

VICTORIA & ABDUL

Lee Hall

Based on the book

VICTORIA & ABDUL: THE TRUE STORY
OF THE QUEEN'S CLOSEST CONFIDANT

by Shrabani Basu

Words appear on screen:

AGRA, 1886
BRITAIN HAS FORMALLY RULED INDIA
FOR TWENTY-EIGHT YEARS

INT. ABDUL'S ROOM, INDIA

A darkened room. Someone is moving in the darkness. Then the shutters of the room are thrown wide open and the blinding light reveals: Abdul, twenty-four, smiling into the sun – we hear sound of the muezzin's call to prayer in the distance.

EXT. ROOF TOP, AGRA

Abdul praying in the glorious sunshine. We see all of Agra below him, the Taj Mahal in the distance.

EXT. STREET, AGRA

Abdul rushes out of a squalid doorway into the bustle of the street. As he hurries through the jammed streets he acknowledges people as he goes, making his way past the lame and sick, through crowds, spice stalls. Suddenly he accidentally bumps into a white colonial officer:

OFFICER

Idiot!

The officer has already turned away so Abdul hurries on through the dusty streets.

EXT. AGRA GAOL. THE SAME

Donkeys, a dog pisses on the wall. Abdul hurries in.

INT. AGRA GAOL

Abdul bows to the guard enthusiastically. The lugubrious guard unlocks several locks on the rusting iron gate. The door slams shut.

Abdul hurries along the corridor. We see pitiful inmates, all at looms making carpets, watched by bored, unshaven guards.

Abdul rushes to his high desk and starts on the Sisyphean task of compiling the prison ledgers with huge concentration. Abdul looks up to see the prison guard.

GUARD

Tyler wants to see you. Now.

INT. TYLER'S OFFICE. THE SAME

A faded, mildewed monochrome of a young Queen Victoria on the wall. Abdul is underneath looking nervously at Tyler, the Prison Governor.

TYLER

Ah, Mr Karim. I wanted to speak to you about the carpets we sent to the Exhibition.

ABDUL

There is problem, sir?

TYLER

No. No. The carpets went down very well. In fact the Governor General has received a letter from the Royal Household thanking him personally. The whole thing's been such a success he has decided to present the Queen with a mohar as part of the Jubilee.

ABDUL

A mohar, sir?

TYLER

A mohar. Apparently it's a sort of ceremonial coin, rather like a medal. I have been asked to find someone tall to present it. Well, you're the tallest person here.

ABDUL

Mr Tyler! When will she be arriving, sir?

TYLER

Not in Agra. In England.

ABDUL

England?!

TYLER

You'll present the mohar at an official function. Like an equerry.

ABDUL

On a horse?

TYLER

I don't think there'll be a horse.

ABDUL

An equerry always has a horse, Mr Tyler, sir.

TYLER

Well, maybe not like an equerry exactly. They were actually after Hindus but I thought you'd do. What do you say?

ABDUL

Are you sure there isn't a horse?

INT. QUEEN'S BEDROOM. ENGLAND

Another dark room. The curtains are thrown, light streams into the room. We see Mrs Tuck at the window. In the shadows is a large bed into which a enormous mound appears to be upholstered.

MRS TUCK

Good morning, Your Majesty.

We cut to:

EXT. ENTRANCE TO DOCKS

Abdul is now with Tyler, a portly Englishman, Bigge, and what looks like his short, squat Indian manservant.

TYLER

This is Mr Bigge – extra Groom in Waiting to the Royal Household who will be in charge. This is Abdul.

BIGGE
This is Mohammed.

TYLER
He's very short.

BIGGE
We had to swop him at the last minute. The tall guy had an accident with an elephant.

Abdul beams at Mohammed, who is distinctly unhappy.

ABDUL
Hi!

Mohammed looks sourly and does not respond.

INT. QUEEN'S BEDCHAMBER

A group of straining footmen roll Queen Victoria over and then manhandle her out of bed.

EXT. ON DECK AT SEA. DAY

Abdul and Mohammed standing in front of Bigge, who has a chart on a tripod.

BIGGE
At the top there's the Private Secretary, then there are the Ladies in Waiting, the Upper Servants, the lower Upper Servants, the members of the Household, the Head of the Household staff – splitting into three parts: the head of the Bedchamber, the personal head of staff, the Butler in Chief, who is in charge of the Household Butler, the kitchen factotum, head of kitchen, the head of waiting staff, the ordinary waiting staff (Windsor), the table maids, then you. Any questions?

ABDUL
Who will have the mohar, sir?

BIGGE
I'm not exactly sure, as yet. I suspect you will both carry it. On a cushion.

ABDUL

We both have a cushion?

BIGGE

No, there'll only be one cushion. Between you.

ABDUL

Can we have a cushion now, sir?

BIGGE

You'll have to mime the cushion.

ABDUL

I don't understand, sir.

BIGGE

Pretend. You'll have to pretend the cushion is there. Like this. The key to good service is standing still and moving backward. The most important thing is you must not look at her.

ABDUL

But how will we present the mohar, sir?!

BIGGE

You put out the cushion and avert your gaze, appropriately. Her Majesty will take the mohar and you will egress retrospectively in a stately manner.

MOHAMMED

What an asshole.

INT. OUTSIDE THE QUEEN'S BEDCHAMBER

A line of dressers, ladies-in-waiting, footmen, equerries etc. all parade into the Queen's bedchamber.

INT. CABIN. AT SEA

Abdul and Mohammed in their tiny cell. Mohammed has a pile of buns. He passes one to Abdul.

MOHAMMED

Have you any idea how cold it is? We're gonna bloody die there.

ABDUL

Why on earth did you agree to come?

MOHAMMED

Had no choice. The tall guy fell off an elephant and I got drafted in at the last moment. Five thousand miles to present a bloody medal.

ABDUL

But it's a very great honour.

MOHAMMED

Honour?! My father fought in the Mutiny. Have you tasted English food? They eat pig's blood.

ABDUL

They do not eat pig's blood!

MOHAMMED

I'm telling you they have pig's blood in sausages. And the brains of sheep. The place is barbaric.

ABDUL

Not to worry.

Abdul shows Mohammed a little tin containing a load of spices.

A present from my mother.

MOHAMMED

My advice: eat as much as you can before we hit land.

He passes Abdul another bun.

Let's give her the medal and get the hell back home.

TILBURY DOCKS. DAY

The huge exodus. Abdul, Mohammed come down the gangplank with Arthur Bigge.

BIGGE

Civilisation!

The posh English people buffet Abdul and Mohammed in the mad rush to the quayside. Finally, they look at the hawkers, scrawny porters, the distinctly uncivilised detritus of Victorian London. A beggar holds out his hand to Abdul.

BEGGAR

Give uz a farthing.

INT. QUEEN'S BEDCHAMBER. THE SAME

The Queen is sitting on a stool with her back to us. A gaggle of dressers stand with the Queen's garments.

MRS TUCK

Arms.

The Queen puts her arms up.

INT. GENTLEMAN TAILOR'S, LONDON. DAY

Wood-panelled room. Men in suits. Abdul and Mohammed are dressed in strange Indian costumes.

TAILOR

Arms.

Abdul puts his arms up as the tailor fixes a sash around him.

BIGGE

Splendid.

TAILOR

We copied them from some drawings in the British Museum.

ABDUL

A sash is not traditional, sir.

TAILOR
(to Bigge)

The Indian drawings didn't seem very Indian – so we made some innovations. We need it to look authentic.

BIGGE

It looks jolly good to me.

INT. THE QUEEN'S BEDCHAMBER

A cloud of powder as Mrs Tuck applies a vast powder brush to the Queen. Just as she is about to emerge from the cloud we cut to Ponsonby, Keeper of the Privy Purse and Private Secretary to the Sovereign, reading the day's itinerary.

PONSONBY

Nine o'clock: breakfast in London. Quarter to ten: Trooping of the Colour. Eleven o'clock: elevenses with the Crown Prince Alexander of Norway, the Norwegian Ambassador, the Chief Under-Secretary of State for the Southern Norwegian Provinces and the Junior Under-Secretary . . .

EXT. COURTYARD, WINDSOR CASTLE. DAY

A carriage rushes into the courtyard. Abdul, Mohammed and Arthur Bigge alight. Abdul and Mohammed look in amazement at their surroundings. Over which we hear Ponsonby continuing his speech:

PONSONBY

(voice-over)

Midday: luncheon at Buckingham Palace. Two o'clock: ceremonial drive down the Mall . . .

INT. THE SAME, QUEEN'S BEDCHAMBER

Mrs Tuck places the Queen's bonnet on. We still haven't seen her face.

PONSONBY

(voice-over)

Two thirty: tea party for thirty thousand children at Hyde Park . . .

INT. THE SAME, CORRIDOR, WINDSOR CASTLE

Bigge, Mohammed and Abdul with their suitcases walking down a corridor in full ceremonial garb.

PONSONBY
(voice-over)

Four thirty: royal train to Windsor. Six thirty: full supper.
Including the ceremonial presentation of a mohar.

INT. STATE ROOM, WINDSOR CASTLE. DAY

Abdul, Mohammed and Bigge arrive in a vast hall. Tables are laid for an enormous dinner. A crowd of secretaries, officials, waiting staff and other servants are being instructed by Alick Yorke, the portly Director of Ceremonies. He stops mid-sentence. Everybody looks at Abdul and Mohammed in amazement.

BIGGE

The Hindoos, sir.

ALICK YORKE

But they are completely different sizes.

BIGGE

There was an incident with an elephant.

ALICK YORKE

But what on earth are they wearing?

BIGGE

It's ceremonial, sir.

ALICK YORKE

On arrival Her Majesty will process to the main doors. Fanfares. Ceremonial entrance. The Royal Entourage will sit: Her Majesty; the Viceroy of India; the Prince of Wales; Princess Beatrice; Sir Henry Ponsonby, Private Secretary; Lord Salisbury, the Prime Minister; Princess Louise; the Emperor of Russia; Lady Churchill; Lady Mallet; etcetera, etcetera. Grace. Soup: consommé à la Portugaise with purée de madeleine. Fish course: morue à huitres. Fanfare. Entrées: quenelles with Regency sauce, ballotines de canard

with a Cumberland gravy, braised beef à la Hussarde, leg of lamb, the pheasant and those potato ribbon things. Dessert: pain d'épinards, profiteroles au chocolat and tartelettes à la Suisse. The dessert is cleared. Speeches. A fanfare. You –

He grabs Abdul.

ALICK YORKE

– will come from the north-west entrance. Process together.
You –

He grabs Mohammed.

ALICK YORKE

– will come to here, and you will stand here – no, a little bit . . . that's it. Presenting the tray thus – the Viceroy will indicate to Her Majesty . . .

ABDUL

Tray?

Everything stops.

ABDUL

I thought it was a cushion.

ALICK YORKE

Who said anything about a cushion? You will present the tray . . .

MOHAMMED

What will I do?

ALICK YORKE

You will stand perfectly still and move backward when required. Her Majesty takes the mohar. What is a mohar?

AN ASSISTANT

It's a coin, sir. Issued by the Moghul Empire.

ALICK YORKE

Why are we presenting it here?! Whatever you do you must not look at Her Majesty. You will bow again. Then moving backwards you will turn to your left – you will lead – thus – and you will process down the hall to be met by Mr Bates

who will walk you back to the north wall where you will stand till the end of the meal. Would you like me to run through that again?

A page rushes in.

PAGE

Mr Yorke. She's leaving Paddington!

ALICK YORKE

Everybody out.

EXT. COUNTRYSIDE. DAY

The Queen's train. Children wave flags as it passes.

INT. ANTECHAMBER. THE SAME

Hundreds of guests are milling.

INT. KITCHENS, WINDSOR CASTLE

CHEF

Where are the bloody quenelles? You two. Out of it!

Abdul and Mohammed are evicted from the kitchen by the chef. Then a voice:

VOICE

She's at the station!

CHEF

Jesus Christ! SHE'S AT THE STATION!

Abdul and Mohammed are grabbed by Alick Yorke.

ALICK YORKE

For God's sake just wait where you were told. Open the doors!

INT. LONG CORRIDOR. DAY

A little pageboy runs in shouting:

LITTLE PAGEBOY
Open the doors! Open the doors! Open the doors!

INT. THE HALL

Ushers let the waiting guests into the main hall, all agog with anticipation.

INT. SIDE CORRIDOR. THE SAME

Abdul and Mohammed stand with a huge line of waiters all ready to start the service.

EXT. GATE, WINDSOR CASTLE

Carriages sweep past.

INT. THE SAME, CORRIDOR

A pageboy runs at full pelt.

PAGEBOY

She's coming! She's coming!

INT. THE SAME, HALL

The guests are by their chairs. A fanfare.

INT. THE SAME, SIDE CORRIDOR

Abdul and Mohammad peering out behind Alick Yorke, who looks at his pocket watch and shouts:

ALICK YORKE

The soup!

INT. THE SAME, CORRIDOR

The pageboy running.

PAGEBOY

Soup! Soup!

INT. KITCHENS

CHEF

Soup!

