



Downloaded from www.bbc.co.uk/radio4

THIS TRANSCRIPT IS ©BBC AND IS A VERSION OF AN ORIGINAL SCRIPT. AS SCRIPTS CAN BE ALTERED IN RECORDING, PRODUCTION AND EDITING, THE BBC CANNOT VOUCH THAT IT IS A VERBATIM ACCOUNT OF THE PROGRAMME AS BROADCAST.

Love Across the Ages

Afternoon Drama for BBC Radio 4

By

Shahid Iqbal Khan

Naked Productions



SCENE ONE

FX

OTHER-WORLDLY MUSIC UNDER FOLLOWING SPEECH

ABU NUWAS: My name is Abū Nuwās al-Ḥasan ibn Hānī al-Ḥakamī. You can, of course, just call me Abu Nuwas, for that is the name that appears on everything I've ever written. I am a poet. I live through words. My words dilate and swell with the sheer force of ungodly pleasures.

I was born in the year 756 and I lived a life with very few regrets. Supposedly, my physical incarnation perished in the year 814 but it's been impossible to die. When you leave something behind like a poem, a footprint or a memory, then you can't technically die. So, I'm afraid you are stuck with me.

My favourite things are poetry, men and wine. Sometimes, all at once. Speaking of men, I like to play Cupid and bring them together. Don't believe me? Then let me show you. Picture this. Bradford 2022. A bookshop.....

MUSIC FADES OUT

SCENE TWO INT. BOOKSHOP

FX

GENERAL CHATTER IN THE BOOKSTORE

SOUND OF BOOKS BEING OPENED, PAGES TURNED AND PUT BACK ON SHELF.

WE ARE WITH DANYAAL AS HE LOOKS AT BOOKS.

FOOTSTEPS OF SHOP ASSISTANT APPROACHING.

SHOP ASSISTANT: Are you looking for anything in particular?

DANYAAL: No.

SHOP ASSISTANT: Well if you need any help, give us a shout.

DANYAAL: Okie dokie

FX

SHOP ASSISTANT WALKS AWAY

DANYAAL SIGHS

OTHERWORLDLY MUSIC UNDER FOLLOWING SPEECH.

PAUSE.

ABU NUWAS: When a person comes near my book, I sense a seductive shadow dancing on my grave.

FX

DANYAAL PICKS UP A BOOK BY ABU NUWAS

ABU NUWAS: This is what it feels like... to be held.. To be observed by razor-sharp eyes filled with wonder and curiosity. To rest in his hands, as he turns the pages and uncovers me in every colour.

In the bath-house, the mysteries hidden by trousers
Are revealed to you.
All becomes radiantly manifest.
Feast your eyes without restraint!

MUSIC ENDS

DANYAAL: You see handsome buttocks, shapely trim torsos,
You hear the guys whispering pious formulas to one another
(“God is great! Praise be to God!”)
Ah, what a place of pleasure is the bath house!
Even when the towel bearers come in

Er.. bloody 'ell..

FX DANYAAL ANXIOUS BREATHING

ABU NUWAS: What you thinking about lad? Buy me. You know you want to.

DANYAAL: Tauba tauba tauba [*Arabic phrase implying repentance*]

FX

BOOK IS PLACED BACK ON SHELF

DANYAAL WALKS AWAY

SHOP ASSISTANT: (*to colleague*) Typical. Knew he wouldn't buy anything.

FX

DOOR PINGS SHUT

OTHERWORLDLY MUSIC UNDER NEXT SCENE

SCENE THREE EXT. ROAD

FX:

DANYAAL FOOTSTEPS

CARS PASS BY.

DANYAAL : (muttering to himself) .. handsome buttocks, shapely trim torsos....

DANYAAL STOPS WALKING AND WAITS AT THE BUS STOP FOR A BIT.

SOUND OF TRAFFIC

BUS PULLS OVER, DOOR HISSES OPEN.

DANYAAL : (muttering to himself) .. handsome buttocks.... trim torsos....

BUS DRIVER: (from inside bus) You getting on son? Suit yourself...

DANYAAL: Um....no.

BUS DRIVER: (from inside bus) Suit yourself...

DOOR CLOSES, BUS DRIVES AWAY

DANYAAL: I'm going to buy that book!

SCENE FOUR INT. BOOKSHOP

MUSIC ENDS

FX

DOOR PINGS OPEN

FX

DANYAAL'S

FOOTSTEPS STOP ABRUPTLY

PAUSE

DANYAAL: Oh, erm (**CLEAR THROAT**) that's my book

SAIF: You the author?

DANYAAL: No, it's er.....It's complicated

SAIF: “The Poetic Works of Abu Nuwas”

DANYAAL: It has my name all over it

SAIF: You're Abu Nuwas!?

DANYAAL: No! I... Look, it's okay...Forget I said anything

SAIF: No, go on.

DANYAAL: I came back to buy the book. I put it down, went out, changed my mind and then..

SAIF: Doesn't make it yours

DANYAAL: Sorry to bother you

SAIF: He must be something if we both came back for him

DANYAAL: ...He's something isn't he..

SAIF: Isn't he just..

DANYAAL: A poet from 8th century Persia. I haven't read anything like it!

SAIF: **(SMILING)** Someone's under his spell

DANYAAL: Haha, aren't we all. I'll leave you/

SAIF: /I've never heard anyone mention his name, ever

DANYAAL: He's like a breath of fresh air.

I hope you enjoy it

SAIF: Listen, why don't we ask at the counter if they've got an extra copy? They might have another one?

