

ACT I

SCENE 1 - INT. MORNING

Lights up. At center stage is a desk, holding a stack of papers and a quill. Seated at the desk is GUILLAUME. He wears a loose but well-maintained military uniform. He is sharply focused on sorting through these papers. All the while, a faint voice is heard - a morning call to prayer from a nearby mosque. LECLERC enters, also dressed in uniform.

LECLERC

Good morning, Commissary.

GUILLAUME

Good morning, Private.

(beat)

LECLERC

Do you grow tired of it?

GUILLAUME

What?

LECLERC

These calls to prayer.

GUILLAUME

I'm used to them.

LECLERC

How much must one publicly proclaim their faith in a day? It makes the Church seem like a small nuisance.

GUILLAUME

I imagine it as a recitation of a grand story.

LECLERC

But you do not know the language, do you?

GUILLAUME

Not much.

LECLERC

Then how much is there to take out of it?

GUILLAUME

There's emotion to it.

LECLERC

I suppose.

(beat)

LECLERC (CONT'D)

(with assertiveness)

Is it true that the General-in-chief has left Cairo?

GUILLAUME

Yes.

LECLERC

For what purpose?

GUILLAUME

A bulletin was put out. A few days ago.

Guillaume scrounges around until coming across the document he was looking for.

GUILLAUME (CONT'D)

(skim reading)

The General is to be absent for several days. He intends to explore the river delta and set a foundation for reestablishing the old canals.

(beat)

He also wrote to the city Divan.

He pulls out another file, and scans through it for a moment.

GUILLAUME (CONT'D)

(reading)

"maintain confidence among the people, remind them of my love for Muslims, and know that my purpose is to confer happiness upon them." He does this every so often. Then he returns.

(beat)

LECLERC

I have heard new rumors. I was at Neu's quarters last evening with several officers. Some suspect that he's left altogether for France.

GUILLAUME

What's changed? The allies still control the sea.

From offstage comes LAJOIE, also in uniform.

LAJOIE

Of course such talk would come from Neu and his companions! Not two months earlier, he spoke of a Russian army preparing to land near Alexandria. Thank goodness most recognized that talk for what it was.

(beat)

Whosoever should advance this notion that General Bonaparte has set out for France should be punished. Discipline is what keeps us swimming above the multitude of Mamelukes, Turks, and Arabs all around us.

Gingerly entering the room is BENOIT, another uniformed soldier.

BENOIT
(hesitant)

Good morning.

(beat)

I come bearing news regarding the General-in-Chief.

LAJOIE
Has he returned from the Delta?

BENOIT
Yes - and then went to Alexandria. From there, he issued this proclamation.

He hands a piece of paper over to Lajoie.

LAJOIE
(reading)

"Soldiers: the affairs of Europe recall me to France. I leave the command of the army to General Kleber. The army shall soon have intelligence of me. It is painful to leave soldiers to whom I am so much attached, but it shall not be for long."

(beat)

LAJOIE (CONT'D)
Did anyone join him?

BENOIT
Yes. Berthier, Murat, Lannes, and Marmont.
(beat)

LECLERC
So goes the holder of our destinies! We have done all for his glory, and yet he separates his fate from us.

(beat)

What spurred him to do this?

BENOIT
(almost guilty in tone)
Several weeks ago, an officer procured some English gazettes, containing intelligence of our military reversals in Northern Italy. Earlier this week, our office received a message from Admiral Gauthaume, intended for General Bonaparte. It reported that the English and Turkish fleets had moved from the immediate Egyptian coast.

LAJOIE
Well, there it is! France herself may be in imminent danger.

LECLERC
Even if that be true, he is ungrateful and has acted in bad faith.

LAJOIE

This campaign was his brainchild and he invested everything in it. Once the threats have been removed, he will do what he can to defend this colony. Munitions, men, rations. All there is to do is persevere, until we receive further intelligence.
(beat)

GUILLAUME

Who has spoken with Kleber?
(beat)

The group exchanges glances, collectively realizing that not one among them has spoken with the new General-in-Chief. Guillaume promptly rises and exits.

SCENE 2 - UNDEFINED SPACE

Guillaume is now alone on stage. He addresses the audience - as though it is party to the journal entry he now recites aloud.

GUILLAUME

Thirty-five thousand men were assembled for the campaign. To give a more enlightened element to the mission, the Directory Government in Paris established the Commission of Sciences and Arts: an institute of engineers, mathematicians, architects, artists, writers and interpreters.
(beat)

Everyone founded the most brilliant hopes upon this expedition, and the General-in-chief dropped words flattering to both our desire of glory and love of riches.

Onto the stage steps NAPOLEON BONAPARTE: young and skinny. He has yet to be Emperor, or even First Consul - this is a man still on the upward trajectory of military and political legend - persistent, passionate, logical, practical, and confident - not yet blinded by his good fortune and festering arrogance.

BONAPARTE

Soldiers: there remains to you only a maritime war. The Roman legions, whom you have not yet equalled, fought the Carthaginians by land and sea. Victory never abandoned them because they were always brave, patient, disciplined, and united. You have done much, but you have a deal more to do for the good of your country, the happiness of mankind, and your own glory. In battle, you have need of each other. You are about to undertake a conquest whose effect will be incalculable.

(beat)

You will inflict upon England the severest stroke.

We shall make fatiguing marches, we shall fight battles, we shall succeed in all our enterprises; the destinies are for us. The Mameluke Beys, who favored English commerce, loaded our merchants with arbitrary taxes, and tyrannized the inhabitants of the Nile, will exist no longer.

(beat)

The people with whom we are about to live are Muslims; their first article of faith is this - there is no other God than God, and Mohammad is his prophet. Do not contradict them. Act towards them as you have done towards the Jews and the Italians. Pillage enriches only a few - it dishonors us, it destroys our resources, and it makes the people our enemies, whom it is our interest to have for friends.

(beat)

The first town which we shall enter was built by Alexander.

GUILLAUME

We were seduced by that appetite for glory.

SCENE 3 - INT. EVENING

Sitting in his quarters is KLEBER: tall, with a stern countenance. He is fiery, proud, majestic, polite, brilliant, courageous, loyal, and disciplined. Guillaume enters.

GUILLAUME

General.

KLEBER

Commissary. What brings you to my office?

(beat)

Is it Bonaparte's statement?

GUILLAUME

Yes.

KLEBER

You're not panic stricken, are you?

GUILLAUME

No. I can't say the same for those I've spoken with.

KLEBER

Do you think our exploits in Italy were accurately represented by Bonaparte's pamphleteers? Our adventure in Syria did not align with what I understood of his abilities. Of course, there were remarkable maneuvers - we may have been annihilated at Mount Tabor if not for his intervention. But that damned impatience of his! It shows no respect for the fatigues of the soldier. To go is nothing - we should be able to return. To take is nothing, we should know how to keep.

(beat)

The Turks were thoroughly defeated at Aboukir. That buys us some time in the north. The imp Murad Bey is reported to have re-ascended the Nile, into the outer provinces. However, so long as we face no more insurrections, the interior is calm.

(beat)

In the meantime, I intend to do what I can on behalf of the army's well-being, namely, our administration. The hospitals. The clothing of the troops. It is fortuitous that you've come to see me. As you have performed exceptionally in your duties, I intend to keep you as my Commissary of War.

GUILLAUME

Thank you, sir.

(beat)

KLEBER

Part of my approach will require a reassessment of our arms and provisions. I would like you to undertake a comprehensive assessment of *how* we have obtained our finances, *how* we have been spending, and *where* those funds may be used more appropriately. Such a project may be best accomplished from a prime location in the city. You are currently in Azbakeya?

GUILLAUME

Yes.

KLEBER

Now that we've resecured Bulak, I would like you to situate yourself there by tomorrow. You may use the servants from the barracks to assist you in the relocation.

GUILLAUME

Certainly.

KLEBER

Excellent. You are dismissed.

SCENE 4 - UNDEFINED SPACE

We return to Guillaume's private narrative, as he resumes his solitary space onstage.

GUILLAUME

We saw the Egyptian coast, stretched like a white ribbon over the blue of the sea. Not a tree, not a dwelling; it was not just nature in her saddest array, but the desolation of nature: silence and death. Bonaparte, ordering the troops to follow him off the beach, began his march for Alexandria. The city was taken without much resistance. Bonaparte assured the Imams and Cheiks, and commanded them to make a proclamation in Arabic. General Desaix commenced the march to the town of Damanhour.

The soldiers, believing themselves in Europe, carelessly marched at a distance from their divisions; they were seized and massacred by the Arabs. They became more careful, but not until two or three heads were thrown in the way. I followed headquarters, and resolved to keep a daily journal of events. The army marched during the night, and rested in the day. Once, Bonaparte closely examined one of the maimed bodies set out before us.

The lights reveal Napoleon once more.

BONAPARTE

Let us heed nothing, the virtues at least are for us.

GUILLAUME

Under the sun, the sands became a sea of fire. Our thirst became intolerable, and was mocked by the appearance of distant water. We arrived at Damanhour. It was merely a village, having a few wells to diminish our thirst, and a few palm trees to afford us shade. We searched the Sheik's house for grain. Our men began to take the usual liberties, but they discovered that the Sheik had secured his women better than his house - the lower part of their bodies was cased in iron girdles. Upon arrival at the Nile, the army, as if by impulse, rushed in; it was not enough to drink, when every limb might partake. No command could restrain them.

(beat)

That night, I was in a deep sleep, when I was suddenly woke. There was an order to depart. The moon set and left us in the most profound obscurity; the clearness of the atmosphere rendered a kind of light, which, like a fog, enabled us to see masses without distinguishing them. Our imaginations represented to us the Arabs and Mamelukes, about to surprise us. We had no guides - the General in Chief had said that Ouarden is on the bank of the Nile, and so we only had to follow the course of the river. The escorts threw their muskets on the ground, exclaiming they were overwhelmed with fatigue. It was in vain to reprimand or persuade them. We were compelled to put their muskets into the hands of the butchers and bakers. We had been four hours on the march, and had not reached Ouarden. Two peasants fortunately fell in our way. They were probably robbers, but on that account were better suited as guides. We bound them, and promised them their life if they led us to Ouarden. After about half an hour, we reached the town.

SCENE 5 - INT. NOON

Guillaume walks into a sparse room, followed by a SERVANT. Held between them are Guillaume's personal belongings.