INT. THE HALL

A fanfare. The main doors fly open. The fanfare reaches its climax. Enter the Queen. We see her properly for the very first time. She is a tiny, almost spherical figure, old, frail, glum and dreadfully tired. Ponsonby leads her to her seat. The entourage follow: the Prince of Wales, laughing coarsely with Lady Churchill, Dr Reid, various dignitaries. All completely casual. Everyone else in the hall is frigidly agog, craning to see the little old lady at the centre. She sits, then utters an audible sigh of relief. Her bowl of soup is placed in front of her. She attacks it greedily making a disgusting slurping noise as she eats. everybody starts to eat.

INT. CORRIDOR. THE SAME

Abdul and Mohammed try to have a gander but are pushed out of the way by Alick Yorke.

INT. HALL. THE SAME

The Queen has soup all around her mouth and is scraping the bowl to get the last bit. Then she is finished in record time. She plonks her spoon on the bowl and cleans her chin with the napkin. Quick as a flash a waiter removes the bowl. Further down the table, as guests are amiably enjoying the conversation around them, suddenly waiters snatch the bowls – still full of soup. Dr Reid addresses a startled diner:

DR REID

I'm afraid you have to be quick. They take it off you as soon as she's done.

INT. THE SAME, CORRIDOR

Scores and scores of waiters rush past Abdul and Mohammed carrying soup bowls.

ALICK YORKE

One down. Six to go.

Bigge appears with the mohar on a tray.

BIGGE

I have the mohar.

ALICK YORKE

Is that it?!

HEAD WAITER

Sir, the fish course.

ALICK YORKE

(shouting instructions)

The fish course!

INT. HALL

The babble of excited chatter. Everyone around the Queen is animated. The Queen ignores it all and is shovelling quenelles into her mouth. Cut to her polishing off the boeuf braisé, then tearing apart a pheasant.

We see Lady Churchill laughing. Lady Phipps, a skinny, terrified-looking Lady in Waiting is eating salad primly. Back to the Queen: her plate is clean and she is nodding off.

PONSONBY

Profiteroles, Your Majesty.

A profiterole is presented and the Queen immediately comes to life.

INT. THE SAME, CORRIDOR

Abdul waits anxiously as streams of waiters bring back the plates from dessert.

ALICK YORKE

The profiteroles have gone. Gentlemen . . .

Alick Yorke makes a final adjustment to the mohar.

ALICK YORKE

Now. Process. Turn. Bow. Present. And absolutely no sodding eye contact what-so-ever!

Abdul takes a huge breath, looks nervously at Mohammed. A trumpet sounds and they walk up the hall. Everybody turns to see the two Indians process with the mohar. The Queen is now talking to the Viceroy and is taking no notice at all of the ceremony. Abdul and Mohammed can see her from the corner of their eye. They reach the head of the table and stop. They turn. Bow. The Queen is still talking and pays them no attention. Ponsonby explains:

PONSONBY

A gift from the Colony of India. A mohar, Your Majesty.

The Queen turns and looks at the mohar, incredulous.

PONSONBY

A coin from the Mughal Empire. In honour of your service to the sub-continent.

Abdul presents the tray bowing his head low. The Queen takes the coin, utterly bemused. Another servant puts a cushion on the table for it to rest on. Abdul doesn't quite know what to do. Ponsonby angrily indicates for them to leave. Abdul takes the hint. They back away as trained.

QUEEN VICTORIA

Are we done?

PONSONBY

We still have coffee, Your Majesty.

Queen Victoria raises her eyes to heaven. Then suddenly looks across at Abdul. He stops, frozen. He smiles at her. She looks at him. The title appears on screen:

VICTORIA AND ABDUL

We hear Mr Bigge sharply chide Abdul.

BIGGE

Eyes!

His smile falls and he drops his head.

INT. DARKENED ROOM. THE FOLLOWING DAY, MORNING

As before: a dark room, a curtain is drawn by Mrs Tuck. The room fills with sunlight and we see we are in the Queen's bedchamber.

MRS TUCK

Good morning, Your Majesty.

Again we see the Queen seemingly upholstered into her bed. The group of servants approach to extract her.

INT. DRESSING ROOM. THE SAME

Regal music. The Queen immobile in the centre of the room, as before.

MRS TUCK

Arms.

The Queen lifts her arms. This time we witness the whole unedifying affair. The dresser arrives with a dress and has some trouble getting it over her head. Finally her head is prised out of the garment. The Queen makes no expression. A gaggle of ladies in waiting and maidservants hand jewels, brooches and various pieces of the Queen's garb to Mrs Tuck who expertly puts these on. Over all of this we hear Ponsonby outline the days activities..

PONSONBY

(voice-over)

Breakfast with the Royal Princes of Belgium. An audience with the Sultan of Dubai where you will be presented with the Diamond of Ooojay. The garden party where you will receive the Right Honourable Marharani of Cooch Behar, Huran Singh, the Maharajah of Karpurthala . . .

INT. THE SAME, THE QUEEN'S BREAKFAST ROOM

The Queen is eating a goose egg with a silver spoon. Dr Reid and a phalanx of silent flunkys are in attendance. Ponsonby is finishing his itinerary for the day:

PONSONBY

. . . And the Crown Princess Lili'uokalani.

QUEEN VICTORIA

Who on earth is she?

PONSONBY

Monarch and only Queen Regnant of the Kingdom of Hawaii, Your Majesty. She has composed a song for you on the ukelele – but we have managed to put her off. Then the afternoon audience with Prime Minister Salisbury.

DR REID

And your movements, Your Highness?

QUEEN VICTORIA

None to speak of.

DR REID

Not even during the day?

QUEEN VICTORIA

We last moved on Sunday evening.

DR REID

I fear the celebratory dinners are taking their toll. May I suggest some Benger's Mixture, Your Majesty?

QUEEN VICTORIA

I refuse to eat Benger's. It's baby food.

DR REID

But it is imperative, Your Majesty, that the royal colon receives a little roughage.

QUEEN VICTORIA

Is there anything else?

PONSONBY

Was Your Highness pleased with the mohar?

QUEEN VICTORIA

The what?

PONSONBY

The mohar. The ceremonial coin presented yesterday by the Indian servants.

QUEEN VICTORIA

I thought the tall one was terribly handsome.

INT. THE SAME, CORRIDOR

Arthur Bigge running at a surprising lick.

INT. SPIRAL STAIRCASE, ARSE END OF WINDSOR CASTLE

Bigge runs up to a door at the top. He throws it open. We see two small empty beds are crushed together.

EXT. COURTYARD. THE SAME

Abdul and Mohammed with their tiny suitcases are about to board a carriage. Arthur Bigge comes running breathlessly into the courtyard.

BIGGE

Stop!

He is almost doubled up with exhaustion. He catches his breath.

Slight change of plan.

Mohammed is horrified.

EXT. GARDEN PARTY. AFTERNOON

Abdul and Mohammed in costume. Bigge is in a food tent, guests mill around outside. They are near a table laden with puddings as they receive instructions.

BIGGE

You must not talk to any guests. Nod or bow but please do not interact with anybody other than the serving staff. I will

come to you when the Queen is seated and you will present the pudding, as requested.

Abdul looks at the jelly on the table.

ABDUL

Excuse me, but what is it?

BIGGE

That is a jelly. A pudding made from the liquor of fruit.

Abdul and Mohammed survey it with great curiosity.

ABDUL

How do they get it so stiff?

BIGGE

Gelatin: a by-product of cow bone.

They look at the wobbling mass in horror.

MOHAMMED

Barbarians!

INT. QUEEN'S MARQUEE. WINDSOR CASTLE. DAY

The Queen is sitting at a table with Lord Salisbury.

LORD SALISBURY

There's another famine in India, more trouble in Ireland, I'm afraid. Suez is a perennial nightmare and I'm afraid the Boers are at it again.

QUEEN VICTORIA

Is there any good news, Prime Minister?

LORD SALISBURY

We have decided to annex Zululand, Your Majesty.

QUEEN VICTORIA

Whatever for?

LORD SALISBURY

To prevent the Transvaal having access to the sea.

QUEEN VICTORIA

Is that absolutely necessary?

LORD SALISBURY

We really have to box in the Boers if we possibly can, Your Majesty.

QUEEN VICTORIA

Prime Minister, you really are terribly depressing.

Food starts to arrive.

Ah, luncheon!

EXT. THE SAME, TABLE AT THE GARDEN PARTY

A wobbling jelly. We pull up to see Abdul carefully carrying it, followed by Mohammed who has his own. Queen Victoria is at the table, looking dour and fearsome. Abdul starts to panic as the jelly starts wobbling perilously on the plate. The more he nears the Queen the more errant the giant jelly becomes. With a great deal of sweat and consternation Abdul navigates the jelly to Her Majesty.

ABDUL

Jelly, Your Majesty.

Abdul puts the jelly in front of the Queen, her eyes light up. Abdul bows ostentatiously, then drops to his knees. The entire table of guests crane round to see what he is doing. Bigge and Ponsonby look on in horror. The Queen looks down curiously. The whole Royal Household seem to hold their breath. Abdul suddenly lunges down – everyone gasps. Kneeling down, he kisses her feet, rises, bows again and retreats backwards. Everyone is astonished. The Queen is startled then her face breaks into a smile.

QUEEN VICTORIA

I feel a great deal better.

She picks up her golden spoon and looks at the jelly.

EXT. THE SAME, BEHIND THE FOOD TENT

An extremely red-faced Bigge has Abdul by the collar.

BIGGE

What the hell were you thinking?!

ABDUL

You said present the jelly.

BIGGE

I didn't say kiss the feet of the Empress of India.

ABDUL

I thought it would cheer her up.

PONSONBY

What on earth's going on here?! Her Majesty has requested Mr Karim and Mr Baksh to be her personal footmen for the rest of the Jubilee.

INT. STAIRCASE. WINDSOR CASTLE. DAY

Abdul and Mohammed follow Bigge up a staircase:

MOHAMMED

You stupid bloody idiot. All you had to do was give her jelly.

INT. OUTSIDE THE QUEEN'S WRITING ROOM. DAY

They've reached Ponsonby.

PONSONBY

Gentlemen. *(To Abdul.)* She wants you to stand by the writing desk. *(To Bigge.)* He can stand by the door.

INT. WRITING ROOM. THE SAME

Abdul stands to attention. The Queen is led in with ceremony. She sits down. Her pens are presented by a flunkey. The flunkey bows and goes off to stand by the door. Abdul is standing to attention right by her side, trying not to show his unease.

QUEEN VICTORIA

Don't worry. I'm not going to eat you.

The Queen takes a piece of headed notepaper and starts writing.

To Doctor Reid . . . A very successful movement . . . this morning at eight a.m. . . .

INT. CORRIDOR, OUTSIDE THE WRITING ROOM

Bigge, various Ladies in Waiting and the two flunkeys. They are trying to look through the keyhole.

BIGGE

What's he doing?

INT. WRITING ROOM. THE SAME

The Queen is deeply absorbed in her letter writing. She signs the letter with a flourish. Then suddenly she is surprised by Abdul who appears at her shoulder with a blotter. He blots her writing and smiles at her.

QUEEN VICTORIA

Thank you, Mr . . .

ABDUL

Abdul. Abdul Karim. I am always writing. In India. I'm writing all the day, every day.

QUEEN VICTORIA

Really. So in India you're not a servant.

ABDUL

No. In India I am writing in my very big book.

QUEEN VICTORIA

You're writing a book!

ABDUL

Oh yes. I am writing every name, who they are, what they will be. This is my life. Every day I am writing. From the morning to the night.

QUEEN VICTORIA

And this is fiction?

ABDUL

No, this is true. Everything I write is the very truth.

QUEEN VICTORIA

I don't understand, if you are an author why you are here, presenting the . . . thing, the . . .

ABDUL

The mohar. It is my humble privilege to serve Her Majesty. I was the one who chose your carpets.

QUEEN VICTORIA

The carpets?

ABDUL

For the exhibition. The Viceroy asked Mr Tyler but actually it was me. You have to have very good eye for the carpets. This is a very nice one. For example.

They look at the carpet beneath them.

ABDUL

Very tight knots. This is the sign of a very nice carpet. The art of carpets came to India with the great Emperor Akbar. The skill of a great carpet is to bring all the different threads together and we weave something we can stand on.

QUEEN VICTORIA

You seem to know an awful lot about it.

ABDUL

My family were carpet makers. But now I write in the book. Life is like the carpet. We weave in and out to make a pattern.

QUEEN VICTORIA

How very true. That is a very beautiful image.

ABDUL

It is a very beautiful carpet. Look at this – here is a bird of freedom caught forever in the design.

QUEEN VICTORIA

So in India you are a poet?

ABDUL

No. I just make a ledger of the prisoners.

QUEEN VICTORIA

Indeed we are all prisoners.

ABDUL

Indeed we are, Your Majesty.

INT. THE SAME, ANTEROOM

Lady Phipps is listening at the door.

LADY PHIPPS

Apparently he's a poet!

BIGGE

A poet?!

Suddenly the doors burst open, out comes the Queen followed by Abdul. Mohammed hisses in Hindi:

MOHAMMED

What the hell are you playing at?

INT. ABDUL AND MOHAMMED'S CELL. NIGHT

A tiny room with two beds squashed together. Mohammed is shivering.

ABDUL

I was just trying to be friendly.

