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| “Sidon”  By  Sajid Al Sanai |
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FAde In:

int. private quarters – night

A ROBED MAN prostrates in the dark. His QUARTERS are furnished simply. It is as though he wished his forehead be one with the ground. The candles are fresh. The evening is young.

The ROBED MAN sits up. He is SIDONIS the Graceful, first of his tribe, the BANU SIDONI. He looks around for a moment, as though waking from a spiritual reverie to realise the stone walls around him.

He sighs, thinking of a time when he once slept under the stars and the only walls he knew were the rough fabrics of his father’s tent.

SIDON

In the name of God, the Gracious and the Merciful.

FADE OUT:

EXT. OASIS

SIDONIS stands atop a large rock overlooking pastures at the edge of the OASIS – his home. He tends his father’s flock, observing them with sharp eyes. His loyal friend, and father’s slave, ABEL sits beside him. There is food, water, and life to be lived. Their nation is abundant, even in the desert.

ABEL

I didn’t expect you to be with the sheep today.

(beat)

The womenfolk didn’t want you around “helping”, did they?

SIDONIS

ASMA said I’d just get in the way.

ABEL

She’s right too. You really would not want to get in the way of a new bride.

SIDONIS

Father has enough hands tending the fire.

ABEL

I suppose when you have everything, you are sufficed the need to toil.

ABEL’s observation is met with silence. He looks at his companion to see if his words offended. SIDONIS contemplates for a moment.

SIDONIS

ABEL, I had a dream last night.

ABEL

Of portent?

SIDONIS

I dreamed I clung to an old pillar. It was sturdy and steadfast and reached the heavens. Yet I was afraid that if I let go, it would topple. I was struck with fear by what would happen if I did not cling to it.  
  
(beat)  
  
I dreamed of a voice that spoke unto me: Surely this pillar will support itself, and you, and those like unto you.  
  
(beat)  
  
But if you hold fear in your heart, then gather from many nations, mixed clay, with which you may strengthen its foundations.  
  
(beat)  
  
I dreamed in that moment a sandstorm brew around me. Yet I let go. When the sands settled after a while, I found the pillar stood as it was, cracked and weathered.

Abel

Praise be to our Lord.

SIDONIS

I have decided. I will ask father tonight.

ABEL

Tonight?

SIDONIS

Tonight, he will be granting boons.

ABEL

A hefty boon you seek at the feet of my Master. You are sure he will grant it?

SIDONIS

God willing.

They contemplate the blessings the OASIS bore them. ABEL sings one last sea-verse. When he is done, the sun begins to set. ABEL smiles.

ABEL

Then I will follow you.

FADE OUT:

FADE IN:

In the evening, there is music played and coffee served to an immense gathering. The bard takes up his El-Oud and sings a song of loyalty and fidelity that touches everyone’s hearts. The women clap and laugh.

A large camel roasts in a specially built oven. Around the tents there are caught glimpses of the cooks toiling to prepare the feast, silhouetted against the cooking fires.

All are present. SIDONIS’ sister ASMA is radiant in her bridal gown. She sits between her mother and father. He is SHEIKH HAYTAM. Proud, and tall. He won his name amongst his tribe as a benevolent leader. To his right sat ASMA’s father and mother-in-law, and between them, the groom.

FATHER

My people! My guests! You all honour me tonight!

ALL

The honour is ours, O Sheikh!

SHEIKH HAYTAM

I am HAYTAM IBN SAREN, SHEIKH of the BANU SIDON. Present is AMIR IBN RAHEM, my counterpart of the BANU JAHL. To SAMIR IBN AMIR, I have agreed to give my first and only daughter’s hand.

(clapping)

For my jewel ASMA, we have decided the bride-price. She has agreed to this and given her consent. May she prosper from it. Their marriage has been sealed before both our councils in witness. Let it not be forgotten.

May ASMA and SAMIR prosper in their new life! Let us break bread together.

Cheering and clapping. The roast camel is presented before the guests. ABEL approaches SHEIKH HAYTAM first bearing bread. The SHEIKH breaks it and passes it to his right.

