

## Lost Kingdom

*Lost Kingdom* by Hassan Abdulrazzak Arab Stages,  
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### SCENE 1

*December 2003. Phoenix, Arizona. GEORGE PIRO (30s), Lebanese-American FBI agent, is listening to music on his mobile phone as he jogs. He receives a call, answers it while continuing to jog. JOSEPH PERSICHINI (50s) appears.*

JOE: George? George Piro?

GEORGE: Who's this?

JOE: It's Joe Persichini.

*GEORGE stops. Catches his breath.*

You alright?

GEORGE (*out of breath*): Yeah, sorry. I was just...

JOE: You fucking someone, George?

GEORGE: What? No.

JOE: Jerking off?

GEORGE: I was running...

JOE: At this ungodly hour?

GEORGE: I like to run before it gets hot—

JOE: Disciplined, I like that. Do you know who I am?

GEORGE: Of course, sir. Did something happen?

JOE: I'm about to offer you an opportunity George. To get on an escalator that could take you to the top. Here, with us at the FBI. But I'm not gonna lie. It could also take you to the bottom. Which way you go will be entirely up to you.

*Beat.*

GEORGE: I'm listening...

**SCENE 2**

*Baghdad, May 2004. An OLD MAN (60s) is planting flowers in a small enclosure in a prison. SEAN O'SHEA (19), an Irish-American member of the National Guard, is watching him.*

OLD MAN: Hand get dirty... nails, dirty... you see?

SEAN: You can't have tools. It's for your safety.

OLD MAN: You are lying, O'Shea.

SEAN: Sir, no prisoner is allowed tools.

OLD MAN: You have time?

SEAN: Time for what?

OLD MAN (*tapping his wrist*): Time... time...

SEAN: Oh, the time. No, sorry. I don't have a watch.

*OLD MAN goes back to digging.*

OLD MAN: You are lying. Again.

SEAN: I'm not! I really don't have a watch. Look...

*SEAN shows him his bare wrist.*

OLD MAN: You need woman. You have woman, she make you think about time... all the time. You late and she...

*Makes throat slitting motion. SEAN smiles. The OLD MAN begins to clean his hands with baby wipes.*

OLD MAN: You find a good woman. Not too smart, not too dumb. Not too old, not too young. In the middle. One that can cook and clean. Then you thank her, and you—

*OLD MAN makes the gesture of bending a woman over his knees and spanking her. SEAN laughs. Dissolve into next scene.*

SEAN: Man, this is so fucking unreal.

**SCENE 3**

*Interrogation room. Table. Two chairs. GEORGE is looking over a file. JOE is restless.*

SEAN: I mean he's giving me advice about broads, how weird is that?

GEORGE: Has he made any special requests?

SEAN: He's obsessed with baby wipes, oh and he keeps asking for the time.

GEORGE: You haven't...

SEAN: I followed your orders. All of the guards have. No watches, no phones.

GEORGE: Good. He needs to understand that if he wants favors, he has to go through me. No one else.

SEAN: Man I wish I could tell someone. Every time dad calls, I'm like... I'm dying to tell him. He thinks I'm shooting A-Rabs in the desert or something and I wanna say... no, pops. This is way, way, bigger—

JOE: You can leave us now, Sean.

SEAN: Yes sir.

JOE: We're running out of time, George.

GEORGE: I know. I'm doing my best.

JOE: I pulled a lot of strings to get you this job. There are people in the bureau who think we shouldn't have an Arab running this interrogation.

GEORGE: I'm an American first, sir.

JOE: Are you really George? Sorry, look, I'm under a lot of... elections are around the corner and the folks in Washington think the softly, softly approach is not gonna work.

GEORGE: I'm making progress. I've established rapport.

JOE: We need a breakthrough or we need a change of strategy.

GEORGE: I don't think if I change my strategy now—

JOE: You're not getting what I'm saying. A change of strategy means I take you off the case.

GEORGE: I just need a little more—

JOE: Time is always in short supply when it comes to politics. Make it happen, George.

**SCENE 4**

*The OLD MAN is facing GEORGE. [Optional: both actors switch to a British accent to represent them speaking in Arabic].*

GEORGE: How are you, Mr. Saddam?

SADDAM: You know what I like about our little chats, Mr. Piro? I get to speak in my own tongue. With O'Shea, I must sound like a child.

GEORGE: Today I want to resume where we left off on our last session.

