

A DARK YEAR

Adaptation & Dialogues
by Fatmir Koçi & Pierre Gautard

Based on the short novel
VITI I MBRAPSHTË
by Ismail Kadare

Current Revision
(nickel Draft)

Co-production Albania/France/Belgium
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1

EXT. VILLAGE OF MOKËR. SOUTH-EASTERN ALBANIA. SUNSET.

1

A comet crosses the sky.

Stunning mountain landscape. Tiny stone houses spread along the mountain slope. Gardens and orchards of the village houses, with the trees in bloom. Spring. Birds are chirping, sheep bleating, dogs barking.

Caption: SPRING 1914

South East Albania

The comet crosses the sky.

Movie title:

A DARK YEAR

based on the novel "Viti i Mbrapshtë"

by Ismail Kadare

dissolve / credits

2

EXT. CAFÉ. NIGHTFALL.

2

The village café with three tables on the outside. Only men dressed up in traditional costume and carrying guns can be seen. These are Shestan Verdha, Cute Benja, Tod Allamani, and Alush Gjati. The other men, who aren't as well dressed as the first, are following the conversation. The four friends drink raki and smoke their tobacco. Everyone is looking up at the comet in the sky.

ALUSH

Where you think it's going to fall?

CUTE

What?

ALUSH

The comet.

Nobody answers.

CUTE

I wish it could fall on England, on London I wish it could fall. So that those border maps of the Balkans could burn down to ashes.

SHESTAN

Stop talking nonsense, Cute; it's not going to fall anywhere.

CUTE

Then what is it doing up there?

(CONTINUED)

SHESTAN

Just coming round and round.

CUTE

Round and round, just like us here:
leave home to come to the café, and
then leave the café to go back
home...

SHESTAN

Don't you ever stop?

Doskë Mokrari enters the café, with an elongated pumpkin in hand.

DOSKË

This is how the comet looks: like a
pumpkin.

He pulls out a knife, cuts the pumpkin in half and throws the seeds on the table. He shouts.

DOSKË (cont'd)

Get up, you morons; let's go and
save Albania, because she is in
such an horrible mess already... And
you have time to waste with that
harlot up there in the sky?...

Cute Benja is the most nervous of them all. He hits the ground with his tufted green-hide shoe. The chicken scatter away. Dust is raised. With a short stick he draws a line around his foot, something like a map.

CUTE

Here you are! I draw a line around
my foot, and what do I get? I get
Albania. She's no bigger than this
tufted shoe of mine.

SHESTAN

Listen here: even the Queen of
England and the King of France know
that Albania is here. They say they
have lost the state seals, they
have lost the maps, and the borders
are nowhere to be found: nobody's
got a clue how to get them back.
And you know why? Because the Greek
pulls the rope on his side, and the
Albanian pulls the rope on his
side, and then here comes somebody
else - say a Serb or a Macedonian -
and does away with the markers at
night. Then what's next is that
everybody going to pull out their
guns, and it's damn over.

(CONTINUED)

The men nod.

CUTE

Hey, hey, wait a minute. You want to drive me insane? How come this border issue is so hard to figure out? Wherever you have Albanians, that's where the borders should be traced. No more Albanians, the land isn't ours.

Everyone nods approvingly.

Cute (cont'd)

Do you really think this land is starving for a king so much that they took the trouble to order us one in Europe? What do you make of it?

ALUSH

That this country is starving for a king, dammit!

The men laugh. Shestan Verdha, a handsome man, keeps silent, thoughtful. He rolls a cigarette and puts it between his lips. Finally, Shestan stands and talks to them.

SHESTAN

I say, tomorrow we leave for battle. There's nothing worth waiting for. The village isn't going anywhere, the women will take care of the farming. Who's coming along?

ALUSH

Battle? What battle? Who are we fighting against?

Silence. They all look at Shestan.

SHESTAN

What we are fighting for, you mean.

DOSKË

Let's leave first, and then play it by ear. There's nothing to be done here anyway. All we do is sit in this café and talk. Let's not waste any more time. We've got guns and bullets ready. Count me in, captain.

SHESTAN

Captain? I didn't say I was the captain.

(CONTINUED)

CUTE

Well, you should be. Where would we get someone better?

Cute Benja stands up and approaches Shestan.

CUTE (cont'd)

I am all for battle, captain. If we don't do it now, when are we going to fight for Albania? We're fed up with words...

They all stay solemnly silent.

SHESTAN

We are going to fight for the German king. He is coming here to teach us how to become Europeans. Isn't this good enough to fight for?

They all nod, although Shestan's words catch them a bit off guard.

3

EXT. SHESTAN'S HOUSE. DAWN.

3

The sun appears over the mountain top. Smoke is coming out of the house chimneys in the village. Shestan washes himself with spring water in the garden of his house. His mother looks sad.

SHESTAN'S MOTHER

You are such a sweet pretty boy!
You have to get married as soon as you come back.

Shestan hides his smile in his towel.

SHESTAN'S MOTHER (cont'd)

Did you hear what I just said? You should get married and have kids. It's a shame to stay single. Everyone in the village is talking about this.

SHESTAN

Yes, mother, I'll get married when I come back.

4

EXT. STREET IN THE VILLAGE. MORNING.

4

Roosters are crowing and dogs are barking in the village. Shestan Verdha meets his four friends,

Doskë, Tod, Alush, and Cute. They are all dressed up handsomely, with their tight suits and their kilts. Their weapons glisten clean.

(CONTINUED)

Women and kids follow them to see them off. Shestan's mother wipes off her tears with her black scarf, as the other ladies wail, stuck together like cattle. Tod's wife cries a river.

TOD

Those who want to cry, can do so
when we're gone. We don't want to
hear any crying here. Stop it,
okay?

Tod's wife tries to choke her crying off. The men say good bye to their relatives and friends, and set off.

5

EXT. VILLAGE. ROAD. MORNING.

5

Gun in shoulder, and food bags on their back, the men leave the village. Suddenly Doskë stops as if he remembered something. He pulls off the gun from his shoulder.

DOSKË

Wait a minute! Where are we going,
without a map?!

CUTE

What do we need a map for, Doskë?
It's going to mess us up!

Shestan is waiting for them.

DOSKË

No way, captain. We can't go
nowhere without a map. Not serious,
you know? The map shows the roads,
shows the state with its borders,
and its borders show the state.
That's the way it is.

They go back to the village.

6

EXT. VILLAGE CHIEF'S HOUSE. MORNING.

6

A leashed dog in the garden barks angrily. Doskë knocks at the main door.

VILLAGE CHIEF

(off screen)

Who is it?

DOSKË

Hey Chief, open the door, we need
the map!

The village chief opens the door with a puffy face. His wife pops up behind him.

VILLAGE CHIEF

Who the hell do you think you are?
I don't give no map to nobody!

(CONTINUED)

Shestan pulls a gun to the man's head.

SHESTAN
It's war time, you idiot, don't you
get it? Give us the map!

VILLAGE CHIEF
What war is that?

DOSKË
It's just war - war, you asshole!

Doskë feels the mayor until he finds the key to the desk
attached to his pants, then goes inside.

SHESTAN
It's a war for freedom.
You get it? Freedom, you
remember?

The offended village chief starts mumbling. Doskë soon comes
back with a roll of paper.

VILLAGE CHIEF
May you never come back!

They turn their backs on him and walk away.

7

EXT. MOUNTAIN PASS. DAY

7

The detachment has stopped at the mountain pass. There are
signs showing different directions as an important crossroad.
Shestan signals everybody to stop. The signs are written in
French, English, German, Russian, Italian . One can read :

REPUBLIC OF KORÇA. FRENCH PROTECTORATE.

Then, showing another direction, a second one: Austrian
Protectorate.

Then other signs showing different directions: Separatist
Orthodox Princedom of Northern Epirus, British Protectorate,
German Reich Protectorate, Islamic Princedom of Central
Albania, Hungarian Protectorate, Catholic Republic of Lezha,
etc.

They stare at all the signs, bewildered.

DOSKË
Where are we?

SHESTAN
How should I know?

Shestan produces the old map of the Ottoman Empire, that
doesn't show the borders of the new Albanian state. Everybody
gathers around the map. Cute points at something.

(CONTINUED)

CUTE

There, captain; this is where we are.

SHESTAN

What are you talking about? This one here is Greece, it says "Ioannina".

CUTE

Sorry, captain. What do I know, I can't even read!

SHESTAN

Then why don't you just shut up and listen to me. OK... Where the heck are we?

He points his finger at a line on the map, then rolls the map and puts it in his bag.

SHESTAN (cont'd)

We go walk down this river which flows to the sea, that is west. Do you get it?

8

EXT. LITTLE TOWN SQUARE. DAY.

8

The fighters are being photographed in front of a mule and canon. They fight with each other for a place in the front row. Keep switching places over and over, until Sotir, the old photographer, already annoyed and somewhat impatient beckons them with his hand and inserts his head behind the camera's black cloth.

Cute Benja tries to switch place again in order to get in front of the tall Shestan. The head of Sotir shows up from behind the black cloth.

SOTIR

Can't do it like that! Can't do it! Please, freeze!

CUTE

What's the matter with you? Have you got a gnat in your ass? Just shoot the damn photo!

They all cackle. Sotir hides his head again and shoots. The image freezes, and shows the fighters laughing in their beautiful attire. Cute Benja is shown smoothing off his moustache, Shestan is in the middle and Doskë is smiling, looking at his captain.

9

EXT. PLATEAU. MOUNTAIN SCENERY. CENTRAL ALBANIA. DAY.

9

Sunny day. A plateau in Central Albania. In the distance, a stunning mountain range. The fighters, gathered around Shestan, listen carefully to his tentative reading from a half-torn Albanian newspaper. It shows a photo of the king Von Wied, his wife Sophia Schomburg and some officials in Tirana.

SHESTAN

(voice over)

"The German prince Wilhelm Wied arrives in Durrës. He has been appointed King of Albanians, by the Great Powers."

Shestan looks at his friends.

SHESTAN (cont'd)

"Wilhelm Wied was received today by a crowd of hundreds of Muslim, Catholic and Orthodox Albanians, who welcomed their new King."

Silence.

CUTE

Can you believe this?

SHESTAN

Well, now it's too late to do anything. It's our fault too, because we weren't able to come up with a king ourselves.

TOD

What's the big deal with this king?! Is it because he's a foreigner? Do you know that even the Greeks used to have a German king for more than thirty years, not to mention the Bulgarians?

Cute keeps looking at the photos on the paper.

CUTE

Bullshit! Ain't worth nothing these newspapers, captain!

10

EXT. ROAD IN THE PLAINS. DAY.

10

A crowd of Çam refugees (Albanians expelled from Northern Greece) and Jews (banned from Thessalonica): men, women and kids, with their carts, horses and a truck as well, coming in the opposite direction of Shestan's detachment with their mule and canon.

(CONTINUED)

8

DOSKË
Any fighting where you're coming
from?

The Jews don't understand. Doskë gestures.

DOSKË (cont'd)
Fighting ! War ?!

SHESTAN
Wait a minute, they don't seem to
get it.
Did you see any fighting...?

JEW 1
Thessalonica, Helada...

CUTE
These are Greeks, did you hear
that? They don't speak Albanian,
they are Jews from Thessalonica.

ÇAM
No, no, what are you talking about?
We're no Greek, we're Çam.

He says something in Greek as well.

DOSKË
I'm sorry, man. I took you for a
Greek. Where are you heading to?

JEW 1
We fled from Thessalonica to come
here; they told us nobody will do
us any harm.

The Çam translates.

ÇAM
He says they've fled Thessalonica
to come to Albania, because nobody
will ever touch them here.
In Çamëria, that was some
carnage. They slew our sons, took
our land and our cattle away from
us, and then sent the police to
chase us away. God only knows
what will become of us.
For them it's even worse: they've
been chased out from every place.

SHESTAN
Why did you leave?

JEW 1

Massacre. They came at night to
kill and ransack us.

The Çam translates from Greek.

ÇAM

He speaks of massacre, they came at
night to kill and ransack them.

DOSKË

And where are you heading to now,
you poor people?

ÇAM

We don't know. All we need is a
piece of land, to get some shelter.
These Jews are going to Elbasan.
They say they have some friends
there. At least they have some gold
on them to survive. How far is it
to Elbasan?

DOSKË

Two-days walk.

Doskë approaches Shestan and whispers in his ear.

DOSKË (cont'd)

Let's take their gold, captain.
We've got a war to fight, damn it!

SHESTAN

Enough, Doskë. We're not here to
rob people. These are people, like
us.

CUTE

Have a safe trip. And hurry up, so
that night won't catch you on the
road.

One of the Jews starts shouting in Greek.

JEW 2

No gasoline left! I told you not to
take it!

He inserts a stick in the fuel tank and takes it out. It is
dry, nothing's left. Shestan's detachment sets off with canon
and mule, while the Çams and Jews unload stuff from the truck
and divide it among the horses.

11

EXT. ROAD. VILLAGE WITH MOSQUE. DAY.

11

The five-fighter detachment walks by a hamlet half hidden in smoke. They see people cutting grass with sickles and burning it in heaps.

CUTE

Captain, these are Albanians,
that's for sure.

SHESTAN

How do you know?

CUTE

Look at their faces, withered up
under the sun.

DOSKË

Cute, do not insult us Albanians.

CUTE

This is true, that's how we look.
That's what the Sun does, dry up
the skin.

SHESTAN

Enough, you two!

The fighters approach with great caution, holding their weapons ready. The peasants quit working and greet them.

CUTE

Do you happen to know where there
is fighting going on?

The peasants shake their heads. They mumble something, talk to each other, then one of them nods.

PEASANT

Ah, yes, I know. In the East.
You see these mountains, over
there ?

Shestan and his men look at the ridge the man is pointing at.

PEASANT (cont'd)

You have to climb this mountain
here: it's a shortcut - if you go
around it, be too long. You see the
pass? When you'll be on the other
side, you'll see a plain. It's not
there.

Shestan and his men exchange a puzzled look.

(CONTINUED)

11

PEASANT (cont'd)

In the distance, on the other side of that plain, you will see a second mountain. As you go through the pass of this second mountain, you'll see another plain, with a river. That's where the slaughtering is taking place, on both banks.

Two more fighters join Shestan's group

12

EXT. OTTOMAN STONE BRIDGE. RAIN. DAY.

12

It's raining. An old ottoman bridge, long and narrow, thrown on a gigantic arch. The fighters stop to let pass two people. First is a man over sixty, with his traditional Albanian suit, comfortably sitting on his horse, and protecting himself from the rain with a big black umbrella. Behind him a young woman follows on foot, dressed in fancy-colored clothes, dripping under the rain. She wears a cross around her neck. The men greet each other, hands on their hearts.

SHESTAN

Have you heard anything about any fighting, old man?

HORSE RIDER

Fighting?! No fighting here. In the South, maybe.

CUTE

What South? South is where we come from.

The man on the horse motions the girl to move, so that she is not too close to the men. Shestan stares at the girl. She looks back, blushing. The old man seems to get confused. Shestan keeps staring at the girl.

SHESTAN

Where do you come from?

AGNES FATHER

Our village is one day's walk from here.

SHESTAN

And she, who is she?

He shows the girl. The man on the horse doesn't seem to like this question.

HORSE RIDER

She is my daughter. Why do you ask?

(CONTINUED)

Cute laughs out loud. Doskë nudges him. Shestan looks at the beautiful girl with her dripping clothes, then at her father, comfortable and dry under his umbrella.

SHESTAN

Where are you going?

AGNES FATHER

I am taking my daughter to the nuns.

SHESTAN

Why?

AGNES FATHER

Excuse me?

SHESTAN

I just asked you "Why?". It's war. It could be dangerous.

The old man is sweating fear.

AGNES FATHER

The country's back with the Turkish Sultan, that's why. My daughter will be safe with the nuns. They'll give her food and shelter. Then, I won't even have to worry about the dowry and the wedding.

SHESTAN

What are you talking about?

AGNES FATHER

The Sultan's armies are coming! Our wives and daughters, they'll have to cover their faces!

The fighters don't buy what the man says.

DOSKË

Don't lie to us, it doesn't suit your moustache.

AGNES FATHER

My moustache's none of your business, sir!

DOSKË

Yes it is! And Albania has no business with Turkey whatsoever! The empire's dead, it's history.