SCENE FIVE INT. BOOKSHOP COUNTER

SHOP ASSISTANT: One sec... I'll check

FX

KEYBOARD KEYS CLACKING

SHOP ASSISTANT: I'm afraid we don't. It's not a.. common book. Very unusual.

SAIF: Can you order it?

SHOP ASSISTANT: Yes! All done for you. So, who's buying this one then?

SAIF: **(GRITTED TEETH)** I am.

SHOP ASSISTANT: Poetry, eh? You're very cultured.

SAIF: I know the alphabet as well

SHOP ASSISTANT: That's £10.99

DANYAAL: How long will it take for the book to come?

SHOP ASSISTANT: Should be here by the weekend. Tap your card

DANYAAL: Right I'll leave you to it

SAIF: Hold on.

SHOP ASSISTANT: I'll pop your receipt into the book

SAIF: Thank you.

Here you go. **(PAUSE)** You can use the receipt as a bookmark

DANYAAL: What's this for?

SAIF: It's for you!

SHOP ASSISTANT: **(DISTANT)** Hello, what can I get for you?

DANYAAL: Wow! Thank you! Let me pay you back

SAIF: Don't even think about it

DANYAAL: What!

SAIF: Consider it a gift

DANYAAL: Why though!! You hardly know me

SAIF: You're a fellow admirer of Abu Nuwas. Sometimes, that's all one needs to know in life.

DANYAAL: Let me thank you in some way

SAIF: Buy me cake.

DANYAAL: Caa-a-ake. Now you're talking.

FX

MAGICAL REFRAIN

ABU NUWAS: Told you, I like to play Cupid!

SCENE SIX INT. ASIAN DESSERT CAFE

DANYAAL: I'm Danyaal.

SAIF: Saif.

DANYAAL: Safe bro.

SAIF: Not heard that one before.

DANYAAL: Sorry, bad joke, argh.

SAIF: Actually it's Saifullah.

DANYAAL: Saifullah.

SAIF: Most people call me Saif. But on account of your terrible joke, I hereby condemn you to calling me by my full name.

DANYAAL: I accept this punishment. Thanks for suggesting a mithaai place. Good shout

SAIF: You a big fan of Asian sweets?

DANYAAL: Yes! Feels different here. I felt uncomfortable in that bookshop. The staff...

SAIF: Oh God! I'm very "cultured" apparently

DANYAAL: What is cultured? What does it mean?

SAIF: No idea. In't it summat that happens to a yogurt?

FX

THEY LAUGH

PAUSE

THEY BOTH TALK AT THE SAME TIME

SAIF: So tell me about yourself-

DANYAAL: Anyway, let's have a look at-

SAIF: Sorry I

DANYAAL: Er

SAIF: You first

DANYAAL: Let's order

SAIF: Good idea

DANYAAL: Too much choice

SAIF: I'd recommend the Gulab Jamun

DANYAAL: Really?

SAIF: No, really!

DANYAAL: I'm not spending my dollars on a gulab jamun

SAIF: No, trust me, the gulabs here are soft and fresh. Piping hot. And they serve it with ice cream.

DANYAAL: Okay, you sold me

SAIF: Yes!!

DANYAAL: I think you should order the same

SAIF: No

DANYAAL: You're going to have to follow the courage of your convictions

SAIF: It'd be a terrible cliche to order food that sounds similar to your drag name

DANYAAL: Wait, what? No way! Is your drag name Gulabo?

SAIF: Aye.

DANYAAL: That's amazing.

SAIF: What's your drag name?

DANYAAL: Umm... I don't have one.

SAIF: Let's make you one. It's the last thing you ate followed by the colour of your curtains.

DANYAAL: (*THINKS FOR A SEC*).. Tuna.. Blue.

SAIF: Hmm.. Keep fishing. We'll come back to that later

DANYAAL: Tuna Blue. What a mood-killer.

SAIF: You must think all this drag talk is ridiculous

DANYAAL: No, I can totally see it. You have beautiful eyes. ... I mean, your eyes (*TRIPS UP ON HIS WORDS*) your eyes really stand out. Smoky....probably a stunning drag queen. I mean, you're stunning anyway. So-so....

FX

A MOMENT OR TWO. THEY LAUGH AWKWARDLY.

SAIF: Are you not much of a... Are you not on the scene very much then? Asian club nights?

DANYAAL: Nah not for me.

SAIF: Not ever?

DANYAAL: Nah.

SAIF: Let me know if you ever fancy it.

DANYAAL: I thought I was the only one in Bradford.

SAIF: Only one what?

DANYAAL: Only one of us.

SAIF: Us?

DANYAAL: You know, us, and the boxes we tick.

SAIF: There's loads of us.

DANYAAL: Loads of us.

SAIF: Talk about a sheltered life. Is that what you really thought?

DANYAAL: No, course not.

SAIF: You expect to hear things like that from a confused kid, not a...

DANYAAL: A grown man?

SAIF: Well, yeah, I always thought that by the time you get to our age, you kind of have it all figured out. Maybe not..

DANYAAL: Oh, I know there's loads of us. I see it on Grindr. In Bradistan, I call it Grindrstan. No one's ever real. It's fake and superficial.

SAIF: I know what you mean. Smoke and mirrors.

DANYAAL: I want something more genuine.

SAIF: I totally get you.

DANYAAL: I feel like I've known you for ages.

SAIF: I think you're mysterious.

DANYAAL: Not been called that before! Boring, yes. Mysterious, no!

SAIF: If there's nothing behind the mysterious facade, then it could be very boring.

DANYAAL: Ouch!

SAIF: As a social expert, I recommend that the two of us go out on a date.

DANYAAL: **(A SLIGHT PAUSE)** You know what, I'm very much on board with that suggestion.

