

(MUSIC that carries the sound of something ancient, the sound of wind taming rocks into desert, of caravans, camels, sands of infinite variety. The sound of an ancient city, rough and gorgeous; thick, luxurious rugs more wonderful to walk on than any grass; incense and order.)

(THE NARRATOR speaks.)

NARRATOR

Some years ago
In a wonderful desert city called Pathragarda
Where the wind carries the scent of spices
And incense
And time itself
A girlchild was born to King Darayavaus
And she was named Aardiya

(AARDIYA, a girl in her early teens, is alone, playing, dancing in a totally carefree, make-believe way.)

NARRATOR (cont.)

Aardiya was a beautiful girl, but...
Willful.
She had to be taught the Proper Ways.

(THE NARRATOR becomes ARTIM, Aardiya's nanny. Artim teaches Aardiya codified rules of behavior, movement, apparent submission. Chief among these lessons is keeping her eyes low, not making eye contact. Aardiya, initially rebellious, learns well, and even begins to enjoy this dance.)

NARRATOR (cont.)

She was an excellent pupil.
On her eighth birthday, Aardiya's marriage had been arranged.
She was to wed the eldest son of Wei Xiaowen, great Emperor of Northern China.
Six years later
On the day Aardiya turned fourteen
After crossing mountains and deserts
Bringing gifts of silk and a new invention called "gunpowder"
The Chinese delegation arrived at Pathragarda
And Aardiya first saw Wei Xuanwu
The man she was to marry.

(Aardiya and XUANWU are both dazzled by the sight of each other.)

AARDIYA
He took my breath from me.

XUANWU
She took my breath from me.

(They dance a formal dance of ritual introduction, overseen by Artim. As they dance they venture to make eye contact. Soon, they are lost in each other's eyes and movement. Artim is pleased. They separate, moving individually but in sync.)

NARRATOR

The contract was signed
Ring-laden hand shook ring-laden hand
All parties agreed it was a most fortuitous match.

(Aardiya and Xuanwu spend time together, becoming friends and exploring their exciting mutual attraction. Days turn into weeks, but they feel like minutes. Artim is always there to ensure they stay on their best behavior.)

NARRATOR (cont.)

Aardiya and Xuanwu gave each other the gift of
Gikh-kaa
Which you may know as “laughter.”
The night before the wedding
The apadana, the great audience hall,
Was festooned with all the riches Persia had to offer
While Aardiya was pampered, perfumed, prepared
According to all the strictest traditions.

(Artim is preparing Aardiya. Artim leaves to fetch some incense, and when she does, Xuanwu appears from behind a pillar in Aardiya’s chamber. They begin to embrace – but hear Artim returning. Xuanwu hides himself just in time. Again, Artim leaves to get the wedding dress, and again Xuanwu reveals himself. Closer to kissing, they are interrupted again by Artim’s imminent return. When Artim leaves a third time, Aardiya and Xuanwu steal their first kiss...but Artim returns and sees them. Wei Xuanwu is banished. Aardiya is punished. Both want to tear themselves apart.)

NARRATOR (cont.)

Six months later
After isolation
And prayer
And fasting
Aardiya was permitted to marry
Wei Xiaomai
Younger brother to Wei Xuanwu.
Her husband would never think of her.
Her husband would never ask how she was feeling.
She and her husband would never share the gift of
Gikh-kaa
Which you may know as “laughter.”
And so
Some years later
Aardiya found herself wandering the strange, cold mountains of China
Mountains that did not smell of incense
Or camels
Or anything she knew
And she gave herself up to Ohrmazd
The great god of light and wisdom she had known since childhood
And willed herself across to Mount Elburg
In her homeland
And she became one with the wind
And she found Wei Xuanwu there, waiting for her

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And now
As you cross the spice-laden desert
If you hear the sounds of Gikh-kaa
Which you may know as “laughter”
It’s not merely the wind.
It’s the sound of Aardiya and Wei Xuanwu.