

Traces (10 page sample)

by
Raffi Asdourian

ZAFFI Pictures
917-653-3294
Raffi@zaffi.com
WGA Registered

TITLE: MOUNTING TENSIONS BETWEEN CHRISTIANS AND MUSLIMS BELIEFS ARE RISING WITHIN THE OTTOMAN EMPIRE OF TURKEY. A COMMITTEE OF UNION AND PROGRESS, OTHERWISE KNOWN AS THE YOUNG TURKS, WIN ALL THE SEATS IN THE 1914 PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS AND TURKISH POWERS CONTINUE TO GROW. FOLLOWING THE WISHES OF THE DECEASED SULTAN ABDUL HAMID II, THE GOVERNMENT DECIDES TO INVADE THE NEIGHBORING COUNTRY OF ARMENIA, USING A NEW ARMY COMPRISED OF YOUNG MEN DRAFTED FOR THE PURPOSE OF DISPLACING THE ARMENIAN PEOPLE.

EXT. ROCKY TERRAIN - MORNING

The sun looks down at the Earth in scorn, giving heat to the protruding red rocks of the countryside. The land lays still and breathes the tremendous heat back into the air.

A young BOY(8), climbs up the rocks struggling, his face hidden from view. He climbs shirtless, his thin frame and torso pushing against the skin of his back.

He is holding something in his hands which are covered in dirt and mud. He shelters the object like a newborn baby.

As he climbs to the top of the rocky structure, the boy passes out of view. From where he had climbed, a baby tree has been planted deep into the hot rock below.

CUT TO:

TITLE: ARMENIA, 1915

EXT. COUNTRYSIDE - CONTINUOUS

A small house sits cushioned amidst farmland. Birds chirp quietly in the trees nearby.

The young boy approaches the house in the distance. Behind him a larger figure follows, dressed in traditional Turkish military uniform.

He quickly grabs the shoulder of the boy.

CUT TO:

EXT. ROCKY TERRAIN - MORNING

The BOY becomes the soldier, SONER(28). Soner turns his head back, grabbing the hand on his shoulder. It belongs to BERK(26), his partner soldier.

BERK

Wake up.

Soner looks at Berk confused.

BERK (CONT'D)

Daydreaming again?

SONER

No. Remembering. This land, I feel
I have seen it before. It has seen
a part of me.

BERK

You've been here before?

SONER

Maybe. I don't know. But the land
speaks to me, to my mind. Listen.
Can you hear it too?

Berk and Soner stand quietly, listening to the birds chirp
from the distance.

BERK

Yes. I can. It says shut up and
move on. Let's go.

SONER

I'm sorry. Yes, let's go.

The soldiers replace their backpacks and pick up their rifles
from the ground. They set off in the horizon, walking beneath
the stones of time.

CUT TO:

EXT. COUNTRYSIDE - MORNING

Two children, ANOUSH(10) and NISHAN(14), play a children's
game with rocks. Their clothing suggest they come from a
humble family, but their smiles hide any sign of sadness or
poverty.

Nishan picks up two rocks from the ground and chucks them.

ANOUSH

You're cheating.

NISHAN

Am not. You're just losing.

ANOUSH

Liar. I saw you. Put it back.

NISHAN

I don't know what you're talking about.

Nishan takes one of the rocks and hurls it with all his energy at his sister. It hits her arm.

ANOUSH

Ow. Nishan. I'm telling mom.

Anoush gets up to head back, but is tackled by Nishan, pinning her to the ground. He obnoxiously plays with his sister's hair.

Anoush struggles to free herself.

NISHAN

What was that? I can't hear you.

ANOUSH

Stop it. Nishan. The ground is hot. Nishan!

Nishan ignores the cries of his sister.

NISHAN

Boys are stronger than girls. If girls were stronger, they wouldn't have to always go to boys. But you can't--

A hand grabs Nishan by the collar of his shirt and pulls him off his sister. He falls to the hot ground and starts to weep.

The hand belongs to the children's father, VAHAN(48). Deep in his eyes, there is a foreboding sense of both sorrow and anger.

Over his shoulder, a large scythe, which he had been using to plow wheat from the fields.

He slaps Nishan across the face.

VAHAN

Is this how you treat your sister? Idiot.

He goes to Anoush and gives her his free hand. She gets up from the ground, safe in her father's arms.

VAHAN

Come baby, come with papa. He
didn't hurt you, look.

ANOUSH

But he pushed me and he pulled my
hair and. . .

Anoush looks back at her brother in anger.

VAHAN

Your brother is sorry. Tell her
Nishan.

Vahan gives Nishan a hard look.

NISHAN

I'm sorry.

VAHAN (TO ANOUSH)

Good. Come on, we go home now. It's
time for breakfast.

Vahan and Anoush walk towards the house in the distance,
holding hands, silhouetted by the rising sun.

Nishan angrily remains on the ground staring back, tears
quietly rolling down his swollen cheek.

CUT TO:

INT. HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

KHONARH(44) scrubs furiously on a shirt on a washing board.
Despite her beautiful features, Khonarh's face shows sign of
age and fatigue from the endless list of household chores she
faces every day.

The sound of SCRUBBING intensifies.

CUT TO:

EXT. ROCKY TERRAIN - CONTINUOUS

Nishan is down on the ground. He bangs his fists in the dirt
causing it to rise.

Loud scrubbing can still be heard.

Nishan is completely dirty. He walks slowly down a mountainous path towards the horizon, careful to follow a calm stream of water.

CUT TO:

EXT. STREAM - CONTINUOUS

The loud scrubbing is still audible. The stream flows down the rocky terrain, between two large stone overpasses.