SAIF: I'm glad you agree with my findings.

DANYAAL: Not only do I agree with the findings of your report, I will action it asap.

SAIF: I'm pleased to hear that.

DANYAAL: How are you with things like lakes, ducks and grass?

SAIF: I find them generally agreeable to my temperament.

DANYAAL: That's a relief. I know a beautiful country park.

SAIF: I'll bring the sandwiches.

SCENE SEVEN

OTHERWORLDLY MUSIC UNDER THIS SPEECH

ABU NUWAS: There are nearly 8 billion people on this planet. That's a lot of people living a lot of lives at once. Doing their own thing, their tiny little thing, in the whole system.

You will still find many who feel lonely. How and why?
There are forces of separation, untold stories, keeping

us apart. Keeping us disconnected. Our voices have been suppressed.

In 2001, the Egyptian Ministry of Culture burned 6000 copies of my poetry! They disapproved of the homosexual gaze.

FX

FIRE CRACKLING

ABU NUWAS:

They set my writings alight. Hoping it would relinquish me to the shadows. O fools! Don't you know that when you set something alight, it doesn't vanquish, it soars!? Fire is energy and it shines a light on all that is hidden. You cannot extinguish poetry from 12 centuries ago. It has a force and power that cannot be burned by time.

Time is eternal. What is yesterday is now. What is tomorrow is now.

FX

OTHER-WORLDLY MUSIC FINISHES

It's the year of 851 and we are in the majestic city of Ahvaz in Persia, now better known as Iran.

SCENE EIGHT EXT. PARK NEAR KARUN RIVER IN AHVAZ, IRAN, 851

FX

WATER FLOWING IN THE RIVER, DISTANT CALL TO PRAYER

ABU NUWAS:

Ahvaz is famous for being a city with a river that runs through it. There is a bridge that connects both sides of the city together. On that bridge is a mosque where the call to prayer reverberates across the area to the market in the countryside. Not far away from the market, Saif and Danyaal are walking up a hill. Or trying to...

FX

DUCKS QUACKING

DANYAAL:

This is Kārūn River

SAIF:

I'm so glad I'm with you, I would never have known!

DANYAAL:

..Let me finish...

SAIF:

I'm not a big fan of laboured walking

DANYAAL:

We're only strolling up a hill

SAIF:

I feel like my legs are going to fall off

DANYAAL: Shall we stop for a rest somewhere?

SAIF: **(BREATHLESS)** Yes let's do that!

DANYAAL: This spot is perfect.

FX

THEY BOTH SIT DOWN, SETTLING INTO THE GRASS

THE SOUND OF THE RIVER FLOWING BY

DANYAAL: A scholar said this is one of the rivers of Eden.

SAIF: Eden?

DANYAAL: I thought the same too. Eden's not on earth, it's in jannat. But in the Bible, the garden of Eden was here on earth. And out of it came four rivers. We're sat next to one of them right now.

SAIF: I wonder what it knows, what it has seen all these centuries

DANYAAL: More importantly, where it starts and where it ends. It's about 9 million hands long

SAIF: That means nothing to me

DANYAAL: If you had to walk the path alongside the river from the beginning to the end, it would take you 2 months.

SAIF: That's long, I suppose.

DANYAAL: No exerted walking, of course, just a simple walk.

SAIF: Cheeky! Why are your cheeks so rosy?

DANYAAL: What do you mean?

SAIF: Go look in the river. Seriously, I mean it. Go and look at your reflection in the river.

FX

DANYAAL LOOKS IN THE RIVER

DANYAAL LAUGHS

SAIF: You're as red as a zalzalak!

DANYAAL: So are you!

FX

DANYAAL SPLASHES WATER ONTO SAIF

SAIF: Danyaal!!

FX

THEY LAUGH

DANYAAL: “Red as a zalzalak”. You should be a poet!

SAIF: Have you been reading Abu Nuwas?

DANYAAL: Mm-hmm

SAIF: What do you think?

DANYAAL: I haven’t made my mind up. I prefer classical poets like al-Qais and Al-Khansa.

SAIF: There’s nothing to make your mind up about. He’s brilliant.

DANYAAL: I can’t believe he left Ahvaz and went to Baghdad. The

Abbasid caliphs invaded us around 100 years ago. They sit in Baghdad and treat us like puppets on strings. Nuwas clearly had no problem with it.

SAIF: He did what he had to. You have to go where you will be noticed.

DANYAAL: What's your favourite poem?

SAIF: Your sunburnt face reminds me of this poem

DANYAAL: Recite it. I want to hear it.

FX

SAIF GETS HIS BOOK OUT OF A CLOTH PURSE

FLICKS THROUGH IT

DANYAAL: Ah you bookmarked the page. And you've made notes in it.

SAIF: Avert your gaze!

DANYAAL: You've written on all the pages.

SAIF: Don't you do that?

DANYAAL: No, that's blasphemy. A book should be respected and treated with reverence.

SAIF: There are different ways of paying respect to a book or admiring literature. Your way is to hold it at arm's length. My way is to get stuck into it and pay attention to everything.

DANYAAL: I've upset you.

SAIF: No, not at all. I'm just saying that people have different ways of showing their love for something.

DANYAAL: What's the poem you were going to read?

SAIF: Don't remember now.

DANYAAL: This one?

SAIF: Maybe.

DANYAAL: I want to hear it.

SAIF: Can't be bothered now.

DANYAAL: Fine, I'll do the honours.

SAIF: Fine.

DANYAAL: Love in bloom. Hmm! Ahem.

Love In Bloom

I die of love for him, perfect in every way,

Lost in the strains of wafting music.

