is the Primal Power, Blemishless, Beginningless
 and Unborn.

The fool claims boastfully about the knowledge of
 His Secrets

Which even the Vedas do not know.

The fool considers Him a stone.

But the great fool does not know any secret.

He calls Shiva 'The Eternal Lord'.

But he does not know the secret of the Formless
 Lord.

According to ones own intellect

One describes Thee differently.

The limits of Thy creation cannot be known

And how the world was fashioned in the beginning ?

He hath only one unparalleled Form.

He manifests Himself as a poor man or a King at
 different places.

He created creatures from eggs, wombs and
 perspiration. Then he created the vegetable
 kingdom.

Somewhere He sits joyfully as a King.

Somewhere he contracts Himself as Shiva, the yogi.

All his creation unfolds wonderful things.

He, the Primal Power, is from the beginning and
 self-existent.

O Lord, keep me now under thy protection.

Protect my disciples and destroy my enemies.

All the villains creating outrage,

And all the infidels be destroyed in the
 battlefield.

O Supreme Destroyer, those who sought Thy refuge,
 Their enemies met painful death.

The persons who fell at thy feet.

Thou didst remove all their troubles.

Those who meditate even once on the Supreme Being.

Death cannot approach them.

They remain protected in all times.

Their troubles and enemies come to an end
 instantly.

Upon whosoever Thou dost cast Thy favourable
 glance.

They are absolved of sins instantly.

They have all the worldly and spiritual pleasures
 in their homes.

None of the enemies can even touch their shadow.

He who remembered Thee even once,

Thou didst protect him from the noose of Death.

Those persons who repeated Thy Name.

They were saved from poverty and attacks from enemies.

(pause)

O, the Lord of the Sword, I seek Thy refuge.

Protect me with Thine Own Hands.

Bestow Thy help on me at all times.

And protect me from the designs of my enemies.

Vidyavant is filled with emotion her eyes bright with tears so that none of those gathered have not been moved by her words and passionate delivery.

Nadir finally stands and then leans down to Zand.

NADIR

I owe you a great favour, my friend.

He walks up to Vidyavant and takes her by the hand and leads her out.

EXT. COUNTRYSIDE. NIGHT

Desan is riding hard through sparse forest and scrub trying to shake off the soldiers following behind. She finally pulls up and dismounts allowing them to catch up.

DESAN

We must have fresh horses.

The soldiers look around in disbelief as they are in wild deserted countryside.

SOLDIER 1

And where would you suggest we find them?

SOLDIER 2

And we have come too far south; we should be travelling more to the east. If we are not careful we will run into the middle of the Persian army.

The soldiers are annoyed and angry and to avoid further questions she leads her horse towards a dense corpse of full size trees. The soldiers dismount and follow.

Inside the corpse she takes the saddle from the horse and throws it on the ground then using it as a pillow and its blanket for cover she closes her eyes.

DESAN

I have ridden for days without rest and as we are so obviously lost and nothing more can be done I

will sleep. Wake me on first light. And find me a horse!

The two soldiers look in disbelief.

SOLDIER 1

(whispering)

What are we to do?

SOLDIER 2

Perhaps we should see this as a chance.

SOLDIER 1

What do you mean?

SOLDIER 2

Well, she has given us orders in the name of Sa`adat, should we not carry them out?

SOLDIER 1

What, and go to find her a horse?

SOLDIER 2

Precisely. That way we can .. get lost.

SOLDIER 1

You mean we could just ..

SOLDIER 2

Disappear - If we ever get to Sa`adat he will only send us to the front line.

Soldier 1 looks at the sleeping Desan and a wily look comes forth.

SOLDIER 1

We could return to our barracks.

SOLDIER 2

Precisely. And as that would take at least 4 days, and only then if we find fresh horses, we would be out of this entire mess.

SOLDIER 1

(with glee)

And with a bit of luck out of the war so lets take her horse.

SOLDIER 2

We would only be obeying orders.

They slip Desan`s horse from its tether and leave as quietly as they can. Desan listens to them go then closes her eyes with a smile.

EXT. LAL QILA (RED FORT). NIGHT

Many braziers burn on the battlements lighting up the surrounding area with spectacular effect.

Bishan with her escort ride up to the guard over the moat and are forced to stop when they are challenged.

LIEUTENANT

(handing a pass)

We need enter for I would deliver a report about the fire in Cannicut.

The Captain of the Guard looks at it, hands it to a soldier who runs ahead across the bridge. Then the Captain waves them through. They cross the moat and turning right enter the Delhi Gate with its dogleg entrance.

Entering into the Red Fort itself they are surrounded by soldiers of the Guard. They are instructed to dismount and to disarm which they do. The escort is led off inside of the keep while Bishan and the Lieutenant are instructed to follow a Palace OFFICIAL.

The Official takes them through the intricate fortification used in this time of war. They are taken through a side door and into the building housing the Diwan-i-Aan (Hall of Public Audiences).

The Hall itself is filled with dignitaries standing around talking in groups. The Official tells them to wait where they are and he weaves his way through the crowd to the VIZIER.

A number of men have spotted Bishan, the only woman present, and one, wearing a dark navy officers jacket and white trousers, a tall elegant Englishman in his late 30s, Colonel FLAGSTAFF, heads across to speak to her.

FLAGSTAFF

(in Hindi)

May I introduce myself, Colonel Flagstaff.

He uses an oriental greeting then holds out his hand. This is the first European that Bishan has ever seen and she eyes him

with suspicion.

BISHAN

I speak only Urdu or Punjabi.

FLAGSTAFF

(in perfect Urdu)

Colonel Flagstaff, of the British East India Company. May I ask who you are?

The Official returns to hear

BISHAN

It is of no concern to you who I am.

The Colonel is taken aback. The Official is pleased.

OFFICIAL

(to Bishan and the Lieutenant)

Follow me please. The Vizier wishes to talk with you.

The Official gives Flagstaff a disapproving look and leads Bishan and the Lieutenant away. Bishan and the Lieutenant are led into a side room.

SIDE ROOM

The Vizier, a man in his 50s and with a stern face, sits behind a desk and looks at them with curiosity. The Official whispers in the Vizier's ear. The Lieutenant greets the Vizier with hand to heart, head and Allah and then bows low. Bishan takes his lead noting the fear on the Lieutenant's face.

VIZIER

(talking to the Lieutenant)

So you have brought news of the fire.

LIEUTENANT

The fire is now under control and the saboteurs killed.

VIZIER

And this .. woman?

LIEUTENANT

It was she that saved the day.

VIZIER

She is a spy of Muhammad Shah?

BISHAN

I am his agent.

The Vizier is taken aback by her interruption. He ignores her person but not her words.

VIZIER

Then no doubt she will wish to see him?

BISHAN

(with force)

No doubt I will.

This is an audacious statement that takes the Vizier by surprise and finally he brings his attention to her.

VIZIER

I thought I knew all of the Emperor's devoted servants.

BISHAN

Perhaps the Emperor has more devoted servants than you would think.

The Vizier is further taken aback by her effrontery but hides it by turning to the Official.

VIZIER

(to the Official)

Take this .. devoted servant .. to the Diwan-i-Khas (Hall of Private Audiences) so that she may meet with her Master.

The Official leads Bishan out. Once she has gone he turns on the Lieutenant.

VIZIER (CONT'D)

Is it for certain that she, "Saved the City".

LIEUTENANT

(with honesty)

Yes Vizier, and my life.

VIZIER

These are troubled times and all may not be what it seems.

He waits to see the Lieutenant's reaction but the Lieutenant has none.

VIZIER

The Englishman, I believe tried to talk to her?

LIEUTENANT

(with pride)

Yes, but she soon put him in his place.

VIZIER

(smiles)

They are hyenas waiting to strip the corpse of the Empire. I fear them far more than Nadir Shah.

(on reflection)

Tell me .. do you wish to remain here or would you go back to your post .. or .. perhaps you would wish to find glory on the battlefield?

LIEUTENANT

Whatever the Vizier wishes, I will do.

The Vizier walks up close to the Lieutenant and stares him in the eye.

VIZIER

(almost to himself)

You seem an honest man. And one brought here by chance. So I will give you a task to perform.

LIEUTENANT

Whatever you instruct I will carry out to the best of my ability.

VIZIER

The court is filled with intrigue and to the point where one cannot know who one can trust.

(he turns away)

The Englishman,

(he turns back)

You will follow him and find out who he talks to and where possible, what is said. Do I make myself understood?

LIEUTENANT

Perfectly.

The Vizier returns to his desk and writes a note and stamps it with an official seal. He hands it to the Lieutenant.

VIZIER (CONT'D)

This will give you access to where ever and whatever you need in the service of the Emperor.

(he holds the Lieutenant`s eye)

You will report only to me - do you understand.

The lieutenant gives his heart, head and Allah.

VIZIER (CONT'D)

Now go.

The Lieutenant leaves.