Abdul is breathing out, fascinated by his breath freezing.

MOHAMMED

Stop being friendly.

ABDUL

She's a very nice person.

MOHAMMED

**She is the tyrannical oppressor of our entire country.
And if we don't get out of here we'll die of bloody cold.**

Mohammed wraps himself in his blanket and turns away. Abdul carries on blowing out frozen exhalations.

MOHAMMED

Will you stop doing that!

EXT. GARDENS. WINDSOR CASTLE. DAY

Ponsonby with Dr Reid and Lady Churchill are hiding behind some trees so they can spy on the Queen and Abdul. Ponsonby looks through binoculars.

PONSONBY

You realise this is the third day in a row.

EXT. CANOPIED WRITING STATION. WINDSOR CASTLE. DAY

The Queen finishes writing. Abdul blots her copy. She closes the book. He goes back to 'standing sentry'. Then the Queen turns her attention directly to him.

QUEEN VICTORIA

So Mr Abdul. May I ask you which part of India are you from?

ABDUL

I am from Agra. The Taj Mahal. You have been to the Taj Mahal?

QUEEN VICTORIA

No.

ABDUL

Oh, it is the most marvellous building in the entire world. The Crown of Palaces. It was built by Shah Jahan, the grandson of the great Akbar, to remember his dead wife, Mumtaz Mahal, who died in childhood with their fourteenth child.

QUEEN VICTORIA

Goodness.

ABDUL

He was so upset with grief. He brought the greatest architects from Persia and Afghanistan to build the Taj Mahal.

QUEEN VICTORIA

It certainly sounds like a handsome building. I would very much like to see it.

ABDUL

Oh, it is beautiful, Your Majesty. All white marble. And Mumtaz laid inside. All of that beauty for the dead Queen.

QUEEN VICTORIA

How romantic.

ABDUL

Oh yes. And he wrote a poem:

‘The sight of this building brings me sad sighs;
The sun and the moon have tears in their eyes.’

But it makes everyone so happy. Agra is very beautiful. Shah Jahan built the Red Fort, the Gardens of Shalimar, and the Peacock Throne.

QUEEN VICTORIA

The Peacock Throne?

ABDUL

Oh, it was the most beautiful throne in all the world. A throne of gold with peacocks on it. And in the throne was the Koh-i-Noor. He would look at the Taj Mahal through the diamond.

QUEEN VICTORIA

But I have the Koh-i-Noor. I have it as a brooch.

ABDUL

Do you?!

QUEEN VICTORIA

It was given to me by the East India Company. It wasn't very shiny so Albert had it recut. So what happened to the Peacock Throne?

ABDUL

I don't know, they smashed it up.

QUEEN VICTORIA

How awful.

ABDUL

Oh, they are always smashing things up. All the British soldiers have taken the jewels from the Taj Mahal.

QUEEN VICTORIA

British soldiers?!

ABDUL

Oh yes, after the Mutiny.

QUEEN VICTORIA

But this is terrible.

ABDUL

At least you have the diamond.

EXT. GARDENS. WINDSOR CASTLE. DAY

Dr Reid looking through the binoculars.

DR REID

What can they be talking about? An Indian and a servant to boot.

Lady Churchill grabs the binoculars.

PONSONBY

What on earth does she see in him?

We see Abdul from Lady Churchill's point of view.

LADY CHURCHILL

Well, he is rather handsome.

EXT. THE SAME, AVENUE OF TREES

Queen Victoria continues talking to Abdul as they walk.

QUEEN VICTORIA

But what happened to Shah Jahan?

ABDUL

He was overthrown by his son and died in Agra Fort.

QUEEN VICTORIA

The wickedness of children.

ABDUL

They buried him in the Taj Mahal next to his wife. They put an inscription: 'Here lies Shah Jahan who left this world to the Banquet Hall of Eternity.'

QUEEN VICTORIA

The Banquet Hall of Eternity.

ABDUL

Oh yes, it is a banquet when we leave here.

QUEEN VICTORIA

I rather like that idea. You seem very well informed, Mr Abdul.

ABDUL

Oh, these are famous stories in Uttar Pradesh. You should go there.

QUEEN VICTORIA

Oh, I can never go there. I am forbidden.

ABDUL

Forbidden?

QUEEN VICTORIA

They fear I would be assassinated.

ABDUL

But you are the Empress of India.

QUEEN VICTORIA

Exactly. (*Proudly.*) You know I've been shot at four times. And someone came for me with a knife!

ABDUL

Goodness. So you have never seen an India street, or a stall of spices.

QUEEN VICTORIA

No.

ABDUL

Oh, the spices. Cardamom, turmeric, cumin, coriander. Garam masala.

QUEEN VICTORIA

What is garam masala?

ABDUL

It's what you put into the sauce. You have never tasted Indian food? A dahl? A rogan josh? Oh they are the greatest dishes in the world! Biryani with mango chutney?

QUEEN VICTORIA

Mango chutney?

ABDUL

Oh yes, a chutney made of mango.

QUEEN VICTORIA

A mango?

ABDUL

Oh, the mango is the Queen of Fruit.

QUEEN VICTORIA

What does it taste like?

ABDUL

A mango is the most delicious fruit in all the world. Like an orange and a peach.

INT. CORRIDOR. THE SAME

Ponsonby and the ladies in waiting are accompanying Queen Victoria down the corridor. Abdul and Mohammed in tow.

QUEEN VICTORIA

Ponsonby. I would like a mango.

PONSONBY

A mango?

QUEEN VICTORIA

Yes, I would like to taste a mango.

PONSONBY

It's impossible. They only grow in India, Your Majesty.

QUEEN VICTORIA

I am the Empress of India, so have one sent. I hope you will like Scotland, Abdul.

EXT. TOP OF THE MOOR. SCOTLAND. DAY

Scottish mists. The vast landscape of Scotland. A train of flunkies come into shot carrying tables, chairs, carpets. Ponsonby, Lady Churchill, Miss Phipps and Reid struggle up with them. Queen Victoria comes into view close to the camera. She points a finger.

QUEEN VICTORIA

Here!

EXT. WILD PROMONTORY. DAY

Queen Victoria is sitting at her 'tea' table, formally set up and replete with every unnecessary accoutrement. It overlooks spectacular scenery, but Queen Victoria behaves as if she was in her back garden. Abdul and Mohammed stand to attention in the background. Mohammed sneezes. Butlers and maids serve the tea. Queen Victoria is very well wrapped up. She gorges herself on a sponge cake. Everyone else is cold and miserable. Ponsonby whispers to Dr Reid:

PONSONBY

It's alright for her. She's upholstered.

The hand of the serving man shakes as he pours the tea.

QUEEN VICTORIA

How do you like your new Scottish costumes?

ABDUL

They're very scratchy, Your Majesty.

QUEEN VICTORIA

Everything in Scotland is scratchy. (*To Ponsonby.*) When does Bertie come?

PONSONBY

Tomorrow, Your Majesty. He is on his way from Monte Carlo.

The Queen takes a slurp of the tea then puts the cup on the table. Suddenly there's a splish in the teacup. Then a pitter-pat as rain hits the table cloth.

EXT. VICINITY OF THE WILD PROMONTORY. SCOTLAND. DAY

Torrential rain. Queen Victoria is being led along by a river by a ghillie with an umbrella. Behind her, Abdul and Mohammed, Ponsonby and Reid are all getting soaked.

DR REID

I hate Scotland.

INT. THE SAME, BALMORAL

A piper plays very close to Dr Reid and Ponsonby who both blow their noses and wince at the infernal racket. It seems everyone now has a cold. The Household are sitting round in misery. The Queen is seated at the centre and is tapping her foot delicately as one of the ghillies is doing a dance in front of her. There is forced merriment from the staff. Mohammed and Abdul are standing at the side, watching the proceedings.

GHILLIE

(in incomprehensible Scots)

Ye must be the Hindoos. Very nice to meet ye.

Incomprehension from Abdul and Mohammed.

GHILLIE

Ye must be the Hindoos. Ye. Must. Be. The. Hin. Doos.

The piping stops.

QUEEN VICTORIA

More! More!

GHILLIE

I wish she'd bloody well go to bed.

The Ghillie wearily knocks back a dram from his hip flask. The piping starts again. Lady Phipps yawns. The unfortunate dancing Ghillie wearily raises his arms for another reel.

INT. STAFF CORRIDOR. NIGHT

Abdul and Mohammed walk to bed. Ahead of them is a butler, with a tray, careering from wall to wall. They pass an open door and inside see the kitchen staff with bottles of whisky open and someone playing the fiddle. Suddenly the music stops. They all look at Abdul and Mohammed looking in at them. The door closes. Abdul and Mohammed look at the closed door. The strathspey starts up again.

INT. QUEEN'S STUDY. DAY

The Queen is sitting at her desk, Abdul by her side. A servant comes in and puts down the boxes. Ponsonby blows his nose and takes her through it.

PONSONBY

Your boxes.

QUEEN VICTORIA

Thank you.

PONSONBY

And the blank journal you requested.

Ponsonby puts on his glasses and takes a pen out of his pocket ready to get down to work.

QUEEN VICTORIA

You may go.

Ponsonby waits. He is confused.

QUEEN VICTORIA

I am perfectly capable of working through the boxes. Abdul is very helpful with his blotter.

PONSONBY

But these are parliamentary papers, Your Majesty.

QUEEN VICTORIA

I am aware of that.

PONSONBY

But Abdul is a servant. He cannot assist with the boxes.

QUEEN VICTORIA

I am the Queen of England. I will have whatever help with my boxes that I require.

Ponsonby is completely banjaxed by the turn of events.

INT. THE SAME, OUTSIDE THE QUEEN'S ROOM

Ponsonby emerges wiping his brow. Mohammed is standing outside the room, as is Lady Churchill. They look to Ponsonby to discover the royal news.

PONSONBY

He's helping her with the boxes.

INT. THE SAME, QUEEN'S STUDY

Now the Queen and Abdul are alone she turns to him.

QUEEN VICTORIA

I want you to teach me Indian.

ABDUL

Indian?

QUEEN VICTORIA

Hindu. Whatever it is you speak.

ABDUL

Are you sure?

QUEEN VICTORIA

Of course I am sure.

ABDUL

But why would you want to speak Hindi?

QUEEN VICTORIA

I am Empress of India. Look. I have ordered a book. I want you to give me private lessons.

ABDUL

I can't teach you Hindi.

QUEEN VICTORIA

Why ever not?

ABDUL

You are the Empress of India. You must learn Urdu. The language of the Mughals. Oh there are a thousand languages in India but Urdu is the most noble. The difference is when you write it down. In Urdu you write like this.

He demonstrates it.

This is Persian script. Just like Arabic. And for Hindi you write like this – in Devanagari:

He demonstrates.

The Persian script is most superior.

QUEEN VICTORIA

I see.

ABDUL

I am the Queen. Mairn raini hoom.

QUEEN VICTORIA

Er donny hoo.

ABDUL

Mairn raini hoom.

QUEEN VICTORIA

Hey Donnnee whoo.

ABDUL
Whoom –

QUEEN VICTORIA
Hoowm.

INT. CORRIDOR. THE SAME

The gaggle of Ladies in Waiting and members of the Household has got bigger and they are listening outside, full of consternation.

LADY PHIPPS
He's teaching her Hindi!

MOHAMMED
Urdu, actually: the Muslim version.

They are aghast.

INT. QUEEN'S STUDY

ABDUL
Mairn raini hoom.

QUEEN VICTORIA
Mer ranee whoo.

ABDUL
That's it! That's it! You are the Queen.

He writes it down.

You see. Now you . . .

INT. CORRIDOR

Now Dr Reid has joined the group. He is looking through the keyhole.

REID
She's writing in the journal. And she's speaking in Hindustani.

PONSONBY
Urdu, actually. The Muslim version.
Mohammed raises an eyebrow.

INT. QUEEN'S STUDY

The Queen is laughing as she tries to repeat Abdul's phrase.

QUEEN VICTORIA

Apanni trishnup kili ap abdu tel new ad.

ABDUL

Nearly. Again.

QUEEN VICTORIA

Apanni trishnup kili ap abdu tel new ad.

ABDUL

Apni. Ni.

Abdul slaps his knees.

QUEEN VICTORIA

Knee. Knee.

ABDUL

Apani utkrsta sabaka kelie apa abdula dhan yavada. Thank you, Abdul, for your excellent lesson.

QUEEN VICTORIA

Apani utkrsta sabaka kelie apa abdula dhan yavada!

ABDUL

That's it. You did it. Now write it down.

INT. CORRIDOR, OUTSIDE THE WRITING ROOM

A new fat arse is on show as its owner bends in to look through the keyhole. The doors fly open. The arse stands up straight.

QUEEN VICTORIA

Bertie!

BERTIE

Mother!

QUEEN VICTORIA

Were you spying on me?

BERTIE

Were you learning Urdu?!

QUEEN VICTORIA

Yes, I was, as a matter of fact.

BERTIE

Do you think that's entirely appropriate?

QUEEN VICTORIA

I am the Empress of India. What could be more appropriate than learning Urdu?

BERTIE

But in front of the entire Household –

QUEEN VICTORIA

You are absolutely right. I can't have all of these distractions. Ponsonby, I wish to go to Glassalt Shiel.