My eyes are fixed upon his delightful body

And I do not wonder at his beauty.

SAIF: His waist is a sapling, his face a moon,

And loveliness rolls off his rosy cheek

I die of love for you, but keep this secret:

ABU NUWAS: (fading up with Saif) I die of love for you, but keep this secret:

The tie that binds us is an unbreakable rope.

How much time did your creation take, O angel?

So what! All I want is to sing your praises.

OTHERWORDLY MUSIC COMES IN

DANYAAL: (fading up with Abu Nawas) So what! All I want is to sing your praises.

PAUSE. MUSIC ENDS

SAIF: You don't like it. I can tell.

DANYAAL: Tell me what you like about it.

SAIF: I like that he's not speaking to the object of his affection directly. He's admiring the angel for creating this beautiful human being.

DANYAAL: Interesting.

SAIF: "And I do not wonder at his beauty" It's such an unexpected line.

DANYAAL: I am reading your notes.

SAIF: Oh you don't need to.

DANYAAL: "My eyes are fixed upon his delightful body. The eyes do not move from the body.

SAIF: Ignore it.

DANYAAL: Therefore they are one. That's why he does not wonder at his beauty. Knows him inside out. Nothing is a surprise, nothing is a revelation. I am submerged in it all. And whoever is submerged in it stops being an observer..”

FX

SAIF SNATCHES THE BOOK BACK

DANYAAL: Oy! I like your notes. They make me see him in a different light.

SAIF: Really?

DANYAAL: Maybe there is nothing wrong with writing inside a book.

SAIF: Oh! Praise be!

DANYAAL: Well it depends on who is writing it. Can't be just any nonsense.

SAIF: Reading is also a way of writing, you're building the world in your head as you read along the page.

DANYAAL: Do you write?

SAIF: You mean when I'm not desecrating someone else's book? Not really.

DANYAAL: You have a talent for it.

PAUSE

DANYAAL: What? Why are you smiling at me like that?

SAIF: I'm not smiling.

DANYAAL: You are.

SAIF: Do I need a reason to smile?

DANYAAL: No. I like your smile.

SAIF: I've been told I shouldn't smile.

DANYAAL: Why ever so?

SAIF: Because of the gap in my teeth. I look strange.

DANYAAL: It is said that men with a gap in their teeth are destined to become rich and famous.

SAIF: I don't believe it.

DANYAAL: I can fix it for you.

SAIF: How?

FX

DANYAAL GETS UP TO SIT CLOSER TO SAIF

DANYAAL: Chin up.

FX

DANYAAL KISSES SAIF ON THE LIPS

NERVOUS LAUGHTER, SIGH OF CONTENTMENT

SAIF: I like debating with you. My last friend was very different. If he didn't agree with something, he'd stop talking and that was the end of that.

DANYAAL: Do you plan to meet this friend again?

SAIF: Yes! In Hell! I don't miss his silent sulking.

DANYAAL: My Ma's an expert at that

SAIF: Ha! My mother's never silent!

DANYAAL: I mean.. I meant, she is like that to my elder sister. She fell in love with a man outside of our religion, a Zoroastrian. So, Ma cut her off completely.

SAIF: Must be.. really hard for you

DANYAAL: I look at Ma and think I don't want to be like her. We have to be open to change. It's the only way to be.

FX

SAIF KISSES DANYAAL AND THEY LIE BACK INTO THE GRASS

PASSERS-BY PASSING BY. GENERAL HUBBUB OF TALKING

DANYAAL: It's getting busy isn't it? We should start eating some of the food we brought.

SAIF: What, now?

DANYAAL: I'm hungry.

SAIF : **(FLIRTATIOUS)** I'm hungry too.

DANYAAL: No, I'm literally hungry. Haven't eaten for hours.

SAIF: Oh..

FX

SAIF GETS OFF DANYAAL

HUBBUB GETS LOUDER AS THE PASSERS-BY WALK PASS

DANYAAL: I know them. Just say good afternoon and act normal. **(CHEERFUL)** Good afternoon!

SAIF: **(DISAPPOINTED)** Good afternoon.

PASSER BY: (distant) Good afternoon!

SAIF: Oh, you said you were going to fix the gap in my teeth!

DANYAAL: I did. I made you forget about it for a moment.

SAIF: **(QUIETER)** I will happily forget everything for you.

DANYAAL: What did you say?

SAIF: Nothing.

SCENE NINE INT. ISTANBUL, TURKEY, 1858

FX

OTHER-WORLDLY MUSIC UNDER NEXT SPEECH. CICADAS IN BACKGROUND.

ABU NUWAS: All over the world, there are many cultures, many countries, languages and customs. But the essence of being human is the same. Everyone wants the freedom to be who they are.

It's a sultry night in Istanbul, or should I say Constantinople, in 1858.

SFX footsteps.

I'm taking you through the bylanes of seaside districts, around the steepled houses, walking up the cobblestone streets. We stop outside one of the dwellings. We can see through the upper

window, the silhouette of two bodies pressing against one another.

We mustn't pry, let's move on. You are peeking, I can tell, very naughty! Look away, have some shame. Have some shame and then throw it away!

Saif has an indecent proposition to make...what if instead of snatched meetings in the dark of the night they start visiting each other openly in the light of day?

**MUSIC ENDS. INSIDE SAIF'S SMALL HOME,
ISTANBUL 1858.**

DANYAAL: What if your neighbours see us?

SAIF: We'll tell them to mind their own business

DANYAAL: Try telling that to a raging mob

SAIF: We don't have to worry anymore

DANYAAL: Hmm?