GUILLAUME

The foundation seems damp.

SERVANT

Yes. Water, from the river. Last week's flooding.
(beat)

SERVANT (CONT'D)

I want to show you something.

GUILLAUME

(a bit suspicious)

Yes?

SERVANT

(Gesturing to a stone in the
corner of the room)

Stand on that stone.

GUILLAUME

Alright.

*Guillaume complies, and the Servant moves to lift a
veil from the ceiling. Guillaume catches a glimpse of
something remarkable in the distance.*

That is quite the view!

SERVANT

Yes, the Pyramids of our ancestors. Something special for you
to look on.

(beat)

GUILLAUME

Well, thank you for your assistance. Mae salame.

*The Servant departs, and Guillaume starts to organize
his belongings. Suddenly, MASIKA AL-SAYED appears,
dressed in the fashion of an upper middle class
Egyptian woman.*

MASIKA

Commissary, I come with important information for your army.

GUILLAUME

(strangely amused)

Well, madam, let's hear it.

MASIKA

It is important that it remain between us.

(beat)

Will any other officers visit you this afternoon?

GUILLAUME

None that I am aware. Mabaref.

Suddenly, the two passionately embrace.

MASIKA

Good use of the language, Habibi.

GUILLAUME

I've been setting aside time to work on it. Maybe I'll tackle the alphabet soon.

MASIKA

Inshallah. If only the rest of the army worked like you.

(beat)

What are you doing in Bulak?

GUILLAUME

My new residence. Our new commanding general is making some changes. He wants me to reassess how we've been using our supplies.

MASIKA

You know, you could have just asked me if you wanted some space set up at the shop a few blocks' away. You've seen it, haven't you?

GUILLAUME

Yes, I remember.

MASIKA

I've been using it mainly for storage. You could still change your mind.

GUILLAUME

Well, best to set an example for the men. Strictly follow the new General-in-Chief's orders.

MASIKA

I suppose.

(beat)

MASIKA (CONT'D)

I heard about General Bonaparte.

(beat)

Are you worried?

GUILLAUME

Kleber is not Bonaparte. That's not necessarily bad.

(beat)

MASIKA

Speaking of which, I had a question about your language.

GUILLAUME

Yes?

MASIKA

I saw some papers that mentioned General Bonaparte by name, but with different spellings. Most said "Bonaparte", but a few were spelled as "Buonaparte". Is that normal in French?

GUILLAUME

No. He is not from France.

MASIKA

Really?

GUILLAUME

He is from an island off the coast. Corsica. The people there originally came from Italy. So, to some, Bonaparte is an outsider. He often uses that more French spelling of his last name. If you listen closely, he still speaks with an accent.

MASIKA

Do the soldiers care?

GUILLAUME

Depends on who you ask. For a long time, France was dominated by the Catholic Church and the old nobles. Before our Revolution. Those who are nostalgic for the past are more likely to see him as an outsider.

(beat)

He's a self-made man. "The Little Corporal" who made a big impression.

SCENE 6 - UNDEFINED SPACE

Guillaume returns to his place on stage, to recite from his journal.

GUILLAUME

One of Bonaparte's staff was taken by the Arabs, as they imagined he was a person of great importance. They carried him to a Sheik, and Bonaparte sent a ransom. A dispute arose in sharing the ransom. The Sheik, to resolve the matter, blew out the prisoner's brains, and sent back the ransom.

(beat)

Upon reaching Cairo, we came upon Murad Bey. His forces extended before us in a long and splendid line. On the right was the Nile, and Cairo, with its hundred minarets and domes; on the left were the Pyramids. In front of these monuments, the witnesses of so many centuries, the fate of Egypt was decided. Bonaparte pointed to them.

Bonaparte appears, to recreate the storied moment.

BONAPARTE

Remember that from the summit of yonder monuments, forty ages are beholding us!

GUILLAUME

Our divisions stood firm against their cavalry charges, and our effect, seconded by artillery, was tremendous. The Mamelukes had thirty or forty pieces of cannon, but they knew little of how to use them. Those who escaped perished in the river. Such was the Battle of the Pyramids. I passed our soldiers, amusing themselves by fishing up, with a rope and iron hook, the dead bodies of the Mamelukes. Their carcasses were so numerous as almost to choke the river. The next day, the principal men of Cairo came to surrender. Bonaparte received them, and assured them of his friendship.

Bonaparte reappears.

BONAPARTE

The hour of the Beys' chastisement is come. There are in your region great cities, canals, and commerce, and who has destroyed them all but the injustice of these Mamelukes? God has now destined their end. People of Egypt: they tell you that I come to destroy your religion. I come to restore your rights, and honor God, his Prophet, and the Koran. All men are equal before God, and wisdom, talent, and virtue are the just grounds of distinction. Tell the people that we are true Muslims. Is it not we who destroyed the Pope, the Christian enemy of Islam? Thrice happy are they who shall be with us; they shall prosper. Happy those who shall be neuter; they will have time to know us, and they will join us also. But thrice woe to those who take arms for the Mamelukes; there shall be no hope for them. Return in peace to your houses. Resume your prayers; fear nothing for your property, your families, and your religion. Muftis, imams, mullahs, dervises, and kalenders, instruct the people; encourage them to join in our labors. Favor the commerce of the Franks, and drive far from you the English! Such is the will of Mohammad. The industry and friendship of the Franks shall be your lot, till you ascend to the seventh heaven.

SCENE 7 - EXT. EVENING

A decorated platform is at center. Kleber enters onto the platform. French and Arabic words and symbols are woven together on the decorations.

KLEBER

Soldiers, your continued bravery has been a sterling example, a worthy emulation of General Bonaparte.

(beat)

However, it is imperative that we adhere to principles of law and order. The General-in-Chief himself articulated such principles not so long ago. I would like to reiterate three in particular before you this evening, that are of the utmost importance:

"Article I.

There shall be in each province a *divan*, composed of seven individuals, whose duty it will be to superintend the interests of the province; to communicate any complaints that may be made; to prevent warfare among the villages; to apprehend and punish criminals (for which purpose they may demand assistance from the French); and to take every opportunity of enlightening the people.

"Article II. There shall be in each province an *aga*, maintaining constant communication with the French. He shall have with him a company of sixty armed natives, for the maintenance of good order, subordination, and tranquillity.

"Article III. There shall be in each province an *intendant*, whose business will be to levy the contributions which formerly belonged to the Mamelukes, but which now belong to the French Republic".

(beat)

In such a manner, this Republic distinguishes itself from the merciless invasions of the past. Let us continue on the path we have charted with the Institute and the other fruits of the Revolution.

SCENE 8 - INT. NIGHT

Guillaume steps into a room filled with maps and assorted stacks of papers. Here, he comes across VIVANT DENON, a scholar from the Institute. Denon is a polite academic, eager for any opportunity to utilize what he's learned in Egypt.

GUILLAUME

Monseiur Denon?

DENON

Vivant. Glad to meet another man of figures.

(beat)

Kleber tells me you're the man who will lead the reassessment. I've been hidden away reading far too many records as of late. The least I can do is fill in whatever questions you may have.

GUILLAUME

Excellent. Let's start with money.

DENON

What about it?

GUILLAUME

How has it normally been collected by the authorities?

DENON

When the Turks came to officially rule Egypt, they allowed the Mamelukes to actually rule, so long as tribute was paid to Istanbul.

Under that arrangement, the Mamelukes were given auxiliary functions to help the Turks manage Egypt from afar, including the collection of taxes. Given that the Mameluke leaders are also military men, this complicated the situation. The Mameluke commanders constantly needed more money to bribe their men to remain loyal, or to buy weapons to arm their side. At the time we landed, the Mameluke military controlled over 60% of the country's customs dues and 80% of the rural farms.

GUILLAUME

So replacing it with the French military may not be so different after all.

DENON

The tax collection itself has never been a smooth process. Some of the locals' stories make the American protests seem tame by comparison.

GUILLAUME

How so?

DENON

An entire village might be swept up in fear and panic. Under the old order, if the men had no money to pay, they might be forced to sell their cattle, or any jewelry their wife owned. Entire villages were willing to beat the tax collectors, burn their crops and desert the village itself - all so nothing could be collected. These troubles were only compounded by a string of almost biblical disasters. In 1783, a low flood from the Nile brought a drought that may have killed up to 500 a day. Then a plague came two years later, bumping that up to 1500 a day. The plague returned in 1791. 1500-2000 a day. Famine returned in 1792. The people allegedly resorted to eating animal corpses, and quite possibly each other. Together, over the last twenty years, over 1/3 of the entire population may have died on account of those disasters. In such times of crisis, males have been taxed and made to pay forced loans, but the economy never made a full recovery, even with such measures.

(beat)

General Bonaparte brought us savants along on this adventure to obtain knowledge of this land. If anything is certain to me, it's this: we have come upon a country that is depopulated, economically depressed, and in political disarray.

(beat)

GUILLAUME

Would it be too much if I asked for good news?

DENON

I have one morsel for you: it's come to my attention that the women of this country have never been taxed.

GUILLAUME

Not too surprising for the villages.

DENON

But the *wealthy* women in the cities. Do you know how much they possess?

GUILLAUME

Why haven't they been taxed?

DENON

Respect, perhaps? Something religious?
(beat)

GUILLAUME

If we focus a tax upon these wealthy women in the cities, starting with Cairo, what would be the chances of new revolt?

DENON

Less than in the villages, perhaps. That said, they might still be inclined to raise a fuss. No one likes to upset tradition.

(beat)

GUILLAUME

I know of someone we can speak to.

SCENE 9 - UNDEFINED SPACE

Guillaume resumes sharing from his private journal.

GUILLAUME

On August 13, I was with the army, returning to Cairo after a short expedition against the Mamelukes. Upon march, were met by an Aide, with intelligence that British Admiral Horatio Nelson had come up on our fleet and destroyed it.

(beat)

How great was the panic at what appeared to cut us off from all hope of seeing France. Much of the reports attributed this disaster to Bonaparte's confidence. It was said that the Admiral desired to return to France, but Bonaparte had detained him and ordered him to carry the fleet, if possible, into Alexandria.

(beat)

On September 20, Bonaparte, after reviewing his troops, pronounced a speech in front of a pyramid of wood, on which were inscribed the names of the soldiers who had died on our expedition.

Enter Bonaparte.