ABEL now passes the bread around to the remaining guests. Upon handing a loaf to SIDONIS, he whispers.

ABEL

I’ll wait outside the tent.

SIDONIS

“My sister’s feast was magnificent, and on this eve under the marital tent, my father’s generosity unto his tribe and to his guests was to be boundless.”

SIDONIS

Father, you taught me that the soul is of many colours. What it imbibes in habit becomes a part of its nature.

We are of many tribes and nations scattered across el-Ard. To witness them is my one wish.

A man is in charge of his destiny, and his Lord guides in the path of his soul. Allow me the chance to know and love my people, and I will return again to take up the charge.

His mother is soft-spoken and firm and proffers Sidon her bangle and seven dates in a pouch. She kisses his hands and bids him remember his people.

“In the year of your birth I dreamed that you would be the sword of His justice. May your dealings be fair, and judgement wise.”

Sidonis, his cousin, and two friends together part from the tribe, riding together with a caravan on the first moon after the wedding.

Father is saddened but benevolent in feeding the desire of his son’s wandering spirit.

He swears to his father,

“I swear to uphold the honour of my nation, the dignity of my father’s name, and the Laws of God whom I hold in remembrance in all my actions.”

The caravan is small. They ride for many nights.

His cousin expresses his wonder on the beauty of women abroad after catching a glimpse of the caravan guard’s daughter one night.

Further west lay the wastes where the ancient tribes had built great towers and gardens in the forests. They had been a multitudinous and passionate people. Their passion lay in their enmities and pursuits of delights in the face of overwhelming hardships. That is how their nation fell.

They come across a village in ruin. There is no water. The elders had a dispute with a neighbouring tribe, who pillaged a water purifier that was rightfully theirs.

int. private quarters - day

A ROBED MAN prostrates in the dark. His QUARTERS are furnished simply. He sits up, clearly in prayer. His face is partially illuminated by light seeping in from the window.

robed MAN

O Creator!

Long-suffering may my patience be for mankind.

For we know nothing of this paltry world; not of our births, nor of our deaths.

Yet we walk the lands with such ambition.

Forgive me my Creator, give me strength. Such strength with which no nation before ours has been blessed, nor any nation after ours shall ever know.

May I frustrate their intrigues and spread the Truth in your Name.

He rises with grace. Perspiration slicks his brow. Solemnity is etched into every wrinkle on his face. The hairs of his beard are greyer than once they were.

throneroom

The ROBED MAN opens the door of his humble PRIVATE QUARTERS and enters upon a THRONEROOM where MINISTERS and GENERALS await him. They stand silently between the many pillars – rows of proud men ordered in rank. Dawn’s light pierces the windows, painting tall shadows at their feet.

Our ROBED MAN is their king. He is SIDONIS RAZ, King of SIDON. He walks among them – he is a man who favours neither throne nor pulpit. The eldest and wisest of his MINISTERS turns to him.

VAZIR-E Azam

Peace be upon you, your majesty.

sidonis raz

And upon you all, peace.

Vazir-e azam

We are gathered today at your command. Our diligence be rewarded with your wisdom.

sidonis raz

There are those among my generals today who will remember the matter of my summons.

For those who did not stand shoulder to shoulder, let it suffice that signs of the coming temptations were revealed to me.

(with grave conviction)

Have fear! An age is upon us where the affairs of the first men are insignificant in the face of our coming end.

Glances are shared among this counsel at the king’s mysterious proclamation.

SIDONIS RAZ

Last night, I was shown that the COPPER WALL had been torn down.

FLASHBACK TO:

ext. beach – day

The GALLEY docks ashore an INLET between MOUNTAINS. Their vessel had been weathered by a month of rough sailing in which they were turned around several times. Provisions on board had grown scant.

Towering above the BEACH is a STONE MONASTERY. Flies gather around beached fish. SIDONIS RAZ descends his GALLEY with a pair of his ranking GENERALS in tow.

The sun-bleached sand is crusty with salt. The air smells rancid. The waves are lifeless in the shallows. There is no wind. This is a bad place.