AGNES FATHER

Don't you understand, you fool? The Turkish Sultan is coming! It's in the papers. It's over, go home!

Shestan comes nearer to Agnes' father and talks coldly, pointing at the exhausted girl.

SHESTAN

Get down! Let her ride the horse!

The man looks scared, but he doesn't budge. Shestan cocks his rifle. Cute, Doskë, Tod and Alush try to stop him.

DOSKË

Stop it, captain. Don't get into a blood feud. These people are Catholic. Their customs are harsh.

CUTE

Quarreling over trifles, methinks.

Shestan is unconvinced. The others try to stop him.

SHESTAN

I don't care what he is. I know what I am doing. Get out of the way!

He approaches Agnes' father and waits for him to dismount.

SHESTAN (cont'd)

Get off, and let the girl mount. She's your daughter.

The man falters, then gets off the horse with a frown.

Shestan grabs the girl by her arm. Agnes tries to resist him, by evading his grip, but Shestan grasps her foot, and tries to place it on the stirrup. Motions her to get on the horse. She doesn't move.

CUTE

Get on the horse, kid. It's for your own good. Your daddy won't say anything.

Shestan looks at the girl, then at her father frozen in anger, and finally greets him, placing the palm of his right hand over his heart. Agnes' father coldly returns the greeting, then hits the horse with his stick. The horse jerks forward. Shestan can't take his eyes off Agnes. Agnes stares back at Shestan. They are in love. Everyone has noticed how dazzled Shestan is.

AGNES FATHER

Move!

(CONTINUED)

Agnes looks at Shestan's beautiful eyes. Shestan's eyes follow her, sadly. Cute shouts at Agnes' father.

CUTE

Sultan my ass, you fucking bastard!

He raises the gun and gets ready to shoot, but Shestan doesn't let him.

Cute (cont'd)

You must be out of your mind, old man! Locking up such a beauty, such a goddamn beauty! Poor girl!

Shestan, through his binoculars, sees the Agnes turning towards him and trying to find out where he is.

... / ...

Agnes' father stops his horse and turns to his daughter. She stays put, with her head down. He slaps her hard. Agnes hits the ground. He yells at her.

AGNES FATHER

I am going to kill you! Right here, right now, with my own hands! You hear me? For Jesus, I swear I am going to kill you! Shame on you!

With a trembling hand, he tries to light a wet cigarette. His daughter follows him, with her head down.

... / ...

Shestan puts his binoculars down, takes his gun and shoots a little aside, to scare the father. The horse is startled, instead. The man on the horse hits the animal with his stick. The girl follows him, through the rain. She turns her head to where the shot came from. Sees only the shadow of Shestan, standing afar on the bridge, smoking gun in hand.

... / ...

Agnes and her father have stopped by the roadside. The man gives hay to the soaked horse, while his daughter is holding the umbrella for him. He opens the food bag and motions Agnes to help herself. She refuses, shaking her head. The man produces bread and some cheese, and starts eating.

AGNES

Dad!

AGNES FATHER

What?

Agnes looks like she can't find her words.

(CONTINUED)

AGNES FATHER (cont'd)

Eat.

She doesn't reply.

AGNES

Dad, I don't want to go there.

AGNES FATHER

What are you talking about?! You have left home already. Everyone in the village knows you are going to become God's daughter now.

Agnes seems to be shocked by her father's words.

AGNES

Dad, are you telling me the truth?

AGNES FATHER

Of course, yes.

Silence

AGNES FATHER (cont'd)

How is it that you don't want to go there? That's God's house.

Agnes insists, still shaking from the cold and emotion.

AGNES

Father, why are you locking me up in that place?

Her father hesitates, doesn't look her in the eyes.

AGNES FATHER

Where can I take you then, daughter?

AGNES

Home, dad.

The father doesn't answer. Agnes keeps her head lowered. The man rolls a cigarette.

13

EXT. PLAINS. DAY.

13

Big plains in Central Albania. Red rebel Flags with the Ottoman crescent can be seen waving all over the place with the green muslim flag. Hundreds of peasant soldiers, some in rags and others in uniforms of the former Turkish-Ottoman army are dancing and beating the drums and singing

(CONTINUED)

REBELS

Give us our daddy! Give us our
daddy! Long Live the Sultan! Long
Live Albania!

The dervishes and the mullahs pray and dance like lunatics. Steam coming from the huge cauldrons as well as the sharp smell of meat being roasted over the fire are everywhere.

Their chief, Kus Babaj, is showing off among them, wearing an old Turkish general uniform. He prays, holding his hands joined in front of his face, and whispers paragraphs from Koran in a trance, making sure everyone sees he is praying. Excited dervishes try out their tricks with fire and knives.

Shestan and his warriors stand hidden on the hilltop.

DOSKË

You hear their new song?

Nobody answers.

DOSKË (cont'd)

Those soldiers heads covered with the Turkish fez, beat their drums and shout: "We want our daddy, we want our daddy," that is, the Sultan. Then they sing: "We set off for paradise, but ended up in hell, Albania, you whore, you've poisoned us all."

Cute seals Dorskë's mouth with the palm of his hand. Dorskë tries to get away. The others try to get at Dorskë, they are angry.

CUTE

Shame on you, Dorskë! How can you call Albania a whore? Could your mouth be cursed for ever!

Dorskë pushes Cute's hand away and raises his gun.

DOSKË

That's not me, you jerk; these are Kus Babaj's thugs! Are you deaf?

ALUSH

Dorskë, stop acting like a fool! How can you call your own land that way?!

They are all standing up now, guns ready. Shestan gets in the middle.

(CONTINUED)

DOSKË

That's what they sing, what do I know?

SHESTAN

Even if they sing it, you don't have to! What a shame, if anybody hears it!

Doskë is stunned.

SHESTAN (cont'd)

OK?

Doskë is silent.

SHESTAN (cont'd)

OK?

DOSKË

Yeah, OK...

Doskë starts to shout.

DOSKË (cont'd)

Long Live Albania, Long Live King Wied!

CUTE

Long Live Albania!

SHESTAN'S MEN

(all together)

Long Live Albania, Long Live King Wied!

No reaction from Kus Babajs' camp. The drum beats covered their shouts.

14 EXT. CONVENT'S GATE. DAY

14

The gate opens and Mother Superior appears. She greets Agnes and her father. He has tears in his eyes.

MOTHER SUPERIOR

What is your name?

AGNES

Agnes.

AGNES FATHER

I'm trusting you with my daughter.

He crosses himself and then places the palm of his hand on his heart.

(CONTINUED)

Mother Superior nods to him who is about to hug his daughter, but a nun has already taken Agnes by the hand and led her inside. The man can barely hold his tears as the gate closes.

15 INT. CONVENT. CORRIDOR. SUNSET. 15

Mother Superior motions to Agnes, a skinny nun.

MOTHER SUPERIOR

This is Rosseta. You will have a spare bed in the same room. She will show you to everything. Off you go!

Rosseta, the Skinny Nun, bows slightly to Mother Superior and goes. Agnes follows.

16 INT. CONVENT. WORKSHOP. SUNSET. 16

Another nun is coarsely cutting Agnes' hair with shears. The Skinny Nun is watching. Agnes stares at the mops passing in front of her eyes and falling on the floor. She looks distraught. The Skinny Nun is amused. The nun gives Agnes a small mirror. She stares at her very short hair.

SKINNY NUN

Go take a bath now.

17 INT. CONVENT. REFECTORY. DUSK. 17

The nuns are eating. Agnes stares at her soup, lost in thoughts. The Skinny Nun sitting next to her takes a piece of bread and gives it to her.

SKINNY NUN

Eat! Move your spoon!

Agnes doesn't react. Mother Superior looks at her. In seconds all the nuns have stopped eating, and wait for Agnes to do something. Silence.

MOTHER SUPERIOR

Eat!

All the nuns wait for Agnes to do something. Agnes understands she must eat. She fills her spoon with soup. But she doesn't feel like eating, she just stares at her spoon.

SILENCE.

MOTHER SUPERIOR (cont'd)

If you don't want to eat, go to your room!
We shall attend to you later on.

Agnes leaves the refectory. Everyone starts eating again. There is a low whispering all around.

(CONTINUED)

MOTHER SUPERIOR (cont'd)

Silence!

The murmurs end.

18

INT. CONVENT. CORRIDOR . EARLY MORNING.

18

Agnes is on her knees scrubbing the floor of the corridor with a brush and soap. She looks exhausted and sad. Mother Superior comes and stands in front of her. She speaks in a low, but harsh voice.

MOTHER SUPERIOR

I knew it. As soon as I saw you, I knew it. What was happening with you.

AGNES

What was happening to me, Mother?

MOTHER SUPERIOR

You think of a man. Do not deny it. I know it.

Agnes looks up at her, wide eyed.

MOTHER SUPERIOR (cont'd)

Don't tell me anything. We do not talk of these things, here.

Agnes gets up and throws the water to wash off the foam on the ground. Mother Superior approaches her, and stares into her eyes.

MOTHER SUPERIOR (cont'd)

When you came here, you brought your body and your soul with you. Right?

She speaks with passion, and tears appear in her eyes, whereas Agnes looks frozen. Silence.

MOTHER SUPERIOR (cont'd)

Right?

AGNES

Yes, Mother.

MOTHER SUPERIOR

But you cannot keep them both now. You have to decide which one to give up. Right?

AGNES

Yes, Mother.

There is a silence, but Agnes doesn't seem overwhelmed.

(CONTINUED)

AGNES (cont'd)
Is it true that an army is coming
from Istanbul, to cover Albanian
women with veils?

MOTHER SUPERIOR
Who told you this?

AGNES
My father. He told me that they are
going to cover us all, from head to
toe, like their wives...

Mother Superior interrupts her with a sharp voice.

MOTHER SUPERIOR
No, this is not true.
Only God's will shall prevail.

Agnes remains apparently shy.

19 EXT. CROSSROADS WITH FOREIGN POWER FLAGS. DAY. 19

Shestan's detachment of fifteen warriors has stopped at
another mountain pass. A sign has been put there, which
reads:

REPUBLIC OF KORÇA. FRENCH PROTECTORATE.

Shestan signals everybody to stop.

CUTE
The French don't seem to be far.

SHESTAN
Shsh! Let's listen for a while,
just in case there's any fighting
going on!

They stop dead in their tracks and turn their heads: silence.
Doskë grabs Shestan's arm.

SHESTAN (cont'd)
What now?

DOSKË
These French, are they with us, or
against us?

SHESTAN
How should I know?

They walk a little more and discover at the top of the slope
a French military outpost.

They are stunned by all the flags they suddenly see: - Great Britain's, France's, Germany's, Italy's and The Austro-Hungarian Empire's - hoisted on a rectangular metallic structure. The flags dance wildly under the wind.

The place is guarded by armed soldiers, wearing the French army uniform. They look alert. Shestan waves at them.

SHESTAN (cont'd)

Don't shoot! What kind of flags are these?

TOD

The first one is British, captain. The second Austrian, the third Italian, and the rest, I don't know.

SHESTAN

And our flag, how come it isn't shown?

CUTE

Why don't you ask them, captain?

SHESTAN

Who the heck is going to talk to them?

DOSKË

Let me do it, captain.

He approaches the guards, who point their weapons at him.

FRENCH GUARDS

Arrêtez-vous!

Doskë stops dead in his tracks. The fighters ready their weapons. Doskë talks to them aloud:

DOSKË

Albania?... Flag, flag, Albania!

The guards do not reply. Doskë points at the flags and repeats his words.

DOSKË (cont'd)

The flag, where? The flag?

SHESTAN

Forget it, Doskë. They do not understand. Ask them about the war. Use that word of yours.

DOSKË

War, war! Where?
War, war?

(CONTINUED)

Doskë accompanies his words with ample gestures, opening his arms and pointing with his finger all around.

FRENCH SOLDIER

No war, no war!

DOSKË

War, War! Bang, bang!

He imitates the sound of a shooting weapon. The guards do not understand. One of them produces a whistle and blows hard. The other one does the same. Shestan and his men do not understand. By now all the guards are blowing their whistles.

CUTE

Let's go, captain! It doesn't look good. They're getting nervous. Their whole army will soon be on us!

SHESTAN

Let's go, then.

The fighters trot away, as the guards keep blowing their whistles all around the place.

20

EXT. SQUARE OF A MOSLEM VILLAGE. DAY

20

The village square. Empty. The door of the mosque is open. None of the village inhabitants is around. Carts and ploughs can be seen scattered all around. The fighters quench their thirst at the stone fountain, and fill up their gourds.

CUTE

Look! They surrender! I swear to God, they are coming here to surrender!

Two men dressed with a French army uniform, enter the village square. One of them holds a white flag. Shestan frowns. The Frenchmen come close and give the military salute. Nobody replies. One of the Frenchmen starts speaking a bad Albanian.

FIRST FRENCHMAN

Where is commander?

SHESTAN

What do you want?

FIRST FRENCHMAN

French commander wants to meet Albanian commander.

Shestan looks at his companions, but doesn't say a word. The French give the military salute and leave.

21 EXT. FRENCH COMMANDER'S TENT. DAY.

21

Shestan, Doskë, and Cute have stopped in front of the French commander's tent in the shade of a couple of tall trees. The French commander is patronizing them, by smoking a long cigar. He turns to his interpreter, but Shestan interrupts him.

SHESTAN

Whose side are you on?

His words are translated into French.

FRENCH COMMANDER

Pardon me?

SHESTAN

I asked: whose side are you on?

The French commander clears his voice, to make the whole thing appear very formal and serious.

CUTE

He seems such an asshole to me.

The French commander turns to his interpreter, but the interpreter seems to have trouble making out Cute's words. He just shakes his head reproachfully.

FRENCH COMMANDER

Let's be frank to each other. France's wish is that the situation in the Balkans be stabilized, that's why we are here. Do you really believe that the Austrian-Hungarian Empire is a friend and protector of your country's interests? I know you cannot believe such a thing. The truth is that they have their own interests to pursue, and you, legendary commander, should avoid falling into this trap! You must also rest assured that France's policy, with regards to...

SHESTAN

Enough already!

He puts his hand on his gun. Everybody freezes. The French Commander keeps talking with the shade of a smile on his lips.

FRENCH COMMANDER

It's such a pity that we cannot find a common ground so that we can proceed with our talks.

(CONTINUED)

FRENCH COMMANDER(cont'd)

I consider your presence, dear commander, as an expression of our efforts, yours and mine, to...

As the French interpreter is translating, Shestan pulls out the map and shows it to the Frenchman.

SHESTAN

Do you know what this is?

The interpreter translates.

FRENCH COMMANDER

It's a map of the Ottoman Empire.

SHESTAN

This is Albania. We are right here. You get it?

FRENCH COMMANDER

If you allow me, dear captain, I'll show you now my map. The one that you have isn't worth anything anymore.

He enters the tent and soon comes out with a map of Europe. He points at the tiny Albania on the map.

FRENCH COMMANDER (cont'd)

This is your country. Right here.

Shestan and Cute Benja bend over to the tiny spot on the map. They are incredulous.

CUTE

What? Jeez, that small!?

The French commander shrugs. Cute hits the ground with his shoe.

Cute (cont'd)

You think Albania is as small as my shoe? Fuck you!

He marks his shoe around as to make a map of Albania.

FRENCH COMMANDER

Keep it if you want. I have another one.

The interpreter translates with a silly grin. The French commander hands Shestan the map. Shestan stares at him.

CUTE

Don't, captain! Don't accept it! Let him keep that piece of trash to himself.

(CONTINUED)

DOSKË

Don't accept it, captain. The
French guy's playing a trick on us.

Shestan tears the map, throws the pieces on the ground, and
turns his back on the French officer. Shestan, Doskë and Cute
walk away.

CUTE

You know, it's not by accident that
France's notorious for being such a
harlot...

They walk away as the French commander resumes pacing in
front of his tent, pulling on his cigar.

22 EXT. MOUNTAIN PLATEAU.NIGHT.

22

Shestan's men are all asleep, but he his awake watching the
stars in the sky. A shooting star. Shestan is in love. Stands
up and has a look all around. Silence. He sits by the fire.
Rolls a cigarette. He looks at the stars. Another shooting
star. Alush comes to Shestan.

ALUSH

What a nice place for a grave!