BONAPARTE

Soldiers: It is five years since our country was threatened. But you took Toulon, and firmly laid its fundamental stone. A year afterwards, you conquered the Austrians. In the year following, you were at the summit of the Alps. Who would have said that you would have come to the shores of the Nile? From the English to the hideous Arab, the eyes of the world are upon you. Your destiny is one of glory, and you are worthy of it. Like the brave whose names are inscribed on yon pyramid, you will die with honor, or in glory return to a country which is proud of you. In our beloved Republic, forty million citizens are celebrating the era of representative government, and thinking of their countrymen in Egypt. It is to their labors, to their blood, that we shall owe peace and civil liberty.

SCENE 10 - INT. DAY

Guillaume appears onstage, accompanied by Leclerc.

LECLERC

What exactly is this man's function?

GUILLAUME

He goes by the title of Ulama. Their principal role is to teach and interpret Islam.

LECLERC

Should I remain positioned outside the door?

GUILLAUME

No. Just invites attention. Stay by my side, and don't say anything too rash.

LECLERC

Yes, Commissary.

Before them is ABD AL-RAHMAN AL-JABARTI, a local with gregarious personality.

GUILLAUME

Are you Abd Al-Rahman Al-Jabarti?

ABD AL-RAHMAN AL-JABARTI

I am.

GUILLAUME

I am Guillaume Laurent, Commissary of the French Army. This is Private Leclerc. We have come to discuss business arrangements between our army and the city.

ABD AL-RAHMAN AL-JABARTI

Please be seated. I will fetch us some tea.

GUILLAUME

Thank you.

Leclerc and Guillaume sit down, as Al-Jabarti goes to prepare some tea.

ABD AL-RAHMAN AL-JABARTI

It is hard to believe that you have been present in our land for more than a year. Do you find yourself more accustomed to Egypt?

GUILLAUME

A bit. A traveller by land arrives gradually at new scenes, prepared by slow transition. By sea, the scene changes as though you are in a theatre. The sudden change can bring solitude.

ABD AL-RAHMAN AL-JABARTI

Perhaps you don't know what to seek out.

GUILLAUME

I've visited the citadels. The wells of Joseph. The aqueduct. The Mekias, and the Cities of the Tombs. Each day, I stop by the bazaars.

ABD AL-RAHMAN AL-JABARTI

Including the bazaar of women?

GUILLAUME

(somewhat embarrassed)

Once, with some comrades.

ABD AL-RAHMAN AL-JABARTI

Were you disappointed to find no bazaars for fair-skinned women?

GUILLAUME

(defensively)

No. I recall seeing the most beautiful woman. Her eyes had remarkable sweetness. Her features were delicate. She could have been a model in a painting.

(beat)

ABD AL-RAHMAN AL-JABARTI

It seems most of you French have relations with any woman who pleases you and vice versa.

(a bit in jest, a bit serious)

At times, when I am about to embrace one of you, I must remind myself of your dirtiness.

LECLERC

(incredulous)

How is that?

ABD AL-RAHMAN AL-JABARTI

Well, you do not shave your heads, nor your pubic hair. At meals, I've seen you mix all your foods with a single dish. Coffee, sugar, arak, raw eggs, limes -

LECLERC

(indignant)

Do you know what *I* see in Cairo? Blind, bearded men; people dressed in rags, pressed together or squatting in the streets; hideous women, hiding their fleshless faces under stinking rags and displaying their breasts through their torn gowns; yellow, skinny children devoured by flies.

ABD AL-RAHMAN AL-JABARTI

You were fortunate that the Mamelukes do not understand more complex military principles. The Beys proudly boast of what savage things they will do to their adversaries, but they are unbalanced in their reasoning and judgment. God-willing, this land may be graced by balanced leadership.

(beat)

GUILLAUME

We understand influence beyond the sword. French merchants have operated here for years. Our greater presence can pay dividends for both sides. In time, perhaps Cairo will rival Constantinople. Or the capitals of Europe.

(beat)

Our purpose of coming before you today is twofold. We first seek to negotiate more favorable agreements with the merchants of the city. More favorable for both sides. It is my understanding that you are an ulama of repute, and so it is my desire that you communicate our offers to those merchants within your network.

ABD AL-RAHMAN AL-JABARTI

That can certainly be done.

GUILLAUME

Splendid. Second, based upon our assessment of finances, we think it prudent to expand the pool of Egyptians who are subject to taxation.

ABD AL-RAHMAN AL-JABARTI

Who did you have in mind?

GUILLAUME

In particular, the wealthy women of the cities. Beginning with Cairo.

ABD AL-RAHMAN AL-JABARTI

That is difficult ground to navigate.

GUILLAUME

Surely you know of someone among the elites whom I could have an audience with? I firmly believe it would be a wise decision in the long-term.

(beat)

ABD AL-RAHMAN AL-JABARTI

There is one woman who comes to mind. She is a Mameluke bride, but she has done exceptionally well for herself without need of her husband. The Mamlukes may have been poor rulers, but there are gems even among them.

GUILLAUME

Will the husband be a problem?

ABD AL-RAHMAN AL-JABARTI

Not since you killed him near the Pyramids.

LECLERC

Excellent, then.

ABD AL-RAHMAN AL-JABARTI

She is shrewd, but at times, quite generous with her wealth. I can introduce you to her in several days time.

(beat)

My apologies. I left the water upon the stove. I will have your tea in a moment.

Abd moves to the stove, leaving Guillaume and Leclerc a moment to themselves.

LECLERC

Do you believe any of what you just said?

GUILLAUME

I do.

LECLERC

Such things will never happen.

Abd returns with the tea.

LECLERC (CONT'D)

The Commissary tells me that you are a man of the Islamic faith?

ABD AL-RAHMAN AL-JABARTI

That is correct.

LECLERC

Such faith seems quite...fundamental. What makes you so comfortable as to be speaking with us Christians in your own home?

ABD AL-RAHMAN AL-JABARTI

I may be a man of faith, but I am not blind to practicality. A kingdom survives if it is ruled by a just ruler, even if he be impious. That same kingdom collapses under an unjust prince, even if he be pious. The misfortune of kings lies in a people in disobedience, and a leader in weakness of direction.

(beat)

Every so often, the Egyptian people rise up, and disobey their leaders. It is not difficult to understand why. Famines, plagues, petty wars between the Mameluke commanders, exploitation of the masses. Each time they disobey, we all fall one step closer to chaos. So, to combat such chaos, we ulama have tasked ourselves with being intermediaries and negotiators between the people and whoever is leading them. To try and find some way to redistribute the wealth of Egypt. As a result of such services, we received patronage from the Mamelukes. It is we who gave them legitimacy - that, and their ability to defend the land from invaders. So long as you can handle your responsibilities, I can handle mine.

SCENE 11 - UNDEFINED SPACE

Guillaume returns alone, center stage.

GUILLAUME

Bonaparte, to divert both himself and the army from that naval disaster, went about improving administration. He ordered the Institute to research the history and geography of the country. He encouraged the establishment of arts and trades found in European capitals. Cairo soon assumed a kind of European appearance. We had upholsterers who made us chairs, tables, and beds. A tannery produced saddles and bridles in the best taste. Shoemakers and hatters were followed by restauraners and distillers - liquors, viands, and pastry a la mode Francaise. Women entertained our Generals and Officers. These ladies taught us Arabic, we instructed them in French. We endeavored to make the best of the country; and with the women, the music, and the fine weather, we were happy.

(beat)

I must quote a letter, sent from Bonaparte to Madam Brueys, our deceased Admiral's lady.

Enter Bonaparte.

BONAPARTE

Your husband, Madam, has fallen under cannon shot, fighting bravely on board his vessel. He died the death of a soldier. The first moment of our separation from those we love is terrible; it renders us solitary upon the earth; it shakes us in body, and in mind.

We see and hear nothing in the external world but through a medium of grief. In having lost all that we deem worth living for, we lose relish of life. We become indignant with the world because it does not seem to feel as we do. But we fly to our friends, to our relations, to our children, for comfort; we bring other sentiments in competition with our grief. We find that not all is lost; we yield ourselves to love, to tenderness, to natural affection, and we become consoled before we are aware of it. This is my advice, Madam: embrace your children, weep with them, and soften your grief by indulging it. Inform them of the loss which they and the country have sustained; then devote yourself to their education, and replace the loss of one brave man by giving us others in his children. And do me the justice, Madam, to believe, that no one in the present feels your loss more than myself; and when you reflect upon what friends remain, do not forget Bonaparte.

GUILLAUME

This observation is as true as it is profound. The whole letter is eloquent, yet simple. It is impossible to read it without feeling that he was a most extraordinary man.

(beat)

We found Bonaparte improving his residence - making the best of bad circumstances. The grounds of the Mamelukes were abound in beautiful trees and flowers; but they were in mass with no paths, no borders, no tasteful disposition. Under the hand of Bonaparte, everything assumed a new air; the lemon, the orange, and the banana gave fruit, and we took coffee and pipes under a rich shade. When possessing the time, Bonaparte departed from Cairo for Suez. He was occupied with tracing the line of the ancient canal by which the Nile once communicated with the Red Sea. He had discovered this line, and vowed to restore it. It is impossible not to lament that a man of this magnificent mind had not virtue corresponding with his talents.

SCENE 12 - INT. DAY

Inside an ornate room is NAFISA KHATUN, a Mameluke widow. She is dressed in a fashion more noticeably elegant than Masika's. Guillaume and Abd step in to greet her.

NAFISA

You are a sight for sore eyes, Ulama.

ABD AL-RAHMAN AL-JABARTI

Madam, the pleasure is mine. Have the arrangements regarding Tuman's property been fully sorted out?

NAFISA

As much as they can be. Thank you for your oversight.

ABD AL-RAHMAN AL-JABARTI

Has the next marriage fallen into place?

NAFISA

No.

(gestures to Guillaume)

These ones have complicated things, not that I'm complaining.

ABD AL-RAHMAN AL-JABARTI

Nafisa, this is Guillaume Laurent, the French Commissary of War.

GUILLAUME

It's a pleasure to meet you, madam.

NAFISA

I do appreciate your courtesy to see me in person.

GUILLAUME

I'm aware of our uneven conduct. I come today to discuss with you the policy -

NAFISA

Yes, yes, that the French authorities intend to impose taxes upon the women of Egypt. I've been informed. Such a policy was never implemented, not even by the Mameluke Beys.