INT. DINAN-I-KHAS (HALL OF PRIVATE AUDIENCES). NIGHT

The Official shows Bishan into the Hall and then leaves. There are several guards in attendants, big and muscular and - female. Their presence throws Bishan a curved ball and as she makes her way down towards the Peacock Throne she is aware of their intense interest in her.

She waits several metres from the Throne itself and gazes at its incredible opulence. A small head with a giant turban suddenly pokes out from behind the throne - Muhammed Shah has a big lecherous grin that seems painted across his elongated face that would be comical on any clown yet is tragic on an Emperor.

EXT. DELHI. NIGHT.

Flagstaff, in an open carriage and with a mounted 4-guard escort, rides into Delhi.

The Lieutenant follows close behind.

Flagstaff stops the driver and dismounts in a busy street.

The Lieutenant dismounts and quickly makes his way along the busy street seeing just in time Flagstaff duck into a lane.

He stops at the entrance to the lane and sees Flagstaff go into a doorway.

He hurries on to the next corner and turns down the lane, quickly mounting to the roof he runs crouched along the different planes of the houses until he comes to a courtyard. He peers down.

COURTYARD

Flagstaff and a man, RAM, are already in conversation.

RAM

They have British canon.

(accusingly)

The very best British canon.

FLAGSTAFF

(false sincerity)

But we are a trading nation.

(turning serious)

And your assessment of the coming battle?

RAM

The Mughal`s have a quarter of a million men
against Nadir`s 70,000.

FLAGSTAFF

And your assessment of the coming battle?

RAM

(laughing)

They don`t have a chance. The Mughal army is
fractured both physically and in terms of moral.
While Nadir, is in charge of a seasoned army with a
single purpose and a single objective. Who would
you choose?

FLAGSTAFF

It is not up to the East India Company to choose
sides.

RAM

Don`t flatter me with your sweet words, Flagstaff.
Nothing would please you more than to see the
Mughal Empire returned to sand, and you know it.

FLAGSTAFF

(false sincerity)

But we merely wish to know with whom we will be
trading.

RAM

(laughing)

I like you British, at least you have a sense of
humour.

Flagstaff laughs and removes a small leather bag from his
pocket. He holds it out and Ram takes it emptying the contents
of silver coins onto his hand.

Ram

(with humour, shaking the coins)

You will rule us all one day - with your trade.

FLAGSTAFF

And would that be such a bad thing?

RAM

(bitter)

No man should be a slave.

FLAGSTAFF

Men are only slaves when they can be bought, bought
in one form

(pause)

or another.

Flagstaff leaves.

ROOF TOP

The lieutenant leaves.

INT. NADIR SHAHS TENT. NIGHT

Nadir enters followed by Vidyavant. He takes out his battleaxe and sticks its metal pointed shaft through the carpet and into the floor. Then throws himself down onto the cushioned mattress.

NADIR

Come, join me.

Vidyavant immediately takes out her dagger.

Nadir just smiles.

NADIR (CONT'D)

Place it next to my axe for I will not take you
with force.

She walks with purpose towards him and raises her arm up high, not taking her eyes off him.

His smile extends revealing his teeth, then he bares his chest.

She brings it down with force - into the floor.

She sits, distraught, with her back to him and he runs his hand down her arm.

NADIR (CONT'D)

Your naivety resonates with something deep within me that I had forgotten I possessed. Something that

is at the very core .. the very core of my life. Perhaps you find it hard to believe that a man such as myself could feel a certain .. kinship .. with your obvious naivety but life stands witness to it.

He`s looking up into the apex of the tent but his mind`s eye is lost in his past.

NADIR (CONT`D)

I was born to be the Commander of a mountain fort but my father died in battle fighting the Tartars. My Uncle held the position for me and as he was sane and sensible in his duty, the people

(pause)

and my family respected him. They wished for him to continue when I attained my majority and so I became his second. But he, like the rest, was .. I suppose .. afraid of me. For though dutiful they sensed a wildness or some dark force that I could not see. That I still cannot see.

He turns his head towards her and she turns hers towards him.

NADIR (CONT`D)

(smiling)

Do I bore you with my story?

Vidyavant shakes her head and gives the weakest of smiles.

NADIR (CONT`D)

Then pass me some wine as it will free me in the telling.

He points to a tray in the corner and she fills him a goblet.

NADIR (CONT`D)

You have touched something within me that needs to find expression, perhaps I feel you will understand where others have not.

VIDYAVANT

Perhaps we share the same fate of being different. A Sikh in a world of Moslems has a sense of being out of place and not wanted. Perhaps this is similar to what you feel.

NADIR (CONT`D)

There is truth in what you say, for as I grew into a man I became a stranger to my own people. Then I was persuaded to join the Shah of Mashad's army as an officer, and became a stranger in a strange land. But this was a cunning means of depriving me of my birthright. I went along with it out of naivety, but then, I was young, and for many years enjoyed the adventure. I did battle in the Shah's service mainly against the Marauding Afghanis.

Vidyavant returns and kneels down and hands it to him she sits back on her feet facing him.

NADIR

My prowess in battle gave me quick assent and I became his best general. But being young and foolish I did brag about my exploits and the Shah took it unkindly when I stole the glory from him over a particular victory.

Nadir raises his sheepskin bound feet then lets them down.

NADIR (CONT'D)

He had the bottoms of my feet thrashed until the toenails fell out. Even today my feet ...

He stops looking at his feet and turns his entire body so that he leans supporting his head with his hand.

NADIR (CONT'D)

I was sent back to my uncle but neither he nor my family nor the people I was from wanted me there. I tried at first to fit in where I could but when my mother died, I left

(pause)

in the night. I was soon joined by two of my Lieutenants, Teymour and Rostam, who also had been banished. You have met them already.

Vidyavant just nods.

NADIR (CONT'D)

The beginnings of the Great Marauder were humble indeed.

(he laughs)

A mule train of seven, and five men. But it provided us with money and arms. And soon we were joined by others disaffected with the Shah of Mashad's service. Our numbers grew and within two

years we were counted two thousand and no camel train was safe anywhere in Eastern Persia.

He drains his cup and Vidyavant takes it without asking and fills it.

NADIR (CONT'D)

The Shah of Mashad finally set out to do battle, but I laid a trap for him, and took a bloody revenge.

She hands him the filled goblet and resumes her position.

NADIR (CONT'D)

Most of his men, who were in fact my men, soon came over to us and we controlled the entire East of Persia.

He sits up and crosses his legs facing her.

NADIR (CONT'D)

The great Shah of Persia himself was under attack from the Turks in the West and the Muscovites and Tartars in the north. He promised my men and me a place in his world if we would help rid him of his enemies. We celebrated and rode out to do his bidding conquering first the Tartars then the Muscovites and eventually the Turks, taking Baghdad. But no sooner had we succeeded than he tried to have me poisoned

(Nadir shakes his head)

I was forced to remove him from the throne and I think it was then that I realized that there would never be a place for me in any .. world.

He reaches out and takes her hand.

NADIR (CONT'D)

Perhaps, if I had been born a devotee of The Sword, things would have been different.

VIDYAVANT

(with kindness)

Perhaps.

They share a moment.

NADIR

It was not long before the Afghanis seeing our troubles in the West attacked Mashad and captured it.

(laughing)

I was sorely tried by these villains .. who had for centuries pillaged the country and I set off to break the pattern. They fled before me, of course, but now I was in control and I pursued them to Herat where I defeated them. But we did not stop there

He is now animated and his excitement catching.

NADIR (CONT'D)

I pursued their remnants to Kandahar and took the city by surprise. And oh Vidyavant, what a prize was in store for us. For there we found riches beyond measure. This goblet has real emeralds and rubies and yes diamonds as well. It is worth a prince`s ransom on its own.

He calms down as Vidyavant examines the goblet he holds out to her.

NADIR (CONT'D)

But it was to have a strange effect on my men. We shared out the booty - enough to make all content. But then they heard from the Afghanis that this hoard of a thousand years was as nothing to what the Mughals had accumulated in Delhi. They heard how they had squeezed the continent dry and how the wealth was a hundred times more than what we had found in Kandahar.

VIDYAVANT

It is true, they have taken everything that we ever possessed and drove us from our land. And they tax everyone, Sikhs, Hindus and even Mohammedans to the point of destitution.

NADIR

(reflective)

This wealth saw a sea change in my men, as avarice, nay, the pure base passion itself, greed, took hold. My men would watch me wondering what I would do.

He takes the goblet back off her and drains the contents.

NADIR (CONT'D)

I am not driven by greed.

(he looks deep into her)

But my entire army by then was .. is. So I asked them, 'if we can take Kabul and secure the Khyber Pass would you ride on to Delhi and liberate the Mughal's wealth for yourselves'. Oh how they blessed my name and called me Great .. The Great Marauder.

He holds out the goblet and Vidyavant fills it.

NADIR (CONT'D)

And such is my fate. For I am just the vehicle

(pause)

just the vessel

(pause)

an empty vessel at that, that gives this passion its form.

Vidyavant returning passes him the filled goblet becoming animated.

