

MIRDAD, A LIGHTHOUSE AND A HAVEN

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Based on

"The Book of Mirdad"

By

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OVER BLACK:

We hear a church bell toll.

BLACK SCREEN:

WHITE QUOTES APPEAR:

"And God said to Noah: The end of all flesh has come before Me."

"But I will establish my covenant with you; and you shall enter the ark, and your wife, and your sons, and your sons' wives."

"And of every living thing of all flesh, you shall bring two of every sort into the ark."

"And Noah did all that the LORD commanded him."

We hear thunder.

THEN THE FINAL QUOTE APPEARS:

"And rain fell upon the earth 40 days and 40 nights."

"Genesis, chapters 6 and 7."

All THE TEXT FADES OUT

FADE IN:

EXT. A MIDDLE EASTERN CITY - DAY (1948)

SERIES OF SHOTS - OPENING CREDITS

On a bright day, the title and main credits are seen as the camera:

A) Moves through clouds in the sky.

B) Goes down above high mountains.

C) Advances toward a beach, reaches it, and carries on.

D) Flies above some NATIVES who walk down the street.

E) Moves toward a group of people gathered in a plaza.

EXT. PLAZA - DAY

In front of them, a STORYTELLER in his 70s, long beard, stands on a small platform, about to finish one --

STORYTELLER  
... and that's how the Maronite  
Church started.

The LISTENERS, about a dozen, are pleased by the story.

BLONDE WOMAN  
How about that!... Can you also  
tell us the story of the local  
monastery? What is it called?

STORYTELLER  
The Ark. Well... many years after  
the Flood, Noah and his family  
arrived here at the Milk Mountains,  
where they decided to settle down.  
Having realized his days were  
ending, Noah called his son Shem  
and told him....

INT. NOAH'S HOME/MAIN CHAMBER - NIGHT

The place is poorly lit by a few torches on the walls. A man with wise eyes sits on a stone-carved throne. He is so old that it's impossible to determine his age. This is NOAH.

His son, SHEM, almost 100, stands in front of him.

NOAH  
Behold, my son, how rich has been  
your father's harvest of years.  
You, your brothers, and the sons  
already repeople the Earth, and  
your seed shall be as the sand of  
the sea, according to God's promise  
unto me. Yet a certain fear besets  
my last days.

SHEM  
What is it, my father?

NOAH  
That men shall in time forget the  
Flood, and the lust and wickedness  
that brought it on.

(MORE)

NOAH (CONT'D)

Lest they forget, I bid you, my son, to build an altar upon the highest peak of these mountains, which shall henceforth be known as Altar Peak.

Shem listens closely.

NOAH (CONT'D)

And I bid you to build a house around this altar, which house shall correspond in all details to the Ark, but in reduced dimensions, and shall also be known as The Ark. Upon that altar I propose to make my last thanks offering. And the fire I shall light there, I beg you to keep always burning.

Noah pauses briefly to see his son's reaction.

NOAH (CONT'D)

As to the house, you shall make of it a sanctuary, where a small community of nine chosen men will live.

Noah stares into space as if looking into the future.

NOAH (CONT'D)

When one of them dies, God will immediately provide another in his stead. They must never leave, living a cloistered life for the rest of their days. They shall keep the fire of faith burning, calling unto the Highest for guidance.

(looks at Shem)

And their bodily needs shall be provided by the charity of the faithful.

SHEM

But my father, why nine?

NOAH

Because that is the number of those who sailed the Ark.

Shem thinks for a moment. Then --

SHEM

But I can count only eight.

NOAH

Behold, I reveal unto you a great secret, my son.

(MORE)

## NOAH (CONT'D)

The ninth person was a stowaway, known and seen by me alone. He was a constant companion and my helmsman. Ask me no more, but fail not to make room for him in your sanctuary. These are my wishes, Shem. See you to them.

EXT. PLAZA - DAY (1948)

The audience listens to the story.

## STORYTELLER

And Shem did according to his father's will.

One of the listeners is NEIL, a foreigner (30s) with dreamy eyes. He seems like a man who searches for something but still doesn't know precisely what it is. Maybe it's in the story he hears with interest.

## STORYTELLER (CONT'D)

When Noah died, his children buried him under the altar, in the Ark, which for ages thereafter continued to be, in deed and in spirit, the true sanctuary conceived by the venerable conqueror of the Flood. One day, a few generations ago, when one of the nine had just passed away...