GUILLAUME

The state of the economy has left us with no choice.

NAFISA

How will you proceed?

Guillaume procures some papers from a satchel he's been carrying.

GUILLAUME

The first stage of the tax plan has already been prepared for the entirety of Cairo.

NAFISA

How many noble women will be made subject to it?

GUILLAUME

Scanning the document.

5,274.

(beat)

NAFISA
(making internal
calculations)

I'll pay them.

GUILLAUME

For who? All of them?

NAFISA

Yes.

GUILLAUME
(surprised, but suppressing
with manners)

Thank you for your generosity.

(beat)

What is it you seek in return?

NAFISA

Nothing. At least not for the time being.

(beat)

So many of the Mameluke brides began as slaves. I myself was bought by my late husband. In time, I came to acquire female slaves, and I've married them off into many households. They remain my confidants, and whenever they may find themselves in trouble, they appeal to me.

(beat)

The constant warmongering of the Mameluke men rendered most as having short life spans. It has become abundantly clear to me, then, that survival is not dependent upon brute show of strength. Thanks to such souls as the Ulama, I've learned about the management of property from his network of knowledgeable minds. He also knows the merchants, and so I've come to learn from them too. Meanwhile, my husband was too busy fighting to keep track of such necessities. The only one left to trust with such duties was me.

(beat)

In fact, I do have one request for you at this time.

GUILLAUME

Yes?

NAFISA

In the past, many of the Mameluke elites would host open meals for the people of Cairo. It was not only a means to maintain channels of communication with the less fortunate, but also a demonstration of generosity. Tables were set up, and anyone who wished could enter. After the meal itself would be finished, any guest could present a request to elites present. I will condition my payment upon an assurance that the French reintroduce such a practice.

Your gatherings have been far too exclusive among the military and its attachments.

GUILLAUME

Of course.

NAFISA

I will make things even simpler for you: I shall host it.

GUILLAUME

Madame, you've been far too kind. We can certainly be responsible -

NAFISA

No. I insist.

(beat)

I'm afraid I must be off. I have a meeting with an Artisans Guild on the other side of the city. I will have one of my servants call on you this week. From there, we can coordinate upon this great banquet.

With just enough respect and attention paid to Guillaume and Abd, Nafisa departs from the stage, leaving the two to see themselves out.

SCENE 13 - INT. NIGHT

Denon, Leclerc, and Lajoie are in the midst of the lavish party hosted by Nafisa, who is watching over everything. Amidst the scene are French and Egyptian partygoers. Some French and Egyptian only mingle with their own faction, while others are willing to interact with their counterparts. Some interactions are jovial, while others are cautious.

LAJOIE

You've visited the city baths?

DENON

Yes. Three times.

LAJOIE

What's it like?

DENON

You find yourself in a vast wooden hall. You undress, and waiters wrap a napkin about your loins, and give you wooden sandals for your feet. Among the vapors, it is so hard to breath that you will need to sit down to acclimate. Then, you enter a new hall, surrounded by more vapors, and give way to heavy perspiration. Once you've collected some strength, a waiter rubs your body with a glove of thick wool - removing all the dirt from your pores.

He proceeds to soak you with water and soap. Here now are the most peculiar things of all - he takes your limbs and cracks the joints. Then, he cracks your spine. Without pain. Inconceivable dexterity. Taking your head, he turns it rapidly. At last, he pinches the skin on your forehead with a napkin to prevent headaches. There is another hall, with a basin of water so hot that I can't bear to keep my hand in it. The locals plunge into it, and emerge as red as lobsters. After all this, you are wrapped in linen, and upon another bed, servants press your flesh with their hands, scrape the soles of your feet with pumice, and do more cracking of your joints. You enjoy coffee and a pipe, and if you fall asleep, no one wakes you. The expense is cheap - you see the poor and rich use the same facilities. The women have their own days, on which a green curtain indicates that men may not enter. As slight a barrier as it is, it is as much respected as a lady's gown is with us.

L.AJOIE

My goodness. How did you first come to such a place?

DENON

General Menou suggested I pay a visit. Not so long ago, he married the daughter of the bathhouse keeper, and converted to Islam in the process. From what I understand, the General mistakenly believed that he was marrying into aristocracy because her family claimed themselves to be descendants of the Prophet Muhammed.

LECLERC

Quite the rude awakening.

DENON

At first. I do think he came to love his bride. She herself has been seen happily wearing European fashions. A fine exchanging of culture, as it were.

LECLERC

And the woman hasn't been assaulted by her Egyptian comrades?

DENON

Here's the trick: since General Menou had become a Muslim, no violence is permitted against his bride.

(beat)

How different are we from the Egyptians at this point? Some of us use the baths as frequently as them. Most of us who have been induced to try their pipes now take great gratification from them.

LECLERC

(almost defensively)

I find their tobacco less bitter than ours, and there is something about the apparatus they use.

DENON

We burn perfumes, drink sweet wines and honey. We have listened to Arabian tales by the fountains and under the shade of orange groves. This damn heat has made us trade in our dress for looser robes.

LECLERC

You certainly can't complain about the comfort.

DENON

Yes, but having found the change comfortable, we have become complete Arabs.

(beat)

Lajoie

Let's say, for argument's sake, that we *have* "become" some bit native - is that necessarily a negative thing?

DENON

Perhaps not, if we can pick and choose their virtues and incorporate them with our own.

LECLERC

Even if we assume "Arab" traits, do you believe that the people will recognize that?

DENON

Perhaps.

LECLERC

And what if they don't? Should we abandon this enterprise?
(beat)

DENON

Not long ago, on one of the Institute's scientific expeditions, I passed through a valley of sand, where I saw massive pieces of petrified wood. There must have been a large forest long ago. It surprised me that no travelers had made mention of such a place, but I came to understand why. The hills of sand move with the least wind. An object discovered one day will soon be engulfed in the sand. Another, at a profound depth, may yet again find the surface. It is frequent enough that natives have reported of whole villages being abandoned.

(beat)

Egypt is not as constant as its people would like to believe. Yes, the Arabs think themselves to be the children of the Pharaohs, but how many others have occupied this land across the centuries? Macedonians, Romans, Crusaders.

(beat)

A bell rings loudly, drawing the attention of the partygoers.

LECLERC

I do believe it's time for the evening's entertainment.

LAJOIE

Do you have some inkling of what it will be?

DENON

I would wager it's between jugglers and dancers.

LECLERC

Here's hoping for the dancers.

VIVANT DENON

I would not count out the jugglers so quickly. The female dancers may be attractive, but the jugglers are quite remarkable. I have seen them cause even the most hideous serpents and insects to dance before a crowd.

LAJOIE

I suppose it all depends upon your appetite.

SCENE 14 - UNDEFINED SPACE

Guillaume resumes his solitary space at center stage.

GUILLAUME

For some time, every thing had been very tranquil in Cairo, but this was suddenly interrupted. One night, I was alarmed at the unusual silence. The doors were all shut; the streets were deserted, and some indistinct clamors were heard. I was certain that all was not right. I decided to make my way to the post of a nearby regiment, and I found General Depuis ordering the infantry to be ready to march. He proceeded towards a cemetery, where a tumultuous populace was assembled. He was surrounded and assassinated. The inhabitants were armed with clubs, pikes, sabres. Many of the French in remote quarters were killed, their houses pillaged and burned. Bonaparte placed cannon at the mouth of the principal streets. The Institute considered itself in the state of siege, and the philosophers were compelled to take arms.

(beat)

General Daumartin opened a cannonade from the citadel upon the mosque. The bombardment continued during the night, and in the morning the chiefs came to solicit pardon. It was granted. The priests and heads of the law then addressed the inhabitants: "An unhappy sedition has arisen in the city and caused the death of many Muslims. But we have interceded with General Bonaparte, and have procured him to save the city from the fury of the soldiers, for he is full of kindness and compassion towards all Muslims. Hereafter respect the laws, and avoid sedition". Bonaparte ordered several forts to be erected around the city.

Enter Bonaparte.

BONAPARTE

Make the people understand that my enemies shall neither have refuge in this world nor in the next. Is there any man so blind as not to see that Destiny directs my operations? Having beaten down the cross, I come from the west to fulfill the task. In more than twenty passages of the Koran, that which happens has been foreseen. I could call each of you to account for the most secret thoughts of your hearts. A day will come when all the world will see it proved, that I am guided by superior orders and that all human efforts will avail nothing against me.

GUILLAUME

In the north, the Ottoman Turks grew concerned over our continued dominion in Egypt. So, a grand army was sent south, encouraged by our European enemies. Bonaparte decided to meet them before they reached Egypt. So, much of our army marched into the Levant. At first, the spring sky cheered our spirits, and the heat was moderate. Our soldiers received the rains with rapture, but when these became torrents, they wished for the nights of Egypt. There, we suffered horribly during the day, but nothing could be more divine than our nights; the vault of Heaven studded with innumerable stars, and a concave moon. The Turks left us ammunition in every town. This was acceptable, as the English had intersected communication by sea. But ultimately, provisions began to fail, and we were compelled to eat our camels and asses. General Kleber's division marched for the first village of Palestine. They wandered about the desert for forty-eight hours, during which they suffered from more heat, fatigue, and burning sand. Kleber had the guide shot on the spot. Bonaparte himself was once in extreme danger; he had only his guides and staff with him, and came across a whole enemy army within musket shot. His usual fortune saved him.

SCENE 15 - INT. DAY

Kleber stands at a table, beside him is Guillaume and GENERAL DESAIX: modest but able, mild but firm. Nothing escapes his attention, and he likes to speak with everyone. He is expressive, gregarious, sharp, and profound in his judgment. He is also a glory hound, his only fear being that he will lose opportunities to gain more of it from war.

KLEBER

It seems the English and Russians have once again roused the Turks to act. A fleet is heading in the direction of Aboukir Bay, and the Grand Vizir is moving in the east. Meanwhile, Seid Ali moves from Constantinople with a second fleet, coordinated with the Englishman Sir Sidney Smith.

This force appears to be moving towards Damietta.

(beat)

I imagine it to be an effort to divert our attention away from the east. If so, we simply need to be smart with the division of our men. I'll be sending Cameron towards Damietta with 2000 men to establish defensive lines.

(beat)

Should they be persistent, we must ensure that we have sufficient resources for a prolonged campaign - perhaps months. Commissary, I need you to scrounge up everything you can find.