SHESTAN

Looking for a place of yours?

Alush nods. Shestan smiles.

SHESTAN (cont'd)

Have a look! It's so beautiful, for
God's sake! Isn't that magnificent?

23 EXT. ROAD TO THE CONVENT. DAY

23

A group of four nuns, carrying wood, is walking towards the
convent, along a muddy road. Agnes is heavily loaded. In
front of her the Skinny Nun breathes heavily. Two horsemen
gallop pass them. Agnes watches them as they ride away. The
Skinny Nun next to her nudges her.

SKINNY NUN

Are you out of your mind? Don't
look at men like that! Do you get
it?

Agnes looks through her, lost in her thoughts. The nuns keep
walking. Agnes drops her burden down and turns around. The
horsemen have disappeared. The Skinny Nun looks back, Agnes
stands still on the road. Skinny Nun stops, Agnes doesn't
move.

SKINNY NUN (cont'd)

Come on!

(CONTINUED)

Agnes takes her burden back on her shoulders. The Skinny Nun follows the others. Agnes stays behind, looks around. The nuns disappear on the top of the hill.

24 EXT. ROADSIDE IN FRONT OF THE TWO ROBERTS INN. DAY. 24

Shestan Verdha's detachment has stopped at some distance from the inn, where "LONG LIVE KING WIED" is written on the wall. Cute Benja, dressed up like a mullah - a Moslem priest - comes back from the inn, out of breath, and reports what he saw. He looks ridiculous in his costume.

CUTE

Captain, there are King Wied's Army formations preceding us. At the Two Roberts Inn I met two Dutch officers. They were drinking wine and speaking Dutch. I swear to God!

SHESTAN

Okay, now take those clothes off!

Cute Benja starts undressing.

25 EXT. THE TWO ROBERTS INN. SUNSET. 25

The column of fighters, with the King's flag, is passing the "Two Roberts" Inn. The haystacks, wet with rain, glimmer under the setting sun. Upturned carts here and there. All around the corn granaries, chicken are fumbling the ground for corn, and fires are burning in the fields with a lot of smoke. No sound comes from the inn.

SHESTAN

What a strange silence...

He has hardly said that when gunfire explodes from the haystacks, the granaries, and the fences. Two fighters on Shestan's flank fall. Shestan tries to look through the binoculars, but they get hit by a bullet and fly off his hands. He yells at his companions, who are attacking on their own mind.

SHESTAN (cont'd)

Get back! Get back!

Nobody listens. Doskë curses the enemy, touching his balls.

DOSKË

Where are you, motherfuckers? Where are your sisters, I am asking you?!

A hail of bullets prey upon them. Shestan is losing blood from the scratch wound on his hand. Cute Benja runs towards the haystacks; he tries to set fire to them, but fails.

(CONTINUED)

CUTE

The haystacks are wet, damn it!
Otherwise I would have burned the
motherfuckers alive, like rats.

Now they are all lying down and shooting in the direction of the rebels' gunfire. The mule pulling the cart with the canon is whining, as it tries to free itself. Cute has finally set fire to two haystacks, from which two rebels try to escape running like hell. Shestan and Doskë shoot at the same time, but the rebels escape in the smoke.

CUTE (cont'd)

Captain! Captain! This is an
ambush!

Flat on the ground, Shestan cannot believe Cute is saying such nonsense in such a moment, with bullets whizzing everywhere. Doskë has dragged himself close to one of the haystacks, and he shoots at it. Someone screams in pain from inside. Doskë stabs the haystack with his bayonet. The rebel inside screams again, with a horrible voice:

REBEL

Death to all Infidels! Allah
uakhbarr!

Stunned and smeared with blood, one of Shestan's warriors comes running out of the smoke. Two bullets hit him in the legs, bringing him down. He cries out, tears running down his cheeks:

SHESTAN'S WARRIOR

Long live Albania! Glory to the
cross! Go git them, my friends!

He can't get up back on his feet. Doskë jumps up.

DOSKË

Let's go get them, brothers! Let's
go fuck their mothers right now!

Kus Babaj, the leader of the Muslim rebels, is following the battle through his binoculars. He spots Shestan Verdha's handsome figure, running gun in hand.

[POV through binoculars] Kus Babaj admires Shestan Verdha's beauty. He orders two rebels.

KUS BABAJ

I want him alive. Allah's made him
by His own hand! Such a pretty boy!
An angel!

The two rebels, dressed in baggy pants, go crawling towards Shestan, to get him alive.

(CONTINUED)

But the wind turns, the haystacks flare up, and the two rebels are suddenly surrounded by smoke. They start coughing, and have to run away from the incoming flames. They finally make it through the smoke, but only to face Cute's and Dorskë's guns. The two rebels are shot down. One of them manages to say a few words, with his throat torn in half:

WOUNDED REBEL

Fuck Jesus Christ and your faggot king from Germany!

Dorskë stabs him in the belly with his bayonet. The rebel moans. Dorskë yells at him.

DOSKË

You fucking moron, I am a Muslim too, but I don't insult no Jesus, no Mohamet and no King! Shame on you!

WOUNDED REBEL

You don't have the balls, that's why!

DOSKË

I don't have the balls?! Why don't you pick up your stinking bowels, instead of leaking your crap all around?

The wounded rebel tries to show off with a smile between his pain convulsions, until he falls to the ground, dead, with his belly open.

Shestan's fighters charge. A red-light flares up in the sky. Kus Babaj motions his people to move back. A fighter runs between two haystacks and is about to set fire to them, when rebel bullets hit him through the smoke. He falls on his back. A hand comes out of the smoke, grabs his binoculars and vanishes.

Someone brings Kus Babaj the binoculars looted from the fallen fighter. Kus Babaj hangs them around his neck, and then they all disappear from sight. There's still fighting going on in the inn. One of Shestan's fighters chases a baggy-panted rebel until he gets him cornered by the well, where they both try to impale each other with their bayonet while talking trash:

REBEL

You, infidel swine! You faithless louse! May Allah strike you dead!

SHESTAN'S FIGHTER

You gypsy motherfucker...
You shithole!

Cute Benja continues to crawl, setting fire to the haystacks. Thick smoke is everywhere. The rebels are heard screaming in chorus, as they leave.

REBELS

(screams)

Allah-u akhbari! Allah-u akhbar!

26

EXT. THE "TWO ROBERTS INN". NIGHTFALL.

26

The area surrounding the inn is still lit up by the many haystacks still burning through the smoke. Shestan's detachment surround Cute Benja, who's talking and crying at the same time.

CUTE

It's my fault, I ruined everything.
Because of those demons in the inn -
they were speaking Dutch, I swear
to God!

Doskë puts the barrel of his gun against Cute's heart. Shestan stops him.

SHESTAN

No, Doskë, no! It's not his fault
if he doesn't understand Dutch. How
could he know they were Kus Babaj's
men, dressed up like Dutch
officers? Take that gun away!

They all stand, tense. Cute Benja starts crying again.

DOSKË

Maybe so! But he should know he
knows nothing in Dutch! Didn't he
tell us they were Dutch officers?

CUTE

Because they were speaking an
unknown language.

The kind of answer that makes Doskë mad.

DOSKË

There! That's what's wrong with
him!

CUTE

Don't kill me, brothers! I have
nine mouths to feed! Please, let me
go back see them, tell them a
couple of things once and for all,
then I'll come back and you can do
whatever you want...

Shestan grabs Doskë's hand and pushes the gun away.

(CONTINUED)

DOSKË

Why don't you just fuck off and
never come back, you son of a
bitch!

Shestan gives him an angry look.

27 EXT. ROAD. DUSK

27

Agnes walks on the road, dressed as a nun. In the distance she sees some soldiers coming her way. She immediately hides behind a stone wall. She hears them singing in Ukrainian: they are drunk. They come near the wall and one of them seems to have seen her, but he only throws an empty bottle against the wall. The others want to do the same, but one of them puts his bottle on the wall, and walks back fifteen meters. He shoots at it with his rifle. The bottle explodes. They laugh. Agnes is terrified. Now the dozen of them does the same and the soldiers shoot at the bottles. They are drunk and miss. Some bullets clash in the wall. The bottles explode. Agnes huddles up while splinters of glass fall all over her.

28 EXT. RIVER BY THE ROAD. SUNSET.

28

Shestan and his men are walking to the river. Shestan turns and sees Cute Benja following them in the distance. Shestan and his men stop, Cute Benja stops too. Shestan signals to resume walking.

SHESTAN

Let him do what he wants. Don't
talk to him.

All of a sudden, they hear screaming in their backs: a horserider appears in a cloud of dust holding a Turkish red flag and riding a magnificent white stallion. He is a kid of fifteen, screaming and riding like crazy. Shestan and his men pull aside to let him pass. Sefer, the young horserider, stops, turns his horse around and comes back to them.

SEFER

Hey men, where are you going?

SHESTAN

To fight.

SEFER

I am Sefer. I am going to fight,
too. I will join Kus Babaj. He is
the greatest warrior, a man of God.
And who are you fighting for ?

SHESTAN

For the king.

Sefer looks confused.

(CONTINUED)

SEFER

What king are you talking about?

SHESTAN

The king of Albania, little boy !

SEFER

Look, I am not a boy. I am a
fighter and a thief ! You see this?

He pats the white stallion's neck.

SEFER (cont'd)

It's for Kus Babaj. I stole it just
for him. See, what a beauty! Kus
Babaj loves horses and boys like
me.

Sefer is hardly holding the horse which bucks on his hind
legs. Shestan comes to him.

SHESTAN

Listen, man. Why don't you bring
the horse back and go home?

Sefer smiles.

SEFER

Home? No, no. I am going to fight.
You will hear about me !

Silence.

SEFER (cont'd)

You got bread ?

Doske throws him a piece. Sefer catches it and bites in it.
He pulls the rope, hits the horse, and gallops away,
screaming and waving the red Turkish flag.

SEFER (cont'd)

Long Live Kus Babaj! Long Live
the Sultan, I am going to war !

Shestan and his men look distraught. They reach the river and
dive into the water. While they are swimming and washing
their clothes, Cute stays at some distance on the bank, and
cries.

All of a sudden, Doske, Tod and Alush grab Cute and throw him
naked in the river. At first Cute is afraid they might drown
him, then everybody laughs at him. He's forgiven.

29

INT. INN. GUEST ROOM WITH A FIREPLACE. NIGHT.

29

Logs burning in the fireplace. Kus Babaj is wearing the two
pair of binoculars around his neck.

(CONTINUED)

Some thirty of his people are there, drinking raki, and some of them, already drunk, are singing. Dervishes, all in white, prance around, busy with their rites. All of a sudden, one of the drunkards goes into a trance and stands up, holding a meat chunk in his hand.

TUÇ OSMANI

I am Tuç Osmani, Kus Babaj! May you
live as long as the mountains, may
Allah look after you!

He throws the meat chunk into the fire. Then he starts crying a river.

TUÇ OSMANI (cont'd)

I want to be roasted for the Bayram
sacrifice!

Then, suddenly, he throws himself into the fire. The dervishes rush to take him out, but he is too strong, he resists and goes back into the flames, screaming out of pain because of the burns.

TUÇ OSMANI (cont'd)

Please, don't remove me from the
fire, I need to roast a little bit
more, I am not done enough. I don't
want to be hard under Kus Babaj's
teeth when he'll have me for dinner
tonight! I want to sacrifice myself
this very evening, in the name of
Allah!

Everybody is around this man gone berserk, covered with burn wounds all over face and body, crying and screaming. He tries one last time to get into the fire, but four men manage to master him and tie him up.

Kus Babaj sighs out of grief. Shaqir Ali, a dervish, raises his glass. Kus Babaj follows the same with a glum reflection in the eye.

SHAQIR ALI

God bless you, Kus Babaj, because
you bring light to this house! We
learned about what happened to your
lover boy Vasilakis, it was such a
sad thing, but what can one do
about it? It was written your heart
be filled with grief in your old
age. Lover boys should have their
face covered just like ladies, to
avoid disasters; because love
cannot be kept in jail, and where
love is, a dagger is not far.

Kus Babaj stares at the flames, his head down. One of the guards starts singing with a wailing voice:

(CONTINUED)

SINGER

Ô Hassan Zyber, you killed my
lover boy,
Even if you had seven souls, I'll
tear them all from you.
You cast a shadow and darkened my
old age,
Why should this disgrace fall
upon me, now an old man?
Even if you had seven souls, I'll
tear them all from you."

Kus Babaj, with tears in his eyes, turns to him:

KUS BABAJ

Thank you. God bless you!

Kus Babaj changes the conversation.

KUS BABAJ (cont'd)

We sent a letter to this German
King - or a "memorandum" as the
infidels call it. Have you heard of
this?

KUS BABAJ'S MEN

(around him)

No, never heard anything, Kus
Babaj. Tell us!

KUS BABAJ

We wrote King Wied that we accept
him for our King and master, on one
condition only: that he gets
circumcised.

Everybody bursts out laughing.

KUS BABAJ (cont'd)

And now we're waiting for his
reply.

SHAQIR ALI

Kus Babaj, the King may agree to
it, but will queen Sophia also
agree? Will she like the king to
screw her with that kind of tool?

Everybody laughs. Kus Babaj raises his hand.

KUS BABAJ

God bless you, my boys. Don't
worry: Albania and Turkey are like
nail and flesh, they can't be
separated.

(CONTINUED)

KUS BABAJ(cont'd)

See, Great Allah already placed his sign of warning in the sky, this comet, shaped like a broom.

Everyone nods.

30

EXT. PLACE KNOWN AS "THE THREE GRAVES".DAY.

30

It is raining. Three representatives of the Austrian army show up for talks with Shestan's fighters with a white flag. The Austrians give him the military salute. Shestan lets them know, with a hand gesture, that he wants to speak first.

SHESTAN

Does Austria really care for Albania, or is it that she's pursuing her own interests in this jumble?

The Austrian officer speaks in Albanian.

AUSTRIAN OFFICER

You should know, Herr Kapitan, that pathetic terms such as "care" lose their intrinsic value, when relations between states are concerned.

SHESTAN

That's enough! I understand. Don't want to hear any more.

The officer stares at Shestan.

AUSTRIAN OFFICER

I have heard about you, Herr Kapitan. Still, the idea I had was somewhat different...

SHESTAN

What you think isn't my business.

CUTE

He's lying, captain. He just wants to fool us.

AUSTRIAN OFFICER

May I ask you why this place is called "The Three Graves"?

Shestan answers with a coarse voice.

SHESTAN

I'll tell you why: one of the graves is mine, the other is yours and the third is waiting for whoever is going to be buried there a hundred years from now.

(CONTINUED)

The officer remains stunned. He nods.

AUSTRIAN OFFICER
You speak like a philosopher, Herr
Kapitan. Very well said indeed!

The Austrians salute and leave. Doskë, Cute and the others surround Shestan and pat him on the shoulders.

31 EXT. SMALL TOWN. MOSQUE AND CHURCH. DAY

31

Shestan Verdha, Doskë and Cute Benja, gun on shoulder, stop in front of a shop displaying a carelessly put up sign:

QUAZIM'S BARBER'S SHOP

The shop is closed. Shestan looks through the window. Nobody's there.

CUTE
It's closed.

DOSKË
I can see it's closed.

Shestan approaches the door on which is written:

« I AM AT THE KING'S »

SHESTAN
The barber is at the King's. This
is what it says.

CUTE
At the King's? What the hell is he
doing there?!

Nobody talks, Shestan moves away. Suddenly Cute shows his joy to Doskë.

CUTE (cont'd)
You know what? I swear to Allah
he's gone to circumcise the King!

DOSKË
What are you talking about?

CUTE
Come on, why should the barber go
see the King? What else could he be
doing there? You tell me.

Doske looks thoughtful.

DOSKË
Maybe you're right. The King, of
course, knows how to shave.

(CONTINUED)

CUTE

Of course, he knows how to shave.
He's German! You get it? It's over,
we're going home soon!

He turns to Shestan, but he is nowhere to be seen.

CUTE (cont'd)

Captain Shestan! It's over! The war
is over! Hey, Shestan, the King has
been circumcised!

He runs away shouting. Doskë follows him, ashamed of Cute's
shouting and dancing on the street:

CUTE (cont'd)

Circumcised! Circumcised!
King Wied has been circumcised!