EXT. MONASTERY GATE - DAY (1885)

MIRDAD, 25, with long black hair and deep eyes, stands naked and wounded outside the open gate. Apparently helpless, he has the air of an invincible knight in full armor and looks much older than his age.

## STORYTELLER (V.O.)

... a stranger presented himself at the monastery gate, requesting admission into the community.

SHAMADAM (in front of him) is the senior monk, late 30s, tall, coarse appearance, thick beard, wearing a habit. Despite being the abbot, he has none of the main qualities required for the position.

He shoots Mirdad an angry look.

## STORYTELLER (V.O.)

But the Senior didn't like his appearance. The stranger was persistent and refused to go away.

Mirdad enters the Ark in the background.

STORYTELLER (V.O.)  
 Finally, he overcame the Senior's  
 resistance, who accepted him as a  
 servant.

Shamadam, also in the background, closes the gate.

INT. SHAMADAM'S OFFICE - DAY (1885)

Shamadam, sitting at his desk, thinks.

STORYTELLER (V.O.)  
 Long did the Senior wait for a  
 companion to replace the one who  
 died, but... no man came.

He looks at the window behind and sees Mirdad as he goes by.

STORYTELLER (V.O.)  
 So, for the first time in its  
 history, the Ark housed eight  
 companions and a servant.

EXT. PLAZA - DAY (1948)

Neil, enthralled, listens to the story.

STORYTELLER  
 Seven years passed and the  
 monastery became extremely rich. At  
 the beginning of the eighth,  
 however, things began to change  
 swiftly. The clever Senior soon  
 realized the stranger was the  
 cause, but, to his wonder, the  
 monks started to follow the  
 stranger. Over the course of two  
 years, all monastery's properties  
 were given away.

EXT. MONASTERY GATE - DAY (1894)

The gate is open. Seven monks (wearing habits) are outside,  
 and they all look at Shamadam, who stands in front of them.

They are: NARONDA, mid-30s, short, with black hair; MICAYON,  
 mid-40s, short, dark-haired; ABIMAR, early 40s, tall, blond;  
 ZAMORA, early 40s, medium height, red hair; BENNOON, mid-60s,  
 medium height, whitening hair and beard; MICASTER, mid-30s,  
 blond, tall; and HIMBAL, late 30s, tall, thin, and balding.

Micayon and Naronda turn and leave, followed by everyone.

STORYTELLER (V.O.)

In the third year, all monks left the Ark. And they say that the Senior, as if cursed, became mute and bound to the monastery.

Shamadam closes the gate. He is sad and alone.

With his head bowed, he drags himself toward the atrium of the monastery, seen from above.

STORYTELLER (V.O.)

There were many witnesses who affirmed seeing him wander the grounds of the deserted monastery. Nobody, however, was ever able to force a single word out of his mouth...

EXT. PLAZA - DAY (1948)

The Listeners are impressed by the story.

STORYTELLER

... because each time he felt the presence of any man or woman, he would quickly disappear, no one knew where.

LISTENERS

Wow! Nice! Amazing!

Neil is disturbed by what he just heard.

EXT. SIDEWALK - DAY

Neil wanders among PASSERSBY as he thinks about the story.

EXT. BAR - DAY

He halts in front of a table and sits down on a chair.

The only customers, besides Neil, are two mature NATIVES seated opposite him. Both men drink and converse in Arabic.

The WAITER arrives.

WAITER

How can I help you, sir?

Neil looks at the Waiter, but his mind is elsewhere.

NEIL

Uh...

WAITER  
Something to drink, sir?

NEIL  
Just water, please.

The Waiter walks away. Neil looks at the Natives.

The Waiter returns. He picks up a glass filled with water from a tray, puts it on the table, and goes away.

Neil stands up and approaches the Natives' table.

NEIL (CONT'D)  
Excuse me. Do you know if the old man at the plaza tells the truth?

NATIVE #1  
Oh, yes, sir. Family lives here long time. Good people.

NEIL  
(to the other)  
You?

Native #2 nods in agreement.

NEIL (CONT'D)  
Thanks.

Neil returns to his table, sits down, and drinks some water. Then he looks at the mountain.

The Altar Peak appears in the background, lit by a beautiful sunset.

INT. HOTEL BATHROOM - NIGHT

Neil, in white pajamas, wipes his mouth with a towel. He looks at the mirror, still intrigued by the abbot's story.

Neil hangs the towel on the towel rail and turns off the bathroom light. Then he steps over to the bed, lies down, and turns off the lampshade.

