

MAGNIFICENT

Written by

Toby Scales

tobyscales@me.com  
206-372-8074

INT. ROYAL PALACE - BEDROOM - NIGHT

CLOSE on a child's face: SULEYMAN as a young boy.

He is six years old, dressed in a silk sleeping garment. He sits up in an extravagantly appointed bed, attempting to stifle his sobs with the edge of a finely woven bedspread.

Through the walls we hear the sound of his parents fighting: the angry, low voice of his father SELIM (known as The Grim) and the angry accusations of his mother HAFSA.

INT. ROYAL PALACE - ANOTHER BEDROOM

Next door, Selim shoves Hafsa to the ground. Her night clothes are torn and bloody. Tears streak down her face.

SELIM

Look at me!

He is stocky, powerfully built with a thick black mustache.

She looks away. He hits her.

SELIM (CONT'D)

Look at me when I talk to you!

Their elegant bed is covered in blood. Hafsa sobs quietly.

He is about to hit her again when the DOCTOR stops his hand.

Selim whirls on him, anger flashing in his pitch black eyes.

DOCTOR

It is not her fault. Sometimes the baby does not take root--

Selim shoves him away and turns back to his wife.

SELIM

She did this, I know it! You and your sorcery. Look at me!

He smacks her again, yet she sternly refuses to look. Her spirit is even more powerful than her beauty.

DOCTOR

Please--

Selim shoves the doctor aside and grabs Hafsa.

Offscreen, a scream-- high-pitched, from a young child.

Suleyman watches in the doorway.

Hafsa looks at her son as Selim lifts her and shouts at her, asking forgiveness while communicating strength.

SELIM

You owe me a warrior!

Suleyman wails, seeing her.

SELIM (CONT'D)

This boy is no warrior! You wrap him in silk, let him play with your harem girls when he should be learning to fight! I will never be sultan with a boy like this!

He releases her as the doctor picks Suleyman up.

DOCTOR

Come with me, little man. This is no place for a child.

As he's being carried out Suleyman watches Hafsa, slumped on the floor, finally look up at Selim.

She spits on him.

The doctor carries Suleyman down the hall as his mother's cries echo and slowly the screen FADES TO BLACK.

SUPER: TEN YEARS LATER

EXT. ROYAL PALACE GARDEN - DAY

Suleyman sits in a tree by himself. The city of Istanbul can be seen in the distance.

He plucks a flower from a nearby branch.

Carefully pulls the petals off one by one.

Suddenly, angrily, he smushes the head of the flower against the bark and smells the aroma it leaves on his fingers.

IBRAHIM (O.S.)

Suleyman! Suleymaaan!

Suleyman presses against the tree. He's hiding.

IBRAHIM walks under the branches calling for him.

Suleyman inches forward, slowly, and--

DROPS on Ibrahim. The two collapse on the ground and roll in the dirt wrestling.

Ibrahim -- a servant boy, about fifteen, with the wispy beginnings of a beard and bright, intelligent eyes -- easily dominates the pale and rail-thin Suleyman.

But once he's on top of him he stands up immediately, remembering his position.

IBRAHIM (CONT'D)  
Your mother sends for you, my lord.

SULEYMAN  
Tell her I'm busy.

He extends his hand to help Suleyman up.

IBRAHIM  
Very well.

He turns to go and Suleyman stops him.

SULEYMAN  
No no!

He grins.

SULEYMAN (CONT'D)  
Would you really have gone?

IBRAHIM  
I serve at the pleasure of the sultan. And his family.

SULEYMAN  
(imitating him)  
"I serve at the pleasure of the sultan."

Ibrahim grins and tackles Suleyman.

The two wrestle on the ground again.

INT. VIZIER ROOM

The Viziers talk about the Persian rebellion. Everyone jockeys for position. They

INT. HAREM - DAY

Suleyman walks quickly down a long hall decorated with elaborate tile work and fine gold detail.

He plucks grass off his royal garments, and tries to brush off the dirt.

He passes a pair of black EUNUCHS standing guard at the entrance to a common area.

As he passes them, his pace slows.