SADDAM: You are wasting your time with this line of questioning...

GEORGE: Did you ever meet Bin Laden?

SADDAM: Never. Bin Laden is a fanatic. I don't deal with fanatics.

GEORGE: But some of your officials met with members of Al-Qa'ida?

SADDAM: So what?

GEORGE: There must've been a purpose to these meetings.

SADDAM: A government can and should meet with all sorts of people.

GEORGE: Was there not a temptation to think: my enemy's enemy is my friend?

SADDAM: America is not Iraq's enemy. I shook hands with Donald Rumsfeld back in the '80s when America was happy for us to fight the Iranians.

GEORGE: I've seen that footage. Let's stick to Al-Qa'ida if you don't mind. Did you consider supplying Bin Laden with WMDs?

SADDAM: You've asked me this before and I keep telling you, we have no weapons of mass destruction.

GEORGE: If you really destroyed them, why did you keep no records? Why didn't you let the UN inspectors have access to—

SADDAM: Can I have my watch back?

GEORGE: What?

SADDAM: I know these techniques. I'm not stupid. You're trying to keep me disorientated. But that

watch was a present from my daughter, Raghad.

GEORGE: When did she give it to you?

SADDAM: The last time I saw her.

**SCENE 5**

*April 2003. RAGHAD (30s) comes in with a plate of food. SADDAM now assumes a more assured posture. He is once again the president of Iraq. GEORGE remains in the scene.*

SADDAM: Bless those hands. Make sure the security are fed also.

RAGHAD: What need do you have of twenty men?

SADDAM: What kind of question is that?

RAGHAD: It will draw attention to you, travelling with such an entourage.

SADDAM: I don't need advice on my security arrangement.

RAGHAD: But father, be reasonable. You don't need so many men, not when the Americans are scouring the sky in search of you.

SADDAM: How many men do you suggest I keep?

RAGHAD: You can dismiss half of them, maybe more.

SADDAM: Ten men to guard the president of Iraq?

RAGHAD: You don't even need that many. One will do.

SADDAM: Enough! You think I'm so feeble as not to know what my own security needs are?

RAGHAD: Sir, all I meant—

SADDAM: I don't tell you how much salt to add or what ingredients to use, so do not presume to tell me how to run my own affairs.

RAGHAD: Father, please, I say this out of love, out of fear for your safety...

SADDAM: For my safety or for yours? You can't wait for me to leave your house, can you?

RAGHAD: Naturally I fear for my children but...

SADDAM: I gave you all you have. You only matter because you are the daughter of Saddam Hussein.

RAGHAD: The Americans are marching onto Baghdad and you don't seem to-

SADDAM: Let them march. This is not the first time I've locked horns with them.

RAGHA: But this is different.

SADDAM: Why is it different? Because you think your father is old and weak?

RAGHAD: No... no...

SADDAM: You think I've lost my senses? That I've gone mad?

RAGHAD: I've never entertained such an (idea)-

SADDAM: You husband, your late husband, he thought I was weak also, he thought he could double cross me and look what became of... Is this your revenge? Throwing me out of your house?

RAGHAD: I'm doing no such thing. I'm just saying you need to travel lightly now. God knows what tricks the Americans have up their sleeves. Adapt to the situation father so you may survive. I... I got you something.

*She hands him a box.*

SADDAM: What's this?

RAGHAD: Open it.

*SADDAM hesitates. A slight mistrust.*

RAGHAD: It's your birthday present.

*SADDAM opens the box. Takes out a watch.*

There's an engraving at the back.

SADDAM (*reading the engraving*): Time shall unfold what plighted cunning hides.

*[Optional: Raghad might say the line simultaneously in Arabic].*

*SEAN removes RAGHAD from the scene. GEORGE takes the watch from SADDAM.*

GEORGE: If you need to know the time, all you have to do is ask me.

*SADDAM goes to his cell and lies down.*

**SCENE 6**

*JOE takes the watch from GEORGE. JOE and SEAN are circling GEORGE in his imagination.*

JOE: You're running out of time, George. Just hurt the fucking son of a bitch.

GEORGE: Then I'd be no better than him.

JOE: Maybe you're beginning to think of him as some kind of father figure?

GEORGE: What, no.

SEAN: You don't give a crap about the 9/11 victims.

GEORGE: He had nothing to do with (that)-

JOE: Are you an Arab first?

SEAN: Or an American?