BERTIE

Glassalt Shiel?!

Everybody is surprised. She looks at Bertie.

QUEEN VICTORIA

Alone.

BERTIE

But I've only just got here.

EXT. LOCHSIDE, DAY

Drone shot of stunning scenery of the lochside. A tiny boat in the loch moves towards a white cottage set against the lowering mountains beyond.

EXT. THE LITTLE HOUSE, GLASSALT SHIEL. DAY

Queen and Abdul on the promontory.

QUEEN VICTORIA

Oh, to be by oneself and live a simple rudimentary existence.

She turns to Abdul.

QUEEN VICTORIA

They don't understand anything, those stupid aristocratic fools. Toadying around. Jockeying for position. I've had this my whole life. They couldn't bear me bringing dear John Brown here. Yet I have been happier here than anywhere in the entire world. Oh, I miss him, Abdul. And Albert. It's been thirty years and I think about him every day. I am so lonely, Abdul. Everyone I really loved has died. And I just go on and on and on.

She weeps.

ABDUL

Oh, Your Majesty.

Abdul kneels and wipes her eyes.

QUEEN VICTORIA

It's an impossible position. No one really knows what it is like to be Queen. I am hated by millions of people – all over the world. I have had nine children, all vain and jealous, and completely at loggerheads with each other. Bertie is a complete embarrassment. I have thirty-four grandchildren, my offspring will rule most of Europe – but look at me: a fat, lame, impotent, silly old woman. What is the point, Abdul?

ABDUL

The point, Your Majesty?

QUEEN VICTORIA

Of life?

ABDUL

Service.

QUEEN VICTORIA

Service?!

ABDUL

I think we are not here to worry about ourselves. We are here to serve a greater purpose.

Queen Victoria thinks about this.

ABDUL

In the Koran it says: we are here for the good of others.

QUEEN VICTORIA

The Koran?

Abdul is trying to cheer up Her Majesty with his enthusiasm.

ABDUL

Oh yes, I am a Hafiz. I know the Koran by heart.

QUEEN VICTORIA

By heart. Isn't it very long?

ABDUL

There are 114 Surahs containing 6,236 verses.

QUEEN VICTORIA

And you know every word?

ABDUL

Many Muslim people know the Koran.

QUEEN VICTORIA

I thought you were a Hindu.

ABDUL

I am a Muslim, Your Majesty. I learnt the Koran from my father. And he taught me all the great poets: Kabir, Rumi. He is my Munshi.

QUEEN VICTORIA

Munshi?

ABDUL

Yes, Munshi. My teacher.

QUEEN VICTORIA

Then we would like you to be the Queen's Munshi.

ABDUL

But I am a servant. A servant cannot be a Munshi?

QUEEN VICTORIA

Well, you are a servant no longer. You are my teacher. You shall teach me Urdu and the Koran and anything else you think of.

INT. HALL. BALMORAL. NIGHT

A dozen local guests are waiting for the dinner. Mohammed is standing with a tray of sherry. Across the room Ponsonby, Bertie, Miss Phipps, Lady Churchill and Dr Reid are gathered in a huddle.

BERTIE

What the hell is a Munshi?

PONSONBY

Apparently it's some sort of 'spiritual teacher', Your Royal Highness.

BERTIE

Has she completely lost her mind?! She's the head of the Church of England, for God's sake! What's the Archbishop of Canterbury going to say?

DR REID

It's utter lunacy.

LADY CHURCHILL

I say he's 'brown' John Brown.

DR REID

And what's more she's given him my room!

MISS PHIPPS

But where have they put you, Dr Reid?

DR REID

(with a hateful look to Ponsonby)

In the tower!

Bertie suddenly sees the Queen arrive with Abdul in tow in his magnificent Munshi garb.

BERTIE

Oh my God.

Bertie looks horrified as the Queen approaches him.

QUEEN VICTORIA

Good evening, Bertie.

BERTIE

Mother?!

Aside Mohammed whispers to Abdul.

MOHAMMED

What the hell are you wearing?

Before Bertie can question Queen Victoria about this turn of events the Head Waiter announces:

HEAD WAITER

Dinner is served.

INT. THE SAME, STAIRCASE

Bertie with Queen Victoria.

BERTIE

Lady Churchill was absolutely scandalised. A servant. And a Hindoo to boot!

QUEEN VICTORIA

The Munshi is a Muslim scholar. He knows the Koran off by heart and for your information is no longer a servant. He is to be given a staff of his own.

BERTIE

This is absurd. Letters. Invitations to supper. You're treating him like family.

QUEEN VICTORIA

No, I like Abdul. Lady Churchill had better get used to the fact – as the Munshi is coming on holiday with us as a fully equal member of the Household.

BERTIE

You can't take a Muslim to Florence!

QUEEN VICTORIA

That will be all.

The Queen walks off upstairs.

INT. RAILWAY CARRIAGE. DAY

The train is trundling along. Mohammed blows his nose into his handkerchief.

MOHAMMED

A spiritual advisor!? You haven't an idea in your head. You promised to get us out of here. And now we're going to bloody Florence.

ABDUL

But don't you see what a privilege it is to see the glories of Italy with all these wonderful people?

MOHAMMED

You complete bloody idiot. Do you really think they are going to stand there and let her promote a wog? I did not come here to carry your bloody cases.

ABDUL

What you are complaining about? We have our own carriage. With a bathroom. They've a very nice bed for you on the floor.

Mohammed blows his nose.

MOHAMMED

I'm dying here. I want to go home. I am telling you this whole thing is a disaster waiting to happen.

ABDUL

I am getting sick of your negative attitude. Life is a big adventure. You just need to open up and enjoy it. We're on holiday. What on earth could possibly go wrong?

Abdul sees a rope above him – he grabs hold of it and reads the little sign beside it.

ABDUL

'Do Not Pull.'

INT. QUEEN'S CARRIAGE. TRAIN. LATER

The baroque splendour of the Queen's carriage. The Queen is in bed. Abdul is there.

ABDUL

I just want to apologise about the emergency brake, Your Majesty. I hope you weren't too badly injured.

QUEEN VICTORIA

It was nothing at all, Abdul. Anyway, it's a completely understandable mistake. I am just so glad you are with us. What a treat to show you Florence for the first time.

Bertie emerges from the royal bathroom in his pyjamas to see Abdul.

BERTIE

What's he doing here?

QUEEN VICTORIA

Abdul was just explaining what happened earlier.

BERTIE

I really don't see why I have to share your bathroom.

QUEEN VICTORIA

I shared a bed with my mother until I became Queen.

BERTIE

Mother, I am fifty-seven years old. The Munshi's got his own bathroom.

ABDUL

Oh yes, it is a very fine bathroom indeed, Your Majesty.

BERTIE

Excuse me.

He has to push his way past Abdul.

BERTIE

Goodnight, Ma-mah.

ABDUL

Goodnight, Mr Bertie.

QUEEN VICTORIA

Bertie. Make sure you shut that door.

Bertie pushes past Abdul unhappily and leaves. The Queen grabs Abdul's hand

QUEEN VICTORIA

Abdul, I have something for you. To celebrate your first trip to Florence. And becoming my Munshi. It is a locket. With a picture of me.

She gives him a locket.

ABDUL

Oh Your Majesty! How can I ever thank you.

QUEEN VICTORIA

Keep me safe.

ABDUL

For ever, Your Majesty.

QUEEN VICTORIA

Oh Abdul. You will love Florence. Such wonderful views.

INT. GARDENS, VILLA PALMIERI. DAY

Abdul and Queen Victoria are walking in the Italianate gardens below the terrace of the Villa Palmieri, Mohammed standing sentry in the background.

QUEEN VICTORIA

Isn't it glorious. Albert loved it here. The Brunelleschi Dome. The Uffizi Gallery. He spent all of his money on Old Masters. We collected so much I had to give most of it to the National Gallery. He so admired the Medicis. That they would commission the greatest artists of the day. So they could leave something astonishing behind.

ABDUL

In India we also commission great artists. Each Mughal Emperor would bring the greatest craftsmen to make great glories for their Durbar Room.

QUEEN VICTORIA

A Durbar Room?

ABDUL

Oh, yes, every Emperor had a Durbar Room. Full of the finest things known to man.

QUEEN VICTORIA

Well, I am the Empress of India. I should have a Durbar Room.

ABDUL

A brilliant idea, Your Majesty. But where would you put it?

QUEEN VICTORIA

The Isle of Wight. Obviously.

Ponsonby arrives.

PONSONBY

Signor Puccini has arrived, Your Majesty.

INT. GRAND ROOM. NIGHT

We are in the middle of the recital. The Royal Household are listening to a fat man singing 'Donna non vidi mai' at the piano. Abdul is listening intently next to the Queen, Bertie next to Lady Churchill. Ponsonby says something to Dr Reid. The Munshi turns:

ABDUL

Ssshhhh!

The fat man at the piano finishes his song. Abdul applauds enthusiastically.

QUEEN VICTORIA

And where did you say it was from, Mr Puccini?

PUCCINI

It's from my new opera *Manon Lescaut*. It's about two lovers separated by the class divide who run away together.

QUEEN VICTORIA

It sounds marvellous.

PUCCINI

But she is imprisoned for her love, Your Majesty.

QUEEN VICTORIA

Oh.

PUCCINI

But they escape.

QUEEN VICTORIA

Bravo.

PUCCINI

But finally she dies, leaving him utterly bereft.

QUEEN VICTORIA

I'm not sure we do like the sound of it. We prefer comic opera. Do you know any Gilbert and Sullivan?

ABDUL

Perhaps Your Majesty will sing us a song?

QUEEN VICTORIA

Oh no. I couldn't possibly.

The Household on cue:

LADY CHURCHILL

But please, Your Majesty.

BERTIE

(aside)

God save us!

QUEEN VICTORIA

Well, just one. From *Pinafore*. Bertie.

BERTIE

Do I have to?

Bertie, reluctantly, goes to the piano.

QUEEN VICTORIA

'Little Buttercup'. In C.

Bertie sits at the piano with immense reluctance. Queen Victoria sings

'Little Buttercup' poorly. She dries, is about to continue, but Ponsonby prompts the applause.

ABDUL

Bravo! More! More!

But to everyone's relief Puccini produces a glass of champagne and hands it to the Queen.

PUCCINI

Bellissimo, Your Majesty.

QUEEN VICTORIA

I was taught by Mendelssohn, you know.

Puccini raises his glass.

PUCCINI

To the Queen.

QUEEN VICTORIA

To me.

She knocks back the champagne.

EXT. TERRACE, FLORENCE. NIGHT

The Queen is tipsy. She holds on to Abdul's arm as they walk along the terrace in the warm evening air, Florence twinkling below. Bertie and Lady Churchill look on aghast. The Queen is singing the melody of the Gilbert and Sullivan song:

QUEEN VICTORIA

La, la, la, la, la, la.

She lifts her arm as she walks, half dancing.

We should not have drunk all that champagne.

She giggles.

ABDUL

May I?

Abdul takes the Queen's other hand and they waltz their way along the terrace, 'la-la-ing' an accompaniment. We are close up on their

almost childish pleasure. Finally the Queen and Abdul stumble and come to a stop. Abdul smiling at the Queen. Still holding her.

QUEEN VICTORIA

Abdul, I have not been so happy for years.

ABDUL

When I came to England, I was terrified of you. But you are a very kind lady. You are a very unique lady to me.

QUEEN VICTORIA

And you are very, very 'unique' to me, Abdul.

ABDUL

I know that you are very much older than me. And you are the Queen of England and Empress of India and I am just a humble Munshi. But I think you are the most special person in my whole life.

His eyes are alight. They look at each other intimately.

ABDUL

Even more special than my wife.

QUEEN VICTORIA

(shocked)

Wife?!

ABDUL

Yes.

The Queen is computing this information, her face severe.

QUEEN VICTORIA

You are married?!

ABDUL

Of course.

QUEEN VICTORIA

But where is your wife?

ABDUL

In India.

QUEEN VICTORIA

Why didn't you tell me you were married?

ABDUL

I didn't think it mattered.

QUEEN VICTORIA

(severely)

Of course, this changes everything. You will have to return to India immediately.

Abdul looks concerned.

And bring her back at once!

EXT. OSBORNE HOUSE. ISLE OF WIGHT. DAY

A shot of Osborne House. Huge music as a carriage approaches.

INT. THE SAME, QUEEN'S BEDCHAMBER

The Queen is sitting with her journal practising her Urdu.

QUEEN VICTORIA

Aaj kal Agra ka msusam kesa hay? [How is the weather in Agra these days?]

Mrs Tuck runs in.

MRS TUCK

He's coming!

INT. QUEEN'S DRESSING ROOM/BEDCHAMBER. DAY

The Queen passes a mirror, checks her appearance, then dashes out of the room.

EXT. OSBORNE HOUSE. DAY

A carriage races down the drive and into the circle in front of Osborne House.

INT. TOP OF THE STAIRS, OSBORNE HOUSE. DAY

Queen Victoria rushes past maids who jump to attention as she goes round a corner and dashes past Ponsonby and Dr Reid, who watch her whizz by in amazement.

EXT. OSBORNE HOUSE. DAY

The music of Triumphant Return continues as the carriage comes to a stand still. Mohammed is waiting by the door. He blows his nose.