VIDYAVANT

No, Nadir, good things will come from this. Take their wealth and you take their power. You will liberate us, the devotees of the Sword, and more, you will liberate an entire continent.

NADIR

Then I will liberate their wealth for you Vidyavant. Perhaps then my life will have meaning beyond greed. And perhaps I will at last have found place for myself - at least, in history.

He leans towards her and just a moment of hesitation interrupts their kiss.

INT. THE RANG MAHAL (RED FORT HAREM). NIGHT

The lotus shaped fountain sprays colour water while hidden musicians play a plaintiff melody. Muhammed Shah with a sad intensity sits listening to Bishan, sitting at his feet, as she brings to an end her story.

BISHAN

(tearfully)

So as you see my noble Lord I had to bring you news of these terrible Sikhs plotting to destroy you.

MUHAMMED SHAH

Tell me the bit again how they .. boiled .. you said?

BISHAN

How they boiled my father alive in oil then fed him to the pigs.

MUHAMMED SHAH

Such wickedness .. was he fed to them .. still hot?

BISHAN

(bursting into tears)

I do not know.

MUHAMMED SHAH

No of course not, my dear. You are such a brave child and saving Delhi from the incendiaries of Nadir`s insurgents as well. You

(he dabs her eyes)

deserve ..

BISHAN

(with excitement)

to join your loyal bodyguard.

MUHAMMED SHAH

(caught)

Well .. yes of course .. I will even make you a Lieutenant.

Bishan jumps up and kisses the Emperor. Just then the Vizier enters politely COUGHING.

MUHAMMED SHAH (CONT'D)

(annoyed)

What is it?

VIZIER

(with emphasis)

We have need of your presence.

MUHAMMED SHAH

(to Bishan)

Ah. Affairs of state my dear. Now you run along with one of my bodyguard and I`ll see you anon.

She bows, as he leaves, smiling to herself.

EXT. DELHI. NIGHT.

The Lieutenant rides into the Red Fort.

INT. VIZIER`S CHAMBERS. NIGHT.

The Lieutenant is shown in as the Vizier watches him prostrate himself.

LIEUTENANT

(hardly able to control himself)

Flagstaff met with a Hindu in Valacot. The Hindu provided him with information concerning the coming battle. Is it true that we have no chance against these .. marauders?

VIZIER

It is almost certainly true. However, to say so, is almost certainly treason. You will not mention this to anyone. Is that understood?

LIEUTENANT

(shaken)

So what am I to do now?

VIZIER

You will carry out my orders! Or you will die!

LIEUTENANT

(unbelieving)

You still wish me to follow Flagstaff?

VIZIER

Now, more than ever. Do you really think that this will all end with the defeat of the Mughal Army?

He comes around to where the Lieutenant stands and places his hands on his shoulders.

VIZIER

(with warmth)

My friend - this is merely the beginning of a new chapter in the story of this great country.

The Lieutenant has a moment of insight.

INT. NADIR SHAHS TENT. NIGHT

Nadir is dressing and Vidyavant watches him from the bed.

VIDYAVANT

So is the battle about to begin?

NADIR

(turning)

Indeed it is.

VIDYAVANT

Then let me watch. I have surrendered to your great seduction now I wish to witness my enemies' surrender to your force.

Nadir joins her.

NADIR

If I have seduced you it was only with the truth. And if I let you watch then it will be because you have seduced me?

VIDYAVANT

(kissing him)

Then let it be.

Nadir stands and SHOUTS.

NADIR

Bring this devotee of The Sword one of my stallions.

VIDYAVANT

(shouting)

No, bring my horse for he is my friend and companion.

Nadir laughs.

NADIR

I must be gone for the hour has come. Join me on the ridge when you are ready.

With this he leaves without looking back.

EXT. CORPSE. NIGHT

The first light of day brings a little colour to Desan's face as she sleeps in depth.

The earth SHUDDERS and WHISTLING fear rends the air.

Desan is awake and on her feet in an instant. A moment later she observes that the soldiers have not returned and she is alone.

She runs through the wood and appears on the crest of a small ridge over looking the battlefield now placed before her.

WE SEE

To the left the colourful ranks of the Mughal's right flank and beyond that the might of Sa`adat.

Directly in front but many kilometres away the army of the Nazim of Hyderabad sitting on a hill.

To her right she sees the black hordes of Nadir Shah's army. His centre is shelling the centre of the Mughals with devastating effect.

CLOSE ON The enigmatic smile on Desan's face which is matched in intensity only by the wild excitement of her eyes. She is beside herself in a joy she has never experienced before.

Riders approach her from the Mughals right flank and she realizes that she has not time to hide - but then why should she.

RAO of Rewari, a dashing young man not 30, sees the young courier and heads strait for him. Rao pulling up to Desan.

RAO

(with humour)

A courier of Sa`adat, lost I can understand, but lost here, and without a horse, needs an explanation.

DESAN

(drawing her sword)

I will have no banter from you! I have important news for Sa`adat. Now give me your horse.

Rao and his men enjoy the moment.

RAO

Put up your sword and put up behind me for we have guests.

He nods in the direction behind Desan where a group of Nadir's outriders have broken cover. Desan sheaths her sword after a quick glance and grabs hold of Rao's outstretched hand. He swings her up and sets off back to his own lines at a gallop.

Nadir`s long-range artillery are now firing like rolling thunder. Explosions appear continuously in Sa`adat`s centre. Rao gallops in front of the massed ranks of the right flank.

RAO (CONT'D)

(shouting to them)

Strengthen our right for I suspect the enemy lies in great strength beyond that ridge.

He comes to his own contingent.

RAO (CONT'D)

(to Desan)

I must leave you here for I have work to do.

(to one of his men)

Give the young courier a horse and see him through to Sa`adat.

Desan drops down and looks up at Rao but he does not see her expression that contains a just little admiration. One of Rao`s men dismounts and gives her his horse.

RAO (CONT'D)

(to his men)

The moment has arrived. We cannot wait for those that have no courage. We must act now or perish.

Desan mounts and is led to the side.

RAO (CONT'D)

For a brave man death only happens once. For a coward death happens every day.

He raises up his horse then charges towards Nadir`s lines. His men follow shouting out his name.

Desan watches as his entire squad of 5000 cavalry drive towards the point between Nadir`s centre and his left flank.

She shouts with the rest "For Rao, For Rao of Rewari".

The soldier leading her horse has to remind her of her quest. She takes one last look at this single column spear heading the attack then grabs the reins from the soldier. She kicks the horse on and is about to disappear behind Sa`adat`s front line when she pulls up sharp.

She turns the horse around and dashes out in front of the right flank and canters along in front of it, towards Sa`adat`s centre.

She witnesses the Mahouts forcing the war elephants on as slowly the Mughals` centre moves forward. Nadir`s long-range canon are firing behind this movement which encourages more to join it. And so the Mughals are led into the attack by Nadir`s wiles.

But for Desan this means nothing for she is lost in the delirium of battle. She looks to the Mughals on her left in their many colours, to the enormity of the centre moving forward and down the valley to where the Nazim remains firmly grounded.

Then to the right and a black tidemark that undulates across the landscape. Only the tip of the centre spits fire like a horizontal volcano.

Men from the Mughals right flank begin to cheer Desan`s progress and she looks at them with surprise for even she wonders why they haven`t followed Rao in his magnificent charge at the enemy.

She pulls up and is about to question their cowardice but then a crafty smile comes to her face as she remembers who she is and she ignores them. Spurring her horse on until she finally reaches the centre and with one final look back at Rao as he is greeted by a column of Nadir`s cavalry, she plunges into the gap and leaves the battle.

EXT. RIDGE. DAY

Nadir is standing in his stirrups on his black stallion, using a spyglass and concentrating on Rao`s charge. Behind him are more than 20 couriers waiting for orders.

Vidyavant, on her small mountain horse rides up along side him. Zand, who is beside Nadir looks at Vidyavant with a knowing smile. She ignores him gazing out onto the battlefield. Nadir suddenly drops down into the saddle and turns.

NADIR

(to courier)

Quickly, reinforce the gap between our centre and left with 2 columns of horse.

A rider peals off from the end and Nadir turns his horse to the right and is about to pass by Vidyavant until he becomes aware of her presence. He stops.

NADIR (CONT`D)

(with humour)

Stay here for I can't have you getting under my feet as you so easily got under my body.

They share an affectionate moment before he rides off. His couriers follow but Zand holds back and walks his horse up to hers.

ZAND

I salute you, Vidyavant.

VIDYAVANT

And why would you salute me.

ZAND

We, his friends, feared that his heart was not in this campaign and he is not half the general in such a condition. But one night with you has changed his demeanour. And so I salute you even though I know not how you have brought about this transformation.

She is not forth coming. And Zand respects her silence giving her his heart, and head and Allah. Then he is gone in pursuit of Nadir.

Vidyavant is suddenly drenched in the sun's rays and the jewels of her raiment glisten like the tears of joy in her eyes.

EXT. SA`ADAT`S CAMP. DAY

Desan is riding through the confusion of the rear of Sa`adat`s army as having being forced into the attack are now having to rearrange their entire disposition.