They ascend the hill to inspect the STONE MONASTERY seeking aid.

int. STONE MONASTERY - day

Inside, it is filthy with detritus. As though untouched since its first construction. There is little light. They come upon a MAN kneeling in the dark. His body and arms are chained. His feet are shackled. A COPPER MASK is clamped on his head.

sidonis raz

Woe unto you, who are you?

The CHAINED MAN raises his head after an age. SIDONIS RAZ remains composed. The GENERALS shrink back somewhat in disgust.

The figure that at first seemed quite forlorn, stands up with great effort. He is nearly a giant - his broad physique imposing in the confined space.

chained man

Who I am does not matter. Soon you will come to know well enough.

Tell me… who are you?

The GENERALS are angered by the man's impudence. SIDONIS RAZ ignores them.

sidonis raz

We are of SIDON.

chained man

Man of Sidon.

(pause)

Tell me of the date palms of BEYZHAN.

GENERAL I

You know of our gardens?

The king silences his GENERAL with a wave of his hand.

SIDONIS Raz

What of them?

Chained man

Do they still bear fruit?

sidonis raz

Yes.

chained man

A time will come when they will cease to do so.

Tell me of the waters of your LAKE KHIVALISH.

sidonis raz

Its waters are sweet and rise in the rains.

CHAINED MAN

A time will come when it will dry up.

And now tell me…

Have your people hearkened to the call of an unlettered man who brought the MESSAGE?

SIDONIS RAZ

We bear witness to the true MESSAGE.

CHAINED MAN

This is good. It is better for them that they follow him.

It is better for you to take heed against me, O man of SIDON.

Sidonis raz

Woe unto you, who are you?

CHAINED MAN

I will tell you who I am. I am ABRAHA. I am the GREAT DECEIVER.

Soon I will emerge and walk abroad, entering city upon city.

And I will crush your people underfoot for the pearls of this world.

There is tense silence at this proclamation. The king whispers…

sidonis raz

(whispering)

… spare us our CITY.

The DECEIVER laughs without mirth.

ABRAHA

You beseech me without shame? I will not spare you.

sidonis raz

Yours is not power. I seek a greater intercession.

BACK TO PRESENT

Without nation and without land, one becomes rootless. Such a man is likened to the wind that blows aimlessly in all directions.

They had become so steeped in their vile ways; they were the strong and we were the weak. They preyed on us and we were left without any recourse to justice. They indulged in horrors and in time became like beasts. They fell upon our people, and one by one, tore them to shreds.

My wife had no shame, for she was of the people who were bared by the sun. She neglected our babe…

I forgive her.

There is no nobility in it.

It is not in me to try a man or a woman by the laws of a land to which I am unaccustomed.

When we were finally compelled to abandon this land of our ancestors, they fell upon us and tore us apart as we fled.

Refugees

Jassas

A nation until the end of time

Bilal wants to find his place in the world. As a slave, he is manumitted by Sidon, and realises he wants to reunite with his people. He deserves this as a reflection of Sidon’s values, and in reflection of the rootless wandering man: refugees without a home, a nation blowing aimlessly among the sands. There is a bittersweet ending for the man who lost his family in the crossing. There is a bittersweet ending for Bilal too upon seeing the dilapidation of his people’s fortunes and civilisation. He becomes magistrate of the colony.

There is a mercenary who follows the caravan from afar. He is a former slave who loved his master for taking him in and wished only to do right by him in learning his master’s trade in order to work. But his master was a hard-hearted man who tortured his slave for his intention to usurp his son’s inheritance of his trade. The slave-boy upon confessing to his master that his intention was to only serve him better out of love, he was only beaten even more vilely. The child having suffered enough, murdered his master and fled into the night vowing never to love in an unjust world, selling favour for coin, and purifying society of slavery and its institutions. “Poor is a man’s life who is not shown mercy in the face of love. Poor is a man who cannot look to his own suffering and show mercy upon others.”

Touch their hands in the moment of death to see their story.

FAde Out:

the end