SAIF: Abdulmejid has changed the law

DANYAAL: Abdulmejid... What?

SAIF: Haven't you heard?

DANYAAL: Who is Abdulmejid?

SAIF: Abdulmejid, the Sultan!

DANYAAL: Why are we talking about the Sultan of the Ottoman Empire? Talk about love, wine, poetry...

SAIF: He has changed the law... so that what we are.. what we do isn't a crime

DANYAAL: How can that be?

SAIF: He's removed all the references from law, everything that makes us illegal

DANYAAL: Wait, are you saying they will no longer jail two men for being together?

SAIF: Finally, he gets it! Thank Allah!

DANYAAL: How do you know?

SAIF: I overheard my uncles talking, they didn't sound very pleased.

DANYAAL: It's not a rumour?

SAIF: No it's direct from a family friend who works for the Empire.

DANYAAL: That's great news. (**PAUSE**) We still need to be careful.

SAIF: "I bought abandon dear, And sold all piety for pleasure. My own free spirit I have followed. And never will I give up lust."

DANYAAL: It's too early in the morning for Rumi quotes.

SAIF: It's Abu Nuwas actually.

293. DANYAAL: It's too early in the morning for Abu Nuwas quotes.

SAIF: Just think, a thousand years ago, he had the freedom to write whatever he wanted, the freedom to be who he is.

DANYAAL: Saifu..

SAIF: Danoo...

DANYAAL: Let's talk about it tomorrow.

SAIF: But I want to know what you think.

DANYAAL: I think it's great news, if we are no longer called criminals for being who we are.

SAIF: It feels like a weight off the shoulders.

DANYAAL: The law and people's attitudes are two different things.

SAIF: I want to scream about us from the rooftops!

DANYAAL: Yeah and then you will be screaming and falling *from the rooftops!*

SAIF: You're such a bore.

DANYAAL: What we have is pure and real. The moment people start finding out about us, they will corrupt it, poison it.

SAIF: So you would never be up for a threesome?

DANYAAL: **(LAUGHS)** Never. I want you all to myself.

FX

DANYAAL THROWS BOOK TO SAIF

DANYAAL: Read me some Nuwas.

FX

SAIF OPENS BOOK

SAIF: I thought it was too early?

DANYAAL: Lull me back to sleep.

SAIF: As you wish.

MUSIC UNDER POEM

Don't cry for Layla, don't rave about Hind!

But drink among roses a rose-red wine,

A draught that descends in the drinker's throat,

bestowing its redness on eyes and cheeks.

ABU NUWAS:

(joins in) The wine is a ruby, the glass is a pearl,

served by the hand of a slim-fingered girl,

Who serves you the wine from her hand, and wine from her mouth — doubly drunk, for sure, will you be.

Thus I am drunk twice, my friends only once:

a favour special, for me alone!

Onwards we drift out of the haze induced by wine. We shall leave Saif and Danyaal here in Istanbul and go to another part of the world, in another period.

SCENE TEN EXT. BAADSHAH MOSQUE COURTYARD, LAHORE, PAKISTAN, 1961

FX

OTHER-WORLDLY MUSIC ENDS. SOUND OF LAHORE STREETS.

ABU NUWAS:

It's 1961. And Queen Elizabeth II is undertaking a royal tour of Pakistan. We are in Lahore. While Her Majesty is making polite conversation with glamorous women in hand loomed saris in the palatial Baadshah Mosque, there is, not so far away, a celebratory occasion happening of a different kind. Move through the bustling roads packed with honking trucks-

FX

MUSICALLY HONKING TRUCKS

TRAFFIC

ABU NUWAS: Beautifully decorated trucks that look like moving artworks... Move through those bustling roads to a humble little home.

SCENE ELEVEN INT. DANYAAL'S FAMILY HOME

FX KNOCKING AT DOOR, DOOR OPENED, DISTANT CHICKENS IN YARD.

PARTY ATMOSPHERE AND MUSIC FROM ANOTHER PART OF HOUSE.

SAIF: Salaam sister, I've come to see Danyaal.

SHAZIA: Come in, the men are upstairs!

SAIF: Take me there.

SHAZIA: You've been here many times before. You know the way!

SAIF: You know me, I don't like parties.

SHAZIA: Uff! Fine. Follow me.

FX

SAIF WALKS BEHIND HER

SOUND OF THE SONG “APLAM CHAPLAM” (AZAAD, 1955) BEING PLAYED

THE SONG FADES AS THE TWO OF THEM REACH UPSTAIRS

SHAZIA: Wait here. I'll bring him.

FX

FAINT SOUND OF SHAZIA SPEAKING TO SOMEONE IN ANOTHER ROOM

SHAZIA: Tell Danyaal his friend is here!

PAUSE. DOOR OPENS, DANYAAL ENTERS

SAIF: Assalaam-o-alaikum.

DANYAAL: **(SELF-CONSCIOUS)** Dear friend, how nice to see you.

SAIF: I've come to congratulate you. On your engagement.

SCENE TWELVE INT. DANYAAL'S FAMILY HOME

SAIF: I had to come and see it with my own eyes.

DANYAAL: I really wanted to tell you Saif/

SAIF: /I haven't come to argue

DANYAAL: I don't have a choice.

SAIF: I understand.

DANYAAL: I was going to tell you. I wrote a letter.

SAIF: A letter!

DANYAAL: I wish you didn't find out like this.

SAIF: You mean you don't want everyone to find out about us.

DANYAAL: You're more than a dirty secret. Come on, you know that.

SAIF: I will have to get used to it.

DANYAAL: Used to it?

SAIF: The things you do for love eh?

DANYAAL: I really think you should../

SAIF: What's her name?