Before she knows it she is at the entrance to a compound and the guards, seeing her courier`s livery grab her reins and lead her inside. She dismounts looking for a way to escape but the guard points to a giant tent.

GUARD

Hurry!

She runs across to the TENT and enters searching for the dispatch she has carried for so long. Grasping it in her small hand she is ushered through to a large table where Sa`adat, a tall white haired man with a magnificent beard, and his Generals are having a furious argument.

SA' ADAT

And who gave Rao the order to attack.

GENERAL 1

He obviously did it to relieve our centre that is sorely pressed by Nadir's powerful canon.

SA`ADAT

But he has compromised our entire right flank and our entire plan.

GENERAL 1

But we cannot now keep to our plan as Nadir is decimating our centre in its defensive position.

GENERAL 2

We have no time for argument we must reinforce Rao's attack and ..

Sa`adat sees Desan standing wide-eyed and staring.

SA`ADAT

Don't stand there boy bring me that dispatch.

Desan looks around then realizes it is to her he is referring. She walks through the Generals and hands Sa`adat the parchment. They all fall silent as Sa`adat reads the message with increasing incredulity. He peers down at Desan bending to get a closer look.

SA`ADAT (CONT'D)

You have come all the way from Srinagar in 3 days?

DESAN

Yes, sir.

SA`ADAT

(smiling benevolently)

Your news is no longer of any use but you my dear friend are.

He places his great arm around Desan's shoulder better to show her off to the Generals. She eyes the huge hand with thinly disguised horror.

SA`ADAT (CONT'D)

(to his Generals)

If only I had 1000 such men as this boy.

(to Desan)

Come my young friend we will view the situation for ourselves.

(to the Generals)

The time for maps and planning are finished. We must act on the moment.

He leads his men out still with his arm around Desan.

OUTSIDE

They quickly mount.

SA`ADAT (CONT'D)

(to Desan)

Stay with me boy for I would trust you to deliver my most important despatches.

Desan is quietly horrified. They ride out of the compound into chaos.

EXT. RIDGE. DAY

Nadir rides up and seeing Vidyavant where he left her, joins her in good spirits.

NADIR

So, how do you like the battle?

VIDYAVANT

Does it go well?

NADIR

(laughing)

Let me explain the situation.

He draws his horse along side of hers then points to his left.

NADIR (CONT'D)

Rao of Rewari, the bravest man they have, has attacked the gap between our centre and left flank. He has lost many brave men to our canon but presses us hard. I have re-enforced the gap only with cavalry - drawing the enemy in.

Then pointing to the centre of the Mughals.

NADIR (CONT'D)

You will see that their centre now charges, if somewhat piece meal, towards our centre, and you will see that our long range artillery now retreats before the advancing enemy.

WE SEE Nadir`s long range artillery being harnessed and taken back up through the ranks of his entrenched canon.

NADIR (CONT'D)

Their war elephants are charging into certain death for we have twice as many canon facing them that they can know.

WE SEE canon been dug out of hiding as Nadir`s long-range artillery pass.

NADIR (CONT'D)

And to our right we see the Nazim of Hyderabad still sitting as if waiting for an invitation to join in the battle.

Nadir is enjoying himself and enjoying keeping his stallion under control.

Vidyavant responds in kind.

VIDYAVANT

Then perhaps you should invite him to the slaughter.

NADIR

Not just yet - timing, as by now I`m sure you know, is everything. Besides, the longer the Nazim does nothing the less he can do. Why bring forward the pleasure when the excitement is in the foreplay?

VIDYAVANT

(suppressing laughter)

As you are the master of these things I will leave the climax to you.

Nadir, laughing, kicks his eager horse into action and he heads along the ridge to his left flank, followed by his couriers.

EXT. VANTAGE POINT. DAY

Sa`adat and his Generals arrive on a small promontory in the centre of his army. Desan who is next to him is still looking for a way out.

Before them the Mughal Commanders see their war elephants almost reaching the front lines of Nadir`s army. He watches as Nadir`s canon open up at point blank range with

devastating effect. His centre, now committed, pour in behind only to be greeted with the 'hail' of death.

To his right, Sa`adat sees Rao valiantly pressing but more black riders appear driving into his weakened flank.

SA`ADAT

Why are the right not supporting Rao.
 (turning to his Generals)
 Send support to Rao!

A General goes to say something but is cut off.

SA`ADAT (CONT'D)

Send half .. no .. send the entire right, and now!

The General does as he is bid.

Sa`adat looks down the valley and sees the Nazim still sitting doing nothing - he`s infuriated.

SA`ADAT (CONT'D)

What game does this man play? How dare he sit there when battle is joined.

GENERAL 2

Perhaps he plays the game of politics my Lord.

SA`ADAT

Aye, he would like nothing better than victory after the Emperor`s army would be destroyed. Where`s my scribe?!

A man rides up carrying a board with feathers sticking out.

SCRIBE

I`m here.

SA`ADAT

Take this. Attack Nadir`s right flank in full force. Immediately!

The scribe writes.

SA`ADAT (CONT'D)

Then seal it with the Emperor`s seal, and mine also.

The scribe obeys. Sa`adat takes the parchment from the scribe and hands it to Desan.

SA ADAT (CONT'D)

(pointing)

Ride like the wind you came on and make sure you deliver it to the Nazim himself.

DESAN

Yes sir.

She starts even before she has spoken. Sa`adat and his Generals watch in amazement as Desan weaves at full pelt through the chaos.

SA ADAT

How can we loose when we have children of such devotion and courage.

WE FOLLOW

Desan as she hurtles through the chaos of Sa`adat`s centre, she jumps over carts and canon and weaves through elephants massed for attack.

Finally she breaks out of the centre`s left flank into open space and descends into the valley between the two Mughal armies.

She hits the bottom and stops - a quiet place out of sight of the bulk of both armies.

She laughs and reins up her horse.

DESAN

(with humorous bile)

If you want a job doing, do it yourself!

She turns her horse up the valley away from the battle and away from the Nazim of Hyderabad`s army. Then pulling out her sword she does a "Rao".

DESAN (CONT'D)

(rearing the horse)

For Desan, For Desan and .. The Sikhs!!

And with this she jumps her horse to a charge and flies up the valley chopping the heads of scrub trees and bushes.

EXT. RIDGE. DAY

Nadir watches as 2 more columns of the Mughal`s right flank commit themselves to joining Rao.

NADIR
(to courier)

Send 2 companies of mixed to support our left, and 1 company of cavalry to attack their advance.

The courier is gone as Nadir rides back along the ridge to where Vidyavant is waiting.

VIDYAVANT
So, are you satisfied?

NADIR
When are men ever satisfied?

VIDYAVANT
When they no longer have passion, perhaps.

Nadir thinks on her words as Zand rides up from their right flank.

ZAND
Rostam, and I, and no doubt, Shahkam, are wondering if we will ever get a taste of this battle. Is the pleasure to be all yours and Teymour`s.

Nadir looks down at the slaughter in the centre and across to the heavy fighting on his left flank.

NADIR
And of the Nazim? Not even a probe?

ZAND
(with irony)
Not even a flag of surrender.

NADIR
(laughing)
Then reinforce Rostam`s right with a battalion of canon and make a big show of it - best to discourage the cowardly Nazim and give Rostam something to do. Then send word .. no .. take word yourself if you so wish to enjoy some sport, to Shahkam. Tell him that once he is joined by my remaining cavalry he will attack their right flank and sweep in behind their centre and take the

battle.

ZAND

(joyous)

You wish me to give the order to our remaining cavalry?

Nadir takes one more look at the situation then rides up to Vidyavant.

NADIR

What say you, devotee of The Sword.

VIDYAVANT

Be daring and take the moment.

NADIR

(to Zand)

And what say you?

ZAND

(looking at Vidyavant)

Take the moment.

NADIR

So easy? Are not our destinies written here?

ZAND

That, they are, my most noble Lord.

Heart, head and Allah.

NADIR

Be gone my friend, but take your time. There is no call for haste while we destroy them in such numbers.

Zand draws his sword and clashes it against Nadir's out stretched battle-axe and is gone.

EXT. RIDGE. DAY

Zand, followed by columns of cavalry, makes his way skilfully through the corpse that Desan had slept in.

He comes across Shahkam's outriders and calls a halt to those following. Then passes through the outriders.

He greets Shahkam and then follows him out to the edge of the corpse and the ridge. Leaving their horse they spy the right

flank of the Mughals now with gaps along its length.

SHAHKAM

This is to be your day Zand.

ZAND

You will let me have the honour?

SHAHKAM

(smiling)

Only if I get the next virgin you find.

ZAND

It is a deal.

They grasp hands.

SHAHKAM

I will drive strait into their end and drive them before me so they back up into each other. Take your columns well behind my left and charge strait for the rear of their centre. Do not stop for anything but strengthen your right screen and let them take care of any resistance.

Zand nods.

SHAHKAM (CONT'D)

Follow this advice and victory will be ours in less time than it takes to break an Arab stallion - aye, and with less danger.