GUILLAUME

Yes, sir.

Guillaume moves across the stage, into a scene at his residence. There, he is greeted by Masika, who has been waiting for his return.

MASIKA

Another late evening with the staff?

GUILLAUME

Yes.

MASIKA

What did you speak of?

GUILLAUME

If I were honorable, I would withhold it.

MASIKA

(teasingly)

Good thing you're not.

(beat)

You don't believe I'm a spy, do you?

GUILLAUME

Of course not.

(beat)

How was your week?

MASIKA

Nothing too special. I went to court yesterday to dispute that purchase I had told you about last week. The bakery on Saliba Street. I had hoped that the seller might be willing to settle beforehand, but there was no such luck to be had. Thankfully, this judge knows me.

(beat)

MASIKA (CONT'D)

Do you ever wonder why you did not fall for one of the European women in the army's entourage?

GUILLAUME

(jokingly)

Compared to the French soldiers, there aren't so many of them. Much too competitive.

(beat)

None of them are as interesting as you.

MASIKA

You don't just mean "exotic", do you? The east seems so fashionable for Europeans.

GUILLAUME

No, I don't. I can't stand the vapid talk about the trends going on at home. Much rather discuss poetry or philosophy.

MASIKA

Good. I like a man who is not so desperate.

GUILLAUME

For some Frenchmen, the want of a companion with whom they can speak lends charms to even the least beautiful. The wives of common soldiers become mistresses to generals and officers.

MASIKA

Have any children been born by the mistresses?

GUILLAUME

Yes. Some.

MASIKA

What happens to them?

GUILLAUME

Depends on their fathers. The French are proud. We fear social scandal. Usually, the motivation is to keep things secret.

(beat)

Some may own up to what they've done.

MASIKA

It's a pity that those children might never know their real parents.

GUILLAUME

No. Don't pity them. It only matters who raised them.

MASIKA

When I was growing up, my father owned a handful of shops in the city - just enough to be considered "elite" by most of those around us. But he was a proud man with lots of spirit. He would tell my siblings and me tales of our ancestors, who had stood tall before the arrival of the Mamelukes.

Their culture has always prized slave origins and military valor, so most of the free-born Egyptians became second-class citizens. But there was opportunity in the marketplace - for anyone. A woman could supervise trusts, or own tax farms, houses, shops, whole stories above the shops, weaving establishments. When the Mameluke rulers grew desperate for money to pay their factions, many sold their properties cheaply to women like me. By karmic justice, the tables seemed to turn.

GUILLAUME

What did your father make of those developments?

MASIKA

Well, he was certainly proud of me. But then there is always the divide between generations, and he is in some ways a traditionalist. For years, he has pushed and prodded for me to marry an ulama, a merchant, or even a more agreeable Mameluke elite.

GUILLAUME

As I understand it, he has not been successful.

MASIKA

No, not as of yet. But he has not relented. I hope that he does not force me into something. At the end of the day, I don't want to discover he's simply like the rest of them.

SCENE 16 - EXT. DAY

Guillaume is exploring a market with al-Jabarti.

GUILLAUME

Kleber expects us to double our general munitions within a few weeks' time. I admire the man, but I don't know if it's possible.

ABD AL-RAHMAN AL-JABARTI

Does that factor in the merchants I introduced you to last week?

GUILLAUME

One or two of them. Those men were kind enough to -

Guillaume suddenly notices something at a nearby stand that catches his attention.

If you'll excuse me one moment. I've gone too long without cardamom.

ABD AL-RAHMAN AL-JABARTI

Of course.

Guillaume approaches a SHOPKEEPER nearby.

'ade?

SHOPKEEPER

Shoo?

GUILLAUME

'ade?

SHOPKEEPER

(Impatient)

It's twenty. Twenty pieces of piastre.

GUILLAUME

(Defensive)

Okay then.

ABD AL-RAHMAN AL-JABARTI

Guillaume, if I may -

GUILLAUME

Thank you, it's quite alright.

ABD AL-RAHMAN AL-JABARTI

Alright.

GUILLAUME

Choukran.

SHOPKEEPER

Yes, thank you.

As Guillaume steps away, an OLDER WOMAN approaches to buy the very same product. They converse in Arabic.

OLD WOMAN

'Ade? "How much?"

SHOPKEEPER

Ashara. "Ten."

OLD WOMAN

Lah, lah. "No, no".

SHOPKEEPER

"That's it".

OLD WOMAN

"No, this is ridiculous".

SHOPKEEPER

"Ok, eighteen pieces then".

OLD WOMAN

"What do you take me for? If I were just one neighborhood over, I could find this for fifteen at most".

SHOPKEEPER

"I'm sorry. Eighteen is my final offer".

The woman appears to back away.

OLD WOMAN

"And I'm afraid I can do no more than twelve. Once I'm a few more feet away, I'm going next door".

(beat)

SHOPKEEPER

Mashi, mashi. "Ok, ok. Twelve".

OLD WOMAN

Choukran kteer. "Thank you very much".

Even in a different language, it's quite apparent to Guillaume that this woman purchased the same item for a much lower price.

ABD AL-RAHMAN AL-JABARTI

I take it you have not had the pleasure of haggling at the souks? These shopkeepers prey on European manners.

GUILLAUME

I thought that something seemed off.

ABD AL-RAHMAN AL-JABARTI

Well, were you going to argue it with him?

GUILLAUME

No.

ABD AL-RAHMAN AL-JABARTI

You Europeans are too polite to argue. You wage war but you can't be belligerent with words at a market. The skill is almost a second kind of currency. You must learn.

(beat)

GUILLAUME

What of your merchant friends elsewhere in the city? Are they willing to assist us?

ABD AL-RAHMAN AL-JABARTI

Several of them are happy to speak with you, but some have also expressed doubts.

GUILLAUME

What doubts?

ABD AL-RAHMAN AL-JABARTI

Well, they are aware of the English and Turkish plans. Between General Bonaparte's departure and the prospect of another invasion, they don't feel too good about the French side. Some actively hope for your defeat.

GUILLAUME

Is there *anything* we could do to change their minds? A gesture of good will? What about an urban renewal project?

ABD AL-RAHMAN AL-JABARTI

I do not know.

GUILLAUME

(exasperated)

We've introduced responsible tax plans. New strategies for stockpiling food. More freedoms for sellers, porters, donkey boys, artisans, pimps, and prostitutes.

ABD AL-RAHMAN AL-JABARTI

It could be that those were changes for the best, but there are two things to keep in mind. First, people are bound to tradition and habit. Second, people are too proud to acknowledge something if you present it as a gift you have bestowed in your great wisdom.

(beat)

GUILLAUME

(noticing the time on his pocket watch)

I apologize, but I best be going. There's a review at the main barracks I must attend.

ABD AL-RAHMAN AL-JABARTI

Of course. I am sorry that I cannot be of more assistance.
(beat)

GUILLAUME

Do you ever fear for your safety - since you're willing to speak with me out in public?

ABD AL-RAHMAN AL-JABARTI

I am not a supporter of the French nation, but I am open to friendship with a French man. I trust that my comrades whom I respect can understand that.

SCENE 17 - UNDEFINED SPACE

Guillaume returns to his journal.

GUILLAUME

In the course of our invasion of the Levant, we came to the city of Jaffa, and put it under siege.

A statement was made to the citizens: "The Ottoman Turks have commenced hostilities against Egypt, but God has given victory to the French. This army has now entered Syria to expel them. Jaffa is invested on all sides by French troops. In two hours, not a stone will be left upon another; in pity, Bonaparte is willing to accept the submission of the garrison. For this purpose, he will hold off any assault till seven o'clock this morning." The Turks gave no other answer but cutting off the head of the man who brought this message.
(beat)

At this time, several actors come onstage, to play out in silence what unfolds as it is told by Guillaume. These moving tableaux are not intended to be deeply realistic enactments, but abstract communications of deep pain, primal emotions, and trauma.

Upon overwhelming them, every street, house, and chamber was the scene of a town taken by assault. Women and girls were thrown on the floor, and in the streets, and ravished by every man who preferred lust to murder. The husbands and fathers had their throats cut in the effort to relieve their wives and children. I was ordered to take a detachment and remove the wounded. One young grenadier had a ball gone through his breast. He asked me if it was still in him. I replied it was not, and that his wound was not mortal. He thanked me, but requested me to let him die. I was about to remove him when a soldier, leading a spirited horse, struck the beast on his behind because it was unwilling to trample upon the wounded man. I was about to menace the wretch for his lack of humanity when a crowd of soldiers and their horses pressed upon the breach, pushing the horse forwards, finishing the sufferings of the man.

SCENE 18 - INT. DAY

Kleber, Desaix, and Lajoie are positioned around a map in Kleber's quarters.

KLEBER

Do you remember what I told you all about General Bonaparte and his impatience? We were witness to such spirit. The Turks lost at the hands of their own impatience. Their infantry rushed into the fray, exposing their sides to our cavalry. The artillery might have played a role, but they dared not fire upon a crowd composed of both their own troops and Frenchmen. Instead, the Turks threw themselves into the Mediterranean.

(beat)

Sir Sidney Smith has joined with the Grand Vizir. A Turkish force, 60,000 strong, now holds position in the Levant.

(beat)

I am open to all informed opinions on how we should proceed.

DESAIX

We are hemorrhaging men every day. In Alexandria, it is by plague. Elsewhere, by engagements, or ordinary disease. The army has been reduced to nearly half of what it was when we departed from France. At some point, the army will be obligated to treat on honorable terms with the English and the Turks.

LAJOIE

This "hemorrhaging" army has continued to chase formidable forces out of Egypt. We remain masters of the desert passages and approaches to Cairo. This army would repulse any British force, should one ever land.

(beat)

KLEBER

Bonaparte prescribed to me the conduct I should pursue if reinforcements did not arrive by this time. I do not know if he has reached a French port. Since the fleet was destroyed, whatever further conquests this army might gain are sure to be taken back. We have had no means of recruiting, at more than 500 leagues from home. We could be of vital use in Italy against new Austrian threats, and I've heard many men express their desire to return home. But all is not lost.

(beat)

I will dictate a letter to Paris, representing our situation.

SCENE 19 - UNDEFINED SPACE

We return to Guillaume's account of the Levant Invasion.