DANYAAL: Naseem.

SAIF: Beautiful name.

DANYAAL: She's a beautiful person.

SAIF: This doesn't have to break us.

DANYAAL: There's something else I need to tell you.

SAIF: What?

DANYAAL: I'm going to London.

SAIF: London!?

DANYAAL: You should get married too.

SAIF: London is the other side of the world! Even the Queen of England would rather be in Pakistan!

DANYAAL: It'd be good for you. It will make your parents happy.

SAIF: I can't go to London! It's expensive.

DANYAAL: Find a job. Move on.

SAIF: I won't. I can't! Don't go. Stay. We can meet up, spend time together. Nothing has to change.

DANYAAL: I have to do it for my mother. It's what she wants.

SAIF: What about what you want?

DANYAAL: I want her to have something to be proud of.

SAIF: What about what I want!?

DANYAAL: I go to London next month.

SAIF: Don't do this.

DANYAAL: It's how things are.. Everyone's going there.
Making a future.

SAIF: **(CRIES)** Don't do this to me.

DANYAAL: I'll write. I promise.

SAIF: Write!? I need more than that. Don't you understand?
Eh?

FX

SAIF THROWS HIMSELF AT DANYAAL

SAIF: Is that all I am? Just another person to write a letter
to?

DANYAAL: You should go.

FX

SAIF PUSHES DANYAAL

DANYAAL TRIPS

DANYAAL: Stay away from me!

SAIF: I'm sorry. I -

DANYAAL: Get out.

FX

DOOR OPENS

SHAZIA: What is going on? This is no occasion to fight!
Are you okay?

DANYAAL: I'm fine. Saif is leaving.

SAIF: Khuda hafiz.

ABU NUWAS: As Saif walks out, he hears once more the faint sound of engagement songs..

FX

SONG - RAJA KI AAYEGI BAARAAT (AAH) IN DISTANCE

ABU NUWAS: For the first time ever, he could sense a sadness behind the happiness of these songs. Every word of joy is only expressed because the artist has also known pain. Without pain, we would not know joy.

SCENE THIRTEEN EXT. ANDALUCIA, SPAIN, 1502

FX

OTHER-WORLDLY MUSIC UNDER SPEECH,

FX

YELLING

HORSES GALLOPING PAST, NEIGHING IN DISTRESS

SOME TROOPS ARE ON FOOT, MARCHING IN THEIR CLANGING ARMOUR GEAR

SOUNDS OF DISTRESS AND PUBLIC TORTURE IN THE STREET.

INHABITANTS ARE BEING MUFFLED AND DRAGGED ALONG BY AGGRESSORS.

ABU NUWAS:

From one Queen to another. . Queen Isabella, along with King Ferdinand, wanted to unify Spain and establish the Spanish Inquisition. It's the year of 1500. We are in Andalucia in Spain, in the aftermath of the ending of the Islamic Empire, and the King and Queen are forcing all Muslims to leave Islam and to convert to Christianity. The normally quiet province of Granada is in disarray...

Amidst the carnage and persecution, Saif is trapped in his own home. It's no longer the place of safety and security that it once was.

FX FROM THE STREET - A COUPLE OF VOICES (MALE AND FEMALE) ARE CRYING OUT AND BEGGING FOR THEIR LIVES.

“PLEASE, I BEG YOU, FOR THE SAKE OF GOD” AND THE PRAYER THAT MUSLIMS UTTER WHEN DEATH IS APPROACHING (LA ILAAHA ILLAL LAH).

SWISH OF SWORD AS IT SWOOPS IN AND OUT OF THE BODIES. SUDDEN SILENCE AS THEY ARE IMPALED BY THE SWORD.

INSIDE HIS HOUSE SAIF IS IN DISTRESS, ROCKING BACK AND FORTH

STRUGGLING TO OPEN DOOR. WITH A PUSH, THE DOOR IS FORCED OPEN.

ABU NUWAS: **(SCARED)** Someone has broken into the house.
Stay quiet! Hide under the bed! Ciao!

FX

SAIF'S BREATHING QUICKENS, HE HIDES UNDER THE BED.

SAIF: (under his breath, fearfully) Allah, keep me safe, Allah, keep me safe.

THE FOOTSTEPS SLOWLY COME NEAR SAIF

SAIF'S QUICKENED BREATHING

PAUSE

DANYAAL MOVES SAIF'S BED

SAIF SCREAMS

MUFFLED SCREAMING AS DANYAAL PUTS HIS HAND OVER SAIF'S MOUTH

DANYAAL: *(WHISPERS SOOTHINGLY)* It's okay... Its okay,
its okay, it's only me

FX

SAIF'S MUFFLED SCREAMING SUBSIDES

SAIF: Have you any idea what you put me through!?

DANYAAL: It's nice to see you too

SAIF: You scared the life out of me!

DANYAAL: I'm sorry... I'm a little shit. Are you taking care of
yourself?

SAIF: I don't know.

DANYAAL: What do you mean you don't know.

SAIF: I don't know!

DANYAAL: Are you eating? Are you safe?

SAIF: Yes, yes, I am!

DANYAAL: Look...

SAIF: I have nothing to offer you. No food, no water.

DANYAAL: I'm not here for that.

SAIF: Then what are you here for.

DANYAAL: Are you all on your own?

SAIF: Kabir was staying here for a while.

DANYAAL: Who's Kabir?

SAIF: My friend.

DANYAAL: Oh.

SAIF: As soon as he realised that we're all in danger...
... He legged it. Coward.

DANYAAL: You deserve better.

SAIF: You should go back to your wife. She will be
wondering where you are.