ZAND

So be it.

They quickly return to their horses.

REAR END OF THE MUGHAL RIGHT

A column of Shahkam's outriders come out of the corpse and ride along the ridge. The Mughal's right turn their fire on this diversion.

Shahkam breaks from the centre of the corpse and attacks the rear of the end with his main body and they fall upon the Mughals with a terrible ferocity driving into them and forcing many over the ridge while ploughing through to the next squad.

Zand waits till the outriders are fully engaged then drives with his columns of cavalry well behind the Mughal's right flank heading straight for the rear of the centre.

His screen of half a column grazes the edge of the rear of the Mughals causing havoc.

MUGHAL VANTAGE POINT

Sa`adat is furious. The giant man paces clenching his hands into fists and shaking them in the direction of the Nazim.

SA`ADAT

He ignores us on purpose! How dare he defy my orders. Take some canon and shell him from his nest!

The Generals try to remonstrate with him but he ignores their arguments and civil war is only avoided when a cry goes up from the other direction.

All their attention turns to the sudden disintegration of their right as Shahkam rides in with terrible force.

Worse still, cries can be heard from behind as a black wedge, like a sharks fin cutting through air strikes terror into drowning sailors, gives way to the terror itself. The Mughal soldiers scatter from around the Generals and Zand rides right up to them his men fanning out till they have them all surrounded.

ZAND

Victory is mine!! Now strike your colours!

SA`ADAT

(dropping to his knees)
Allah have mercy.

The giant man is broken.

NADIR`S LEFT

Rao, covered in blood, is exhausted to the point of collapse. The few of his men that remains close around him as the black hoard eats into their number.

Teymour rides down with his bodyguard through his canon and with the cheers of his men surging behind him he drives straight into the Rewari pocket.

TEYMOUR

Surrender Rao your resistance is futile. No man could do more.

For an answer Rao lunges at him only to be cut down by a dozen swords.

NADIR`S CENTRE

Vidyavant is watching the disintegration of the Mughal right when she is joined by Nadir.

NADIR

The moment is at hand.

A great cry goes up from Nadir`s men as they see the Mughal`s colours been struck.

Nadir rides back along the ridge with Vidyavant close behind. They gaze out at the battle that is a battle no more. Just a collection of minor incidents with Persian joy and Mughal despair as themes.

Rostam joins them.

ROSTAM

And what are we going to do with the Nazim for he has yet to strike his colours.

NADIR

He cannot possibly hope to carry the battle on when he was never part of it.

ROSTAM

Perhaps he hopes to escape defeat by retreating.

NADIR

(angry)

That, I will never allow the coward to do. Take my guard and demand his surrender.

VIDYAVANT

No! Let me take his surrender.

Nadir and Rostam both look with surprise at her, until the idea permeates their consciousness and activates their sense of justice - they are overcome with mirth.

NADIR

(to Rostam)

Go with her. I must take Sa`adat.

Vidyavant rides up close to Nadir and looks directly into his eyes. They share a moment, then glancing at Rostam, Nadir turns.

Vidyavant and Rostam watch as he rides alone down through his cheering troops. He takes out his battle-axe and rouses them on.

THE CAMP OF THE NAZIM OF HYDERABAD

His retinue on a magnificent carpet surrounds the Nazim, a very tall wiry man with a curled up beard and a turban jewelled with precious stones and a size too big for his head. He sits on a small gold throne in the very centre of the carpet. They watch anxiously as a column of Nadir's own bodyguard approach up the hill. A Courtier next to the Nazim speaks nervously in a whisper to him.

COURTIER

Do you think these barbarians will understand court procedure, sire.

NAZIM

(angry)

No doubt they will understand that as I haven't joined battle there will need be for a settlement between our armies.

The Captain of the Nazim's Guard was expecting anything but the presence of a woman at the head of Nadir's army and he challenges her too late.

CAPTAIN

You will dismount in the presence of...

Vidyavant brushes him aside and Nadir's men fan out driving the guard back, coming to a halt in a semi-circle around the Nazim's carpet.

The Nazim's courtiers fall back to the very edge of the carpet leaving the Nazim exposed.

Vidyavant walks her horse onto the carpet to the horror of the Nazim's men. She turns her horse sideways on and theatrically sweeps her arm in the air bringing it down so it points towards the Nazim.

VIDYAVANT

Your Sword!

When he hesitates Nadir`s bodyguard draw their long barrelled pistols.

VIDYAVANT (CONT'D)

Your Sword!!

The Nazim looks behind him.

NAZIM

My sword, fool, get me my sword.

An elaborately jewelled sword is past to him. Vidyavant is like a statue and the Nazim looks around hardly able to believe what is expected of him. Finally he concedes and gets up and in faltering little steps hastily hands it to her. He retreats backwards.

Vidyavant looks at him with contempt before turning to Rostam. She hands him the sword.

VIDYAVANT

Tell Nadir - another life.

She turns her horse and walks him past the Nazim. The courtiers flee and the army behind gives way opening a path for her.

She stops and theatrically sweeps her arm in the air and holds it out to the soldiers. They part and start throwing their weapons on the ground either side of her. As she walks her horse further into the army, so it parts, then kicking her horse into a trot she rides down a path of falling steel to freedom.

EXT. SARAFI BAZAAR. DAY

The bazaar is busy with traders and trundling through the chaos is an ox cart driven by a young boy. A CLOSER look reveals Desan.

She stops next to a PAN shop and gets a betel pan that she sticks in her mouth. Looking around she glances up at a LARGE BLACK KETTLE hanging from a metal bracket over an entrance next to the pan shop. She enters.

INT. BLACK KETTLE. DAY

The entrance to the chi shop is small but inside the cool interior it is large with several kangas (raised seating areas which can be heated during winter.) The place is 3 parts empty.

Light falls in pools on only a few areas and deep inside in one dark corner sits Bishan a cloak covering the livery of the personal body guard of Muhammed Shah.

Vidyavant, in a sari, carries a tray with a small black kettle and 3 bowls across to the kang where Bishan is sitting. Placing it down she slides onto the kang and sits next to her. Desan, following her, leaps onto the kang.

The three form a half circle facing the door.

DESAN

My new ox cart is outside so we've only got a few minutes before these Delhi rogues steal it back.

BISHAN

As you are probably aware Nadir Shah is taking up residency in Lal Qila (Red Fort) today, which has made our job of getting Subeg out even more difficult.

DESAN

Great! I told you we should have acted last week.

VIDYAVANT

How could we. We didn't even know where Subeg was then.

BISHAN

At least he's safe as he's housed in the area which Nadir is taking over and the Mughals are forbidden entry. Which of course means that I am also forbidden. But there is much confusion, so much so, that I was able to slip out of the fort today with ease.

DESAN

So we might be able to slip in.

BISHAN

We might.

VIDYAVANT

Then let us chance it for we cannot stay here forever. Agreed?

BISHAN

Agreed.

DESAN

Agreed.

BISHAN

If you load your new ox cart up with fresh fruit and vegetables and I come with you I might be able to get us all in as suppliers to Muhammed Shah. Let`s hope Nadir`s guard are still sorting themselves out as they take control of the fortifications.

VIDYAVANT

2 women and a boy shouldn`t prove much of a threat to the Great Marauder.

BISHAN

(to Vidyavant)

Have you any money left from the sale of your ..?

DESAN

(laughing)

Dancing clothes.

VIDYAVANT

Enough. And, enough of your cheek.

DESAN

Then the die is cast.

They drink their chi.

EXT. LAL QILA. DAY

The sun is setting over the Red Fort as Desan and Vidyavant riding on the ox cart and Bishan on a horse approach the moat.

The Persians stop them and Desan is forced to show the guard the contents of all the baskets. Most of the eyes however are on Bishan and her uniform. They are eventually allowed past.

INT. LAL QILA. NIGHT

Going through the same routine inside the gate they are just about to move off when the Persian GATE CAPTAIN appears out of the Gate House.

GATE CAPTAIN

Halt. And where do you think you are taking that.

BISHAN

Its fresh supplies for Muhammed Shah`s kitchen. The Captain has a quick look.

GATE CAPTAIN

Muhammed can wait. Take it across to the kitchens of Nadir Shah.

Their luck is shared in their glances. Bishan goes to lead the way.

GATE CAPTAIN (CONT'D)

(to Bishan)

Not so fast Lieutenant.

BISHAN

I was just going to show them the way.

GATE CAPTAIN

Think again.

(to soldier)

Show them the way.

(to Bishan)

You can keep me entertained for a while.

Bishan has no choice and dismounts as the ox cart is led away.

BISHAN

(calling out)

You will need to store the vegetables below the kitchens.

Bishan turns to the Gate Captain with a smile.

BISHAN (CONT'D)

Now, what kind of entertainment did you have in mind?

She doesn`t wait to be asked but enters the Gate House.

INT. KITCHEN. NIGHT

The kitchen is in turmoil with a "Swelter" of a Persian COOK giving orders to his minions. Desan doesn`t waste a moment but walks right up to him carrying a basket.