Doskë acts as if he's never known him;

32 EXT. SMALL TOWN. THE BAZAR. DAY

32

Shestan stands in front of a shop displaying wedding dresses.
Suddenly, Cute Benja appears at the street corner, running
and shouting:

CUTE

Captain, it's done! The King has
been circumcised!

SHESTAN

Oh, my God!

Shestan stops Cute by putting his palm on his mouth.

SHESTAN (cont'd)

Can't you ever shut up!

33 INT. BARBER'S SHOP. DAY.

33

The barber is shaving Shestan. Many men have already gathered
in the shop. The barber is telling his story with a loud
voice, his eyes glittering with happiness. Everyone listens
with fascination.

BARBER

Here, see, the king's whiskers,
they were this long.

The barber makes a gesture with his hands half meter wide.

BARBER (cont'd)

Handsome, blue eyed. A real
gentleman.

(CONTINUED)

BARBER(cont'd)

Not to mention his clothes.
Diamonds and gold, shining like a
mirror!

CUTE

Listen, why don't you tell us what
you were doing there? What's your
business with the king? Is he a
relative of yours, or what?

BARBER

What are you talking about? My
brother works at the royal stables,
and his Majesty is very fond of
him. So, one day, he told the king
that his brother - me - would very
much like to shave Him - free of
charge, of course - as often as he
wishes.
And the king didn't say no,
obviously.

SHESTAN

Cute, let him tell us what the king
told him.

BARBER

As I was lathering his cheeks, he
began to tell me...

[Dissolve to the king's apartments, as the barber continues
his story in voiceover.]

34

INT. KING'S PALACE. PRIVATE APARTMENT. DAY.

34

In the middle of a very big room, the barber is lathering the
king's face helped by his young son as an assistant, holding
the towel and the hot water basin. The boy is constantly
smiling.

KING WIED

Do you believe in God, good man?

BARBER

Don't know how to put it, your
Majesty.
I do and I don't.

KING WIED

What does this mean?

BARBER

This is rather tricky thing, your
Majesty. Can't find the right words
to explain it.

KING WIED

Why is it so tricky?

(CONTINUED)

BARBER

How could I put it? I am just a barber, I shave people's cheeks. Religion is no topic for people like me.

The king looks at him in the mirror, silent for a while.

KING WIED

Are you a Muslim?

BARBER

My father's a Muslim, my mother's a Christian. I am both.

KING WIED

Is that so?! How interesting!

BARBER

Yes, your Majesty. In this country nobody makes a big deal of religion. Sometimes people from different religions they marry.

KING WIED

That's pretty interesting.

BARBER

What about you, your majesty? Are you a Christian?

KING WIED

I am a Protestant.

The barber doesn't seem to understand.

KING WIED (cont'd)

May I ask you something personal?

BARBER

Anything you want, your Majesty!

KING WIED

Are you circumcised?

BARBER

Of course I am, your Majesty. Everybody is. My son too.

The barber laughs.

BARBER (cont'd)

Circumcision isn't common in your parts ...if I may say so. Is it your Majesty?

The King doesn't react.

(CONTINUED)

KING WIED
Of course not.

BARBER
Well, that's how the world is. And
you've never seen one, right?

KING WIED
No. Not really. Why?

BARBER
You can have a look at my son's,
here. If you want, that is.
I mean, if it's not too
embarrassing for you.

The King doesn't answer

BARBER (cont'd)
He wouldn't care much.
He understands, he's a smart
little boy.

King Wied smiles. The barber lowers the boy's pants, and
pushes him closer to the king.

KING WIED
Oh, no!...

The little boy who still has the water basin in his hands,
keeps smiling like a simpleton. The barber fumbles with his
son's penis. Then he pulls the pants up, and ties them with
the drawstring.

BARBER
That's good luck for my boy, your
Majesty: the king of Albania's seen
his circumcised pistol.

The King looks stunned.

[Dissolve back to the barber's shop, where the barber is
shaving Shestan, and telling his story]

35 INT. BARBER'S SHOP. DAY.

35

Everyone is laughing out loud. The barber's young son joins
them. The barber works slowly, and looks solemn all of a
sudden.

BARBER
Did you hear about this? They've
sent a letter to the king, asking
him to get circumcised!

Everybody is listening.

(CONTINUED)

SHESTAN

How do you know? Who sent this letter?

BARBER

What do I know?! But if he refuses, there's going to be war. And that's bad news for everybody.

CUTE

Well, what's the big deal? Let him get cut. Only good comes from it. It's healthy, and sanitary.

SHESTAN

Shut up, Cute! Easier said than done. The king knows what to do anyway.

CUTE

Well, you can't be so sure.

Silence falls. The barber wipes off Shestan's face. The muezzin's song is heard "Allah uakhbarr, Allah uakhbarr". People leave the barber's shop and head for the mosque. Only Shestan, Cute Benja, Doskë and the barber remain inside. The barber is taking his apron off. Shestan produces a coin and hands it to him.

36

EXT. ROAD. NIGHT.

36

Shestan's warriors walk. The moon rises in the sky.

CUTE

The moon.

DOSKË

I can see it.

CUTE

Yes, but I mean isn't it strange how the moon shines over the earth?

DOSKË

What's so strange about it? It's like that. That's all.

CUTE

Easy to say...

SHESTAN

Shut up and keep walking in silence. We don't know what's around us.

They march.

37

EXT. ABANDONED VILLAGE. DAY.

37

The fighters carefully approach the ruins of an abandoned village. Nobody seems to be there. Cute walks to the well.

CUTE

I swear to God this water is not
poisoned.

They all look at each other

SHESTAN

What are you talking about?
You're getting more and more
stupid everyday. Do you realize
that?

CUTE

No. Why?

SHESTAN

Shh... Quiet!

All three of them cock their guns. They take a cautious step forward.

SHESTAN (cont'd)

Who's there?

They step back and take cover behind the well. They hear a little noise.

SHESTAN (cont'd)

Come out!

Nothing moves.

SHESTAN (cont'd)

Come out! We are friends!

Agnes very slowly appears. She is still in her nun's clothes, but they are torn and ruined. She looks destroyed. Her headdress is gone. She is crying, terrified. Cute lets the bucket fall down the well.

AGNES

Please don't hurt me, don't hurt
me...

SHESTAN

What?

He lowers his gun and realizes he is facing Agnes. She has dark rings under her terrified eyes.

(CONTINUED)

AGNES
I haven't slept since... three days ago.

SHESTAN
Nobody's going to hurt you. You're alright.

Agnes doesn't trust them, and stays behind the well.

SHESTAN (cont'd)
Are you alone?

AGNES
I don't know.

SHESTAN
What are you doing here?

AGNES
Have anything to eat?

Cute Benja gives her some bread. Shestan comes to her, takes her gently by the hand, and has her sit down on a rock. Agnes cries.

SHESTAN
Why don't you eat something first?

CUTE
Who did this to you?

AGNES
The soldiers.

CUTE
What soldiers?

AGNES
Don't know what soldiers. Couldn't make out the language.

SHESTAN
Cut the crap, Cute. Let her eat.

Agnes looks up at Shestan with hope.

CUTE
What do we do with her, captain?

SHESTAN
She comes with us.

CUTE
Why?

SHESTAN

Why do you always ask questions?

Agnes chews the bread trembling with fear. She raises her beautiful eyes, and looks at Shestan. Cute fills the flasks with water.

38

EXT. ROAD. RAIN. DAY

38

Shestan's fighters and Agnes march. It is raining. Shestan takes off his cape and gives it to Agnes who's shivering from the cold.

SHESTAN

What is your name?

AGNES

Agnes.

SHESTAN

Agnes, you remember me? We met at the bridge, with your father.

Agnes doesn't answer.

SHESTAN (cont'd)

I am Shestan. From the village of Mokër, in the south...

Agnes is mute.

SHESTAN (cont'd)

We shall have to go to the convent, and leave you there. It's the only safe place. It's not too far. When the war is over, you can go back home.

Agnes shakes her head in despair.

AGNES

I left the convent, and I cannot go home.

SHESTAN

How come?

AGNES

I'm scared.

They look at each other.

SHESTAN

Scared of whom?

AGNES

My father...

(CONTINUED)

Shestan looks at her.

AGNES (cont'd)
He will know.

She cries and falls on her knees.

AGNES (cont'd)
He's going to kill me, if I go back
home.

SHESTAN
Did you hear this? She can't go
back home.

CUTE
You mean, since she's been raped...

SHESTAN
(interrupting harshly)
Yes, Cute. Yes.
It's like that.

Shestan, Doskë and Cute Benja feel awkward.

AGNES
Take me with you.

They all fall silent.

AGNES (cont'd)
I know how to shoot!

The three fighters are surprised by Agnes' sudden claim.

SHESTAN
No. You'll stay with the nuns.
We're heading for war.

Agnes grabs him by the sleeve. Shestan pulls off, and walks
away through the rain. Agnes follows.

CUTE
But I don't understand why...

DOSKË
Shut up.

39

EXT. MUSLIM REBELS' ENCAMPMENT. DAY.

39

Kus Babaj's rebels' encampment near a village with mosque.
Kus Babaj rides his beautiful white Arab stallion. He pets
the horse with affection. Sefer looks at him in admiration,
gnawing at a piece of corn on the cob.

(CONTINUED)

KUS BABAJ

That a boy! You made me so happy!

Sefer grins proudly and trustfully.

KUS BABAJ (cont'd)

Listen to me now. I'm going to ask you for a special favor. Tonight at midnight you'll have to hide yourself somewhere close to the King's palace. No one must see you, is that clear? You will have to stay hidden until the clock strikes twelve. Okay?

SEFER

Okay.

KUS BABAJ

You can use your fingers, so that you can't go wrong. Finish one hand first, then the other, then the two thumbs. All together make twelve. If you mess this up, we're going to hang you by your feet.

Sefer keeps grinning like an idiot, too proud of his mission and his trust for Kus Babaj.

KUS BABAJ (cont'd)

This is not a game. It can cost you your skin, you know what I mean?

Sefer nods.

SEFER

Okay.

KUS BABAJ

Very well, Sefer, you'll count four cannon shots. There won't be a fifth. When you have counted four, run like hell. I'll give you the money myself tomorrow. Go break a leg now.

Sefer bows to Kus Babaj and rides away through the dust. Drums can be heard.

40

EXT. THE KING'S PALACE. NIGHT.

40

Munching some bread Sefer walks up the hill where king Wied's palace stands. He stops dead in his track when he spots the Dutch guards. He climbs the wall silently, the guards fail to notice him. He pulls out the torch and the lighter.

(CONTINUED)

SEFER

The queen sleeps here. She's white like a snowflake, they say. She bathes in milk all day long, and then she makes love all night. She's a nymph, that's what she is.

41 EXT. THE KING'S PALACE. NIGHT. 41

The clock of the palace strikes twelve. Sefer is finishing counting his fingers. He lights up the torch, and starts waving it above his head. No shot is heard.

SEFER

May God help me with this!

The torch flames fly wild under the wind.

42 EXT. MUSLIM REBELS' ENCAMPMENT. NIGHT. 42

A turbaned gunner fires his canon in a thunder.

43 EXT. THE KING'S PALACE. NIGHT. 43

The shell is heard whistling through the sky. Sefer closes his eyes. He keeps waving the torch for the far away gunner to aim at. There is an explosion behind his back. He opens his eyes, scared to death.

Sefer hears the Dutch guards shouting. He keeps waving the torch, as the second shot hits closer. He closes his ear with the palm of his hand. He waves the torch again.

SEFER

Why delay the third shot? Is there anything wrong with the canon? Damn, my arm is all numb now. Wait a minute: there goes the thundering... then the whistling, it's coming...

The incoming shell makes a horrible shrilling noise. Sefer gapes at it but holds his torch firmly. The shell explodes behind him.

44 EXT. MUSLIM REBELS' ENCAMPMENT. NIGHT. 44

The canon fires once again.

45 EXT. THE KING'S PALACE. NIGHT. 45

Another cannonball is heard slicing through the night air. It now comes straight at Sefer, as if guided by the torch. Sefer shouts out.

(CONTINUED)

SEFER

I am here, come to me!

He laughs.

[Special effects] Through Sefer's eyes, we see the shell fly towards us. Hit by the shell, Sefer's body flies away in pieces. The torch flies away as well, like a comet and hits the ground in sparks.

46

EXT. RIVER. DAY.

46

Foggy day. Shestan's detachment crosses a furious river. Agnes follows Shestan holding his cape. On the opposite bank a sign has been posted, written both in Latin and Greek script:

SEPARATIST ORTHODOX PRINCEDOM OF NORTHERN EPIRUS

Shestan reads it out aloud.

SHESTAN

It says "The Separatist Orthodox
Princedom of Northern Epirus".
What's wrong with these people?!

He brings the sign down and throws it in the river. Shestan opens the wrinkled map, straightens it out and places it on his knees. He starts marking with a pencil the road they have covered already. They gather around him.

DOSKË

We've done a lot of walking, damn
it.

Shestan draws a line on the map pointing north-east.

TOD

Captain, I'm afraid this place here
is Macedonia.

SHESTAN

How do you know?

TOD

Here, look: it reads "Ohrid", and
there: "Skopje". And these are the
lakes. Here you have the villages
with Albanian names, and there
those with Slav names. We're in the
wrong place. We had better go back.

They start looking around.

CUTE

What are you talking about? We
haven't seen any Macedonian so far.

(CONTINUED)

DOSKË

He's right. Haven't seen any of those. Just go ahead, captain, and draw your line, because this is still our land.

Shestan hesitates.

SHESTAN

Hold on a minute. This is Kosovo and this is Serbia, and I have Albania here, Greece is there, and this place here, you think it's Macedonia, right?

TOD

I've been in Skopje myself, two years ago.

CUTE

And how was it?

TOD

People all over the place; stores, mosques, churches; just like here.

DOSKË

What are you talking about? Can't be just like here.

TOD

I swear, it was just like here. Only the language was different.

DOSKË

Any Albanian there?

TOD

A lot.

CUTE

Good people?

They all look at Cute disapprovingly.

DOSKË

There can't be any bad Albanians, for God's sake.

CUTE

Of course not!

With a pencil, Shestan circles the Albanian territories on the Turkish map. Then, he crumples it and tucks it in his belt. Starts rolling a cigarette. Agnes is asleep. Shestan covers her with his cape. She wakes up, and stares at Shestan, with fearful eyes.

(CONTINUED)

SHESTAN

Sleep now.

The fighters smoke and stay silent. Shestan goes under a tree to rest. Cute Benja smiles and chats with Doskë.

CUTE

It's so weird, Doskë, sometimes I don't even know what I'm talking about. Have you noticed that?

DOSKË

No.

CUTE

That's odd, 'cause I...

DOSKË

I know, I know. Without thinking. I do that sometimes. But you know, what's important is what we do; what we do we do is what we are.

CUTE

Doskë, you know what I miss most? I miss a piece of warm pie so much... My wife can cook it so well, you wouldn't believe. I won't give up the ghost till I've had a real meal one last time: a cheese and onion pie, and a bowl of thin yoghurt, and then a nice little nap by the fireplace. Nothing can beat that.

DOSKË

Cute, for God's sake, why are you telling me all this about a cheese pie? Can't think of anything else?

CUTE

And you know what I miss too?

Doskë sighs.

CUTE (cont'd)

A wedding party. Just imagine if we had a wedding party. Everyone dancing: first the men. Just think of those women dancing. You just have to look at one of them. Goose pimples all over.

DOSKË

Is that what you call it?

(CONTINUED)

Murmur of water from the river and birds chirping in the trees. One of the fighters produces a clarinet and starts playing a famous tune. Cute Benja and Shestan are dancing. Other fighters join in, until the dance becomes really huge, with about thirty people in quilts, hanging on from each other's shoulders, jumping up and down and screaming like wild beasts out of pleasure. Agnes wakes up, startled. She sees the men dancing. She keeps her eyes trained on Shestan's handsome face.

While everyone is dancing, a group of people wearing different clothes sneaks in the back. These are Macedonian peasants, armed with rifles and hay forks. Nobody notices them. They stop at a short distance from Shestan's fighters. They wave their hands in order to attract the dancers' attention, but in vain. Finally, the Macedonians shoot their weapons in the air. The Albanian fighters freeze and look around. Nobody has been hit. The two sides stare at each other, challengingly.