DANYAAL: I didn't... I... didn't go through with it in the end.

SAIF: Go through with what?

DANYAAL: The wedding.

SAIF: You postponed it?

DANYAAL: I couldn't go through with it.

SAIF: Like you said, it's a duty and it's the way things
are. Doesn't matter how you feel, it's always
been the way

DANYAAL: I don't want to live like a corpse.

SAIF: You've got your family... your mother... to think of.

DANYAAL: Are you trying to change my mind?

SAIF: These are dangerous times. The world is unpredictable. Stay with your family.

DANYAAL: You are my family.

SAIF: I'm not. You made that very clear...

DANYAAL: I kept thinking, "if this is my last day on earth, I want to spend it with Saif".

SAIF: As soon as times change, you will be gone like Kabir.

DANYAAL: Please forgive me. Give me another chance. I beg you.

SAIF: I'm tired of opening my heart to men and getting trampled on. Is there really any future for us now anyway?

DANYAAL: We should leave.

SAIF: I am not leaving this house.

FX

SOUNDS OF CARNAGE OUTSIDE

DANYAAL: We must seek safety!

SAIF: Where? The whole country's in turmoil.

DANYAAL: Let's get out of this godforsaken country!

SAIF: Are you out of your mind?

DANYAAL: I want to take you with me.

SAIF: I can't leave all this behind. This is my life.

FX

SOUNDS OF CROWDS AND CHAOS OUTSIDE

DANYAAL: We'll leave in the middle of the night. I want to know now. Are you coming with me?

SAIF: Why is it so important if I come with you or not?

DANYAAL: Because I love you.

SAIF: You mean it?

FX

DANYAAL KISSES SAIF

DANYAAL: Let's go to a place where no one knows us, where no one can stop us from being together.

SAIF: I will leave with you tonight. But you must promise me one thing.

DANYAAL: What?

SAIF: No more secrets.

DANYAAL: No more secrets. I promise.

OTHERWORLDY MUSIC UNDER NEXT SPEECH

SCENE FOURTEEN

ABU NUWAS: Moving away is a form of self-love. The more you travel, the more you find yourself. The more you find yourself, the more the love grows. It is still, ever-present.

If you can't be true to who you are, then life is a sentence and you may as well numb the pain with wine and gratification! I tried to write about this but it turns out that I'm not very good at pathos.

SCENE FIFTEEN EXT. A STREET IN BRADFORD, 2022

FX

OTHER-WORLDLY MUSIC ENDS

ABU NUWAS:

Let's circle back now to where we began. Saif and Danyaal are taking the next big step - they are moving in together! They are starting a new life away in the leafy outskirts of Bradford...

EXT STREET SOUNDS, BRADFORD 2022

DANYAAL:

Okay, you ready... 1.. 2.. 3

FX

GRUNTING AND SIGHING AS THEY LIFT THE SOFA

SAIF ROARS LIKE A CAVEMAN

DANYAAL:

Where did that come from

SAIF: That's my inner Fred Flintstone coming out

FX

SAIF ROARS AGAIN

DANYAAL: You're scaring the neighbours! Hold on a sec..

FX

DANYAAL GRUNTS AS HE LIFTS FROM HIS SIDE INTO THE HOUSE

SCENE SIXTEEN INT. THE NEW HOUSE

SAIF: **(BREATHLESS)** Can we stop for a moment?

DANYAAL: Keep going, you're doing great! We're almost there

SAIF: Look.....It's gonna drop...

DANYAAL: One sec.. Let's get into the living room.. And.. release

SFX SOFA PUT DOWN

SAIF: **(OUT OF BREATH)**

DANYAAL: Whoo!

SAIF: Whoever said that moving house is one of the most stressful moments ever wasn't half kidding...

DANYAAL: Especially when moving with you.

SAIF: Haha.

DANYAAL: Well, we did it, kiddo.

SAIF: This is it. No going back.

DANYAAL: Do you remember when you first asked me out?

SAIF: I didn't ask you out. You asked me out!

DANYAAL: Lies! You called yourself like a social expert or something.

SAIF: Damn you and your memory.

DANYAAL: What does Saif the social expert recommend next?

SAIF: I recommend that we go on a break from all this and take a nap.

DANYAAL: A nap is the most sensible idea.

SAIF: See, I'm so practical and level-headed.

DANYAAL: I wish you were!

SAIF: I'm having the right side of the bed.

DANYAAL: That's my side.

SAIF: Not if I get there first. Race you there.

DANYAAL: Hey!

FX

THEY GALLOP UPSTAIRS

SCENE SEVENTEEN INT. HOME

OTHERWORLDLY MUSIC. PHONE LINE RINGING. MUSIC ENDS

HAMIDA VOICEMAIL: Hello and Salaam! This is the Younis family landline.

DANYAAL SOBBING QUIETLY

HAMIDA VOICEMAIL: We're not in at the moment. Please leave a message and one of us will get back to you as soon as possible. Thank you so much for calling!

DANYAAL DISCONNECTS THE LINE. HE SOBS.

SAIF: (entering room) What's wrong?

DANYAAL: Nothing.

PAUSE. SAD MUSIC STARTS.

SAIF: You regret it already don't you?

DANYAAL: Regret what? Saif!

FX

SAIF GOES OUT OF THE ROOM.

DANYAAL: Saif! Saif!....Talk to me!

SCENE EIGHTEEN EXT. OTHER DIMENSION

FX

MUSIC ENDS

ABU NUWAS: Wait a moment! No, no, no! We can't have this.
We can't leave things on a sour note.

I sprinkle a bit of patience on this angsty couple.
Sprinkle sprinkle. Some love and an open mind.