MOHAMMED

Bloody hell.

And rushes towards the carriage to open the door.

INT. GLAZED TERRACE, OSBORNE HOUSE. DAY

The Queen is now looking out from the terrace with great anticipation.

QUEEN VICTORIA

How terribly exciting!

EXT. OSBORNE HOUSE. DAY

Mohammed runs, ignominiously, over the gravel to open the door of the carriage. We cut back to Osborne House. There are expectant faces at every window. The terrace is crowded with Household members. Mohammed opens the carriage door. Abdul emerges from the carriage. He steps down resplendent in his ceremonial outfit, double-sashed, replete with sword and pistol, and the Star of India. He looks like a cross between a Maharajah and a Pirate King and rather fatter than before. Mohammed is unimpressed.

MOHAMMED

(under his breath)

For God's sake!

INT. FIRST FLOOR TERRACE, OSBORNE HOUSE. DAY

Bertie, Lady Churchill, Miss Phipps are gathered with Alick Yorke, all looking down at Abdul's arrival.

LADY CHURCHILL

Look at the size of him.

BERTIE

And he's got a sword.

MISS PHIPPS

And a pistol!

EXT. OSBORNE HOUSE. THE SAME

Abdul holds out his hand and Mrs Karim emerges from the carriage – in full burqa.

INT. FIRST FLOOR TERRACE, OSBORNE HOUSE. DAY

There is an audible gasp from Miss Phipps.

BERTIE

What the devil is she wearing?

MISS PHIPPS

You can't even see her face!

EXT. OSBORNE HOUSE. DAY

A skinny serving boy, Ahmed, gets out of the carriage. He looks around amazed at his surroundings.

INT. FIRST-FLOOR TERRACE, OSBORNE HOUSE. DAY

Now Dr Reid and Ponsonby are out on the terrace – further down from Bertie and the Ladies in Waiting.

DR REID

Who the hell is that?

EXT. OSBORNE HOUSE. DAY

Abdul cuffs Ahmed on the ear, bringing him 'to'.

ABDUL

The bags. The bags!

Ahmed runs to help Mohammed with Mrs Karim's bags. Mrs Karim stands resplendent.

INT. GLAZED TERRACE. OSBORNE HOUSE. DAY

The Queen looks on delighted.

QUEEN VICTORIA

I think she looks rather splendid.

MRS TUCK

But you can't actually see her, Your Majesty.

QUEEN VICTORIA

I think it's rather dignified.

EXT. OSBORNE HOUSE. DAY

Abdul turns and helps another fully burqa'd lady from the carriage.

INT. FIRST FLOOR TERRACE, OSBORNE HOUSE. DAY

Another scandalised gasp from the company.

LADY CHURCHILL

Oh my God. Another one! How many has he got in there?

BERTIE

The ruddy sod's a bigamist!

MISS PHIPPS

(delighted)

This is an absolute scandal!

EXT. OSBORNE HOUSE. DAY

Abdul stands with his two burqa'd ladies while Mohammed and Ahmed get bags from the carriage.

INT. GLAZED TERRACE. OSBORNE HOUSE. DAY

The Queen looks on.

QUEEN VICTORIA

I do hope they like their little cottage.

INT. ABDUL'S COTTAGE. DAY

A knock at the door. Abdul opens the door to find the Queen.

QUEEN VICTORIA

I hope it's not inconvenient. I just thought we'd pop round for tea.

EXT. OTTAGE. DAY

A chocolate-box cottage on the Osborne Estate. We see the Queen is accompanied by a vast entourage of people.

INT. TINY LIVING ROOM, ABDUL'S COTTAGE. DAY

A 'tableau' of Queen Victoria, Ponsonby, Lady Churchill, the Queen of Greece (1870–1932), the Grand Duchess Sophie of Saxe-Weimar-Eisenach (1824–97), Princess Helena of Schleswig-Holstein-Sonderburg-Augustenburg (1848–1923), and their entourages, Mohammed, Abdul, Ahmed, Mrs Karim and the mother-in-law along with the usual entourage, plus the retinue of the royal visitors, all squashed tightly in Abdul's tiny living room. Bertie and Dr Reid are perched on travel cases because of the lack of chairs.

QUEEN VICTORIA

This is my granddaughter, Sophia, The Queen of Greece, this is the Grand Duchess Sophie of Saxe-Weimar-Eisenach, and my daughter, Princess Helena Augusta Viktoria of Schleswig-Holstein-Sonderburg-Augustenburg.

ABDUL

A pleasure to meet you. This is my wife Mrs Karim, and this is my mother-in-law.

QUEEN VICTORIA

How very nice to meet you. How are you enjoying England, Mrs Karim?

Abdul translates this – at great length – to his missus. She whispers something to him – also at great length, then . . .

ABDUL

She says: 'Very well. Thank you, Your Majesty.'

The Munshi's wife then whispers to him again for an interminably long time. Everyone waits politely. Finally he turns and smiles.

ABDUL

'Apart from the cold.'

They laugh gently.

BERTIE

(aside)

God help me.

ABDUL

Your Majesty, Sophia – the Queen of Greece, Grand Duchess Sophie of Saxe-Weimar-Eisenach, Princess Helena Augusta Viktoria of Schleswig-Holstein-Sonderburg-Augustenburg, I would like to take this opportunity on behalf of myself, my wife and my wife's mother to thank Her Majesty Victoria Regina of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland, Defender of the Faith, Empress of India, for accommodating us in this beautiful cottage. We are extremely grateful for her infinite kindness and interior decoration. The gift of hospitality and friendship to strangers is of very high importance in our culture and we are honoured to repay it in our very small way. What is ours is yours.

BERTIE

(under his breath)

Quite literally.

ABDUL

And this is how the world should be. Here we are, representatives of the great nations of the world, all snuggled together, having a nice cup of Indian tea. Thanks be to Allah.

Queen Victoria leads the polite applause.

QUEEN VICTORIA

My dear Munshi, Mrs Karim and Mrs Karim's mother – it's so good to have you back, my children. We have missed you enormously.

EXT. ABDUL'S COTTAGE. DAY

A groom and pony-driven carriage wait for the Queen. The royal visitors are leaving. Bertie marches up the path, Ponsonby anxiously following close behind:

BERTIE

Children?!

Dr Reid is on Ponsonby's heels.

DR REID

(aside, to Ponsonby)

If they are going to live here can I get my room back?

The Queen is the last to leave. She takes his hand:

QUEEN VICTORIA

Oh Abdul, I am so glad you are back – it really has been dreadfully dull without you. And I am so glad to meet Mrs Karim. There's just one thing I've been curious about this whole afternoon. What does Mrs Karim look like behind her veil?

ABDUL

Behind her veil? You must see her.

QUEEN VICTORIA

Is that allowed?

ABDUL

Of course it is allowed. You are a lady. And the Empress of India.

QUEEN VICTORIA

Really?! You think she'd let me take a glimpse?

ABDUL

She would be honoured, Your Majesty.

Ponsonby and Bertie at the end of the garden path.

BERTIE

Where the hell is she going now?

INT. TINY LIVING ROOM, ABDUL'S COTTAGE. DAY

Queen Victoria is sitting on a chair. Mrs Karim takes off her burqa. We glimpse the gorgeous costume underneath, full of colour. Then we see her face. Her nose is pierced with a gold chain linked to her ear. She giggles like a schoolgirl. Victoria is transfixed.

QUEEN VICTORIA

Oh, you really are beautiful.

Mrs Karim giggles again, not understanding a word. The Queen stands and takes both of her hands:

QUEEN VICTORIA

Tum bahut sundar ho. [You are very beautiful.]

Mrs Karim beams. Her mother watches inscrutably from her burqa. Abdul looks on at the whole scene, proud as Punch.

QUEEN VICTORIA

Main tum yahaan hai bahut khush hoon. [I am so happy to have you here.]

EXT. OSBORNE HOUSE. DAY

A carriage arrives. Ponsonby is waiting for Lord Salisbury, who gets out.

LORD SALISBURY

What on earth is a Durbar Room?

INT. OSBORNE, CORRIDOR APPROACHING DURBAR ROOM. DAY

The Prime Minister, Lord Salisbury, is marching up a corridor, followed by his private secretary and deputy private secretary, with a face filled with fury. Bertie and Ponsonby are running alongside.

PONSONBY

It is a celebration of all things Indian inspired by the Mughal Emperors, Prime Minister.

LORD SALISBURY

But I don't understand. Who gave her permission to build this in the first place?

BERTIE

Don't blame me. I was in Monte Carlo.

PONSONBY

I'm afraid she is a law unto herself, Prime Minister.

LORD SALISBURY

For God's sake. She'll be wearing a burqa next. I am holding you entirely responsible, Ponsonby.

They have arrived at the Queen, who is waiting with Dr Reid, Lady Churchill, Miss Phipps and the usual entourage.

QUEEN VICTORIA

Prime Minister, you are late.

LORD SALISBURY

I'm terribly sorry, Your Majesty.

QUEEN VICTORIA

Let us begin.

INT. INDIAN CORRIDOR. DAY

The Queen leads Salisbury, Ponsonby, Bertie, etc. down the Indian corridor.

QUEEN VICTORIA

This, as you can see, is the Indian corridor. The Durbar Room was designed by Mr Bhai Ram Singh.

They pass a smiling Mr Bhai Ram Singh.

BERTIE

(in Salisbury's ear)

The place is crawling with them.

QUEEN VICTORIA

And we commissioned a series of portraits. Of eminent Indians. This is Princess Gurmma.

Lord Salisbury tries to feign interest as he looks at the painting.

QUEEN VICTORIA

This, of course . . . is the Munshi.

Salisbury looks horrified at the portrait of Abdul. Then his eye falls upon the real Abdul who is in full Munshi uniform, a flowing smock.

Abdul beams at the Prime Minister.

ABDUL

An honour to meet you, Mr Prime Minister, sir.

QUEEN VICTORIA

A very good likeness. Don't you think?

ABDUL

(whispering to Lord Salisbury)

I asked him to take a few pounds off. This is my wife, Mr Prime Minister, sir, and this is my mother-in-law.

The two ladies are by his side in their identical burqas.

At least I think that's the right way round.

Abdul chuckles at his own joke.

And this is my servant, Mohammed.

Mohammed blows his nose. Ahmed is there.

LORD SALISBURY

(aside to Ponsonby)

What the hell is going on here, Ponsonby?

QUEEN VICTORIA

And this, Prime Minister, is the Durbar Room.

INT. DURBAR ROOM, CONTINUOUS

Salisbury follows the Queen into the Durbar Room in all its splendour. It is a state room decorated in an over-the-top higgledy-piggledy of Mughal and Hindu motifs. Indian musicians play from the balcony. The Queen walks through the room pointing out the carvings:

QUEEN VICTORIA

The carvings are all from Uttar Pradesh.

And the carpet:

The carpet was woven in a gaol in Agra. Perfect, of course, for the tableaux.

At the end of the room is the Peacock Throne.

QUEEN VICTORIA

And the *pièce de résistance*. The Peacock Throne.

The Queen sits on the throne.

An exact copy of the one in Agra. And, of course, the Koh-i-Noor!

She is wearing the Koh-i-Noor brooch.

QUEEN VICTORIA

Now I really do feel like the Empress of India.

She is like a little child, swinging her feet joyously. Salisbury and the household deputation look on at her:

BERTIE

(aside to Dr Reid)

I thought she was supposed to be dying.

LORD SALISBURY

It really is a remarkable addition to the house, Your Majesty.

QUEEN VICTORIA

We have Abdul to thank for the whole idea.

ABDUL

(who is now standing next to the Queen)

Oh, really – it was nothing.

Ponsonby steps forward, very formally.

PONSONBY

To celebrate the completion of the Durbar Room. A little surprise, Your Majesty.

Mohammed appears bearing an ornately inlaid box. The Queen opens the box and looks inside. Pulling a confused face:

QUEEN VICTORIA

What is it?

PONSONBY

A mango, Your Majesty.

A general gasp. Abdul peers inside.

ABDUL

It's 'off'.

A look of horror on everyone's face.

QUEEN VICTORIA

Ponsonby. This mango is off.

Ponsonby's chagrin.

INT. LADIES' DRESSING ROOM, OSBORNE HOUSE. NIGHT

Lady Churchill, Miss Phipps, and various other ladies from the entourage in petticoats getting undressed. Helped by Mrs Tuck.

LADY CHURCHILL

A line has definitively been crossed.

INT. MEN'S DRESSING ROOM. OSBORNE HOUSE. NIGHT

Abdul is getting changed into his Sultan of Persia outfit. Mohammed wipes his brow and sits down, shaking with a fever.

MOHAMMED

This is a complete and utter disaster.

ABDUL

I don't understand.

MOHAMMED

They've been waiting for this.

ABDUL

Who have?

MOHAMMED

Ponsonby, Reid. The whole damn lot of them. Don't you see, she's been rubbing their noses in it but now it's going public. I'm telling you they're not going to stand for it – they'll rise up and chop your bloody balls off. You've upset the order of everything. You think they are going to lie back and take it?

ABDUL

But I haven't done anything.