On either side of him now are silk-curtained windows looking onto a common areas of the harem, behind which the HAREM GIRLS can be glimpsed chatting and playing games.

All at once a sudden burst of laughter from one of the rooms freezes Suleyman in his tracks.

His heart beats loudly.

He makes eye contact with one of the eunuchs. The eunuch, broad-shouldered and bald, closes his eyes.

Suleyman turns to one of the windows. More giggling.

He tries to angle his head to see through the crack between the curtains, but the room appears empty.

He lifts his hand to pull the curtain back, and offscreen a woman clears her throat.

Hafsa stands at the end of the hall with her door open.

SULEYMAN

Hello mother.

He scurries down the hall to her.

Hafsa glares at the eunuch and closes the door behind them.

INT. MOTHER'S CHAMBER

Hafsa's chamber is elegantly appointed - one of the finest rooms in the palace. Dark wood, silk pillows and a view of the Topkapi gardens in full bloom.

His mother gestures, and Suleyman sits on the bed. He is a young man, but his attitude remains that of a petulant tween.

HAFSA

How are your studies?

SULEYMAN

Fine.

HAFSA

You're covering geography?

SULEYMAN

Uh-huh.

She pours him a cup of tea from a copper pot.

HAFSA

And your combat training?

HAFSA (CONT'D)

Then you know who the Persians are?

SULEYMAN

Mm-hmm.

HAFSA

Suleyman, listen to me.

Her tone commands his attention.

HAFSA (CONT'D)

Your father is going away for a while. The sultan has asked him to put down a rebellion in the East.

SULEYMAN

Huh. I hope he dies in battle.

He helps himself to some baklava which sits on a nearby tray.

HAFSA

You don't mean that.

SULEYMAN

Yes I do! What has he ever been to us but cruel? And violent?

HAFSA

Cruelty and violence are necessities in war, my son, and no one knows this better than your father. He will succeed in this war, and you will be grateful when he does. Because if he is not successful, your uncle Ahmet will become sultan.

SULEYMAN

Who cares who becomes sultan?  
What's so great about being sultan  
anyway?

HAFSA

Let's say it is better than the  
alternative.

SULEYMAN

Mmm.

Suleyman sips his tea and chomps his baklava.

HAFSA

Your father wants you to go with  
him. To lead the second army.

He stops chewing.

SULEYMAN

So what is our plan?

She smiles at him.

HAFSA

I've taught you well. You must  
always have a plan, Suleyman. This  
is the way of power. Tonight, after  
you deliver a poetic, moving speech  
wishing your father well in battle--

SULEYMAN

Ugh.

HAFSA

--you and I will take a ship to  
Kaffa, in the North. My father has  
arranged a governorship for you  
there.

SULEYMAN

Kaffa? Am I to be a governor of  
goats?

HAFSA

It has taken me months to make  
these arrangements, the least you  
could do is show some gratitude.

Outside, Suleyman watches one of the designated MUEZZIN enter  
a tall minaret in the courtyard.

SULEYMAN

How do you become a muezzin?

She laughs.

HAFSA

First, you must be born blind.

SULEYMAN

Really?

HAFSA

Of course! You don't want someone climbing up a tower and peering through your window, do you? I don't care how holy you are.

Suleyman watches the minaret, waiting for muezzin to emerge on the upper gallery level.

SULEYMAN

Can you imagine! Climbing the same stairs in darkness, always at the same time every day... how dull his life must be.

HAFSA

I only wish your life could be as dull.

She admires his face framed in the window.

HAFSA (CONT'D)

You have your father's eyes.

SULEYMAN

Mama.

HAFSA

It's not a bad thing. When we were first married, his eyes were all I could think about. Distant, and dark as a tunnel. I used to watch his face and wonder where the tunnel would take me, if only I could follow it...

SULEYMAN

I have your nose.

HAFSA

Yes. You should thank me for that, too.



He embraces her.

SULEYMAN  
I don't want to leave, Mama! What  
will we do there?

She looks at him very intensely.

HAFSA  
We will survive.

SULEYMAN  
But Mama--

The call to prayer begins.

MUEZZIN (O.S.)  
Allahu akbar, allahu akbar (etc)

She clutches him suddenly, briefly, then wipes a tear away.