MACEDONIAN PEASANT

(in Macedonian)

Who are you?

SHESTAN

Who are you?

None of the Macedonians replies.

CUTE (cont'd)

(in Albanian)

It looks like we have trespassed
on the goddamned Macedonian
territory!

Both sides remain silent.

SHESTAN

Don't shoot. Just stay calm.

He starts to walk towards the Macedonians. Doskë follows him, in order to stop him.

DOSKË

Don't get any closer, captain.
They are armed.

SHESTAN

Stay where you are. I can talk to
them.

Shestan walks towards the Macedonians. They wait for him. Shestan's people stay ready for combat. Shestan stops in front of the Macedonians. (al)

(CONTINUED)

MACEDONIAN PEASANT

This is Macedonia. What's your business here?

SHESTAN

We lost our way. The map confused us. Now we are going back. My men were dancing to shed off the fatigue.

The Macedonians whisper to each other. Shestan's fighters are inching closer on their guard. The Macedonian peasants listen to him in silence, still unconvinced.

MACEDONIAN PEASANT

We thought you were preparing for a wedding.

SHESTAN

Wedding? No, oh yes, but my men just love to rehearse before the wedding. We are expecting the best dancers.

MACEDONIAN PEASANT

Mmm, mmm. What kind of music is that?

SHESTAN

Why do you ask?

MACEDONIAN PEASANT

'Cause we know these tunes, too. But we play them properly, much better than you do.

SHESTAN

Well, that's why we're neighbors. Divided by a river.

He offers the Macedonian his tobacco pouch.

SHESTAN (cont'd)

Here, roll a cigarette.

The Macedonian hesitates, looks around. Doskë and Cute have taken out their own tobacco pouches. One of the Macedonians accepts the offer, with words of gratitude. Everyone else follows. The sight of these scores of men smoking evokes a feeling of peace. The Macedonian is now staring at Agnes. He turns to Shestan.

MACEDONIAN PEASANT

That girl over there... do you use her for fun?

(CONTINUED)

The Macedonian peasants laugh and stare at Agnes. She gets scared. Shestan looks at them with a frown.

SHESTAN

No. We aren't here to have that kind of fun.

MACEDONIAN PEASANT

Why don't you give us the girl? We'll pay you handsomely.

Shestan tries to control himself. Some Macedonian peasants giggle. Shestan starts talking, his voice not disguising the hidden threat.

SHESTAN

We have been trusted with that girl! Nobody can touch her. Trusted! Bessa! The given word!

He has now switched to Albanian. The Macedonian peasant marks it, thinks for a while, then replies in bad Albanian.

MACEDONIAN PEASANT

I see! Trusted. Vera, in trust. Didn't know.

SHESTAN

Yeah, Vera. Given word. Sacred.

Both sides stare at each other.

SHESTAN (cont'd)

We must go now. God bless you!

Shestan salutes them with hand on his heart. As they cross the river, Agnes walks behind Shestan, holding at his coat. The Macedonian peasants watch them from across the river, still suspicious.

47

EXT. RIVER BANK. SAME PLACE. NIGHTFALL.

47

Shestan's fighters have set up fires. Through his binoculars, Shestan watches the Macedonians across the river, as they light fires, too.

DOSKË

I say let's get out of here, captain. Nobody knows what gifts the night will bear.

TOD

Let's go, captain. We'll manage to find our way, somehow.

(CONTINUED)

CUTE

Hey, what are you talking about? We have no clue what direction to take whatsoever. We risk trespassing in Greece or Macedonia once again.

SHESTAN

We stay here. Didn't do them wrong, neither killed nor robbed them. We just got lost.

He turns around, notices Agnes who is staring at him.

SHESTAN (cont'd)

You know what?

He smiles.

SHESTAN (cont'd)

Let's dance. Yes indeed: let's dance! All night long till morn'. So we all stay awake: us and them. Halil, come here.

The man called Halil approaches him quickly.

SHESTAN (cont'd)

Play, and we'll dance. Now! Play loud!

Halil whistles, and two men show up, carrying a violin and a tambourine. The music starts. Shestan's men get up and start dancing by the fire. On the other bank, the Macedonians look surprised. Shestan's men jump up in the air graciously, their kilts fluttering like wings.

The Macedonians watch, while one of them leaves for the village. The dance goes on and on.

... / ...

Now it's the Macedonians' turn to start dancing, on the opposite bank of the river. Their dance is similar to the Albanians'. They are gradually racing each other. The Macedonian orchestra consists of a clarinet, a violin and a drum. Shestan and his fighters watch on. Now they have to wait for the Macedonians to finish dancing. They wait, covered with sweat. The Macedonian dance seems to go on and on forever.

DOSKË

Captain, these guys will never stop. They are cheating. Be better to alternate our numbers, don't you think?

(CONTINUED)

SHESTAN

They'll get tired soon, Doskë, just
be patient.

But the Macedonians keep dancing on and on, jumping around,
screaming out of pleasure.

... / ...

They look tired now and some of them give up and fall to the
ground. But new ones join the dance, and it seems it will
never end.

... Now the Albanians resume dancing without waiting for the
Macedonians to stop. The race becomes real: which group will
outperform the other? The excitement gets out of control.
Agnes stays crouched, scared by the men's fury.

... The dancers' crowd is getting thinner on both sides,
because some of those dancing are now down on the ground.
Still, a couple of men hold on. Angry at their opponents'
perseverance, they keep moving and shouting in Macedonian and
Albanian.

48 EXT. RIVER BANKS. BOTH SIDES OF THE RIVER. SUNRISE. 48

Crack of dawn. Macedonians and Albanians lie on the ground
sleeping, snoring aloud. Smoke comes out of the fires.

49 EXT. MOUNTAIN ROAD. DAY 49

Shestan's fighters march through a sunlit mountain landscape.
Agnes follows Shestan. Shestan turns around and stares at
her. The girl looks worn out.

SHESTAN

We still have to walk a lot.

Agnes doesn't reply. She gets closer and smiles at him.

AGNES

You are very handsome.

SHESTAN

You say that again and I kill you.

Agnes looks at him with affection

AGNES

Are you a Muslim?

Shestan answers softly

SHESTAN

Yes

(CONTINUED)

AGNES
Do you have a wife?

SHESTAN
No, why?

AGNES
How come?

SHESTAN
How come? I don't know.

AGNES
Well, you are a man, that's why.

Shestan is confused and doesn't know what to say.

SHESTAN
Then what?

AGNES
Nothing. Just saying...

He looks at her. Agnes lowers her eyes, hides her smile. Shestan hurries away.

50

EXT. CONVENT. DAY

50

Shestan knocks on the convent's main gate. No one seems to show up. Finally he climbs over the gate.

SHESTAN
Anybody there?

No answer. Agnes waits. Shestan shouts out once again. No answer.

AGNES
No, I don't want to stay here.
Take me with you!

SHESTAN
No! This is where you're going to stay, it's safe, and the sisters be nice to you.

AGNES
No. They are not nice. Witches, you mean. I am scared...

He motions Cute to help him. They grab Agnes and let her over the wall. Mother Superior appears with three nuns but they don't open the main gate.

MOTHER SUPERIOR
Go away, please. You cannot stay here!

(CONTINUED)

Agnes stares at Shestan still sitting on the wall.

SHESTAN

Sister, you take her please, for
God's sake. Can't keep her longer,
we're bound for battle. If we leave
her on the road, the beast will
make mincemeat of her.

MOTHER SUPERIOR

May God help you!

Mother Superior, nuns and Agnes enter the convent while
Shestan and his men leave.

51 INT. CONVENT. CORRIDOR. DAY. 51

Agnes shouts are heard.

AGNES

(off screen)

No, I don't want to stay here!
I don't want to stay with you,
people!

The Skinny Nun leaves her room and walks stealthily in the
vaulted corridor. Agnes bangs her door.

52 INT. CONVENT. DAY. 52

Agnes stands behind the door of her room. She hears some
noise coming from the end of the corridor. Suddenly, the door
opens and four nuns come in, grab her, take her to the
washroom, and undress her.

53 INT. CONVENT. OFFICE. DAY. 53

Agnes is in Mother Superior's office, sitting on a stool. Her
hair is still wet, she has a new nun's uniform, she looks
nervous. After a while, the door opens and Mother Superior
shows up, along with Rosseta, the Skinny Nun. Mother Superior
sits down in front of Agnes, then speaks softly, with a
threat.

MOTHER SUPERIOR

Sister Rosseta, Agnes will stay
with us until the war is over. You
will have to take care of her. May
you love each other through your
love in God.

Mother Superior crosses herself, and says a prayer. Agnes
watches them closely.

54

EXT. LAKE. DAY.

54

A beautiful sunny day. A lake surrounded by an amphitheatre of hills. Shestan's fighters walking along the shoreline come across a couple of signs that read:

ISLAMIC PRINCEDOM OF CENTRAL ALBANIA.

WE ADMIT REFUGEES FROM KOSOVO, BOSNIA AND MACEDONIA.

WE DO NOT ADMIT REFUGEES FROM SERBIA, GREECE AND BULGARIA.

A procession of Catholic believers wearing icons and a primitive Christ statue walk pass them singing. Alush stares at the Christ's statue. The procession stops on top of the hill, and lays down the cross. They seem to be waiting for something. Worried, Alush comes to Shestan.

ALUSH

What the heck are they doing, captain?

SHESTAN

Dunno. Maybe praying.

ALUSH

I don't think so. There's something fishy going on there. Look at them! They look like they've lost their mind!

SHESTAN

Whatever. They're not armed.

CUTE

You never know, captain.

SHESTAN

Hey, hey, wait a minute. We can't fight the whole world here! What they are doing it's none of our business, okay?

Alush rolls a cigarette. Cute comes running.

CUTE

We got the wrong direction, captain! We're walking in circles!

Doskë smiles.

SHESTAN

No, no, we've always been heading north. Just keep walking!

Shestan is staring at the Catholic mob on top of the hill, who now pray to the Christ's statue.

55 EXT. MUDDY PLAINS. DAY.

55

The fighters plod their way through the mud. An artillery shell whistles through the air. The shell flies towards the fighters and hits Alush Tabutgjati who's drinking water from his canteen. Alush's body is split in two. He expires promptly, in a pool of his blood.

CUTE

What was that, my brothers?! What was that? It came out of the blue... God have mercy upon us!

SHESTAN

Bury him in a good place. Right there!

He points at the muddy plain.

56 EXT. RIVERBED. DAY.

56

The fighters run to cross the river. The green religious flag with the crescent and the red Sultan flag appear on the opposite bank zigzagging above the reeds. Shestan motions his men to get back into the forest at the foot of the mountain. Shots are heard, then drum beats, then people yelling "Allah akhbar" but no one is to be seen.

57 EXT. FOREST. DAY.

57

The detachment is engaged in battle. The forest scenery is wonderful, but all around we see glimpses of chaos. Men hating other men. Everybody fighting against everybody.

Kus Babaj's men hoist their Ottoman Empire flags, yell and play their drums. All are both exhausted and hysterical, some enraged and some panicking. Dead and wounded everywhere. Doskë, runs towards Kus Babaj's shelter - he looks like he's lost his mind altogether. He screams as he hits an enemy with his bayonet. Blood splatters him red all over and covers his face.

DOSKË

Come here, you scum of the earth; come here so that I can make a shish kebab of your bodies. You sonofabitch!

He rushes to Kus Babaj but his guards throw him back. Doskë keeps shouting.

DOSKË (cont'd)

Kus Babaj, I'll go piss on your grave! You shitty bastard!

(CONTINUED)

KUS BABAJ

If I get you, I'll have your balls
crushed, you pork of an infidel!

DOSKË

But you can't get me, you old
carrion. Come here, if you have the
balls! Just come here! I am
invincible, I am a hero!

Kus Babaj's rebels shout in chorus:

REBELS

Give us our daddy, give us our
daddy!

They beat their drums angrily. Shestan's tries to help Doskë,
but all he gets is a bayonet hit in the arm. Shestan knock
him down with the butt of his gun. Doskë collapses on the
ground. The beautiful meadow is now littered with the many
dead and wounded.

SHESTAN

My God, everybody's dead!

Kus Babaj's rebels withdraw and disappear behind the trees.
No more shots. Only moans and cries for help from the
wounded. The rebels' hysterical cackle is still heard through
the forest. The fighters withdraw too, dragging their
wounded. Shestan gets to Doskë and tries to find a word of
courage for him.

SHESTAN (cont'd)

Don't give in, Doskë! We got to get
back home.

DOSKË

No I won't, my captain. I am a
hero, I'm not going to die. That's
impossible. Just give me some raki.

Cute gives him raki with a smile. Shestan arm is all red with
blood. Doskë holds him tight, right on his wound. Shestan
grins.

58 EXT. CONVENT. DAY.

58

Outside the convent's walls. Doskë lies in front of the main
gate. He is about to expire. Nuns are taking care of him.

DOSKË

Play the bells now that I'm still
alive... Play the bells, I say!

Shestan looks at Mother Superior. She nods with her head, and
a young nun runs to the bells.

(CONTINUED)

Shestan turns his eyes towards the inner door of the convent. Waits. The bells are tolling. Doskë has a smile.

DOSKË (cont'd)

You hear? They are ringing for me!

Shestan approaches Mother Superior.

SHESTAN

Please, Mother Superior. Keep him here. We cannot take him with us.

MOTHER SUPERIOR

God forgive me, we cannot. I'm so sorry.

SHESTAN

But Mother, we are from a village in the South.

MOTHER SUPERIOR

Then why don't you go bury him there?

SHESTAN

Mother, our village is far away. We don't know when we shall be back. You see, we cannot keep a dead man with us for weeks. He's not going to last. We have to give him a proper burial.

MOTHER SUPERIOR

He's none of us. We cannot bury him.

Shestan is getting nervous.

SHESTAN

How so? Is he not a human being? Okay, just leave him outside, so the dogs devour him.

As he speaks, he catches a glimpse of two nuns showing up with a couple of bread loafs. He freezes. One of the nuns, is Agnes. She stops in front of him. He looks at her with affection. Agnes gives him a smile, hands him a bread loaf. Shestan accepts it. Agnes keeps her hands on the loaf, to let him know that he must look at the bread, carefully. Shestan is aware of her silent request but doesn't understand. Agnes takes the loaf away from his hands, and puts it in his bag. Agnes then leaves, but she turns back once again, to have a last look at Shestan. Shestan seems lost. Doskë is yelling at the nuns.

DOSKË

Damn you! I am dying! Play the bells!

(CONTINUED)

DOSKË(cont'd)

Don't want to go anywhere, don't
want to stay with those witches!

SHESTAN

Watch your mouth, Doskë! You can't
talk like this. We are guests here.

DOSKË

Play the bells! Christ is
resurrected! I don't go to church,
Me? I go to battle! No, no, I go
home. Tomorrow!

One of the nuns rings the bells, energetically. Doskë is more
and more delirious.

DOSKË (cont'd)

Do you hear it or not? Please,
brothers, take me home, please!

Shestan turns his head, looking for Agnes, but he can't spot
her anymore in the courtyard. The nuns have already closed
the main gate. Outside the convent's walls the fighters are
having their meal, and resting. Someone is already singing:

SHESTAN'S MAN

"Albania, why don't you resist,
Albania, why are you melting
away, Like flowers in March,
Like snow in April?"

The others sing along.

59

EXT. CONVENT. AGNES ROOM. DAY

59

Agnes is in her room. The men's singing is heard coming from
outside. She prays. She looks at Shestan through the window
and cries. She follows every single move of his: the way he
walks, the steps he takes, his posture, the gestures he makes
with his hands; she tries to catch his eyes as he turns,
occasionally, towards the convent's windows.

AGNES

Please forgive me, God!

She falls on the bed, face forward. She prays to the wooden
figurine of Jesus, but she's so badly in love with Shestan.

AGNES (cont'd)

No, I can't pray. Oh, God, why did
you make him come here?

Suddenly, there is a knock on the door. Agnes stands up
abruptly. Wipes off her tears. The knock is heard again. She
opens the door: Mother Superior.

... / ...

(CONTINUED)

Mother Superior and Agnes sit facing each other.

MOTHER SUPERIOR
My dear, God will help you forget,
if you help yourself, that is.