GUILLAUME

Our route to Acre, the great citadel of the Ottoman Turkish army, was rendered more difficult by rains which destroyed the roads, if they could be called. Our horses, asses, and camels could not extract their feet from the mud. Two vessels of Sir Sidney Smith's entered Acre, and Bonaparte addressed the city.

Bonaparte appears.

BONAPARTE

God is clement and merciful - I have made war upon the Ottoman Pchas because they provoked it. I command you to submit. It is fate that I should conquer Egypt and Syria. All my friends shall prosper in this world, and in the next. All my enemies shall be unhappy in both.

Learn from Jaffa and Gaza how terrible I am to my enemies - how clement and merciful to my friends. Do you desire war or peace? If peace, I will give it to you. If war, I will bring it to you.

GUILLAUME

He also wrote to the eldest Pacha, Djezzar.

BONAPARTE

It is not my wish to make war against you, but you provoke it. What purpose of mine will answer, if I should shorten the few years which yet remain to an old man like you? Dismiss the Mamelukes from Egypt, and take peace and pardon.

GUILLAUME

After a cannonade from daylight to three pm, the order was given. The grenadiers rushed to the breach. Djezzar appeared, firing pistol shots, and rallied his men. The enemy also assembled behind mountains on our right. General Murat was sent to make a reconnaissance, and I accompanied him. The hills were covered with shrubs, and flowers of a thousand hues saluted our eyes. We congratulated ourselves on what Syria might be under European cultivation.

(beat)

Three attacks were made upon Acre, with the same ill success. The sufferings became so great, and the putridity of the dead so offensive, that a frightful mortality appeared - the plague, and the knowledge of it spread terror. Bonaparte made almost daily attacks; they all failed, and this began to depress the spirits of the army. We began to believe Bonaparte was not infallible. It was resolved to abandon the siege.

BONAPARTE

Soldiers - you have traversed the desert with greater rapidity than an Arabian army. The enemy, on march to invade Egypt, is destroyed; you have taken its General, its field equipment, and its baggage. You have possessed yourselves of all the waters of the desert. Having maintained a war for three months in the heart of Syria, having taken forty pieces of cannon; six thousand prisoners, and razed the fortifications of Gaza, Jaffa, and Acre. Could we wait here only a few days, we might take the Pacha in his palace; but the capture of this ruined fort is not now worth the delay. I might lose some of those brave men whom I require for more essential services. Soldiers, you have a career of danger and fatigue to run. Having so bravely repelled all the efforts of the east, you are now called to repel those of the west. You shall find new occasions of glory, and if every day is marked with the death of a hero, new heroes must arise beneath their example; and must take their rank among that illustrious few, who command fortune, and compel victory.

SCENE 20 - INT. DAY

We return to Kleber's office. He is once again with Desaix.

DESAIX

The English seized our vessel destined for France. One of our sailors attached the letters to a cannonball and threw it overboard, but the cord broke. The information intended for the Directory in Paris has likely been passed along to Admiral Smith.

A change in lighting signals the passage of time. We enter in on a new meeting between Kleber and Desaix.

DESAIX (CONT'D)

The Admiral asserts that any arrangement cannot be done without England's consent. Furthermore, he states that conferences to discuss the matter should be on board his ship. He was adamant that there should be no peace so long as Egypt is not restored to its sovereignty.

(beat)

KLEBER

I will appoint you to speak on my behalf before the Admiral and the Vizir. I have no objection to the conferences being held on board Sir Smith's vessel.

SCENE 21 - UNDEFINED SPACE

Guillaume returns.

GUILLAUME

(both defensive and ashamed)

I pledged to reveal the worst which may inform future opinion of us: the fate of the prisoners. The army was weakened by our costly campaign to Acre. The average soldier rarely received full ration. To feed the prisoners was to encumber our movements; to confine them would have created the possibility of revolt. There remained only one course: frightful, but believed necessary. These troops did not without extreme repugnance submit to the service.

As before, several actors come onstage to play out what is described by Guillaume. He is aware of their presence, and cannot avert his attention from them as he continues to describe the events that unfold.

The Turks foresaw their fate. They shed no tears, they were resigned. Some wounded who could not march so fast as the rest were bayoneted on the way. Having reached the sand-hills, they were halted near a pool of dirty water. The officers had the mass divided into small bodies, being led to different parts, where they were then shot in quick succession. One young man threw himself at the feet of a horse, and implored the officer above to spare his life: "Of what am I guilty? What evil have I done?" His tears were unavailing. All other Turks, taking each other's hand, gave and received an eternal adieu. Their spirits defied death; you saw in their tranquility the confidence which in those last moments was inspired by their religion, and the hope of a happy hereafter. They seemed to say "I quit this world to enjoy with Mohammed a lasting happiness." I saw a respectable old man coolly order a hole to be made in the sand, deep enough to bury him. He laid himself upon his back, and his comrades covered him with sand, and trampled upon the soil, to accelerate his sufferings. Our soldiers exhausted their cartridges, and it was necessary to destroy them with the bayonet and sword. I could not support this horrible sight, but hastened away, pale and almost fainting. These men, yielding to that fear which makes us shrink from death, strove to get behind one another. There was a pyramid of the dead and the dying, and it was necessary to drag away the bodies of the dead, in order to finish the wretches who had not yet been reached. Not many days later, I was demanding provisions of the Sheik of a local village. He was slow in obedience. I reported him to one of the generals - "kill him" he said, "and the next Sheik will obey you better".

SCENE 22 - INT. DAY

Kleber is again meeting with Desaix.

DESAIX

The Admiral has sent us a new year's message: a counter-proposal.

(beat)

Our return to France with arms and baggage will be faithfully executed. The proposal would ensure that the Turks be restored to possession of Egypt, but it would declare that the French army has not been defeated. That its bravery and reputation demonstrates that it still possesses means of resistance, and is not obligated to capitulate.

KLEBER

How considerate of our pride.

(beat)

The Ottoman Turks have upwards of 60,000 men, well-supplied by sea. Arabs from many countries have assembled with almost 15,000 camels. We have a force of 10,000, currently divided.

Belbeis must be guarded to preserve communications with Cairo. 1,000 men are stationed at Lesbeh to guard against insurrection, 1,800 are split across the Nile Delta, 1,200 are in Cairo and Giza, and nearly 2,500 are situated in Upper Egypt to hold off Murad Bey. The inhabitants are weary of our residence.

(beat)

I will sign the armistice. It is time to go home.

END OF ACT I

ACT II**SCENE 1 - UNDEFINED SPACE**

Guillaume occupies his space center stage.

GUILLAUME

We retreated from the Levant during the night, dozing upon our horses. We burned the villages and crops as we proceeded; the scene was horrible. Finally, we re-entered Egypt. Bonaparte took all dispositions to put the army in a state to fight new battles. The difficulty of procuring blue cloth caused all colors to be adopted. One regiment was in red, another in green, etc. Bonaparte, not unacquainted with rumors of our retreat, published a proclamation through Egyptian leaders.

Bonaparte appears.

BONAPARTE

He is arrived in Cairo, the Chief of the French army, who loves the religion of Mohammad. He rests with his soldiers, in perfect health, thanking God for his many favors. They entered Cairo by the gate of Victory, with the greatest splendor and attendance: the appearance of the troops was a most delightful spectacle. All the inhabitants went forth to meet him; convinced that the reports concerning him were false. Bonaparte beat the Turkish soldiers. He proceeded to Gaza, and they fled as birds and mice fly before the cat. He proceeded to Jaffa. The inhabitants despised his protection, and he gave them up to the fury of his troops; thus perished nearly five thousand. He destroyed their ramparts and pillaged all within the city: this is the work of God, who says, and all things are. He fed and clothed the Egyptians therein. Afterwards he destroyed the walls of Acre - the castle of the Turkish Pachas. Such is the termination of tyranny. Two motives induced his return - that he might observe the promise made to the Egyptians to come back in four months' time, for his promises are most sacred; the second, having learnt that disaffected had sown trouble during his absence. His highest ambition is the destruction of the wicked, and to confer favors on the righteous. Return then to God, submit yourselves to his decrees. The General will instruct himself in the Koran. He intends to build a mosque without equal, and he will embrace the religion.

Bonaparte disappears.

GUILLAUME

During the invasion, insurrections manifested through the country - one was particularly unique. An adventurer from the center of Africa announced himself to be the angel El Mahdy, promised by the prophet - uniting the Arabs.

The imposter pretended that he had descended into the desert, and on the destitute he lavished gold. With his group of followers, he surprised sixty men of our marine legion, and massacred them. By casting a little dust against our cannon, he pretended to prevent their firing. Colonel Lefebvre went with four hundred men to proceed against this angel. Formed into squares, we slaughtered these senseless men, who fearlessly put themselves upon our cannons, unable to recover from their delusion. It was not until night, on counting their killed and wounded, that they comprehended that miracles had ceased.

SCENE 2 - INT. NIGHT

Masika and Guillaume are inside his residence.

MASIKA

Has the deal been settled?

GUILLAUME

Yes. Kleber is traveling to sign it.

MASIKA

This calls for a celebration, then!

(beat)

You deserve some credit.

GUILLAUME

I did nothing directly.

MASIKA

You helped keep your men fighting to get to this point.

GUILLAUME

Alright then.

(beat)

MASIKA

What's to become of the army?

GUILLAUME

It will be permitted safe passage. Back to France.

MASIKA

The entire army?

GUILLAUME

Yes.

MASIKA

What about this colony you've attempted?

GUILLAUME

Command is willing to abandon it, so long as we see the Republic again.

(beat)

(in jest)

You're not sad to see it go, are you?

MASIKA

No, of course not.

(beat)

Have you been ordered to depart?

GUILLAUME

Not yet.

(beat)

Perhaps a detachment will be allowed to stay. To help with the transition.

MASIKA

Inshallah.

(beat)

We should go out and celebrate with your comrades.

GUILLAUME

That's alright. I'm happy to remain here.

MASIKA

What if I'm not?

GUILLAUME

Then feel free to go on without me. I'll be waiting for you.

(beat)

MASIKA

Are you feeling jealous?

GUILLAUME

Not particularly.

(beat)

MASIKA

Aren't you the least bit defensive?

GUILLAUME

Of course.

MASIKA

Well, I want you to show it more.

GUILLAUME

I trust you! Doesn't that count for something?

MASIKA

Yes, but I want you to assert yourself.