BEGIN DREAM SEQUENCE

INT. MONASTERY DINING ROOM - DAY

Shamadam, very sad, sits down at the table.

INT. MONASTERY CORRIDOR - NIGHT

Shamadam gets close to his cell but pauses at the entrance.

INT. MONASTERY ATRIUM - DAY

Shamadam sits on a bench, head down. He suddenly outstretches his hands in supplication as he looks at something ahead.

EXT. MOUNTAIN FOOT - DAY

Neil looks at the mountain, but doesn't understand why he is there, nor what happens.

EXT. MONASTERY GATE - DAY

Neil is now close to the open gate. Shamadam, inside the monastery, stands in front of a MAN whose face is not clear. Neil walks up to them.

All of a sudden, Shamadam kneels before the MAN, who is, in fact, another Neil.

The Neil in front of Shamadam looks at the "observer" Neil with a begging expression. The "observer" Neil realizes, astonished, that he looks at himself.

INT. HOTEL ROOM - NIGHT

Neil, frightened, turns on the lampshade.

NEIL

My God!

He sits up on the bed, gasping and sweating --

NEIL (V.O.)

Who was that man?... Is he the silent monk?... Should I help him?... I guess I'll have to climb the mountain.

His expression shows that the need to unravel the monk's mystery has become stronger than anything.

NEIL

Yes, I'll climb the mountain!

EXT. DUSTY ROAD - DAY (DAWN)

Neil, with a staff in his hand and a knapsack on his back, starts his journey by setting foot on the path to Altar Peak.

He looks at the mountain, which sits in the background.

It seems that there is, from the peak to the base, a straight and smooth path over the mountain.

EXT. MOUNTAIN FOOT - DAY

Neil halts before the mountain, taken aback --

Broken flint of various sizes and shapes, most of them sharp, seems to be the only way to the summit.

He lowers his head, dispirited.

QUICK FLASH - PREVIOUS NIGHT DREAM

Neil sees Shamadam on his knees, hands folded in prayer.

BACK TO SCENE

He takes a deep breath, fastens the staff in the knapsack, and marches with resolve toward the mountain.

He tries to climb, but the flint keeps slipping from his feet.

Neil then digs his hands and knees into the rocks, which allows him to ascend better.

EXT. MOUNTAIN - DAY

Under a red-hot sun, Neil climbs by crawling up in a zigzag, but the rocks aren't as sharp as at the start.

He pauses for a moment, looks downward, and sees his considerable progress.

EXT. MOUNTAIN - DAY (LATER)

Neil walks toward a boulder, sits down on it, and wipes the sweat from his face. He places the knapsack on the rock, opens it, picks up a bag with seven loaves of bread, and then a canteen, from which he drinks a long sip of water.

When he is about to take the first loaf of bread, the NOISE of a bell and the WAILING of a reed flute reach his ears --

A black goat (with a bell attached to its neck) appears in front of him, followed by several goats. It would have snatched the bread if it hadn't heard the voice of their GOATHERD, a tall, dark, and joyful young man, who wears just a piece of skin over his loin and holds a flute in one hand.

GOATHERD

(moving the goats away)

Oh! Hey! Oh!

(to Neil; smiling)

My bellwether is a spoiled goat. I feed him bread whenever I have it.

(petting the animal)

(MORE)

GOATHERD (CONT'D)

Do you see how good Fortune  
provides, my faithful bellwether?  
Never despair of Fortune.

The Goatherd places the flute beneath his garb, stoops, and  
picks up several loaves of bread.

NEIL

We can share this simple meal.  
There's enough bread for both of  
us... and for the bellwether.

The Goatherd takes a bite of each one and throws the rest to  
the goats, which eat them fast.

Neil, amazed and motionless, watches them.

The Goatherd does the same with the rest.

NEIL (CONT'D)

Now that you gave your goats the  
bread of a hungry man, won't you  
give him a little milk?

GOATHERD

My goats' milk is poison to fools.

NEIL

But why am I a fool?

GOATHERD

Because you brought seven loaves of  
bread for a seven lives' journey.

NEIL

Should I have brought seven  
thousand, then?

GOATHERD

Not even one. The way that provides  
not for the wayfarer does not  
deserve his trust.

NEIL

(looks briefly at the sky)  
The day is finishing, and I must  
resume my climbing. Would you tell  
me if I am still far from the  
summit?

GOATHERD

You are too near oblivion.

The Goatherd turns around and goes away, playing a sad TUNE.  
The goats, bleating, follow him.

Neil observes them leave and takes a deep breath.