AGNES
I can't, Mother. I have sinned.

MOTHER SUPERIOR
We all have.

They stay silent for a while.

MOTHER SUPERIOR (cont'd)
If you hope time will make it
easier for you, it isn't going to
happen. If you wait for a man, he
might come to you, if he is not
killed in the war. But if you wait
for God, he will certainly come to
you.

AGNES
When is God coming, Mother?

MOTHER SUPERIOR
I never ask myself that kind of
question.

AGNES
Why don't you, Mother? Is it a sin?

MOTHER SUPERIOR
No, Agnes, it's not. It's just that
you can't answer it. The waiting
itself is the answer.

Agnes looks at her, taken aback. Mother Superior stands up,
rather satisfied with herself, and walks out of the room.

60 INT. CONVENT. CORRIDOR. DAY.

60

The Skinny Nun's screams are heard echoing throughout the
convent. Rosetta has lost her mind, and the other nuns are
holding her firmly, so that she doesn't hurt herself bumping
against the walls or the floor. Agnes watches the scene from
her bedroom door.

The Skinny Nun screams, and the nuns hold her above the
ground, as they try to tie her up. Mother Superior orders
them to follow her. Someone tries to muffle Rosseta's
screams. Two other nuns cry, upset by their friend's
breakdown. After a while, the screams can't be heard any
more. Agnes stays at the door of her room, terrified and
lonely.

61 INT. CONVENT. REFECTORY . DAY.

61

The nuns are gathered in the refectory. Mother Superior speaks.

MOTHER SUPERIOR

I have bad news for all of us. The king is leaving. These are times of troubles. We must be prepared: anything can happen. Let's pray to our Lord, Jesus Christ, so that he grants us protection.

The nuns cross themselves and pray.

MOTHER SUPERIOR (cont'd)

This is why I will not tell you, because I love you all: those who want to leave - whoever they are - can do it now.

Long silence. Nobody moves.

MOTHER SUPERIOR (cont'd)

God bless you all.

Mother Superior keeps an eye on Agnes. The Skinny Nun looks at her too. But Agnes keeps her head down, without reacting to Mother Superior's words.

62 EXT. ROAD THROUGH THE MOUNTAINS. SUNSET.

62

Shestan and his fighters are on a long and narrow road through the mountains of Northern Albania. They come across a road sign that says:

THE CATHOLIC REPUBLIC OF LEZHA

They knock the sign down and destroy it. Shestan lays his bag on the ground and looks for the map. he opens it, and picks up the bread loaf Agnes gave him. He shares it in half with Cute. Cute finds a letter inside his share. He cleans it up, and opens it. But he cannot read. He looks around to make sure no one has seen him, then comes near Shestan and gives him the letter.

CUTE

Here, that's what I found, inside your loaf.

SHESTAN

Inside?

CUTE

What's in it?

(CONTINUED)

SHESTAN

It's for me.

CUTE

For you? Who wrote it?

Shestan cannot find a proper answer. He has figured out the letter comes from Agnes.

CUTE (cont'd)

Read it to me, captain, please!

SHESTAN

This is from the Bible, Cute. The Christians' Bible. God's words.

CUTE

God's? No kidding!

Please read them to me, captain.

Shestan reflects, but his eyes are dancing on the sheet of paper.

SHESTAN

God says: "Thou shalt not kill!".

Cute Benja reflects then shakes his head and resumes chewing his bread.

CUTE

Allah says that too. But who sent you this letter?

SHESTAN

God did, Cute.

CUTE

God? Why would God write you?

SHESTAN

It is a sign, Cute.

CUTE

What is this sign, captain?!

I don't get it.

SHESTAN

God says we should go back home.

Cute Benja speaks with a trembling voice.

CUTE

God is right. That's what I say too, let's go back to our kids.

Shestan reads the letter in low voice.

(CONTINUED)

SHESTAN

"God says to Moses: That man who loves a woman but who hasn't married her yet, let him go back to her, because if he is killed in battle she will become someone else's..."

The letter starts trembling in his hands.

63

EXT. MUSLIM VILLAGE. CENTRAL ALBANIA. DAY.

63

A mosque in the background. The peasants in Turkish attire, and a group of dervishes dressed in white, are listening to the sermon of Ahmet the dervish. Ahmet is standing on a huge boulder and keeps wagging the stick he holds in his hand. A drummer crisscrosses the crowd, beating his drum. He stops when the dervish starts talking.

AHMET

Everybody's gone, Allah, but You!
You remained in the sky so that
we could remain here on Earth.
Father Sultan, please forgive
her, because she hardly knew what
she was doing; she turned down
your helping hand, and preferred
a German to you; a German who
can't even keep his pants up.
What a shame!!

Shestan's detachment enters the small square, holding up the King's flag. The peasants receive them coldly. The dervish stops his speech. Cute Benja approaches a group of men and salutes them.

CUTE

Greetings! Can we buy some food
here?

PEASANT

No food here in the village. Only
Allah can give us bread.

(a3) Cute mutters something between his teeth, then approaches Shestan and talks to him in a whisper. Shestan tells him to listen to the dervish, while checking the surroundings.

AHMET

Ô Great Allah! Can't you see the
devil wants to do away with
Albania? He wants the women's
veils ripped open! But a woman
with her veil torn isn't a woman
anymore but a whore, and whole of
Albania becomes a brothel.

(CONTINUED)

AHMET(cont'd)

But You, Ô Great Allah, You won't allow this to happen, and us your humble servants, we are ready for sacrifice, and we will hang these infidels and miscreants by their feet!

As the dervish goes on with his speech, Shestan and his companions look at the faces of those listening. Suddenly, a group of religious kids dressed in white robes come out from the mosque, running threateningly, and they join the listeners, sitting down cross legged. Shestan is getting very suspicious and feels the situation is turning acid. (a2)

AHMET (cont'd)

We don't want an Albania with three religions, but a free Albania, with the one and only true religion, that of Mohammed's! What must be, must be, my sons. Allah gave me this life, and if Allah requests it, I will gladly give him back.

The crowd pray and psalmody:

CROWD

Thank you, thank you! Ô Dervish Ahmet!

Ahmet kneels on his rock and chants his prayers with his eyes closed. The crowd follows. Suddenly, the dervish stops his prayer, stands, and points at the fighters.

AHMET

What are you looking for, brothers?

SHESTAN

We'd like to buy food. We pay for it in cash.

AHMET

What are you?

SHESTAN

We're just people. Trying to join the war.

AHMET

The war is over, captain. The king ran away like a rat. Allah saved us all. Allah is great! Allahu akhbar! He gives us war, and he gives us bread.

(CONTINUED)

SHESTAN

You are mistaken, Ô dervish. Men
are those who make the war!

Ahmet the dervish refuses to answer, climbs down the rock and heads for the mosque, leaning on his walking stick. As Shestan's fighters leave the small square, kids follow them and throw stones at them. They do not react.

SHESTAN (cont'd)

Let it be, they're just kids. They
don't know what they're doing.

CUTE

That filthy moocher! With all the
stink, still talking about God!

The kids have stopped at the end of the square, and keep throwing stones at the fighters, mocking them until they disappear.

64

EXT. BLUE INN. ROAD. NIGHTFALL.

64

The Inn appears in the background. The detachment of the fighters can hardly walk any longer. They are crushed with fatigue. Cute stops and spits on the ground angrily.

CUTE

Where's the war, captain? Seems to
be running away from us all the
time. Don't think we're getting
anywhere, captain. We're exhausted,
walking night and day.

Shestan answers him sharply.

SHESTAN

You asking me where the war is? How
should I know, Cute?! We set off
for war together. If we can't find
it, it's nobody's fault. And stop
screaming as if they were
slaughtering you.

CUTE

The hell with war! I want to go
back to the village. We had to
leave our homes, our wives and
kids, for this damned war. But what
do you know, anyway? You have
neither wife nor kids.

Shestan is silent. Cute keeps walking and the other fighters follow him. Shestan is left behind.

65 DREAM (AGNES). ROAD. SUNSET

65

Sunset. Agnes the Nun is walking fast on the road. She turns her head towards the setting sun. It's dusk already. She quickens her step, scared. On the other side of the road, she sees herself, wearing Shestan's coat. Agnes stops and looks at her. Agnes with the coat takes the hand of Agnes the Nun and they walk away.

AGNES WITH THE COAT
I know where he is.

AGNES THE NUN
Where?

AGNES WITH THE COAT
I can't tell you. Follow me!

Agnes the Nun doesn't believe her.

AGNES WITH THE COAT (cont'd)
Look, his coat. He lost it on the way.

AGNES THE NUN
Tell me where he is!

AGNES WITH THE COAT
He is on his way to his village. We must find him before he gets there. Once he's there, he is getting married. His mom's found a bride for him.

AGNES THE NUN
Getting married?

Agnes with the coat takes her by the hand and pulls her, but Agnes the Nun resists, pulls her hand away and runs to where she was coming from.

Agnes with the coat stands in the middle of the road. It starts raining. Agnes the Nun runs away terrified and disappears.

Agnes opens her eyes, realizes she has been dreaming. She catches her breath, still terrified by the dream.

66 INT. CONVENT. NIGHT

66

Candle in hand, the Skinny Nun is at Mother Superior's door. She cries.

SKINNY NUN
Mother, open up, it's me, Rosseta!
Open the door, please!

(CONTINUED)

Mother Superior opens the door, surprised by this late visit, and asks Rosseta inside.

SKINNY NUN (cont'd)
Mother, may God forgive me! Sister Agnes has escaped!

Mother Superior crosses herself. She fills a cup with water, and hands it to the crying Skinny Nun. She puts on her black robe, and sits in front of her.

MOTHER SUPERIOR
Listen, sister. Nobody must know she is gone. This is God's will. It's not your fault.

The Skinny Nun can hardly stop sobbing. Mother Superior talks to her softly.

MOTHER SUPERIOR (cont'd)
Rosseta, sister Agnes is not going to come back. She has chosen her own way. That's life, my dear. A long and winding road, with no end in sight. The end, though, always comes to you.

The Skinny Nun, troubled by these wise words, looks up at her with affection.

67

EXT. HILL IN FRONT OF THE BLUE INN. NIGHTFALL

67

Kus Babaj follows Shestan's fighters through his binoculars. (a4)

KUS BABAJ
Come back, my son! Ô Allah! They are so tired. Tell them to come back and get some rest at the inn!

Suddenly, bells start ringing at the convent. Kus Babaj swears.

KUS BABAJ (cont'd)
Shut up! Damned whores! What's the fuck with these bells now?

GUARD
It's the infidels' Bayram, Kus Babaj.

Kus Babaj points his binoculars at the fighters.

KUS BABAJ
Come back, my sons, come rest at last before the big sleep...

(CONTINUED)

POV from the binoculars: the fighters walking in line, then Shestan Verdha's handsome profile.

KUS BABAJ (cont'd)

Are you still trying to run away
from me, my son? Ô Allah, I pray
You, tell them to spend the night
at the inn, they're so tired!

Through his binoculars, he sees Shestan give a suspicious look at the desert plains surrounding the inn.

68 EXT. ROAD PAST THE BLUE INN. NIGHTFALL. 68

The fighters have now left the inn behind. Cute Benja stops, stamps his feet on the ground and yells.

CUTE

What do we do now, captain Shestan?
Can't walk no more. Enough.

The detachment stops. Shestan turns his head and stares at the inn already wrapped in darkness. Signals his companions to walk back.

69 EXT. BLUE INN. COURTYARD. NIGHTFALL 69

A man with a lantern greets the fighters at the inn's gate. He is Ali, the inn-keeper. Shestan takes the lantern from his hand and raises it to the man's face, Ali brings up a smile.

SHESTAN

What is your name?

ALI

Ali.

SHESTAN

We'll spend the night here. We need
your word we're going to be safe.

The inn-keeper marks it, showing surprise at Shestan's request.

ALI

You have my word! Come inside!

He puts his hand over his heart and bows.

SHESTAN

Give us something to eat and then
prepare our beds! Our animals have
to be attended to as well. Here's
some money.

He produces some coins and drops them in Ali's hand. The fighters enter the inn.

(CONTINUED)

Ali motions his two sons to go feed the horses. Shestan goes back to the inn's gate and checks the road. He then goes sit on a tree stump and starts rolling a cigarette. He looks downhearted. Stares at the moon reflections upon the ponds. Lights his cigarette and starts smoking. Sleep is closing down on him. He goes to the pond and splashes some water onto his face. Then, he climbs on the roof. Up there he can see the road and the inn's courtyard. The need to sleep is becoming a torture. He wakes up with a jolt when the cigarette burns his fingers. Stands up, listens to the silence. Only the frogs' chorus can be heard. He lies down on the roof. He's asleep.

70

EXT. BLUE INN. ROOF. NIGHT

70

On the roof, Shestan is sleeping under the stars, covered with his coat. Suddenly, Cute Benja's scary coarse scream is heard, like a diabolic cackle:

CUTE

We're getting slaughtered,
brothers!

Drums are heard, as in the Muslim rebels' rituals. Then a rooster sings. Head with red crest and beak opening and closing.

Shestan opens his eyes. The sky is full of stars. He hears drum beats. He is still in his dream. He stands up. Right at the rooftop he sees the shadow of a man with a long knife in his hand, shining in the moonlight, coming at him.

SHESTAN

Ali, is that you?

Ali the innkeeper screams like mad and jumps on Shestan. The two men roll over fighting on the roof. Then fly down still fighting in the air. The two bodies land heavily on the haystack. Ali is on top but doesn't move anymore, while Shestan, underneath, has his eyes wide open, having a uncanny look. Slowly, he closes them.

71

EXT. AGNES' HOUSE. NIGHT.

71

Still wearing the nun's robe, Agnes knocks on the door at her house. Dogs bark. One of them - her dog - comes to her, recognizes her. The door opens, and light from a burning candle lets somebody's face be seen.

AGNES FATHER

Who is it? Come in, please!

AGNES

Daddy, it's me, Agnes!

AGNES FATHER

Who?

(CONTINUED)

72

AGNES

Me, Agnes, father!

The man freezes. He brings the candle closer to his daughter's face. Agnes removes the scarf. The man now recognizes her. He is shocked. Steps back, and turns his back on her. Agnes opens her arms towards her father.

AGNES (cont'd)

Father, I am back!

The father, although moved, raises a hand in denial.

FATHER

Go back to where you came from,
girl!

Agnes, tearful, takes a few steps towards him. The man turns to her, threatening.

AGNES FATHER

Get off my door, I say!

AGNES

Daddy, please, for God's sake, let
me in!

She falls on her knees. The man goes somewhere inside, and then reappears with a rifle. Agnes sits with her head lowered.

AGNES FATHER

Don't tempt me, girl! Go back where
you came from!

AGNES

Father, I can't go back there. I
don't want to, I can't live with
them. Please, don't do this to me!

Her father has lost his mind. Agnes doesn't budge, even though the gun's barrel looms over her head. Agnes's mother has appeared on the threshold, and crosses herself. Agnes looks at her.

AGNES FATHER

Go away, I say. In God's name, go
away. I don't have a daughter to
receive in my house. Go away, while
it's still dark and people are
asleep.

He's tearful too. Agnes doesn't move. Her father raises the gun and shoots at the ground in front of her. Gravels sprinkle everywhere. Dogs bark. Agnes is startled, but she still refuses to move. The father brusquely pushes his wife aside, and closes the door.

(CONTINUED)

Agnes stays for a while on her knees, then stands up and goes to the well. She takes some water, washes off her tears. Her dog comes back to her, questioningly.

72 EXT. AGNES' VILLAGE. NIGHT 72

Agnes walks through her village. She is scared, dogs bark, roosters protest and cackle. She stops walking and looks around.

73 EXT. COUNTRY ROAD. BREAK OF DAWN. 73

Agnes walks fast on a deserted country road.

74 EXT. BLUE INN. COURTYARD. SUNRISE. 74

The sun is coming slowly out. Shestan's fighters' severed heads fly out through the inn's main entry door and fall in the mud, with the rebels screaming. Drums are being played and Kus Babaj's men are dancing and singing around the heads.

KUS BABAJ'S MEN

"We set off for paradise, but ended up in hell, Albania, you whore, you've poisoned us all. Five hundred years of fun, what do you want now, boys. Albania, you whore, you've poisoned us all.