Nishan goes to the edge and looks at his reflection in the water. He smashes the liquid with his fists, disturbing both the water and his reflection.

Nishan washes his face off. He stands up and takes his shirt off his back and hurls into the stream. It floats away with the current.

CUT TO:

Berk and Soner walk with the current of the stream. Soner suddenly stops and pauses.

He takes off his backpack and drops his gun on the ground.

BERK

What's wrong with you? We stopping again?

SONER

Check the map. I think we're lost.

Soner picks up his gun.

BERK

Fine. But not for long.

Soner removes his canteen and fills it up in the stream. He looks at his reflection in the rippling water, as the canteen disturbs the flow of the stream.

Berk checks carefully the map.

BERK

You know, we may be closer than we thought.

SONER

We follow the stream to the end.

BERK
It'll take longer that way. There
is a path through these hills-

SONER
We'll be lost if we don't.

BERK
Nonsense.

Soner removes the canteen from the stream. He does not move, remaining absolutely still as he stares at his reflection.

In the now calm water, a CHILD stares back at Soner.

A shirt floats across the reflection causing Soner to look away from the water. Berk looks at him aggressively, motioning his head upstream.

They both start wield their rifles defensively. Across the stream, they see the bare torso of a young boy.

His face is hidden in the water, as he washes himself.

Soner looks in disbelief. He looks back to Berk who motions with his rifle.

The child turns back slowly and removes his hands from his face. It is Nishan, washing his swollen cheek.

NISHAN
Hello.

SONER
Hello.

Berk and Soner exchange look. Berk puts his rifle back on his shoulder.

SONER (CONT'D)
Can you help us?

CUT TO:

INT. HOUSE - MORNING

Steam rises from a pan. Khonarh, is making fresh bread.

She sweats from the rising steam of the pan and a nearby tea kettle, while folding dough in her hands. Vahan is washing Anoush's face by the kitchen sink.

VAHAN
Underneath all that dirt, a little
angel was hiding.

Vahan takes the hand of Anoush and using his fingers crawls
up her arm in a playful fashion. She giggles in delight.

VAHAN (CONT'D)
Be a good girl and help your mother
with the table.

Anoush hurries over to help her mother with plates for the
breakfast table. Vahan approaches Khonarh, still preparing
the bread and other foods.

He gives his wife a kiss.

KHONARH
Vahan, where is our son?

VAHAN
He is like an animal with his
sister. He's thinking about what I
said.

CUT TO:

EXT. COUNTRYSIDE - CONTINUOUS

Nishan is leading Berk and Soner towards the house. They walk
at a slow pace, the rising sun ahead of them.

SONER
We appreciate this very much.

NISHAN
It's nothing.

BERK
These plains are hidden by the
mountains. Do you live far from
here?

NISHAN
Not far.

BERK
If you don't mind, who was it that
hit you?

NISHAN
No one hit me.

BERK

Then what is this a mark on your face?

Berk takes the boys face and turns it towards him. Nishan pulls away.

NISHAN

I was running too fast and fell.

SONER

Same thing happened to me when I was young.

Soner smiles at Nishan.

NISHAN

Where are you two from? Your accents sound different.

BERK

We are from Turkey.

NISHAN

Turkey?

SONER

It's been a long voyage.

NISHAN

There is nothing here, why come so far?

BERK

Orders.

NISHAN

Ordered? By who?

BERK

The sultan.

NISHAN

Who?

SONER

Never mind all that.

NISHAN

Oh. What is that?

Nishan points to Berk's RIFLE.

BERK

This is a standard issue. It's a
Mauser, model M-1893.

NISHAN

Can I hold it?

Berk looks at Soner.

SONER

Here you can hold mine. But
careful, it's both heavy and
dangerous.

The trio stop walking momentarily and Soner hands Nishan
the rifle.

NISHAN

If it's so heavy and dangerous, why
bring them?

SONER

We are soldiers. We must carry
them.

BERK

Is the house much further?

Nishan moves the rifle as if aiming. Soner helps him to hold
it up. He swings the rifle over to the ridge.

Beyond the ridge, the house is clearly visible.

CUT TO:

INT. HOUSE - MORNING

Khonarh places the warm food on the table. Anoush sits,
chewing on a piece of bread.

Vahan sits down at the head of the table, pouring water from
a wooden jug.

KHONARH

I don't like it when Nishan wanders
alone in the mountains.

Khonarh sits opposite of Anoush. She smiles at her mother.

VAHAN

He needs to learn respect for
others.

VAHAN(cont'd)

He has none, and he thinks because he is a boy he has the right. To fight and beat anybody. Even his own sister.

Anoush looks at her father and smiles. He pats her on the head.

VAHAN (CONT'D)

He'll understand life is hard enough as is to not fight with those he should love.

KHONARH

Still, I wish you hadn't left him alone up there. What if he falls and traps himself there? How will we know?

VAHAN

He may be an idiot, but he can navigate the mountains fine. He'll be back, starving for breakfast.

There is a knock at the door.

VAHAN (CONT'D)

You see. There here is. Anoush let your brother in.

Anoush goes to the door and opens it.

VAHAN (TO KHONARH)

We have to instill some values into these children, or they'll never grow into responsible adults.

Standing in the doorway is Nishan with Berk and Soner by his side. Anoush looks up at the soldiers then back at her parents.

Vahan and Khonarh stare silently in disbelief for a moment. Vahan stands up.

VAHAN

Who are you people?

VAHAN

What are you doing with my boy?
What are you doing in my house--

KHONARH

Vahan, please--