DESAN

Do you want these in the basement?

The Cook looks at the vegetables.

COOK

Is that where they`re normally stored?

DESAN

So I`ve been told.

COOK

(confused)

Then get on with it.

Desan pulls a face blind side of the Cook then nods to Vidyavant. She directs Desan`s attention to servants coming out of an entrance to stairs and the two converge at the opening.

BASEMENT

They arrive in a labyrinth of corridors with people milling about. A short moment of assessment leaves them despondent.

DESAN

How the Hell are we supposed to find him down here.

VIDYAVANT

We`ll just have to take one at a time. Choose.

DESAN

This way.

Desan enters the one nearest and Vidyavant follows.

A shadow watching from a dark corner also follows. They come to another junction but this one with less people.

VIDYAVANT

We must mark our way or we will be lost for sure.
Leave your basket here.

DESAN

Listen, we have another problem. The cart is still laden and we can`t be unloading it if we find him.

Vidyavant can see the logic in what she says.

VIDYAVANT

You go back and unload then follow this trail of curry leaves. One from the entrance and one to the

way I take.

DESAN

Let`s hope the rats don`t have a taste for curry.

Desan is gone. Vidyavant sets off down a corridor.

GATE HOUSE

Bishan enters, notices another door and immediately spies inside. She turns to watch the Gate Captain shutting the outer door then leaps up onto a kang in the corner of the room. The Gate Captain goes to join her but she stops him.

BISHAN

I hear you have the finest of wines in Persia so how about showing me some Persian hospitality and letting me judge whether the stories are true at the same time.

The Gate Captain is only slightly taken aback and goes to a box covered with a cloth, takes out a bottle, puts it back then takes out another.

With satisfaction he grabs 2 cups from a shelf and rejoins Bishan on the Kang.

BASEMENT

Vidyavant comes to yet another junction. One where there are guards. She pulls back before they see her only to bump into the shadow. She turns quickly.

SHADOW

You won`t find him down here.

VIDYAVANT

What?

The shadow steps into light.

ZAND

Recognize me now?

VIDYAVANT

Oh Zand, please tell me where he is and I will take him from here. He has done you no harm.

ZAND

Nadir said you would come for him.

VIDYAVANT

He is my betrothed.

ZAND

He is not the same man.

(her face drops)

They tortured him and left him to rot.

VIDYAVANT

(in pain)

Take me to him, please, please Zand.

ZAND

They have had to remove his broken fingers. He will never hold a sword again. But worse, for I fear his mind may have gone.

VIDYAVANT

(breaking into tears)

Oh no.

(pause)

He will need me now more than ever.

Zand feels sympathy for her.

ZAND

Come.

He steps out into the light and the guards part as he enters a staircase and ascends followed by Vidyavant.

GUARD HOUSE

Another empty bottle joins the one already on the floor. The Gate Captain is getting amorous with an encouraging Bishan when a knock comes on the door. The Gate Captain slides off the Kang and opens the door.

SOLDIER

There are members of Muhammed Shah`s household here with papers carrying some seal. You need inspect them.

The Gate Captain leaves to his duty.

BISHAN

(ironically to herself)

Take your time Captain, as absence is want to make the heart grow fonder.

She takes a small block of hashish from her waistband and using her knife grates some into the Captain's cup.

INT. PHYSICIAN'S ROOM. NIGHT

Zand opens the door but does not enter. The physician is just finishing bandaging Subeg's hands. Subeg sits vacant, his mind quite gone.

Vidyavant flies to him but all her pleads and remonstrations are to no avail.

VIDYAVANT

(to the physician)

Is there nothing you can do?

PHYSICIAN

The body I can treat but the mind .. only time and Allah can mend.

CORRIDOR

Zand returns with Nadir and they gaze into the room at Vidyavant as she cradles Subeg's head in her arms. Nadir and Zand look at each other.

NADIR

Let them escape. That way he need never know of our union.

Nadir turns away.

GATE HOUSE

Bishan watches the Gate Captain finish his cup then taking it from him she wraps herself around him smothering him with kisses. His hands begin to roam.

BISHAN

This is not the place. I still have my modesty if not my virtue. Perhaps ..

She nods to the other room. The delinquent smile of the Gate Captain gives a good indication of his intoxicated state.

EXT. LAL QILA. NIGHT

Desan has almost finished unloading the cart. She carries the last of the baskets on her shoulder into the Kitchen but her way is blocked by Zand.

DESAN

Out of my way fool! Can't you see I'm busy?

ZAND

Indeed I can. Busy trying to rescue a devotee of The Sword.

Desan looks up into the humorous expression on Zand's face.

DESAN

Oh, Shit.

She turns looking for a way out but can see it's futile. She drops the basket.

DESAN (CONT'D)

(turning back)

Can I interest you in a strange fact.

ZAND

Such as?

DESAN

(pulling off her turban and letting her hair free)
I'm but a poor defenceless woman.

Zand is amazed and reaches out and feels her breasts.

ZAND

Indeed you are.

DESAN

Touch them again and I'll bite your face off.

Zand laughs with gusto.

ZAND

For the men of your religion I cannot speak, but of their women, I cannot speak to highly.

Desan is taken aback and looks around her expecting trouble.

ZAND (CONT'D)

(turning)

Now you better help Vidyavant for Subeg is not in such good health.

Vidyavant appears at the door with Subeg supported on the other side by a soldier. Desan, both surprised and delighted relieves the soldier and they carry Subeg to the cart and put

him in.

ZAND (CONT'D)

Now you are meant to be escaping, so cover him with baskets. This is the most that I can do.

He turns and leaves with the soldier. Desan quickly does up her hair as Vidyavant piles the empty baskets onto the cart.

BATTLEMENTS

Nadir and Zand watch from the battlements as the cart trundles through the fort. They follow its progress quickening to round the corner, the diagonal of which the cart is taking to the Gate House.

GATE HOUSE

The cart arrives and pulls up before the guards.

SOLDIER

(to soldier)

Get the Captain.

The soldier goes and knocks on the door. But he has to knock again before it is opened. The soldier is taken aback as Bishan confronts him tidying her hair.

BISHAN

(spying the cart)

The Captain is sleeping

(stepping outside)

best if I show these people out.

She closes the door behind her and looks around for her horse. Spying it she spends no time mounting. The soldier goes inside the Gate House. Bishan rides up to the guards but they stop her, suspicious, and waiting for the Captain to give them their orders.

A terrible moment is broken by Bishan turning her horse around and calling into the Gate House.

BISHAN (CONT'D)

Come on out Captain and let us through.

The Captain appears at the door and staggers out and right up to Bishan taking out his pistol.

He points it up at her and as she sees him cock the weapon

she knocks the barrel up and the SHOT rings out.

BATTLEMENTS

The musket ball PINGS off the battlements next to Nadir.

This has Nadir`s men on the battlements with their weapons pointing down at the gathering at the gate.

NADIR

(shouting)

Take them alive! I`ll be down directly.

GATE HOUSE

The 3 girls and Subeg are held by the guards. Nadir talks to the soldier who went looking for the Gate Captain. Nadir is furious. He walks up to the Captain, who is pistol whipping Bishan, and taking out his battle-axe he removes the Captain's head with a single stroke.

NADIR (CONT'D)

(shouting furiously)

There will be no womanizing or drinking by those on guard! Is that understood!

The men make their heart, head and Allah.

NADIR (CONT'D)

You are the best and most disciplined fighting men in the world. And just because we have won a great victory doesn`t mean that we can allow our self-discipline to become lax or surely we end up like the Mughals!

The Captain`s body finally falls over as if to make the point.

Nadir bends down and picks up the pistol that so nearly ended his life and looks at it thoughtfully then hands it to Bishan.

NADIR (CONT'D)

A story to tell your children.

He moves along to Desan and reaches out feeling her breasts. She growls back defiantly. His smile belies his amazement.

Nadir walks up to Vidyavant but looks to Subeg who is being supported by 2 soldiers.

NADIR (CONT'D)

He may recover ..
(turning to her)
in time.

VIDYAVANT

In another place.

He turns to the guard.

NADIR

Send them on their way.

Zand and a squad of men arrive as the girls and Subeg are put on the cart.

NADIR (CONT'D)

(to Zand)

See them safely to the city.

Vidyavant turns and watches Nadir walk away.

EXT. DELHI. NIGHT

The slow procession of the ox cart with its Persian escort makes its way from Lal Qila to Sarafa Bazaar through busy and excited streets.

Passing in the opposite direction in a carriage is the British Colonel Flagstaff of the East India Company.

Flagstaff's attention is brought to the ox cart because of its Persian guard and notices Bishan with great interest. Once they've past he stops his carriage and gets the driver to turn it around.

The Road Block Lieutenant who is following Flagstaff has to turn his horse down an alley to avoid Flagstaff spotting him.

The procession is now even longer but it soon comes to a halt at the entrance to

SARAFI BAZAAR

Zand rides up along side of the cart.