(beat)

Aren't you proud to be with me?

GUILLAUME

Yes!

MASIKA

Then show it.

GUILLAUME

Alright!

(beat)

MASIKA

Are you afraid of what would your fellow Frenchmen would think of you?

(beat)

Some aren't so bad.

GUILLAUME

You don't know them. They're *just* smart enough to not be obvious about it with you.

MASIKA

I've had pleasant conversations with Private Leclerc.

GUILLAUME

You trust *him*?

MASIKA

What is it about him that causes you so much trouble?

GUILLAUME

His arrogance. His obsession with blood.

MASIKA

He's too violent for you?

GUILLAUME

No. With inheritance. Family.

MASIKA

What do you mean?

GUILLAUME

He thinks he's the best among us because of his Family's noble status. He's only a private, but he believes he's entitled to a higher rank. As though we still had a king.

MASIKA

From what you've told me, your life has been not so different.

You are the eldest descendant son of the Ouimet family.
(beat)

GUILLAUME

Not according to men like him.

MASIKA

What do you mean?

GUILLAUME

My mother was a bastard child.

(beat)

She was raised by my grandmother, Marie Duquette, and my grandfather, Augustin Ouimet. By virtue of her social standing, my mother was targeted during the worst of the Revolution, and executed. When I could safely return home from my schooling, I sought any records I could find, to help keep her memory alive. Among the stacks of pages, I stumbled upon correspondence from a man in a nearby village, claiming that *his* father was responsible for my mother's conception - making this man her half-brother and entitled to some share of our possessions. For whatever reason, it seems my mother didn't investigate these claims. However, I couldn't just leave it be, and I pursued this lead. I spoke with many people in that nearby village, to get an understanding of who this other man was. It appears he was nothing more than a drunk merchant who ignored his own family. To sleep around with local women he fancied. My grandmother - twenty years his junior - fell in with him, as her family's estate was located close-by. When I brought these allegations to my surviving great aunt, Marie's sister, she confirmed it to be true.

MASIKA

Did your grandfather know?

GUILLAUME

He was a smart man. Maybe he deduced it from the circumstances. My mother's features. The timing of conception. Maybe he choose to raise her as his own despite the truth. Then again, he may have had no clue. Had the matter come to his attention, my mother might have been raised in squalor.

(beat)

People like Leclerc believe that, by virtue of that ugly secret, my mother and I have been severed from our family. That our real lot is with people with whom neither of us ever spoke. Whose customs played no role in our upbringing.

(beat)

I am bound to the narrative that has shaped my entire life. That is as true to me as anything else. It has done me good.

(beat)

Bonaparte might be the most arrogant man in all of France, but he shaped his own story.

A child of Corsica has become *the* General of a New France. By his narrative, we move closer to a society of merit - borne from the estates *and* the streets. He might have abandoned the army, but his example never left me.

(beat)

MASIKA

At some point in the past, I realized that the only difference between history and the fantastic tales I grew up with is that one can be said to be real with a bit more confidence than the other. Our peoples' histories are still stories we tell ourselves. So often, we can never know for sure what the past was actually made of, but its stories help us shape ourselves.

(beat)

All you should ask is his: what is the narrative that you believe in? That makes you feel the most alive and unafraid? For you, that is the truth, and you should have no shame in following it.

The two embrace.

SCENE 3 - INT. EVENING

Lajoie, Leclerc, and other soldiers are gathered in a dining hall, to celebrate the agreement.

Lajoie

(reading)

"For the evacuation of Egypt, between the Ministers of the General in Chief; and their excellencies the Ministers of His Highness the Supreme Vizir. The French army, willing to give proof of its desire to witness the termination of the quarrels, consent to evacuate Egypt, trusting that this concession will lead to the general pacification of Europe".

Leclerc

The terms, please.

Lajoie

"the French shall retire with arms, baggage, and effects, to be from thence embarked and transported to France, in their own vessels and in those necessary. There shall be an armistice until the period when embarkation shall be completely effected. All subjects of the Ottoman Turkish Empire detained in France or in the power of the French shall be set at liberty; all French detained in the Ottoman Turkish Empire shall be set at liberty. No inhabitant of any religion shall be disturbed for connections they may have had with the French. The French promise not to commit any hostility, and the vessels shall not touch any other coast than that of France, unless absolutely necessary.

The French army shall be furnished with the necessary quantities of wheat, meat, rice, barley and straw. Signed the 24th of January, 1800."

LECLERC

Smith has dispatched the agreement to London, Kleber is in route for Cairo, and all the officers are selling their horses.

(beat)

Gentlemen, I look forward to landing with you upon French shores!

SCENE 4 - EXT. DAY

Onto the stage come Lajoie, Denon, Leclerc, and Guillaume. They appear to have their eyes scanned on the horizon.

DENON

Well, Commissary, I might be more agreeable to this journey if not for the hazards all along the way.

(beat)

To think the battlefield might still be this messy after so much time: limbs; feet, heads, robes, muskets, sabres, turbans.

LAJOIE

Let's be quick about it then. If we have to sleep here, we'll be disturbed all night by the insects from the carcasses.

Guillaume suddenly stops in place, and directs the party to look outwards.

GUILLAUME

There. It's a flagship. Look at the size.

VIVANT DENON

Why would the British resume the blockade?

LECLERC

Their Court must have seen the intercepted letters. Seeing our situation was desperate, they sent new instructions.

LAJOIE

Even so, we reached an agreement!

A small barrage of cannon fire erupts in the distance. The group instinctively recoils, but realizes they are not the targets.

LAJOIE (CONT'D)

What is it shooting at?

GUILLAUME

There's a smaller vessel to the west, under lower sails. It looks like a long boat.

We hear the sound of a boat being hauled ashore. A FRENCH SAILOR appears.

SAILOR

Hello, my friends! I bring good tidings from the French Republic.

(beat)

Bonaparte is First Consul of France.

Lajoie

He is in the government?

SAILOR

Yes. He has made peace with much of the enemy Coalition, having trounced the Austrians again. Consul is a title in the new government - the Directory is no more.

(beat)

Colonel Latour is on board, with dispatches for General Kleber.

Leclerc

Let's show him the way then!

The group excitedly leads the sailor offstage, to deliver this news to Kleber.

SCENE 5 - INT. DAY

Kleber and Desaix are meeting once again in Kleber's quarters.

KLEBER

We sacrificed too much to leave this agreement for dead. General, I want you to send a party to locate the English Admiral, so that we may procure a precise explanation for this turn of events.

DESAIX

Certainly sir, but what of the Ottoman Turks? The Vizir is adamant that we abandon Cairo.

KLEBER

The city is our only fortified point outside of Alexandria. I can't do it.

DESAIX

He has brought his forces with him. Upwards of forty thousand.

KLEBER

According to this newly-arrived party, it appears that Bonaparte is preparing a maritime expedition to support us. Given everything that's transpired, I do not know if he will actually follow through.

(beat)

There is only one path, and we must take it now. We will set out at the break of day - we ought to direct the first impulse. If we allow the Turks to approach under the city walls, we may be exposed in the rear to rebels in the population. What are our numbers?

DESAIX

Twelve to thirteen thousand.

(beat)

KLEBER

So be it.

Kleber walks forward. Alone, at center, he addresses the troops.

KLEBER (CONT'D)

Soldiers: your hope has been disappointed, there is bad faith to punish, and an insult to avenge - not to mention the prospect of a dishonorable captivity. You are outraged in your honor, preferring a noble death to infamy. Remember Mount Tabor - how ineffectual that swarm of enemies besieged our weakened division. We were surrounded, but in our squares, we defied all efforts. You may be at a smaller number, but you are brave men, accustomed to the dangers of war, and proved by so many combats, formidable in your valor. Soldiers: we can answer such indignity only by victory - at the end of the bayonets. Let us march!

SCENE 6 - INT. DAY

Inside a military hospital, Guillaume is reclined, recuperating from an injury to his arm. Desaix enters.

DESAIX

Commissary! Thank goodness. How are you holding up?

GUILLAUME

(gesturing to his injured arm)

Alright. Hopeful that nothing will be removed.

(beat)

How did things progress?

DESAIX

As if by design: our infantry charged their lines, already broken by the artillery.

From there, the affair was quickly decided. The Vizir, seeing that we were about to cut him off, made a retreating movement, which turned into a rout.

GUILLAUME

What is Kleber planning now?

DESAIX

He is pursuing the Vizir's forces. They appear to be moving north. Meanwhile, Bey has proposed a settlement between us and his Mameluke forces.

GUILLAUME

Really?

DESAIX

Yes. I believe our victory demonstrated how hopeless it would be for the Mamelukes to keep struggling against our army.

GUILLAUME

You've certainly been my favorite visitor.

DESAIX

It's not all good news. We likely have another insurrection on our hands. One of the other Turkish commanders has moved between Kleber and Cairo. Not long after, a mass of citizens began killing all the French they've encountered, along with Christians accused of showing attachment to us.

GUILLAUME

Kleber can't take too long. He must return to Cairo soon.

SCENE 7 - INT. NIGHT

Inside Kleber's quarters are Kleber, Desaix, and Guillaume, who is still recuperating but in improved shape.

KLEBER

How many?

DESAIX

Twenty thousand men between the Turks and the revolting inhabitants of Cairo.

(beat)

KLEBER

We will assault the entrenchments. Should that prove unsuccessful, we will form a siege, and fix the batteries upon them.

(beat)

I'm tired of this. I will grant free passage to Syria for any Turkish detachments that remain.

We will cede a province to Bey, so long as the Mamelukes observe the peace and pay an annual tribute to - whoever is in control of Egypt.

(beat)

Commissary, may I have a word with you?

GUILLAUME

Of course, sir.

Upon silent order from Kleber, Desaix departs from the room.

KLEBER

Based upon our numbers, I believe that commissaries are needed to make preparations in France for the army's arrival. I have requested that you be appointed to one of these positions. You will be traveling with Desaix.

GUILLAUME

Thank you, sir. When must we depart?

KLEBER

Once we've retaken the city - no more than several days after.

(beat)

GUILLAUME

I will be ready.

KLEBER

Good. I will miss you, but I'd rather see you help get everyone home.

SCENE 8 - INT. NIGHT

Guillaume comes onstage to greet Abd Al-Rahman Al-Jabarti.

ABD AL-RAHMAN AL-JABARTI

Commissary, what brings you back to my residence?