MOHAMMED

You stupid, bloody Uncle Tom. Don't you see you've upset the order of everything. I'm telling you this whole thing is a complete catastrophe.

Abdul looks worried.

ALICK YORKE

Everything alright in here?

INT. DURBAR ROOM. NIGHT

Now the Durbar Room has been transformed. A large stage with a plush velvet curtain has been erected at one end and dominates the room. The room is crammed with people ready to see the tableaux. Bigge, Reid, Ponsonby, all the staff in the rear rows crane to see the arrival of Mrs Karim and Mrs Karim's mother.

The Queen raises her hand and waves at Mrs Karim.

QUEEN VICTORIA

Mrs Munshi! Please, sit here. Bertie.

Bertie, much put out, is forced to move. Salisbury watches the whole thing in horror.

INT. LADIES' DRESSING ROOM. NIGHT

Lady Churchill puts on her a yashmak and looks in the mirror.

LADY CHURCHILL

I have never been so humiliated in my entire life.

INT. DURBAR ROOM. NIGHT

The lights in the hall have dimmed. Music. The Queen squeezes Mrs Karim's hand. Alick Yorke appears from between the curtains on stage.

ALICK YORKE

A scene in Ancient Persia.

He withdraws. Ponsonby pops a pill. The Queen is agog with delighted anticipation. The curtains open to reveal painted flats. A scene from Ancient Persia. Lady Churchill, Miss Phipps and Mrs Tuck come on dressed in Persian costumes. They pose as a harem of supplicants. Enter Abdul, dressed as the Sultan of Persia with Ahmed as his servant. Mohammed is at the back sick with fever.

ABDUL

I am the Sultan of Persia, King of all Kings. You are now under my power.

LADY CHURCHILL

Your Highness. We bestow all the riches of the Orient upon you.

The ladies proffer paste jewels. Abdul tries his best to look triumphantly regal. They all look out uneasily at the audience trying to maintain a matey rictus as the orchestra swells and they hold the tableau. Ahmed is in the way – Abdul surreptitiously cuffs him to clear his sightline.

We notice Mohammed swaying, clearly ill, and just as the curtain descends as everyone else is fixed in the tableau, Mohammed sneezes. Lord Salisbury is open-mouthed. Ponsonby holds his forehead in despair. The Queen is unabashed with her approval.

QUEEN VICTORIA

Bravo! Bravo the Munshi!

BERTIE

(aside to Dr Reid)

Now she thinks he's Henry Irving.

As the curtain opens for the 'call', the Queen leaps to her feet. The entire household follow suit, applauding politely. Only Mrs Karim and her mother remain seated. Abdul gestures his respects to Her Majesty and bows egregiously. She claps enthusiastically. The curtains close again. Salisbury is not happy.

INT. HALLWAY, OSBORNE HOUSE. NIGHT

Lord Salisbury bollocks Ponsonby.

LORD SALISBURY

What the hell is this, Ponsonby? Munshi-mania? I'm trying

to keep an empire together and it looks like they're running the place. I want this whole sodding mess knocked on the head or you're finished. Understood?

Lord Salisbury turns and leaves leaving Ponsonby chagrined.

INT. POST-TABLEAU ROOM, OSBORNE HOUSE. NIGHT

The post-tableau soirée. Victoria is sitting amongst the prominent members of the household, drinking sherry. Ponsonby, battle-torn, comes in to join them.

QUEEN VICTORIA

Ah, Ponsonby. Tell us, what exactly did the Prime Minister say about the tableau?

PONSONBY

To be entirely frank, Your Majesty, he seemed to be a little perturbed.

QUEEN VICTORIA

Whatever for? He must have liked the Munshi.

PONSONBY

I think the Munshi was the problem, Your Majesty.

QUEEN VICTORIA

Really? I thought he was rather good.

PONSONBY

I think he meant his position, Your Majesty. I think he was rather alarmed he had such a prominent role in the Household.

QUEEN VICTORIA

Of course Abdul has a prominent role in the household. He is my Munshi.

PONSONBY

But he's an Indian, Your Majesty.

QUEEN VICTORIA

I am aware of it.

PONSONBY

But given current sensitivities in the sub-continent, Your Majesty. The Prime Minister was concerned it might be 'sending the wrong message'.

QUEEN VICTORIA

I should have thought it was a jolly good message.

PONSONBY

But he's a Muslim, Your Majesty.

QUEEN VICTORIA

Precisely. We owe them so much, do we not? For their role in the Mutiny, for example.

The hubbub drops to a deathly silence.

PONSONBY

The Mutiny, Your Majesty?

QUEEN VICTORIA

Yes. For all the help they gave us with the Hindus.

DR REID

But the Mutiny was a Muslim-led revolt, Your Majesty.

QUEEN VICTORIA

Are you sure?

DR REID

Of course. The Muslim soldiers revolted when it was rumoured their rifles were greased with pork fat.

QUEEN VICTORIA

Really?

PONSONBY

The Grand Mufti, himself, put out a fatwa against you personally. And Muslim soldiers killed over two thousand British personnel.

BERTIE

Who have you been talking to, Mother?

Suddenly Abdul arrives with a flourish in his smartest Munshi garb.

ABDUL

Ta-da!

The Queen glares at him. Everyone else is staring. He realises something is wrong.

INT. SCULPTURE CORRIDOR. OSBORNE HOUSE. NIGHT

The Queen is standing next to Abdul in the corridor, giving him a furious dressing down.

QUEEN VICTORIA

I have opened my heart to you. I have brought your family from India, promoted you in the teeth of very considerable opposition and disquiet from the Household. I even turned a blind eye when you failed to tell me you were married, which came, as you know, as quite a surprise. How could you let me humiliate myself in front of the entire Household?

ABDUL

I am deeply sorry, Your Majesty.

QUEEN VICTORIA

You said the Hindus were behind the Mutiny!

ABDUL

I didn't say it was only the Hindus, Your Majesty.

QUEEN VICTORIA

You told me categorically that the Muslims were my friends.

ABDUL

But we are your friends, Your Majesty.

QUEEN VICTORIA

Abdul, there is a fatwa against me. It was Muslims who started the whole thing! This is completely unacceptable. Abdul, I thought you were outstanding as the Sultan of Persia, but I'm afraid you will have to go home.

INT. FURTHER ALONG THE CORRIDOR. NIGHT

Bertie, Lady Churchill and Dr Reid have gathered and are spying on the conversation. Unable to repress his delight:

DR REID

Hallelujah!

INT. OSBORNE HOUSE. SCULPTURE CORRIDOR

Abdul is knocked for six.

QUEEN VICTORIA

You have hurt my feelings very much indeed, Abdul. Don't you see what a position I have been put in? Thank you for everything you've done for me.

She starts to leave. She turns and faces Abdul. We can see Mohammed looking on behind her.

I will miss you a very great deal.

She turns and walks down the corridor.

Queen Victoria marches along the corridor passing Bertie, Dr Reid and Lady Churchill, who dutifully follow her, smirking like cats that have got the cream.

Abdul is standing devastated. We see Mohammed has been watching.

MOHAMMED

So we're going home.

He starts to cough.

INT. SCULPTURE CORRIDOR. NIGHT

Victoria walks along the corridor followed by the smirking Bertie, Dr Reid and Lady Churchill. The Queen stops at the end stairs, met by Mrs Tuck. Victoria turns to face Bertie, Reid and Churchill. They suddenly adopt an appropriately solemn demeanour.

BERTIE

Goodnight, Mother.

QUEEN VICTORIA

Goodnight.

The Queen eyes them suspiciously – she knows she’s been had. They try to keep straight faces.

INT. STAIRS. THE SAME

The Queen turns and struggles up the stairs. Reid’s face breaks into a smile.

INT. QUEEN’S BEDCHAMBER. OSBORNE HOUSE. NIGHT

The Queen on her dressing stool, unnerved. She looks up at the photo of Abdul on her wall: Abdul standing proudly as she sits at her desk. She thinks.

QUEEN VICTORIA

Mrs Tuck!

INT. ABDUL’S COTTAGE. NIGHT

Pouring rain. It is Mrs Tuck under an umbrella. Abdul is amazed.

EXT. LANE OUTSIDE. NIGHT

Victoria is in her pony and trap. Abdul is standing by the trap under an umbrella held by Mrs Tuck.

QUEEN VICTORIA

Abdul, you have been an utter fool and I am absolutely furious with you. It is unconscionable that as my Munshi you should have lied to me in any way. But also it would be completely churlish not to recognise the considerable kindness and devotion you’ve shown. And after all, I am sure you thought in some way you were protecting me. But as the monarch, I do realise nothing can really protect me. And in that light I have decided, even though I am very disappointed, I would like you to stay.

Abdul is astonished.

QUEEN VICTORIA

But it must never happen again.

ABDUL

Oh Your Gracious Majesty. How can I ever thank you?

QUEEN VICTORIA

Well, there is something we really must sort out, Abdul.

Abdul has no idea what she could mean.

I am deeply concerned about Mrs Karim.

INT. QUEEN'S BEDROOM. OSBORNE HOUSE. DAY

The Queen is having breakfast in bed attended by Dr Reid, Ponsonby and Mrs Tuck.

QUEEN VICTORIA

I want you to examine Mrs Karim.

DR REID

Examine Mrs Karim?!

QUEEN VICTORIA

Just make sure everything's working.

PONSONBY

But I thought the Munshi and his family were leaving us,
Your Majesty.

QUEEN VICTORIA

Whatever gave you that impression?

Astonishment from all and sundry.

The Munshi and his family are an integral part of the Royal Household. And I would be very grateful if you gave her a thorough examination.

She blithely goes back to work on her egg. Dr Reid looks at Ponsonby.

INT. OSBORNE HOUSE. TOP OF STAIRS. DAY

Bertie, Ponsonby and Reid descending the stairs.

BERTIE

As far as I'm concerned this is war. We're going to dig up every last piece of shit the blaggard's ever done. I want someone in India raking through the family coals. Isn't your son out there, Ponsonby?

PONSONBY

I couldn't possibly be involved in subterfuge, Your Majesty.

BERTIE

Look. I'm going to be the one in charge very soon. You'll do as you're bloody well told. I want no stone unturned. We are going to make a dossier. Have it all down in black and white; and put an end to this for good.

Bertie leaves. Ponsonby looks at Dr Reid.

DR REID

Well, I better go and examine Mrs Munshi.

INT. COTTAGE. DAY

Dr Reid is sitting awkwardly on a chair, a stethoscope round his neck, clearly very unhappy. The Munshi's wife is in full burqa with a veil, sitting on the side of the bed. Her mother, also in full burqa, sits beside her holding her hand. Dr Reid looks at Mrs Karim awkwardly, then turns to Abdul who is waiting anxiously by the doctor's side.

REID

I need to see her tongue.

ABDUL

Oh, it is not possible to uncover a lady's mouth, Doctor.

REID

But how can I tell anything if I can't see her tongue?

Abdul speaks to the mother-in-law in Hindi, the mother-in-law speaks to Mrs Karim. Then she daintily lifts her yashmak a fraction and sticks out her tongue. The doctor looks at it gingerly then it disappears back behind the veil as quickly as it appeared.

ABDUL

Well?

REID

I think she's fine.

INT. OUTSIDE MOHAMMED'S ROOM. DAY

Ponsonby and Bertie are in the servants' corridor. Ponsonby knocks on a door.

INT. MOHAMMED'S ROOM. DAY

Bertie and Ponsonby are in Mohammed's room. Mohammed has declined since we last saw him.

PONSONBY

Mr Mohammed. We have come here because we are not unaware of your predicament. That you arrived in the first place almost by accident and find yourself stuck here through a bizarre set of circumstances – none of your own making. It is not beneath our notice that the inclement English weather, especially on the Solent, has been the cause of a precipitous decline in your general health and what's more you continue to suffer the vast indignity of being a servant to someone who is in many ways your inferior, who seems to discharge his role with increasing abuse and disregard. But it has occurred to us that we might be able to offer you some help.

MOHAMMED

Help?

PONSONBY

Travel home, medical care, perhaps a modest pension. In return, of course, for a little information.

MOHAMMED

What sort of information?

PONSONBY

Look, I'm not going to beat about the bush. You've borne the brunt of Abdul's appalling behaviour and that is of a great deal of interest to a lot of people.

MOHAMMED

You want me to dish the dirty?

PONSONBY

In a manner of speaking.

Mohammed coughs into his handkerchief.

MOHAMMED

What would you like me to say?

BERTIE

Anything really.

PONSONBY

We need details. What he says, what he does.

Mohammed thinks about this.

MOHAMMED

Abdul does what everybody else does. Looks for preferment. 'Curries' favour. Crawls up the stinking greasy pole of the shitty British Empire. Making fools of you all because he is a servant — an Indian, Muslim servant — and you are all quaking in your boots because he's beating you at your own game.

BERTIE

No one is quaking in their boots. We are the most powerful nation on Earth at the height of our influence.

MOHAMMED

In that case the only way is down. So stick your stupid British Empire up your stinky royal bottom-hole, Mr Bertie Prince, sir. I hope he makes the whole damn thing come tumbling down.

He coughs into his handkerchief. There is blood. Mohammed is shocked. Ponsonby looks on in pity.

BERTIE

I'll see that you die here.