HAFSA  
Let us pray.

She kneels on a prayer mat and begins to pray.

He watches her, waiting for her to say something else.

But she says nothing, so he kneels and begins to pray too:

SULEYMAN  
Allahu akbar, allahu akbar...

EXT. TOPKAPI PALACE

Suleyman emerges from the harem and crosses the courtyard.

In the courtyard is a group of JANISSARIES - the royal palace guard. They are speaking with their commander, MEHMET-- mid-30s, handsome, a disquieting intensity.

Mehmet sees Suleyman crossing the courtyard and catches up with him as he walks.

MEHMET  
You are a man in a hurry!

SULEYMAN  
I must study.

Mehmet stops him.

MEHMET

Why bother with studying, when soon  
you will be leading an army?

He leads Suleyman to the edge of the courtyard, below which  
can be seen the outer rim of the Topkapi palace walls and  
beyond that the port of Istanbul, bristling with warships.

MEHMET (CONT'D)

You see that, little prince? Five  
thousand men await your orders. As  
soon as the wind picks up we'll  
sail East, to glory.

Suleyman looks unimpressed.

MEHMET (CONT'D)

Don't you want to see new lands?  
Sample foreign women?

Suleyman shrugs.

SULEYMAN

I like it here.

MEHMET

Of course Topkapi is a fine place  
for women and eunuchs, but men are  
made to fight. The Prophet Mohamed  
says it is so, praise be to him.

SULEYMAN

The Prophet says a great many  
things. Not all of them are  
praiseworthy.

Mehmet clenches his jaw at this offense.

MEHMET

Your father thinks you will try to  
escape before the wind changes. My  
men will ensure that does not  
happen.

He gestures at two of his Janissary guards, who take up  
positions outside the harem entrance.

SULEYMAN

So I am to be prisoner?

MEHMET

At the palace, everyone is a  
prisoner.

He walks off.

Suleyman eyes the guards.

Looks back at the harbored ships disdainfully.

BAYEZID (O.S.)  
Admiring the ships?

He turns to see the sultan himself, BAYEZID II -- his grandfather. Bayezid is white-haired and beneficent.

He grins broadly at Suleyman.

BAYEZID (CONT'D)  
I said, were you admiring the ships?

SULEYMAN  
Yes, Your Majesty.

Bayezid stoops to address him.

BAYEZID  
You used to call me *dede*!

SULEYMAN  
I was younger then, Your Majesty, and did not understand the rules of court. If I have offended you--

BAYEZID  
Please. I was your *dede* before I became sultan. What do you think of the fleet? Quite a sight, eh?

SULEYMAN  
I've never seen so many at once.

BAYEZID  
We are lucky. We have a large harbor, at the intersection of two seas. The harbor is what makes Istanbul the greatest city in the world.

SULEYMAN  
Which is why your father built this palace on the highest point of the city. So he could defend against attack in any direction.

Bayezid places his hand on Suleyman's back and walks him through the palace gates, which lead from the outer courtyard to the inner courtyard.

BAYEZID

Precisely. It took him years to wrest control of this city from the Byzantines. And now it is up to me to hold onto it.

Beneath the gates, Bayezid stops and speaks quietly.

BAYEZID (CONT'D)

I assume you have heard of my plans for your father?

SULEYMAN

Yes.

BAYEZID

Will you be joining him on the battlefield? Or has your mother made other plans?

SULEYMAN

I... do not know, Your Majesty.

BAYEZID

Then your mother has made plans. Good.

Suleyman looks nervous. Bayezid smiles at him.

BAYEZID (CONT'D)

You misunderstand. I'm glad you will not be encamped. War is no place for a boy like you. But if you are to stay at court you must get better at lying, *torun*.

He smiles knowingly at Suleyman and walks away.

EXT. HAREM ENTRANCE

Two Janissary GUARDS lean against the wall.

INT. SULEYMAN'S CHAMBER

A sparse location, unlike the rich tilework and lavish decor of the harem. A bed, a small table, an elaborate mirror.

Suleyman sits on the bed with his pen, writing.