In the inn's courtyard Shestan sits in an armchair, holding his wounded belly. Kus Babaj stands besides him playing with his rosary.

KUS BABAJ

Your friends are gone to paradise.

Shestan looks at the pile of severed heads.

75 EXT. MUSLIM VILLAGE. WOODEN CAROUSEL. DAY. 75

Kus Babaj and Shestan Verdha ride the carousel. Kus Babaj stares at him with desire and talks to him affectionately.

KUS BABAJ

Are you Christian?

SHESTAN

No. Muslim.

KUS BABAJ

Really? I thought you were Christian. My lover Vasilakis was a Christian. Do you know what happened to him? They killed him, they sliced him through the nipple.

(CONTINUED)

Silence. The carousel moves around whining and making all sorts of cracking sounds. Kus Babaj sighs and seems about to cry.

SHESTAN

What did you want to tell me?

KUS BABAJ

What is it that you wanted?

SHESTAN

We were looking for war.

KUS BABAJ

What war?

SHESTAN

The real one.

Kus Babaj laughs out loud, flashing his gold teeth.

KUS BABAJ

There never was a real one. Man goes to war in order to fool himself. Or maybe because he doesn't know what to do with his life. Or because he can't stay home. Look at me: do you know why I roam the country like this?

SHESTAN

No, but it's one of the questions I wanted...

KUS BABAJ

Because I have nothing left. My heart is broken. I am a lonely man. Are you in love?

(a5) Shestan doesn't answer. He stands up, unaware of the spinning carousel.

KUS BABAJ (cont'd)

Where are you going? Wait!

Shestan jumps off the platform. Kus Babaj follows him with his eyes, and calls out to him.

KUS BABAJ (cont'd)

Why waste your life? You are going to get killed, you pretty thing...

Shestan walks away and passes Kus Babaj's rebels sitting cross legged around a fire. Kus Babaj, still riding the carousel, has tears in his eyes.

76 DREAM (SHESTAN). SHESTAN'S HOUSE.

76

The roosters are singing. Shestan is sitting next to the fireplace in his house, wearing a white shirt. A big bread loaf is being baked on the cinders. AGNES shows up at the door, dressed like a nun. She smiles. She carries in her hands a steaming hot water basin. She approaches Shestan looking at each other in the eyes. Shestan washes his hands and his face. He then takes Agnes's hand, and she kneels next to him. Shestan lowers her black robe, and she appears naked. Shestan slowly washes her face, her body, her legs. AGNES picks the bread loaf from the hearth, blows off the ashes to clean it, breaks the bread and gives a piece to Shestan, who stares and smiles at her...

77 EXT. NUNS' CONVENT. DAWN.

77

The nuns walk out of the convent's gate and walk up the dusty road in procession. The bells toll.

78 EXT. CROSSROAD. LATE MORNING. XXX

78

Agnes walks on a country road. She arrives at a crossroad where people are going up to the Hill of Holy Grave. She sees in the distance the procession of nuns coming towards her. She kneels on the side of the road and waits for them.

(a6) The procession of nuns is about to pass Agnes still kneeling on the side of the road, when Mother Superior suddenly notices her and tells the nuns to halt. Agnes throws herself flat on the ground, asking for forgiveness. Mother Superior looks at her, then makes sure the other nuns are listening. Then she speaks:

MOTHER SUPERIOR

Now, now, my child, come... Rise up.

Agnes gets on her knees, head bowed.

MOTHER SUPERIOR (cont'd)

Why don't you go back home?

AGNES

I can't, Mother. I have sinned.

MOTHER SUPERIOR

Do you remember what I told you once?

Silence

MOTHER SUPERIOR (cont'd)

I told you you had to choose between the love of God and that of a man.

(CONTINUED)

76

MOTHER SUPERIOR(cont'd)

That if you wait for God, he will certainly come to you, but if you wait for a man, it isn't going to happen, even if he isn't killed in the war. Do you remember?

AGNES

Yes, mother.

Mother Superior speaks with a soothing humbleness:

MOTHER SUPERIOR

Poor Agnes, you see, I - myself - isn't much in the eyes of the Almighty, and I didn't want to make a prediction. I am not a soothsayer. I am too small a being on this earth to have the power to know what will happen in the future. Only God knows what will happen, and He shall prevail. We all put our faith in Him. Maybe God spoke through my words when He tried to warn you, and this is why what I told you cannot be a prediction.

Agnes looks defeated but doesn't move. She didn't quite catch what Mother Superior is getting at...

MOTHER SUPERIOR (cont'd)

Of course I know, my poor child, you didn't want this to happen, but it has happened. That's the way it goes in life. I have heard that a party of Albanian Muslims from the village of Mokër has been slaughtered about twenty kilometers from here in an ambush, inside some inn. It was a massacre, I was told: none of them survived. I believe we are talking about the same people. I am really sorry.

Then Mother Superior just walks away towards the Sacred hill, followed by her nuns and some people. Agnes is completely destroyed. A crowd passes by, she doesn't move for a while. Some wind blows. Time passes while she stays curled up in the dust.

Finally she rises. She seems elsewhere. She follows the crowd like a ghost. Her robe is gray with dust.

79

EXT. HILL OF THE HOLY GRAVE. SUNNY DAY.

79

The hill shimmers under the sun. Two different processions join each other on the top of the hill.

(CONTINUED)

The first is composed of Catholic peasants from St. Mary's village with a large cross carried by several people. The other procession comes from the neighboring Muslim village of Zall Her, hoisting the green flag with the moon crescent. Agnes gets in the crowd and hides behind the nuns.

On top of the hill, a Muslim old timer points to a large rock, half buried in the ground. There's an Arabic inscription on one side of the rock, and a Latin inscription on the other side. He points to the sky. (a7)

OLD MAN

Listen to me, all of you! This is the Holy Grave of Saint Doruntina, a saint for Muslims and Christians! Ahmet the dervish will be buried alive and will stay inside his grave until sunset. We shall dig him out only then, and if Allah helped him stay alive, we'll erect the mosque right here. Nobody will have to fight about it any more! Now it's up to you, Christians, to select one of your kind, to be sacrificed and see whether he'll make it until sunset. If nobody wants to be sacrificed, then go back to your place and ring your bells, and let everyone know that a mosque is going to be built right here, with Allah's help!

Three men are already digging the grave for Ahmet. He sits by the grave and waits: he prays, rosary in hand. The Catholic side remains silent. The old Muslim yells out loud.

OLD MAN (cont'd)

Isn't there anyone among you, Christians, who is ready to give up his life for his God?

Silence. (a8) Agnes turns to the assembly and speaks out with a loud voice.

AGNES

Listen to me, people, Muslims and Christians! Take me to the cross: I want to be crucified! Let my father know that his daughter followed God's way, let everyone here or above know this!

The nuns can hardly believe their ears. Agnes' decision is final. Everybody else is talking. Ahmet the dervish, looks incredulous. The Catholic crowd starts praying, in chorus. They kneel.

(CONTINUED)

Agnes is trembling. The nuns kneel in front of the statue of Jesus and pray. Everybody is taken by a frenzy of prayer. The Christian side repeats in chorus: "Amen, Amen". Agnes takes a few steps forward and looks at the assembly. Mother Superior shakes her head, looking away in apparent disapproval. Agnes crosses herself and covers her face, so that nobody can see her pain. The cross is laid down. The old man speaks.

OLD MAN

When everything is ready, we'll
leave them alone with their God.
At sunset, it will be over: if
the dervish has survived, we
shall build the mosque; if the
woman has survived, you may build
your church. If they're both
dead, nothing's going to be
erected.

Murmurs. Ahmet the dervish is given some water. The Skinny Nun takes water to Agnes. Agnes recognizes her, and smiles. Drinks water from her hand.

SKINNY NUN

I'll watch you. Live on, sister!
May God be with you!
This is a great day!

She hugs her. Agnes lies down on the cross. Ahmet the dervish climbs down the open grave. His people encourage him by saying their prayers around the hole in the ground. He lies down. People throw earth on him. He is seen smiling. Hammers are heard driving the spikes into the cross. The Catholic people cross themselves and pray. Some nuns cry. Birds are singing.

80 EXT. MUSLIM VILLAGE. MOSQUE. NOON.

80

(a9) Shestan appears on the village's square. He enters the mosque. Nobody's inside. Shestan lies on the rug. The muezzin's steps are heard, as he comes down the stairs. He is very young.

SHESTAN

I come from the battle. Everyone
was killed.

MUEZZIN

Did you kill anyone?

81 EXT. HILL OF THE HOLY GRAVE. NOON.

81

The hill shimmering under the sun. The cross with the crucified Agnes is visible on the summit. The crowd has left. A man smoking tobacco sits near the hole where they buried Ahmet the dervish.

(CONTINUED)

The Skinny Nun is on her knees in front of the cross, praying. On the cross, Agnes doesn't budge. Her head has fallen on her chest from exhaustion. The Muslim man bends over the pile of earth, and places his ear on the ground, listening. He turns to the Skinny Nun, exhilarated.

MUSLIM MAN

He's singing! The man is singing!
That's what I call a brave man,
may Allah give him strength!

The Skinny Nun gives the man an astonished look.

SKINNY NUN

Singing? How come?

MUSLIM MAN

He does sing, by Allah! Come!
Come, and listen to him!

Horrified, the Skinny Nun approaches the dervish's grave. She kneels then leans her cheek against the freshly moved earth. She can't hear a thing.

MUSLIM MAN (cont'd)

Can you hear it?

SKINNY NUN

No.

MUSLIM MAN

Well, listen better!

SKINNY NUN

No song, nothing. Can't hear a
thing.

MUSLIM MAN

What are you talking about!? He was
singing only a minute ago!
Get away from there!

The Muslim man almost pushes her away. The Skinny Nun stands up, trembling. The Muslim man places his ear against the grave. Stays in that position for a while, then stands up, looking cheerful. Starts shouting.

MUSLIM MAN (cont'd)

He is singing again!

The Skinny Nun looks at him, skeptical.

SKINNY NUN

If you say so.

The man rolls a cigarette, content. The Skinny Nun goes to the cross and talks to Agnes.

(CONTINUED)

SKINNY NUN (cont'd)
Agnes, Agnes, sister! Can you hear
me?

The man stares at Agnes, also waiting for a reaction. Agnes moves her head a little. The Skinny Nun takes a breath of relief. Agnes is still alive. The Muslim man picks up the water jug to drink, then looks at the Skinny Nun. He gets up, comes to her and hands her the jug. The Skinny Nun refuses. The man looks at her, surprised. He shrugs and walks away, still carrying the jug. He drinks, then sits cross legged, and starts counting the beads on his rosary.

... / ...

The sun is now at its highest. Three people from the Muslim village and three from the Catholic - among which Mother Superior - have come to check the buried Dervish and the crucified Agnes. Agnes is still alive, but very pale. Blood has trickled along her limbs to the ground. The Skinny Nun cries softly. Agnes opens her eyes, stares at them, then dazzled by the sun, looks dizzily down at the crying Skinny Nun.

MUSLIM MAN
She's alive.

CATHOLIC MAN
Yes, she's alive.

SKINNY NUN
Of course she's alive!

The Skinny Nun approaches Mother Superior.

SKINNY NUN (cont'd)
Mother, she's in pain, we should
bring her down from the cross.
It's a terrible pain. Maybe we
should stop this now.

MOTHER SUPERIOR
Now is too late, sister.
May God give her life!

They move to the grave where Ahmet the dervish is buried. The first man places his ear against the earth and listens carefully.

MUSLIM MAN
He's alive.

The Catholic man listens too.

CATHOLIC MAN
Yes, he's alive. That's weird!

(CONTINUED)

The Muslim doesn't like these words.

MUSLIM MAN

Why weird? Of course he's alive!
We heard him sing! Ahmet the
dervish has been buried alive
many times when he served the
Sultan as a soldier, in the
Arabian Desert.

The Catholics look at each other, annoyed, then the two groups leave and head for different directions. The Skinny Nun stands facing the cross, without moving. The birds are singing.

82

INT. MUSLIM VILLAGE. MOSQUE. NOON.

82

Inside the mosque, the muezzin attends Shestan's wounds. He damps his lips with a wet cloth.

SHESTAN

I put myself in your hands.

The muezzin smiles.

MUEZZIN

You put yourself in Allah's hands.

Shestan produces Agnes' letter, and shows it to the muezzin.

SHESTAN

Who is Moses?

The muezzin reads.

MUEZZIN

Musa the prophet, a great fighter
and a very wise man. Used to take
orders from Allah.

Shestan looks stunned.

SHESTAN

Orders from Allah?!

MUEZZIN

Yes indeed. Now listen, good man!
Don't ever come back to this
place.

SHESTAN

Why?

The muezzin doesn't answer. He just stares at him.

(CONTINUED)

MUEZZIN

And don't take the road. Go through to the hill. It's easy to spot: they've crucified a woman there, a nun, this very morning.

SHESTAN

A nun, you said?

MUEZZIN

I don't know. Her father, they say, wanted her to be crucified.

SHESTAN

Her father?

MUEZZIN

He rejected her.

Shestan is already out of the mosque. The muezzin follows him.

SHESTAN

I owe you one, my friend!

Shestan is already out of sight.

MUEZZIN

May Allah be with you!

83 EXT. MUSLIM VILLAGE. NOON.

83

Shestan runs around the hill. Goes past a fence where somebody has hanged black clothes to dry. Picks them up making sure nobody's watching, and runs away.

84 EXT. HILL OF THE HOLY GRAVE. NOON.

84

(a10) A woman figure dressed in black, carrying wood on her back, is painfully climbing up the hill. It is Shestan disguised as a Muslim woman in wide breeches, with a black veil on her head. He finally sees the cross with the human figure on it. He gets closer to the top.

The Muslim man on guard at the Dervish's tomb walks to the cross, where the Skinny Nun is watching over Agnes. He stops and stares at Agnes, who is covered in blood. Shakes his head in wonder, awe and incomprehension.

MUSLIM MAN

My God! That's what it is, when you lose your mind: you become a Christian!

(CONTINUED)

The Skinny Nun looks at him, angered. The man is embarrassed by the Skinny Nun's gaze, and leaves. He goes sit, cross legged, near the Dervish's tomb, and sulks.

Shestan Verdha shows up on the top of the hill. He can't yet recognize the face of the person on the cross. He sees a nun sitting at the base of the cross, and a few yards away, a man smoking his pipe next to a pile of fresh earth. The man spots him, stands up and yells at him.

MUSLIM MAN (cont'd)
Hey, old woman, go away! Hurry
up! Go away! This is a sacred
place!

Shestan approaches humbly, throws the wood away, and pulls out a large knife to the man's throat. (all)

SHESTAN
Don't say a word, or you die!

The Muslim man stops dead and nods. Shestan motions to the cross.

SHESTAN (cont'd)
You do understand?

The man nods, frightened. Shestan ties up his hands with a rope, and then stuffs his mouth with the veil. The Skinny Nun recognizes Shestan. Shestan runs to the cross, grabs the ladder and places it against the cross. Climbs up and uncovers the girl's face. Agnes. He leans his head against her chest. She is still alive. Sees the nails through her wrists.

AGNES
Who are you?

SHESTAN
What have you done?

He produces his knife, grabs a rock from the ground, and goes back to the cross. Starts using the knife and the rock, like a lever, to pull out the nails. Agnes moans.

SKINNY NUN
You can't do this! Agnes chose the
cross herself! I am here to watch
on her. Please, leave her alone!
This is sacrilege!

He keeps working on the nails. Agnes moans in pain. She doesn't recognize him. Shestan removes the nails.

SKINNY NUN (cont'd)

Why are you doing this?
I took an oath, with God. This is
sacrilege!

(a12)

SHESTAN

God? Which God? Tell me!
What kind of god is He?
Is He the god who brought you here?
Who told you to do this?

AGNES

(delirious)

Who are you who takes so many
forms? What is your name?

SHESTAN

Please, tell me yours!

AGNES

(half conscious)

Agnes! Agnes is my name.

SHESTAN

Agnes. I've seen you in a dream...

AGNES

(half conscious)

Yes. Me too.

With the Skinny Nun's help, Shestan lays Agnes on the ground. Shestan takes his water bottle, and pours a few drops on Agnes's dried lips. Agnes is thirsty, wants to drink. Agnes is shaking. She looks at him, Shestan holds her wrapped in his arms. Agnes motions towards the grave where Ahmet is buried.