INT. OSBORNE HOUSE. COUNCIL CORRIDOR. DAY

Bertie and Ponsonby in a cabal with Dr Reid.

DR REID

What do you mean, he wouldn't say anything?

PONSONBY

Well . . .

BERTIE

The man's a complete shit.

QUEEN VICTORIA

(out of shot)

Dr Reid!

The Queen comes round the corner. Suddenly Ponsonby et al. swing round to see her with Lady Churchill, Miss Phipps et al.

QUEEN VICTORIA

I am not a fool. I know there is some skulduggery afoot. Something is going on here and I am not going to stand for it.

Ponsonby et al. look terrified.

QUEEN VICTORIA

Dr Reid, I asked you to get to the bottom of Mrs Karim's fertility issues and it seems nothing has been done.

DR REID

Well, actually, Your Majesty, it was impossible to make a conclusive judgement for religious reasons.

QUEEN VICTORIA

Well, did you examine the Munshi?

DR REID

No, Your Majesty.

QUEEN VICTORIA

Well, examine the Munshi.

The Queen heads off. Lady Churchill and Bertie hold back.

QUEEN VICTORIA

Bertie.

Bertie sheepishly follows. Dr Reid turns to Ponsonby.

DR REID

I did not do seven years at Edinburgh University to look at Indian dicks.

EXT. OSBORNE HOUSE. DAY

Dr Reid stomps, unhappily, carrying his doctor's bag towards Abdul's house.

INT. ABDUL'S COTTAGE. DAY

Dr Reid with his stethoscope, as before. Abdul standing.

DR REID

Trousers.

EXT. OSBORNE HOUSE. DAY

Dr Reid running at full pelt in the opposite direction.

EXT. COURTYARD. OSBORNE HOUSE. DAY

Dr Reid running across the courtyard.

INT. CORRIDOR. OSBORNE HOUSE

Dr Reid running. He skids round a corner.

INT. PONSONBY'S OFFICE. OSBORNE HOUSE. DAY

Reid bursts in.

DR REID

Eureka!

Ponsonby looks up.

He's riddled with the clap!

INT. CORRIDOR. OSBORNE HOUSE. DAY

Ponsonby and Reid knock on a bedroom door. A voice from inside.

BERTIE

(off)

Go away!

PONSONBY

Your Royal Highness. We come with important news about the Munshi!

INT. BERTIE'S BEDROOM. OSBORNE HOUSE. DAY

Bertie is now in bed with a post-coital cigar. Lady Churchill is also in the bed. Ponsonby and Dr Reid have just explained the news.

BERTIE

The clap!

LADY CHURCHILL

But we can't possibly tell her. It would kill her stone dead.

BERTIE

Maybe it's not such a bad idea.

PONSONBY

There's more. It appears the father, far from being an Indian Eminent, is in fact a prison apothecary.

BERTIE

Are you sure?

PONSONBY

I received a telegram only this afternoon from Agra. My son visited the gaol himself. They are absolute nobodies.

Bertie takes a puff while he thinks about this.

BERTIE

Well, it sounds pretty conclusive to me.

INT. QUEEN'S STUDY. OSBORNE HOUSE. DAY

Bertie knocks on the door and goes in.

BERTIE

Mother, we have to see you . . .

The Queen is sitting behind a small desk, Abdul intimately by her side. Ponsonby and Dr Reid stand nervously before her.

BERTIE

(looking at Abdul)

Alone.

QUEEN VICTORIA

I am in the middle of my Urdu lesson.

BERTIE

Mother, we come with very important news of a highly personal matter.

QUEEN VICTORIA

I have nothing to hide from Abdul.

PONSONBY

I am afraid, Your Majesty, We have news concerning the Munshi. Proof, beyond any doubt, that Abdul Karim is a low-born imposter, Your Majesty.

QUEEN VICTORIA

But the Munshi is from a noble family and a long line of teachers.

PONSONBY

The Munshi was a mere clerk in a common gaol.

She is silent.

My own son has sent word from India and has actually spoken to the man in question.

DR REID

His family are completely uneducated. His father is a lowly apothecary.

BERTIE

The Munshi didn't even go to school, Mother. The man's a complete fraud. There he is, overseeing the boxes. I'm next in line and I can't get anywhere near them.

PONSONBY

It is true, Your Majesty. You have been hideously duped and ignominiously misused, Your Majesty. The Munshi is a blackguard and an arch deceiver. I am afraid Abdul and his father are completely common.

The Queen looks horrified at the proceedings.

We have prepared a dossier.

Ponsonby flourishes the dossier and slams it on the Queen's table. She seems flabbergasted. She looks at the dossier. The case seems conclusive. They stare at her with bated breath.

QUEEN VICTORIA

You despicable toads. Racialists! Spying?! Dossiers?! Picking on a poor defenceless Indian. Of course they don't have qualifications. It's completely different out there.

BERTIE

But don't you see, Mother, he's using his position for his own gain.

QUEEN VICTORIA

And how does that make him any different to any one of you? How dare you look down on Abdul. How dare you defame his poor father. Bertie, I am ashamed that you are part of this. Abdul is a loyal, wise, sympathetic human being who has risen on his own merits. Not by endless backstabbing or family connections. I will not have this. Now. Repeat after me. I will be courteous to the Munshi.

She stares at Ponsonby. He looks at Abdul, then reluctantly:

PONSONBY

I will be courteous to the Munshi.

QUEEN VICTORIA

You.

DR REID

I will be courteous to the Munshi.

QUEEN VICTORIA

Bertie. All of you. 'I will be courteous to the Munshi.'

EVERYONE

I will be courteous to the Munshi.

QUEEN VICTORIA

It has become apparent that to get any respect in the Household one needs to be formally recognised. In which case, Abdul, I intend to give you a knighthood in the next honours list.

Ponsonby almost collapses.

DR REID

Enough! This is absurd. We can't protect you from this any further.

The Queen stares in astonishment.

The man is riddled with gonorrhoea.

Stunned silence.

QUEEN VICTORIA

Gonorrhoea!?

PONSONBY

Yes, Your Majesty.

QUEEN VICTORIA

Well, you're a doctor. Why don't you treat him?! Now get out of my sight. All of you.

INT. OUTSIDE THE QUEEN'S STUDY. OSBORNE HOUSE. DAY

Abdul, Bertie, Ponsonby and Reid come out of the room. Suddenly Dr Reid loses it and pins Abdul up against the wall.

REID

You're killing her, you pox-ridden Indian shit.

Reid is strangling Abdul.

ABDUL

Doctor R—

Abdul turns puce as Reid throttles him. Ponsonby tries to wrest Abdul from Dr Reid's clutches.

PONSONBY

Dr Reid! Be courteous!

Reid comes to his senses and lets go. Abdul is shaken.

INT. PONSONBY'S OFFICE. OSBORNE HOUSE. NIGHT

The council is completely full with scores of staff and members of the Royal Household.

LADY CHURCHILL

Knighthd?!

BIGGE

Surely there is some law against it?

LADY CHURCHILL

The man's a common Indian, for God's sake.

MISS PHIPPS

And a Muslim.

ALICK YORKE

She can't just do what she likes.

DR REID

That's right. We are the ones who make this palace work and we are being ignored and exploited. We have to stand up to this wanton bullying.

BIGGE

Exactly. This is a usurpation of the basic tenets of leadership.

ALICK YORKE

There are moral standards at stake. What is this? The Year of the Munshi?

They all laugh.

LADY CHURCHILL

I propose we should rise up as a household and demand that she retracts.

MISS PHIPPS

But she's the Queen.

LADY CHURCHILL

She is *our* sovereign. Her position is entirely based on the implicit contract she makes with *us*. Who manages the estates? Who is up at the crack of dawn preparing her breakfast? Toadying to foreign diplomats? Eating those interminable meals? Listening to the infernal drivel? Lords and Ladies, the time has come to say no. We must stand together and show her who really runs this ship.

PONSONBY

But this is a palace coup.

LADY CHURCHILL

It is an assertion of our inalienable rights as the aristocracy of this country. The monarchy is not there by divine right.

PONSONBY

I think it is, actually.

LADY CHURCHILL

Oh shut up.

BIGGE

I agree. We must resist these foreign intruders, for the sake of England, the Empire and St George.

LADY CHURCHILL

I say: either she drops this preposterous insult or we will all leave.

GENERAL ASSENT

Hear, hear!

MISS PHIPPS

But isn't this treason?

LADY CHURCHILL

This is politics. The bloody unions do it. I don't see why we shouldn't have a go.

ALL

Hooray!

ALICK YORKE

The Nabob has met his match.

Yes! Yes!

BIGGE

Let's show them what we are made of.

More approval!

That we are prepared to stand up to tyranny: for justice, for
right and for England!

Huge cheers.

LADY CHURCHILL

Are you with me?

Unanimous assent.

Are you with me?

Unanimous assent and self-congratulation apart from:

ALICK YORKE

So what should we do?

Nobody is sure.

DR REID

Somebody has to tell her.

They all suddenly look nervous.

BIGGE

We should make a deputation.

ALICK YORKE

Won't that look like a cabal?

LADY CHURCHILL

I think you should go. You are the head of Household.

PONSONBY

I couldn't possibly go, it would bring the position into
disrepute.

ALICK YORKE

You know her quite well, Mrs Tuck.

MRS TUCK

I'm just a dresser. What about Miss Phipps?

Everyone's attention is drawn to the skinny, mild-mannered, nervous Lady in Waiting.

LADY CHURCHILL

Brilliant. You're the maid of honour. Exactly the person to break the news.

Miss Phipps looks terrified.

INT. COUNCIL CORRIDOR. OSBORNE HOUSE. NIGHT

Mrs Tuck fusses over Miss Phipps, making her look just so. Ponsonby, Dr Reid and Lady Churchill are there.

PONSONBY

Off you go – and don't take no for an answer.

The poor woman is terrified. She timidly makes her way up the stairs. She stops and looks back. Lady Churchill gives her a look of stern admonishment. Phipps nervously carries on. Then stops again. It's grandma's footsteps. Churchill ushers her on again.

INT. OUTSIDE THE COUNCIL ROOM. NIGHT

A terrified Miss Phipps knocks meekly on the double doors.

INT. QUEEN'S STUDY. NIGHT

Miss Phipps walks nervously across the vast room to the little table where Queen Victoria is sitting alone at her letters. The Queen looks up, clearly displeased to be interrupted. Miss Phipps is shaking. The Queen stares at her full of indignant expectation.

MISS PHIPPS

Erm . . .

QUEEN VICTORIA

Speak up.

Miss Phipps tries to gather herself and stop herself collapsing.

MISS PHIPPS

Your Majesty . . .

QUEEN VICTORIA

Out with it, girl, we are very busy.

MISS PHIPPS

There is something I must say that . . .

She looks at the Queen, terrified.

QUEEN VICTORIA

What is the meaning of this? Stop shaking.

MISS PHIPPS

I have come to ask you to reconsider the elevation of . . .
of Mr Karim.

The Queen can't quite believe her ears.

QUEEN VICTORIA

What did you say?

MISS PHIPPS

I have come to ask you not to give Mr Karim a knighthood,
Your Majesty.

QUEEN VICTORIA

Why the devil not?

MISS PHIPPS

The members of the Household demand that you abandon
your plans, Your Majesty.

QUEEN VICTORIA

Demand?!

MISS PHIPPS

We believe that it degrades the very concept of knighthood.
He comes from a very low family, Your Majesty. And he is
coloured.

QUEEN VICTORIA

Get out of my sight.

Miss Phipps looks like she's beginning to crack.

QUEEN VICTORIA

Did you not hear me?

MISS PHIPPS

Your Majesty, I must inform you that if you refuse – the entire Household will resign.

The Queen cannot believe her ears. She pauses for a moment. Then lets out an earth-shattering scream of rage:

QUEEN VICTORIA

Treason! Treason!

She sweeps the table in anger, evicting her Fabergé egg.

INT. KITCHENS, THE SAME

Miss Phipps is given whisky.

INT. OUTSIDE THE QUEEN'S STUDY, THE SAME

Ponsonby, Bertie and Reid approach the Queen's study.

INT. QUEEN'S STUDY. DAY

Bertie, Ponsonby and Reid march into the room. The Queen is sitting with Abdul. Abdul stands up and moves out of the way.

BERTIE

Mummy. Enough is enough. You are bringing the monarchy into crisis. And you are humiliating yourself for no good reason. You will drop this Munshi business forthwith. Do you hear me?

She stares at him.

The Munshi is a servant. He is an ignorant, pox-ridden, Indian peasant. Did you really think the Household would countenance such an insult?

QUEEN VICTORIA

I will not be disobeyed.

BERTIE

No, I've put up with you for over fifty years. You will drop this forthwith or . . .

QUEEN VICTORIA

Or? . . . Or? . . .

BERTIE

We will have you certified insane. And removed from office immediately. Here are the papers. Signed by Dr Reid.

The Queen is stunned. She looks at Dr Reid, who appears terrified of the whole situation.