ZAND

(to Vidyavant)

I will leave you here and wish you well. There are many of our soldiers here tonight so if you have trouble mention my name.

VIDYAVANT

I wish you well Zand and hope that Nadir strips the Mughals bare of their wealth and power.

ZAND

(laughing)

No doubt he will.

Zand and the escort turn away.

Desan gets down and leads the ox by the head into the busy Bazaar.

Flagstaff gets out of the carriage as Zand rides past.

The Lieutenant dismounts and leaves his horse to follow Flagstaff.

The atmosphere in the bazaar is charged with excitement and resentment - the Persians acting with the arrogance of the conquering army are taking liberties.

At the sign of The Black Kettle Desan brings the ox cart to a halt.

Vidyavant helped by Bishan gets Subeg out of the back of the cart.

Flagstaff approaches with the Lieutenant not far behind.

FLAGSTAFF

So, what is a bodyguard of Mohammed Shah doing with an escort of Persians.

He looks at Subeg then spots his Kara on his right wrist.

FLAGSTAFF (CONT'D)

Ah, the porridge thickens with each new helping.

He looks at Vidyavant and Desan.

FLAGSTAFF (CONT'D)

Are we all Sikhs then?

(to Bishan)

And how about you my dear?

DESAN

(to Bishan)

Who is this jumped up monkey!

BISHAN

More a mangy hyena come to pick on the bones of an Empire. Ignore him.

They go to take Subeg inside but Flagstaff stops them by grabbing Bishan`s arm.

FLAGSTAFF

(angry)

A hyena is it. You will know your new masters soon enough.

This is too much for Desan who takes the whip from the cart and lashes him across the face.

At first he staggers back then propels himself at Desan in fury. The fight is not as one sided as the difference in their size would suggest. Her courageous stand soon has a crowd gathering.

BISHAN

(to Vidyavant)

Take Subeg inside.

She is just about to join the fight when she spots the Lieutenant.

BISHAN (CONT'D)

Have you Mughal men lost your manhood altogether. Is it left to women and children to fight these lackeys of our invaders.

People in the crowd look at the Lieutenant who is stung into action and he leaps onto Flagstaff. But Bishan is already carried away.

BISHAN (CONT'D)

(to crowd)

Have none of you heard the news that this very night Nadir was shot dead by a woman. A member of our Shah`s mighty bodyguard!

The Persians crowd around to listen as traders go to help the Lieutenant. A man shouts from the crowd.

MAN

It is true, there was a shot at Lal Qila tonight.

BISHAN

Yes, and from this very gun!

She holds up the pistol and at the same time reveals her uniform from under her cloak.

The Man comes through the crowd and smells the barrel of the pistol.

MAN

Aye. It has been recently fired.

This is too much for the Persians who go to grab her but the crowd are already incensed and start fighting with the Persians.

BISHAN (CONT'D)

Fight these invaders for they are nothing now but the body of a headless corpse.

The fighting runs out of control as the local people turn on their invaders with sticks and knives. Soon a full-scale riot is unleashed against the outnumbered Persians.

Desan pulls herself free of Flagstaff's grip as he disappears under a torrent of blows by the Lieutenant and locals.

Desan joins Bishan.

DESAN

Are you mad?!

BISHAN

That is a fine question when you started this!

They look at the mayhem going on all around them. Then a wicked smile eases its way onto Desan's face and she slowly turns to Bishan who slowly turns to her

BISHAN (CONT'D)

(catching her smile)

Dog eats dog.

Desan looks down to where Flagstaff is being beaten to a pulp.

DESAN

And dog eats rat.

They both giggle.

BISHAN

Come on we`d better get out of here. We must make good our escape through the chaos.

They both go to enter The Black Kettle but a rush of people from inside carrying knives and clubs almost bowls them over.

INT. BLACK KETTLE. NIGHT

Desan and Bishan enter and close the door and set the bar across then make their way through the now deserted chi shop just in time to see Vidyavant feeding Subeg through a small window.

EXT. LANE. NIGHT

The lane is filling with people from the houses as the word goes around that Nadir is dead and an uprising is in progress.

A man in the lane, who is helping Subeg through the window, gets dragged off by others joining the insurrection. Subeg falls head first into the lane. He lies stunned for a moment then sits up and looks about him trying to figure out where he is.

The girls gaze down at him through the window.

GIRLS

Subeg!

He looks up and sees their concerned faces as a glint of recognition comes to his eye and a smile emerges on his face.

SUBEG

I must be dead.

He gets up and wanders off down the lane bumping into people running to join the riot.

The girls' fight over who get out of the window first.

He looks about at the situation, his eyes wandering up to where people are looking out of windows and standing on roofs.

Eventually his eye comes to the FIZZING round globe of ball lightning lazily transversing the sky leaving a sword like

gash in the heavens. He raises up his hands in delight.

SUBEG (CONT'D)

Oh divine wonder. I am truly in heaven.

The girls catch up with him.

GIRLS

Subeg! Subeg!

SUBEG (CONT'D)

(turning to them)

And what wonder is this?

He staggers back before they embrace him.

VIDYAVANT

My love are you returned to us?

Subeg looks about him like a wild man.

SUBEG

Returned? Returned where?

The girls can see his confusion.

DESAN

(shaking him)

You are in Delhi and we have rescued you from the Mughals.

VIDYAVANT

(to Desan)

Stop! You are only making things worse.

(to Subeg)

You must trust us for we have to flee.

The girls can see that his confusion is great and that fear is now descending upon him.

BISHAN

At least he can walk now let`s see if he can run.

Desan and Bishan grab him by the arms and they set off down the alley against the flow of people.

Vidyavant looks back and sees the Lieutenant dropping out of the window.

VIDYAVANT

We are pursued already.

Bishan turns and recognizes the Lieutenant.

BISHAN

(to Vidyavant)

Take his arm. I will deal with this.

She waits until the Lieutenant catches up then grabbing his arm she sets off after the other 3.

LIEUTENANT

Is Nadir really dead?

BISHAN

I left him for dead then escaped in the confusion taking refuge with these poor people collecting a prisoner. They have helped me, now we must help them. For if the Persians find out these people helped me they will surely be tortured to death.

LIEUTENANT

(filled with excitement)

I know where we can get horses.

He sprints past Subeg and his support.

LIEUTENANT (CONT'D)

Follow me.

INT. LAL QILA. NIGHT

Nadir is having a council with his Generals in an opulent room. The atmosphere is one of conviviality. Nadir helps himself to some wine when an OTRIDER bursts in and heads strait for Shahkam.

OTRIDER

The news of Nadir`s death has caused an insurrection in Sarafa Bazaar. Our men are being slaughtered.

The Generals look towards Nadir and the Outrider`s eyes turn in his direction. He immediately drops to his knees and places his head on the floor.

OTRIDER (CONT'D)

Allah be praised.

NADIR

No one has told me of my death.

OUTRIDER

They are slaughtering our men and the insurrection is spreading. They think you dead.

NADIR

Teymour, seal off the area. Rostam, bring your men into the city for though they were not blooded in battle they will be blooded now. Shahkam, guard the barracks of the Mughals men and bring Muhammed Shah to me. And Zand .. quash these rumours .. and find out how they began.

They all leave at once.

NADIR (CONT'D)

(to himself)

I wonder ..

He drains his cup.

EXT. OUTSKIRTS OF DELHI. DAY.

Desan has Subeg up behind her his arms wrapped around her clinging on as she rides at full pelt into open countryside. Vidyavant, Bishan and the Lieutenant are trying to keep up with her pace.

The Lieutenant sprints ahead and pulls Desan up. They all come to a stop.

LIEUTENANT

I can go no further with you I must return to my duties.

BISHAN

Don't be a fool all of your life, Lieutenant. Great Beauty can be a great deception and you have been deceived by mine.

LIEUTENANT

I don't understand.

BISHAN

We are not Mohammedans but Sikhs. And if you return to Delhi you will surely be tortured to death by the Persians or your Mughals or more likely by both. For you have just helped their enemies to escape.

The Lieutenant is confused.

BISHAN (CONT'D)

Perhaps it is your naivety that has a certain charm that I once recognised in myself. So I give you the chance of joining us and leaving this madness behind.

LIEUTENANT

You are a Sikh?

DESAN

We are all Sikhs!

The realization strikes hard as his predicament sinks in. His fury is finally unleashed as he drives hard at Bishan knocking her from her horse. He drops from his horse and takes out a dagger but Vidyavant is as quick as he and she drops from her horse behind him and picking up a stone in a single motion lays him out cold.

LATER

The Lieutenant comes to his senses and staggers to his feet. He looks around for his horse but the girls have taken it. He breaks into tears at his total humiliation.

LIEUTENANT

I swear I will drag you from whatever cursed hole you hide and I will skin you alive.

He sets off back to Delhi.

INT. ROADBLOCK. DAY

He staggers into the post house of the roadblock to find 2 soldiers from his old unit.

LIEUTENANT

Where are the rest of our men?

SOLDIER 1

They are all confined to barracks.

LIEUTENANT

Are there none outside of the control of Nadir.