GUILLAUME

No official business.

(beat)

How are you doing?

ABD AL-RAHMAN AL-JABARTI

Quite alright. I have seen a fair share of civil disobedience across my years. We ulama always find a role for ourselves.

(beat)

Are you leaving Egypt?

GUILLAUME

Yes. Officers are needed to prepare France for the troops' return.

(beat)

ABD AL-RAHMAN AL-JABARTI

What do you make of it?

GUILLAUME

Of what?

ABD AL-RAHMAN AL-JABARTI

This grand French enterprise.

GUILLAUME

I need some time and distance to make a proper assessment.

(beat)

ABD AL-RAHMAN AL-JABARTI

For what it's worth, it could have been much worse.

GUILLAUME

I suppose that's some consolation.

(beat)

I just know that I'm tired. The French countryside seems like the best cure.

ABD AL-RAHMAN AL-JABARTI

I hope you can find comfort in the familiar, then.

(beat)

But who knows? Perhaps we may see you again in these lands, under more balanced circumstances.

GUILLAUME

Inshallah.

Guillaume and Abd share a warm goodbye. The lighting shifts, and we now find Guillaume before Nafisa.

GUILLAUME (CONT'D)

Hello, madam.

NAFISA

Commissary. I'm honestly surprised to see you visit me.

GUILLAUME

Why is that?

NAFISA

As you might imagine, I'm aware of the evacuation.

GUILLAUME

And?

NAFISA

What purpose could I serve to the French now?
(beat)

GUILLAUME

I wanted to leave you with something.

NAFISA

Some sort of...token of appreciation? To convey how much you'll miss me?

GUILLAUME

No.

(beat)

I have with me a copy of recent French records for Cairo, pertaining to tax collection and food supplies.

NAFISA

I'm certain that in several weeks time, I could have procured all such information from my contacts.

GUILLAUME

These are the finest records I've seen on either subject. The savants have put in exceptional work.

NAFISA

Ah, there's that European arrogance shining through -

GUILLAUME

It's true.

(beat)

Normally, these would return with us to France. Destined to become decaying records. But they should serve some other purpose. They can help with the administration of this city.

NAFISA

If I take these records, I suppose you might find it a bit easier to sleep at night?

GUILLAUME

Perhaps.

NAFISA

You have earned the right to keep some hope alive.

The lighting shifts, and we now find Guillaume alone in his residence, busy cleaning up and organizing his things for his imminent departure. Suddenly, Masika appears.

MASIKA

Hello, Habibi.

GUILLAUME

Hello.

The two move to embrace.

GUILLAUME (CONT'D)

Maybe we should stop.

MASIKA

Why?

GUILLAUME

Might as well get used to it. Sooner rather than later.

(beat)

It seems to be the path that will bring the least pain.

MASIKA

After everything you've experienced, are you still so afraid of it?

GUILLAUME

I don't know how much more I'll be able to handle.

(beat)

MASIKA

Alright then, let's try it.

The two tentatively move apart from each other.

GUILLAUME

What will you do after the evacuation?

MASIKA

I'm not sure. It depends on who takes power. Should it be those who resent anyone who worked with the French - like the Mamelukes - my family and I may relocate outside of Cairo. I imagine they might try to seize my properties as retaliation.

GUILLAUME

If that happens, will you be alright?

MASIKA

I believe so. We were never in their good graces to begin with, but my family is resourceful. For all the times we've been plagued with misfortune, we always found a way to scrape by.

(beat)

GUILLAUME

This was all a fluke, wasn't it? That I was here in the first place. That we had this for as long as it lasted. You speak of reliable comforts - I never had something like this before. That I caught your attention was a shock to me - that I kept it was something more.

MASIKA

Patience, Habibi. We haven't lived so long. God willing, we have much time left on this earth. Let this be a message for both of us: see what is possible, even in the most hostile places. One day, when you're poring through dry correspondence, perhaps you may find an update from me, that takes you back to now, even if for a short while. I will find a way to have it done. And I look forward to learning of your exploits.

Reluctantly, they separate from each other.

SCENE 9 - INT. DAY

Guillaume is back in the office from the beginning of the play. He is tidying up the desk, making sure everything is ready for departure. As before, Leclerc enters.

LECLERC

I stopped paying attention to them.

GUILLAUME

What?

LECLERC

The calls to prayer.

GUILLAUME

What did it?

LECLERC

I'm not sure, exactly.

(beat)

They became familiar. That's probably it.

(beat)

GUILLAUME

I'm surprised to see you here. Seems as though everyone has relocated to the coast.

LECLERC

Well, why are you here, then?

GUILLAUME

Being thorough, that's all. Too much paper these past two years.

LECLERC

Of course.

(Beat)

I wanted to thank you, Guillaume.

GUILLAUME
For what?

LECLERC
Being constant.

GUILLAUME
How?

LECLERC
In your manner. No matter the circumstances. After Bonaparte abandoned the mission, I thought we'd certainly do ourselves in. Panic would cripple our advantages, and the enemy's manpower would do the rest. It's the ones like you who held it together, down the line. I think you've done Kleber proud.

GUILLAUME
I appreciate your sincerity, but I can't find much truth in it. Masses are moved by spectacle. Administration is a sideshow of a sideshow. Nothing invigorating about maintenance.

LECLERC
Not under normal circumstances. But under the extremities? A triumph.

(beat)

GUILLAUME
Do you intend to stay in the military?

LECLERC
Not if I can help it. But what to do with my time then? To my knowledge, the state still holds most of my family's assets. I could probably use our name to secure a civil post.

GUILLAUME
Well, whatever meets us, I hope you can adapt accordingly.

SCENE 10 - EXT. DAY

Desaix and Guillaume are standing side by side, on board a ship sailing to France.

GUILLAUME
I miss them already.

DESAIX
What?

GUILLAUME
The minarets of Cairo.

DESAIX

It's only been a few days.

GUILLAUME

I anticipate that I'll never see anything like them the rest of my life.

DESAIX

Well, never say never.

(beat)

GUILLAUME

When will viands be passed out for lunch?

DESAIX

At two o'clock. Or so the English officer told me.

GUILLAUME

You've spoken with him?

DESAIX

Yes. I was pleasantly surprised to hear him speak decent French. I don't trust the English in a big lot, but you can find a decent man.

(beat)

GUILLAUME

Have you spoken with any of the wounded?

DESAIX

Yes.

GUILLAUME

How are their spirits?

DESAIX

They're grateful, and filled with hope.

GUILLAUME

If only Kleber could have seen it.

(beat)

You know, I dread the sight of Toulon somewhat.

DESAIX

How is that?

GUILLAUME

We find ourselves, despite the vast expanse around us, bound to closed quarters. When we finally reach France, we must be bound up again, to prevent the spread of exotic disease.

DESAIX

After two years, what's another few weeks? We might just have a lovely view of green all the while.

(beat)
Were there any goodbyes you found to be difficult?

GUILLAUME
Yes.

DESAIX
Who might I ask?

GUILLAUME
A woman. The simplest mistake.
(beat)
Did I believe in the colony? Even if it survived, did I really expect to *remain* there?
(beat)
For all the warnings in my head, I threw myself straight into it.

DESAIX
Nothing is certain. You could have remained in France all this time, with a desk job, and found a girl in the city. No trouble of location or transience. Yet some other obstacles might inevitably break it down. I find that so many of my troubles are molded purely in the mind. Inside it is a shapeshifting spirit, which guarantees I always have a target of worry. I hope you can find solace in peacetime. If you've learned to toughen up this early *and* indulge in some passions, I think you're doing quite well for yourself.

SCENE 11 - INT. DAY

Guillaume and Lajoie are seated at a table in a muted room. Desaix appears, brandishing a bottle of wine and three cups.

DESAIX
To celebrate our final day of quarantine.

LAJOIE
How the hell did you get that?

DESAIX
Just a bit of persuasion. Months of haggling in the souks finally paid off.

GUILLAUME
Perhaps you should've held *my* position.

DESAIX
Too little spectacle, I'm afraid.
(beat)

GUILLAUME

How much time before you two must depart?

DESAIX

I've got time to spare for old comrades.

LAJOIE

Agreed.

(beat)

On board, there was a puzzling story I heard about Bonaparte. During our last battle with him - after the Turks had disembarked from their boats - it is said that he met with General Murat. In his confidence, Bonaparte is said to have exclaimed: "This battle will decide the fate of the world." What a delusional tone.

GUILLAUME

He had already contemplated his departure from Egypt. He had received the intelligence. The victory against the Turks would not decide the fate of the world, but General Bonaparte attached all the interest of the event to himself. He saw France uniting around a warrior, giving him sovereign power. He believed himself the arbiter of Europe. So, the battle would decide not only his own fate, but that of the world.

(beat)

DESAIX

(pulling out an envelope)

Speak of the man, and he shall appear. I received a letter from the General yesterday afternoon.

LAJOIE

What does it say?

DESAIX

It is an overview of his accomplishments upon returning to France.

GUILLAUME

Propaganda then?

DESAIX

No. It is too unhappy. This is sincere. He is describing the miseries that accompany greatness. He is covered with glory, but he is not happy.

(beat)

But did you see the report on the reserve army's march in last week's journal? Bonaparte will leave us nothing to do.

LAJOIE

Northern Italy is never quiet for too long. It's the safest bet to make up for lost time.

DESAIX

I certainly hope so. What about you, Guillaume? What's your first order of business?

GUILLAUME

My only stop for now is Paris. I must consult with the new government on matters of the army's return. I also want my family to know that I'm alive and in good health. I hope to see them in good health too.

DESAIX

Well, whatever you decide, I hope you find what makes you happy to be alive.

The three men embrace, and Desaix and Lajoie exit. Guillaume remains onstage. As if possessed, he removes a sheet of paper from his knapsack, and begins to write.

GUILLAUME

(reading aloud as he writes)

"To Masika al-Sayed, Chief Advisor of his Excellency, I write to you to reaffirm the French Republic's commitment to the great Egyptian state. Though it has been removed from its intellectual and military enterprise in the region, France still recognizes the value of a great alliance and interexchange between our peoples. Such opinions remain at the forefront of First Consul Bonaparte's mind. Any request you may have of the French Republic will be given due consideration. Yours Truly, Guillaume Laurent, Commissary of the Army of the Orient, Liaison to Egypt, Patriarch of the Ouimet Family".