QUEEN VICTORIA

I am eighty-one years of age. I have had nine children, forty-two grandchildren, and almost a billion citizens. I have rheumatism, a collapsed uterus, am morbidly obese, deaf in one ear. I have known eleven prime ministers, passed 2,347 pieces of legislation. I have been in office for sixty-two years, 234 days – thus I am the longest-serving monarch in world history. I am responsible for five households and a staff of more than three thousand. I am cantankerous, boring, greedy, ill-tempered, at times selfish and myopic, metaphorically and literally. I am, perhaps, disagreeably attached to power and should not have smashed the Emperor of Russia's egg. But I am anything but insane. If the Household wish to disobey me, so be it – let them do it face to face. I will see everyone in the Durbar Room. At once!

She marches out past Abdul:

Where on earth did you get gonorrhoea?

INT. OSBORNE HOUSE. DURBAR ROOM. DAY

The Durbar Room is full. The chief members of the Royal Household are there: Ponsonby, Reid, Phipps, Lady Churchill, but so are the pages, footmen and the maids. The Queen marches in to face them.

QUEEN VICTORIA

I understand there is some concern over my desires on preferment. I understand that feelings have run high and I understand that you have decided to resign rather than withstand my decision. If any one of you would like to tender their resignation it will be accepted without any unfortunate consequences – but at least have the decency to do it to my face. If anyone wishes to resign, please step forward.

She stares at them, absolutely formidable. Nervousness. People looking at one another. Small feints, but no one moves. Abdul is watching from the doorway.

QUEEN VICTORIA

I would like to inform you that I have decided against awarding any knighthoods at this moment.

Relief all round that she's come to her senses.

QUEEN VICTORIA

Instead, you will be delighted to know I have decided to make the Munshi a Commander of the Royal Victorian Order as a special token of my personal esteem for his services to the Empire. That will be all.

Ponsonby is so overcome he has to sit down. The Queen is shaking. She walks through the middle of the crowd who part to observe their customary obsequies. She walks out into the corridor.

INT. INDIAN CORRIDOR. OSBORNE HOUSE. DAY

The Queen walks out into the corridor alone. But we see she is faltering. Abdul sees her and runs the whole length of the corridor and catches her in his arms. Dr Reid and Mrs Tuck arrive. Reid pushes Abdul out of the way to get to the Queen.

DR REID

Satisfied?

Reid pushes Abdul away from the Queen. Then suddenly a shaken Ahmed arrives.

AHMED
Dr Reid! Dr Reid! It's Mr Mohammed!

EXT. GRAVEYARD. DAY

A devastated Abdul is at Mohammed's funeral. The Queen is with Abdul, Mrs Karim, the mother-in-law and Ahmed. Dr Reid and Ponsonby stand nearby out of duty to Her Majesty. Reid turns to Ponsonby.

DR REID
One down.
Abdul stands by the grave as the others leave.

ABDUL
I am sorry, my friend.
Then Abdul helps lead the Queen away.

QUEEN VICTORIA
We need to talk.

EXT. CARRIAGE. GROUNDS OF OSBORNE HOUSE. DAY

After the funeral. The Queen and Abdul sit in the open carriage. The Queen is wrapped up against the cold weather but looks very frail. She takes Abdul's hand.

QUEEN VICTORIA
I think it's time that you went home, Abdul.

ABDUL
This is my home.

QUEEN VICTORIA
I have been short-sighted and selfish. You are a young man, Abdul. Your whole life ahead of you.

ABDUL
But, Your Majesty –

QUEEN VICTORIA
I cannot protect you if I am not here. You must go, Abdul –

with your wife. The vultures are already circling. I don't even think I will see this year out. All these stupid ceremonies. What is the point in them, Abdul? They will kill me.

ABDUL

You will live for many more years, Your Majesty.

QUEEN VICTORIA

No. Abdul, I am sick and weary. I can hardly see, barely hear. The Empress of half the world and I can't get in and out of my own carriage.

ABDUL

I cannot leave you. I am your Munshi.

QUEEN VICTORIA

You must protect yourself. How could we have been so blind? Forget me, Abdul. You have been a very good friend.

ABDUL

They can do what they like, but every day I will come and be at your side as long as I shall live.

QUEEN VICTORIA

You are a silly fool, Abdul. But I adore you.

Snow falls all around them. Abdul holds the Queen's hand.

INT. CORRIDOR. OSBORNE HOUSE. DAY

The Queen, now ill, is wheeled along the corridor.

INT. THE SAME, QUEEN'S BEDCHAMBER

The Queen is now in bed unconscious, surrounded by the Household.

INT. CORRIDOR OUTSIDE QUEEN'S BEDCHAMBER. NIGHT

Abdul is waiting outside the door. Ponsonby and Reid come out looking grave.

DR REID

I think you should inform the Kaiser.

EXT. OSBORNE HOUSE. NIGHT

Wide shot of the house at night. A light shining from an upstairs room.

INT. THE SAME, CORRIDOR

Abdul is dutifully standing sentry outside the Queen's room.

EXT. OSBORNE HOUSE. DAWN

Wide shot of Osborne House. Carriages arrive. The Kaiser gets out.

INT. CORRIDOR. THE SAME

The Kaiser et al. walk past Abdul into the Queen's room. The door is closed.

INT. QUEEN'S BEDCHAMBER. OSBORNE HOUSE. DAWN

The darkened room is full. On one side of the bed is the Kaiser, on the other is Bertie. They look at the Queen, who appears to be asleep. Suddenly she stirs. There is a gasp in the room. She opens her eyes. Dr Reid takes away the oxygen mask. Bertie takes her hand.

QUEEN VICTORIA

Abdul?

BERTIE

It's me, Mummy. And your grandson, Wilhelm. The Kaiser.
She takes the Kaiser's hand.

QUEEN VICTORIA

No fighting when I'm gone. Promise me. Where is my
Munshi?

BERTIE

Hush. Hush. Everything is fine.

QUEEN VICTORIA

But I need my Munshi. Where is the Munshi?

Bertie, hurt that he is not enough, gives in.

BERTIE

Bring her the Munshi.

INT. CORRIDOR OUTSIDE QUEEN'S BEDCHAMBER. DAY

Abdul is resolutely standing by.

DR REID

Don't you dare upset her.

INT. QUEEN'S BEDCHAMBER. OSBORNE HOUSE. DAY

The crowds of dignitaries part to let Abdul through. He approaches her sadly, and holds her hand.

QUEEN VICTORIA

Abdul?

ABDUL

Yes. I am here.

QUEEN VICTORIA

I want to talk to the Munshi alone.

DR REID

I think Your Majesty might . . .

QUEEN VICTORIA

I said: alone!

INT. CORRIDOR. THE SAME

The Kaiser, Bertie, the Household et al. all troop into the corridor.

INT. THE QUEEN'S BEDCHAMBER. THE SAME

The Queen has been propped up with pillows. Abdul kneels by her bedside. Dr Reid is discreetly at the back of the room, in the shadows. The Queen takes some oxygen then turns to Abdul.

QUEEN VICTORIA

When I was young I used to long for death. And now when

there is nothing to live for I cling on to life with every
breath. I am scared, Abdul.

ABDUL

Don't be scared.

Abdul quotes a poem in Hindi. Then translates it:

QUEEN VICTORIA

'Listen, little drop, give up yourself without regret
And in exchange you will gain the ocean.
Give yourself away
And in the arms of the Great Sea be secure.'
The Great poet Rumi.

She squeezes Abdul's hand.

ABDUL

Prema puri hai. Hama kevala tukare kara rahe haim. 'Love
is the whole. We are only pieces.'

QUEEN VICTORIA

That is very beautiful. You are a teacher, Abdul.

ABDUL

Everybody knows Rumi.
Allah is the teacher.
Love is the whole.
Prema puri hai.
We are only pieces.
Hama kevala tukare kara rahe haim.

QUEEN VICTORIA

'Prema puri hai. Hama kevala tukare kara rahe haim.'
Alhamdulillah!
I keep thinking I am falling.

ABDUL

Fall. Everything will be well. You are about to go to a much
safer place.

QUEEN VICTORIA

To the Banquet Hall of Eternity.

ABDUL

Yes. Goodbye, my Queen.

Abdul is crying. The Queen holds on to Abdul's hand.

QUEEN VICTORIA

Goodbye. Take care, my sweet son.

She starts to nod off. Dr Reid puts his hand on Abdul's shoulder, clearly moved.

DR REID

Let her sleep.

INT. CORRIDOR

Abdul emerges still in tears. Bertie, the Kaiser, the Archbishop et al. all look on in pity as Abdul, completely absorbed, walks away. They troop back into the Queen's chamber.

INT. THE QUEEN'S BEDCHAMBER

Everyone has resumed their vigil. The junior serving girl yawns at the back. Suddenly we realise the Queen's oxygen bottle stops emitting bubbles. Bertie has the Queen's hand. He realises she has died.

INT. CORRIDOR OUTSIDE QUEEN'S BEDCHAMBER

Abdul is waiting outside. The doors open. Bertie appears. He looks Abdul in the eye with contempt.

EXT. PALACE GATES. OSBORNE HOUSE. DAY

Bigge, dressed immaculately in black with a top hat, walks to the gates to make an announcement.

BIGGE

I grieve to say Her Majesty passed away at half past six precisely. Long live the King.

INT. QUEEN'S STUDY. OSBORNE HOUSE. DAY

Bertie in the darkness of the Queen's study. He throws open the shutters himself, morning light floods in. He sits at the Queen's desk – it's his now.

INT. QUEEN'S BEDCHAMBER. OSBORNE HOUSE. DAY

Mrs Tuck throws open the curtains as she did at the beginning of the film. The crepuscular room is flooded with light. Maids throw off the sheets. The Queen's body is blanched.

INT. QUEEN'S STUDY. OSBORNE HOUSE. DAY

Bertie looks down and sees on the desk her Urdu journals.

INT. CORRIDOR OUTSIDE QUEEN'S BEDCHAMBER

Mrs Tuck comes out of the Queen's bedchamber. She takes Abdul's hand and leads him into the room.

INT. QUEEN'S BEDCHAMBER

The Queen has been transformed into a transcendental vision. We see Abdul transfixed by the dead Queen. Slowly, with great reverence, he kneels before her.

ABDUL

May Allah bless you.

He kisses her feet. Finally as he raises his head we see his devastated sadness. Then his look turns from one of devastated loss to one of foreboding.

INT. CORRIDOR, OSBORNE HOUSE

Abdul walks out along the corridor and down the grand staircase. On the sound track we hear the sound of violent banging on a door.

VOICE

(out of shot)

Open up in the name of the King!

EXT. ABDUL'S COTTAGE. DAY

Mrs Karim opens the front door. Suddenly several henchmen appear pushing her aside as they rush into the house.

INT. FRONT ROOM, ABDUL'S COTTAGE. DAY

The henchmen run into the room and start ransaking the place. Mrs Karim and her mother in full burqa try to prevent them taking things. A henchman goes past with a drawer stuffed with letters.

EXT. GARDEN, ABDUL'S COTTAGE. DAY

The henchmen have made a big pyre of the letters. One henchman pours petrol on and the whole thing goes up in flames. Bertie looks on contentedly, smoking a cigar. Mrs Karim runs out.

EXT. ROAD TO ABDUL'S COTTAGE. DAY

Abdul walking. He looks up to see smoke. He hears Mrs Karim scream and he starts to run.

EXT. GARDEN, ABDUL'S COTTAGE. DAY

A henchman throws on more letters. Mrs Karim, screaming, is now being restrained by a henchman. Suddenly there is a shout. Abdul comes running into the garden.

ABDUL

No!

Footmen hold back the screaming Abdul as the pyre burns.

BERTIE

I want you out of here immediately.

Satisfied, he leaves. Mrs Karim takes Abdul's hand.

MRS KARIM

They've taken everything.

She surreptitiously gives him something as the pyre burns. He looks down. She has given him the locket. He holds it tight. The smoke of the fire obscures everything.

INT. PASSENGER FERRY, SOLENT. MISTY MORNING

The smoke turns into mist on the Solent. We are on a ferry. Abdul and his wife as it pulls away from shore. No one recognises Abdul. He opens his palm to reveal the Queen's locket. Looking back, he disappears into the mist as the boat sails away.

INT. DARKENED ROOM, AGRA. MORNING

As in the beginning of the film, shutters are opened on to bright daylight as a muezzin calls to prayers.

EXT. ROOFTOP, AGRA

As before, we see a figure from behind praying. The rooftops of Agra below, the Taj Mahal in the distance.

Title:

ABDUL RETURNED TO AGRA IN 1901

EXT. STREETS, AGRA. BRIGHT DAY

The bustle of an Agra street. A figure makes his way through the chaotic street life as in the opening of the film. But this time the figure is slow. We follow him from behind and see he has grey hair. We realise this is Abdul. He makes his way determinedly through the city to a park.

EXT. AGRA, PARK

Abdul makes his way to a statue of Queen Victoria. He kneels. We think he is praying but he kisses the Queen's feet.

ABDUL

Good morning, Your Majesty.

Abdul sits on the base of the statue. He looks out at the crowds passing by. In his hand we see the locket – the camera slowly cranes back. Abdul the faithful retainer has kept his word: he remains loyally with his Queen despite everything.

Title:

HE DIED NINE YEARS LATER

We crane above the statue to see the whole vista of Agra. The Taj Mahal glistening in the background.

Title:

INDIA GAINED INDEPENDENCE IN 1947

The End.