AGNES (cont'd)

There's a man buried there...

Shestan does not understand. Agnes points to the pile of fresh earth. He cannot believe her.

SKINNY NUN

It's a sin, isn't it? A man, buried
alive?

Shestan grabs her by the arm, and has her sit on the ground, by the grave. Agnes is shaking from shock. The tied up Muslim man stares, terrified. Shestan unties him, and talks to him harshly, with his knife against the man's throat.

SHESTAN

Dig the man out of the grave!

(CONTINUED)

The man is so scared he can hardly move.

MUSLIM MAN
I can't. It's sacrilege!

Shestan grabs him by the throat and shouts.

SHESTAN
Dig, I say, or you die!

The man, out of fear, suddenly starts digging very fast the soft earth with his bare hands. Shestan helps him out, digging with the knife. He finally reaches the burried man, still alive, smeared with mud. Shestan pulls him out from the grave. Removes the mud from his face, and notices how pale the man is.

SHESTAN (cont'd)
He's breathing, he's breathing,
he's alive!

MUSLIM MAN
Of course he's alive! I heard him
singing!

SHESTAN
Singing?

MUSLIM MAN
Yes, he was singing a sura from the
Koran.

Shestan orders him to give the man some water. The Skinny Nun approaches Agnes and hugs her.

Shestan talks to the Muslim man.

SHESTAN
If anyone asks you what happened
here, you'll tell them God's Angel
showed up and took them away. Do
you understand?

MUSLIM MAN
Yes, yes, of course, I will...

SHESTAN
Say it!

The man repeats the words, frightened.

MUSLIM MAN
An-Angel-of-God-came-down-and-took-
them-away!

SHESTAN
Good.

(CONTINUED)

Shestan takes Agnes in his arms, and starts walking.

SHESTAN (cont'd)
Please, stay alive!

The Skinny Nun and the Muslim Man remain on the hill top staring at them as they go.

85 EXT. WHEAT FIELD. SUNSET. 85

Shestan hides with Agnes in a wheat field gilded by the setting sun. He picks a couple of ears, crushes them, and gives them to Agnes. Agnes tries to chew, but swallows with visible pain. He gives her some water from the gourd, then some more fresh wheat to eat. Agnes looks at him, with admiration. Shestan stares at the sun, about to set. Cattle bells are heard, as their herd is coming home from the meadows. Shestan stands up, and sees the sheep scattered all over the plateau. A shepherd on a mule whistles at the sheep.

86 EXT. ROAD. MUSLIM VILLAGE. DAWN. 86

Shestan puts a crown made out of wheat on Agnes' head.

SHESTAN
Agnes, now you are a Saint!

Shestan, dressed up like a shepherd, pulls a mule on which Agnes can be seen, her head covered with a long white scarf, held by a tiara of wheat. She looks like a holy woman, taking part in a ritual. They walk by a field where peasants are working. The peasants respectfully stop and watch them pass by.

87 EXT. CHRISTIAN VILLAGE. DAY. 87

They go through a Christian village. People first look at them with curiosity, and children run after them. Some women start praying, then kneel when they see the wounds. Two old ladies approach Shestan and give him water, plums and figs. They cross themselves.

WOMEN
Glory to Jesus Christ, our Lord.
Now and forever.
Where are you heading to, young man?

Shestan tries to cross himself, a little confused, and doesn't know what to answer right away. He stops the mule and looks at the small crowd surrounding him: they are all curious.

SHESTAN
This woman is holy! She is a Saint!

People watch him, still incredulous. Shestan approaches Agnes on the mule, removes her scarf and shows them her wrists and ankles, with the nail wounds.

Stigmata!

People are flabbergasted, some women scream out of wonder, one of them faints. They all fall on their knees, and pray.

SHESTAN (cont'd)

This girl was sanctified on the cross. I am now taking her home, to her parents, to the village of Shen Pal .

Already, they all want to touch Agnes's robe. One by one they follow Shestan and the Saint woman on the road.

88 EXT. ROAD. END OF AFTERNOON.

88

Later, on the road. Now, the procession with Agnes, the Saint woman, already counts more than a hundred people. It has changed into a magnificent ritual. Shestan looks at the huge line of people. Cannot believe his eyes. Now he is sure it will be easier to take Agnes back home. It worked.

89 EXT. AGNES' VILLAGE. SUNSET.

89

The procession with the Saint reaches Shen Pal, Agnes' village, by sunset. The crowd is even bigger now and they are chanting:

CROWD

Glory to our Lord, Jesus! Now and for ever!

Shestan is moved by what he sees and hears. He looks at Agnes who sits, hieratic and fearless like a veiled statue, on her mule.

90 EXT. AGNES' HOUSE. COURTYARD. SUNSET.

90

The long procession stops in front of Agnes's house. Shestan helps Agnes get off the mule. He uncovers her face. People recognize her, and express their admiration:

CROWD

Agnes has been sanctified by our Lord! Agnes is God sent! Our Agnes has become a Saint!

Agnes's family has come out of the house: father, mother, sisters and brothers. Agnes enters the courtyard majestically, then crosses herself and kneels. Everyone can see the Stigmata on her wrists and ankles. The crowd kneels.

(CONTINUED)

Her mother has now recognized her, and she is stupefied. Her father approaches her, astounded, sees his daughter's pale face, the dried blood on her wounds. Shestan talks to Agnes' parents. Everyone listens in silence.

SHESTAN

Agnes was sanctified on the cross.
This was the Almighty's will.
She now has come home to see her
mother and father, and to give
her blessing to all you people.
We are tired, we had a long
journey.

Nobody says a word, people pray: they are witnessing a miracle. Agnes' father looks at Shestan. Shestan looks back at him. Agnes keeps her eyes closed and tears roll down her cheeks. Everybody (including Agnes' parents) have fallen on their knees in front of Agnes, and pray. Agnes looks at her mother through her tears. Then, she stands up and majestically enters the house. All her family follows her inside. The door remains open. Around the house hundreds of people now sit and pray. They have lit up hundreds of candles.

Shestan rolls a cigarette.

91 INT. AGNES' HOUSE. WOMENS' ROOM. NIGHT. 91

Agnes is sitting with her back to the fireplace. Glimpses of the fire crown her head and the reflection of the light on her white clothes give her complexion an inner brightness. Her mother and sisters are sitting in front of her at some distance, showing her an unusual respect. The tabletop and furniture are crowded with presents and flowers. Many women are now in the room. Everybody looks at her with admiration. One of the women brings Agnes her little baby for benediction, she touches its forehead.

92 INT. AGNES' HOUSE. MENS' ROOM. NIGHT. 92

There are only men around the open fire. Agnes father offers his tobacco box to the guests. In this room the tabletop and furniture are also crowded with presents. No one talks. Everyone in the room stares at him with due respect to the father of Agnes, as if waiting for an explanation of what has just happened to his daughter. Agnes' father proudly ignores a few suspicious looks, now he has recovered his honor.

93 EXT. AGNES' HOUSE. NIGHT. 93

Shestan is taking off the mule's saddle. Hundreds of candles light up the faces of people praying in front of the house.

94 INT. AGNES' HOUSE. WOMENS' ROOM. NIGHT. 94

Agnes mother crosses herself and talks to Agnes.

(CONTINUED)

AGNES MOTHER

Agnes, are you going to stay home?

AGNES

No, mother.

AGNES MOTHER

Where are going, then?

AGNES

Far away, mother.

AGNES MOTHER

What are you going to do?

AGNES

I have to meet other people.

Agnes' mother looks at her, in pain.

AGNES MOTHER

Are you going to have a house?

AGNES

Maybe, mother.

AGNES MOTHER

Are you going to see us again?

Agnes looks at her, she can't hold her tears.

AGNES

I don't know, mother.

They embrace each other.

95 EXT. AGNES' HOUSE. NIGHT.

95

There are hundreds of candles lit all over the place, in the garden, on the roof, everywhere. It is like a holy night. People have gathered around open fires and talk in a low voice. Many of them pray. It sounds like a wide murmur.

Shestan is feeding the mule with oats. He tries to see what is going on inside Agnes' house. He only sees many people getting in and out, but cannot see Agnes.

96 EXT. AGNES' HOUSE. NIGHT.

96

Shestan is sleeping peacefully, coiled up inside a warm blanket. Around him, people are still praying. The flames of the candles dance under a light breeze.

97 EXT. AGNES' HOUSE. NIGHT.

97

Agnes' father walks fast towards where Shestan is sleeping. With an oil lamp in his hands he tries to scan Shestan's face. It seems he wants to know who is this man who is taking his daughter from him, and at the same time has given him back his honor. He cannot quite make it out. He stays there for a while, just looking at Shestan asleep. Then he lays some bread, cheese and water near Shestan. He then sits and crosses his legs, waiting for him to wake up.

98 EXT. AGNES' HOUSE. SUNRISE.

98

Sun is rising up. Roosters are heard everywhere. Shestan opens his eyes. He wakes up. He cannot believe his eyes. In front of his face sits Agnes' father, cross-legged.

SHESTAN

Good morning!

Agnes father doesn't reply. He just hands him his tobacco pouch. Shestan takes it and rolls a cigarette.

AGNES FATHER

I want you to tell me something.

SHESTAN

Go ahead.

AGNES FATHER

What has really happened to my daughter? I think you know it.

Shestan stands up, looks at him and starts to harness the mule's saddle. Agnes' father stares at him. Shestan pulls the mule toward the house. Agnes' father goes after him.

AGNES FATHER (cont'd)

Tell me what happened to my daughter...

Shestan doesn't answer him, he just pulls the mule to Agnes' house through the courtyard.

AGNES FATHER (cont'd)

Why don't you tell me? I am her father...

Shestan just holds the mule. Agnes shows up on the doorstep, her mother and other women following her. They kneel. Shestan helps Agnes getting on the mule. Her mother and sisters cry. Agnes' father stands behind them. Shestan and Agnes on the mule now leave. The crowd follows them in procession.

99 EXT. AGNES' VILLAGE. MORNING. 99

Agnes and Shestan, who pulls the mule, leave Agnes' village. Dozens of people do not follow them, they cross themselves, and kneel. They wave to the saint. They pray, watching the couple fade away in the morning light.

100 EXT. ROAD. DAY. 100

Agnes has stopped the mule. She looks around.

AGNES

I have to change my clothes.

Shestan looks at her, surprised. Agnes doesn't make a single move. After a second, Shestan understands she doesn't want him to look at her.

SHESTAN

Oh, yes... I won't look at you.

He moves to the other side of the mule and turns his back to her.

Agnes takes off her austere nun's dress. She turns it inside out, pulls here and there, undoes a seam, turns the nun's dress inside out once again, and with a few enchanted gestures, the dress she now puts on is all white. She lays the white veil on her head in some gracious way.

AGNES

Now you can turn around.

Shestan turns around and he is dazzled: Agnes smiles and beams in a totally white dress, the wedding dress she has magically improvised. He walks around her and helps her get on the mule.

Agnes beams.

101 EXT. WHEAT FIELD. NIGHT. 101

Shestan and Agnes lie, turning their backs on each other. The Moon is full. Shestan cannot sleep. Neither can Agnes. They are both shy.

SHESTAN

Are you cold?

AGNES

No. Are you?

SHESTAN

No. Are you hungry?

(CONTINUED)

AGNES

No.

SHESTAN

Are you scared?

AGNES

Scared? I don't know.

102 EXT. WHEAT FIELD. DAWN. 102

They wake up in each other's arms.

103 EXT. OTTOMAN STONE BRIDGE. DAWN. 103

An old ottoman bridge, long and narrow. They cross the bridge both riding the mule. Peasants with carts pass them by, look at them, amused, and say hello.

104 EXT. SMALL TOWN. DAY. 104

Shestan ties the mule to a pole and gives it some oats. People sitting outside a small café look at them with some curiosity. Shestan helps Agnes get off the mule and they both walk to a shop on the door of which a sign reads:

FOTOGRAF SOTIRI

(Sotir, the Photographer).

105 INT. PHOTOGRAPHER'S SHOP. DAY. 105

An incredible variety of photos are hanging on the walls: families, weddings, fighters. Shestan and Agnes look at the photographer's hands, as he flips through some photos in a big box. Shestan seems forlorn. Sotir, the photographer, shrugs, puzzled.

SOTIR

That's weird. It's not here. Can't find you, neither your bride.

SHESTAN

It's not that kind of photo, sir. It's a picture of me with my companions. You took it yourself, on the square, over there.

SOTIR

On the square? When was that?

SHESTAN

Some months ago, I don't quite remember when. We had a canon and a mule with us.

(CONTINUED)

SOTIR

Ah, yes! Now I remember! All the
fuss you had to make!
There you go!

He points at a spot on the wall. Shestan looks at the wall and sees the photo with the familiar faces of Cute, Tod, Doskë, Alush, Mëhill, Marko, Andrea, Tod, Aleksander, Hyskë, and the others. They are all smiling and happy. Agnes gets closer to have a look at the photo too. Shestan is frozen.

A heavy silence.

SHESTAN

I want a picture of me with my wife

Shestan gives Sotir a gold coin. Sotir bites on it to check it.

... / ...

Shestan, sitting in a wooden armchair, and Agnes with her hand on his shoulder, are being photographed. Shestan, facing camera, holds the picture of him and his friends in his lap.

106 EXT. SHORE OF A GREAT LAKE - SOUTH-EASTERN ALBANIA. DAY. 106

Shestan and Agnes wash hands and faces in the pure water of the lake. Shestan looks at Agnes' beautiful hands. He takes them in his hands and brings them to his lips.

107 EXT. MOUNTAIN. SOUTH-EASTERN ALBANIA. DAY. 107

They cross the pass between two mountains. Houses of a small village appear in the distance, on the plateau.

SHESTAN

Look! This is my village. Over
there!

He points at the mountain. Agnes tries to find out the faraway village. She listens to him.

SHESTAN (cont'd)

One day you will go see your
family again. You'll take the
mule and I'll come with you. I
have to give the mule back. This
shepherd, he is a friend.

108 EXT. VILLAGE OF MOKËR. FIELDS. DAY. 108

Shestan walks along the crop fields, leading the mule with Agnes on it. In the distance, he sees two men ploughing.

(CONTINUED)

These two stop working, and look at the man who is pulling the mule with the bride on it. They are Cute Benja and Tod Allamani. They made it to the village before Shestan.

CUTE

Tod, what kind of man would take a bride like this? Isn't it strange?

TOD

Yes, sure, Cute, it is!

CUTE

How come there's a wedding in the village and we know nothing? This is unheard of.

They are taken aback. Can't take their eyes off the man pulling the mule with the bride on it, but can't recognize him, he is too far away.

Cute (cont'd)

This guy must be nuts, bringing his bride over just like this, as if she was some game out of a hunt! Something must have happened. I can feel it. That's the kind of thing I can feel from a long way off! Let's finish this, and we go see what's going on!

They resume their ploughing. Shestan sees the two men working in the field, but he cannot recognize his two friends, they are too far away. He pulls at the mule, and hurries up.

109 EXT. VILLAGE OF MOKËR. DAY.

109

Shestan and Agnes arrive at the village. They stop.

SHESTAN

See, my house's the one over there.
You see the smoke?
My mother must be inside. She
most likely thinks I'm dead.

He can barely hold his joy. Agnes adjusts the scarf. They ride on. Kids follow them and keep yelling.

KIDS

The bride, the bride, the bride!

110 EXT. SHESTAN'S HOUSE. DAY.

110

Subtitle:

28 July 1914

(CONTINUED)

Shestan and Agnes are getting married. Everyone from the village is there, dancing and singing. A one-legged Cute comes in, holding on his crutches, followed by his children and Tod. Cute raises his arm and music stops. Everyone looks at him.

CUTE

War, war has started.

Silence. Shestan looks at him. Cute and Tod go to Shestan. They shake hands and embrace.

SHESTAN'S MOTHER

Play the music. Loud!

People start to sing and dance. Shestan, Cute and Tod raise a toast.

TOD

War is coming, captain.

CUTE

War is coming, captain.

SHESTAN

To life!

They drink, then Shestan takes them to dance. In the middle, Cute holds on to their arms, and the three men dance together like crazy.

THE END