SOLDIER 1

Only those based in Saharanpur and that's only because it is so far to the north. But even they will succumb, it's only be a matter of time. The

Persians are disarming the entire Mughal Army.

LIEUTENANT

Have you any weapons?

SOLDIER 1

None.

LIEUTENANT

What about a horse?

SOLDIER 1

There are 2.

The relief is only too apparent as he relaxes against the wall letting himself slide down till he's sitting on the floor.

LIEUTENANT

Saddle one and put provisions on the other. I ride to Saharanpur.

The soldier leaves.

EXT. CAMP. NIGHT

While Bishan tends the horses Vidyavant and Desan sit either side of Subeg taking it in turns to feed him from a pot on a small fire.

DESAN

(to Subeg)

Can't you remember anything? Surely you remember me? I'm unforgettable.

Subeg looks at Desan and smiles in a vacant way.

VIDYAVANT

Can you not remember our village Subeg?

He looks at Vidyavant with the same vacant smile then down as if trying to remember. He suddenly looks up in a eureka moment beaming a smile.

SUBEG

Chi!

He looks to both the girls in anticipation.

VIDYAVANT AND DESAN

Chi?

They look at each other exasperated while Subeg turns his gaze to the heavens.

Bishan puts a small kettle on the fire and is joined by the other two. They look at each other in sad silence.

EXT. SARAFI BAZAAR. NIGHT

Nadir, Zand and Teymour are joined by Rostam.

ROSTAM

Shall I give the order.

NADIR

Slaughter them all.

Rostam rides off and WE follow. He raises his sword as he nears his men and they enter the deserted bazaar with a terrible purpose.

SCENES of horror as the Persians act out a terrible revenge. They enter houses and drive the people out or slaughter them where they are found. Terrible scenes of cruelty and no mercy.

EXT. SAHARANPUR. NIGHT

The Lieutenant rides into the Mughal barracks. He comes to a stop outside of a large tent and enters. A Major jumps to his feet taken by surprise.

MAJOR

What is the meaning of this?

LIEUTENANT

There's been an uprising in Delhi.

MAJOR

What, are they mad. Nadir will slaughter them all.

LIEUTENANT

Only too true but I am not here to raise an army against Nadir for such action would be an even greater folly. No, I want to attack the Sikhs for it was they that fostered the uprising in Delhi. And once Nadir has gone they will cause us nothing but trouble in our weakened state.

The Major digests this news.

MAJOR

Its true they have been raiding in increasing numbers and have taken a number of outposts and captured large quantities of arms .. You are probably right .. Swift action now when they are not expecting it could prove provident.

LIEUTENANT

So will you give me a detachment.

MAJOR

I will do better than that I will take my entire force. It will be good for our men and us to exercise our anger and frustrations. Now tell me about the uprising in Delhi.

They both sit down.

EXT. SARAFI BAZAAR. DAY

A new morning brings fresh horrors as the Persians take their pleasure with the women. And still the slaughter continues as hidden children are put to the sword.

EXT. ROAD. DAY

The girls with Subeg make their way north galloping at speed.

EXT. ROAD. DAY

The Lieutenant and the Major with a large company of men gallop fast.

EXT. SARAFI BAZAAR. NIGHT

CPV winds its way through streets covered in bodies WE pass houses and shacks on fire. A small child wanders through the devastation climbing over bodies WE halt and watch his progress.

VOICE (V.O.)

Hang up the swing of love today!
 Hang the body and the mind between the arms of the beloved,
 In the ecstasy of love's joy:
 Bring the tearful streams of the rainy clouds to your eyes,
 And cover your heart with the shadow of darkness:
 Bring your face nearer to his ear, and speak of the deepest longings of your heart.
 (PAUSE)
 Listen to me brother! Bring the vision of the Beloved into your heart!

EXT. MOUNTAIN TRACK. DAY.

The girls walking their horses and Subeg riding but being led by Vidyavant come to a stop 2/3rds of the way up a mountain pass. The girls throw themselves on the ground exhausted.

Subeg slips off his horse and lies where he falls staring up at the sky, gently laughing.

The girls just look at him.

Vidyavant starts to laugh and Desan soon joins her with Bishan not far behind.

VIDYAVANT

What folly.

DESAN

What enormous folly.

BISHAN

But what a magnificent, enormous, folly.

They all get up and lift Subeg up so that he is sitting facing back down from where they have come. They sit facing him with affection. He looks one to the other with a foolish smile upon his face. Then he suddenly stands and points back down the track. The foolish smile now turned into one of fear. The girls leap to their feet and follow his gaze.

Mughal cavalry riding with speed not more than 2 kilometres away.

DESAN

(annoyed)

Now I wonder who that can be?

BISHAN

Perhaps I should have killed him.

VIDYAVANT

Too late now. We must make speed and warn our brethren.

They quickly mount, Desan taking up Subeg behind her they set off.

Not much further on they leave the track over the pass and take the small one that winds its way around the mountain to the

SCREE SLOPE

The going is hard and they have to dismount and pick their way across the face heading for the waterfall. They are 2/3rds across when the first Mughals arrive. The first Mughals try riding across letting off a few SHOTS as they go.

LIEUTENANT

(shouting)

Stop firing you'll cause an avalanche.

One wrong hoof fall and a horse and rider slip on the scree and plunge down the slope causing a mini avalanche. The rest of the Mughals quickly dismount.

By the time the girls and Subeg get to the waterfall the Mughals are half way across.

WATERFALL

Under the waterfall they are greeted by armed Sikhs who soon recognize Bishan.

SIKH 1

We all thought you dead.

(looking at Subeg)

And is this who I think it is?

BISHAN

What remains.

SIKH 1

We cannot tarry here for there are too many of them to take out on the scree slope we must lure them inside.

He leads them along the ledge and into the cave. They quickly make their way through and emerge out along side the river.

Hundreds of armed Sikhs greet them as they arrive from the town.

ENTRANCE TO WATERFALL

The Mughals climb onto the ledge behind the waterfall and gingerly make their way along to the cave entrance.

They soon make torches and lighting the way the Lieutenant forges ahead. Mughals pore in behind the waterfall as others still cross the scree slope.

ON TOP OF THE WATERFALL

Bishan, Vidyavant, Subeg and Desan follow a small track beside the river until they come to where armed Sikhs are gathered behind rocks looking down on the Mughals crossing the scree slope.

DESAN

When are we going to fight? We are just letting them enter.

Bishan points high above the scree slope where three men stand holding a pole levered under a large rock. And further along, others, all waiting.

BISHAN

We will wait until the Mughals come out next to the river. Then watch the fun. SHOTS can be heard from behind them as the first Mughals reach the entrance next to the river. Then a huge EXPLOSION.

RIVER ENTRANCE TO CAVE

The dam holding the river on its course BLOWS up and the emerging Mughals look on in terror as the water behind the dam bursts down upon them - the whole river changing direction and rushing down into the cave.

TOP OF WATERFALL

The girls and Subeg look on as the river dries up before their eyes. They look quickly over the side in anticipation and they don't have long to wait.

LEDGE BEHIND WATER FALL

The Mughals look up as the water stops falling then look around themselves in total confusion. A great ROARING sound can be heard mixed with SCREAMS from inside the cave. It suddenly dawns on them what has happened and they try scrambling back along the ledge. A great column of water SHOOTs out of the cave entrance peppered with logs and men taking the rest of the Mughals on the ledge with it. The cave is flushed out.

TOP OF SCREE SLOPE

The Sikhs watch the column of water SHOOT out and only after the water has subsided do they lever their boulders down onto those Mughals still on the scree slope. A huge AVALANCHE on the scree slope takes out the remaining Mughals.

TOP OF WATERFALL

The girls and even Subeg cheer with the rest.

EXT. FEAST. NIGHT

The mountain valley is illuminated with thousands of lamps. The centre of the town around the river is one BIG FESTIVAL.

Subeg wanders amongst the many groups searching for someone.

He SEES: Desan, telling her story to a group of young girls with real gusto - reliving her ride in front of the Mughal army at the battle of Karnal and how in not bringing the orders to the Nazim she made sure of the Mughal`s defeat. Desan sees him turn away.

He SEES: Bishan talking to a Giani about how she started the riot in Sarafa Bazaar and of her dream of the Naked man and how it changed her life forever. Bishan sees him turn away.

He SEES: Vidyavant telling a group of men of her ride on a path of steel through the army of the Nazim and of her meeting with The Great Marauder himself. Vidyavant sees him turn away.

Subeg is looking for someone else. He wanders right down to the river`s rocky bank and there he finally finds Bishan`s sister, Bibi, sitting quietly by herself.

She turns and sees her great love and covers her face but he brings it down with his bandaged hands. She can restrain herself no more and leaps up into his arms. They kiss with tenderness and a quiet passion.

Desan, Vidyavant and Bishan watch from a short distance away. Their sadness tempered first with consternation then humour and finally - a joyful release.

They walk back to the festivities, arm in arm, leaving the lovers to the moonlight.

CREDITS