SCENE NINETEEN INT. NEW HOME - THE MORNING AFTER

DANYAAL COMES INTO KITCHEN.

SAIF: Morning sleepyhead. I made you coffee.

DANYAAL: Thank you.

SAIF: And I've made you toast. Ow ow ow ow.

FX

DROPS TOAST ONTO DANYAAL'S PLATE

DANYAAL: It's a... healthy colour.

SAIF: The toaster is very... thorough.

DANYAAL: Is it?

SAIF: It's prone to overreacting. A bit like me.

DANYAAL: Your soul-aligned toaster.

FX DANYAAL MUNCHES ON TOAST

SAIF KISSES DANYAAL ON THE FOREHEAD

DANYAAL: I was missing mum

SAIF: You don't need to explain.... By the way, I've decided I'm going to cook over the weekends and then we can freeze the khana for the week ahead. So we don't have to cook after work.

DANYAAL: What would I do without you!

SAIF: Spend all your money on takeaways.

DANYAAL: What's in the box?

SAIF: All our books.

FX

DANYAAL OPENING BOX AND GETTING BOOKS OUT

DANYAAL: Remember this? When we first met..

SAIF: Couldn't leave Abu Nuwas behind now, could we?

DANYAAL:

(RECITES FROM BOOK)

My body is racked with sickness, worn out by exhaustion: my heart smarts with a pain searing like a blazing fire!

For I have fallen in love with a darling who I cannot mention without the water of my eyes bursting forth in streams.

The full moon is his face and the sun his brow. To the gazelle belong his eyes and his breast.

SAIF: Not heard that one before.

DANYAAL: I don't regret it.

SAIF: Regret what?

DANYAAL: Last night you said I regret it.

SAIF: I don't know what I were thinking.

DANYAAL: I want you to know, I don't regret a single thing.
Get that thought out of your head right now.

SAIF: Your family's literally not talking to you.

DANYAAL: You've made sacrifices as well.

SAIF: It's not the same. My Mum and Dad still answer
my phone calls.

DANYAAL: It weren't easy though, was it?

SAIF: I feel like it's all my fault.

DANYAAL: What is?

SAIF: I've taken you away from your family.

DANYAAL: I'm here cos I want to be here. This was my idea. I want to spend the rest of my life with you. You're my family.

You're a headache but you're my family.

SAIF: **(LAUGHS)**

DANYAAL: Promise me you will stop thinking like that.

SAIF: You know, we're so lucky. We have a roof over our head. There's a charity... they look after LGBTQIA+ people who've been made homeless. They say half of the people who come to them are from a religious family.

DANYAAL: That's sad.

SAIF: I wonder if any of those people ever find a safe place to stay.

DANYAAL: We could offer ours.

SAIF: What?

DANYAAL: We've got a spare room...

SAIF: **(GASP)** That's a brilliant idea! I love it!

DANYAAL: I mean, I don't know how it works, if we can do that but/

SAIF: It's worth finding out though! We can be the family for those who don't have one.

DANYAAL: If it don't work out, we can get a dog.

SAIF: We are not getting a dog!

DANYAAL: We'll name it Abu Nuwas

SAIF: How dare you!

DANYAAL: There's something about him, isn't there?

SAIF: It's certainly not a halo.

DANYAAL: A life lived with few regrets. Unapologetic living. That's who we need to think of when it all gets a bit too much.

SAIF: Did you know he's in A Thousand And One Nights?

DANYAAL: No way! As what? Himself?

SAIF: He appears as a collector of tales or something. I bought the book. I can't wait to read it and find him, it will be like bumping into a mysterious old friend.

DANYAAL: Hmm, the mystery never ends.

FX

SAIF KISSES DANYAAL

SAIF: I don't want it to.

OTHERWORLDY MUSIC UNDER NEXT SPEECH

SCENE TWENTY

ABU NUWAS: And they lived happily ever after. Phew! It's true I did appear in A Thousand and One Nights. Don't judge me. Sometimes you do things just for the money.

Then there are things you do to make the world a better place. The world is very talented at keeping people apart. You could walk through a crowd of thousands and still not make a

meaningful connection with anyone. I see no harm then in releasing a tiny bit of Cupid magic dust, using the enchanting powers of poetry, to create a little bit of that something in the air. A glance. A look. A double-take. Who knows where a simple hello will lead to? What if you let down your armour and reach out? What if you take the plunge and venture into the deeper wade of the water?

What if you.. Oh, excuse me, I have to go. I'm being called to Mercury. They named a crater after me in 1976 and ever since then it's been pandemonium! The responsibility has been too much! Right now, two aliens are having an altercation and it's going to get ugly. Turning that into a love story is going to be quite a task. Very well, I'm not one to turn down a challenge. I will need a lot of Cupid magic dust. Sprinkle, sprinkle!

Allow me to take your permission to leave.
Thank you for listening. Khoda haafez.

MUSIC STILL PLAYING. CLOSING CREDITS:

Love across the Ages by Shahid Iqbal Khan

Saif was played by Darren Kuppan, Danyaal by Esh Alladi, Abu Nuwas by Raad Rawi and the Shop assistant by Nadia Emam

Original music was by Sarah Sayeed, and sound design by Steve Brooke.

The quotes from the poems by Abu Nuwas were translated by James Montgomery, Jim Colville and Philip Kennedy.

Love Across the Ages was written by Shahid Iqbal Khan, directed by Nickie Miles-Wildin and produced by Polly Thomas.

It was a Naked Production for BBC Radio 4

ABU NAWAS: Sprinkle, sprinkle!

MUSIC ENDS