GEORGE I'm...I'm...

JOE: You're disappointing me, George.

SEAN: An American, a real American, would pluck his eyes out.

## **SCENE 7**

*Night time. GEORGE charges into SADDAM's cell. SEAN is with him. SADDAM wakes up, alarmed.*

SEAN: Get up.

SADDAM: If you are going to execute me, I don't want to be hanged. I want a firing squad, you hear me. I don't want to die like a criminal.

GEORGE: We are taking you to a hospital for a medical check up, that's all.

SEAN: I'm gonna hood you now. Don't panic, OK?

*Sean places a hood on Saddam's head. Saddam is agitated.*

I said, don't panic.

*GEORGE guides SADDAM to another part of the stage, seats him down. SEAN, JOE, and RAGHAD begin to make helicopter sounds. This goes on for a while. GEORGE leans closer towards SADDAM. Is he about to hurt him? GEORGE removes the hood. SADDAM blinks his eyes. He's somewhat disorientated, looks out of the window.*

SADDAM: Where are we?

GEORGE: Can't you tell?

SADDAM: No.

GEORGE: We're flying over Baghdad.

*RAGHAD kneels near her father. He looks down at her. RAGHAD becomes Baghdad and then the voice in SADDAM's head, the way JOE is in GEORGE's. But these voices also speak directly to each other at times.*

SADDAM: She looks so beautiful.

GEORGE: She does.

RAGHAD: I was yours.

SADDAM: My fair kingdom.

RAGHAD: And you lost me.

SADDAM: No, no. I'll never accept that. I'm your president. I'll always be—

GEORGE: Your majesty?

SADDAM: What did you call me?

GEORGE: ...rifle for a rifle, stick for a stick...

SADDAM: What? I don't understand...

GEORGE: I said you gave a speech back in 2000, you said Iraq would not disarm until others in the region did. Rifle for a rifle, stick for a stick, stone for a stone.

RAGHAD: Be careful father, it's a trap.

SADDAM: What about it?

JOE: Steady George, don't show you're eager to know.

GEORGE: You didn't write it, did you?

SADDAM: Of course I did. I remember that speech.

GEORGE: It was designed to send a signal that you still had WMDs in your possession, wasn't it?

SADDAM: I keep telling you most of the WMDs were destroyed by the UN weapons inspectors in the



'90s. I gave the order for the rest to be destroyed also.

GEORGE: Why keep the secret, why put your nation at risk, why put your own life at risk to maintain the charade that you still had them in your possession?

RAGHAD: Don't answer that.

SADDAM: I had no choice.

JOE: Of course he did.

GEORGE: I think you did.

SADDAM: I had to keep the Iranians at bay; I had to make them think I had the capability to destroy them.

JOE: This was about the Iranians?

RAGHAD: The world doesn't just revolve around the USA.

SADDAM: They're our next door neighbor. Your country is 7,000 miles away.

GEORGE: Why didn't you put a stop to the war with us later, when you saw the troops massing on Iraq's borders?

SADDAM: I miscalculated.

RAGHAD: Don't give him the satisfaction!

SADDAM: I thought America would just launch an air strike or two like they did in 1998.

GEORGE: So all your evasions about WMDs were a show? For the Iranians? That's what you're telling me?

RAGHAD: He thinks you're mad.

SADDAM: I had to maintain a credible threat.

JOE: A credible threat?

RAGHAD: Why the incredulity? God knows your politicians love using that phrase.

GEORGE: If you had WMDs would you have used them against us?

SADDAM: Not unless you attacked first.

GEORGE: You had no compunction about using them against the Kurds.

SADDAM: That was different. We were at war with Iran and the Kurds sided with the Iranians.

RAGHAD: Stop dad, you've said too much.

GEORGE: Only some did and only because you were persecuting them.

JOE: You got him now, George.

GEORGE: I just want to understand. Help me understand. How could you slaughter your own people?

RAGHAD: Keep quiet, dad! I'm begging you.

SADDAM (*to Raghad*): Don't you dare tell me what I can or can not say! (*to George*) I'm the president of Iraq. I could not let treason go unpunished. I did it because it was necessary.

*Sean puts the hood back on Saddam and guides him away.*

## SCENE 8

*JOE is leafing through GEORGE's report.*

JOE: This is good George. They're not gonna like it in Washington but...at least you answered the question that was on everybody's mind. You're alright?

GEORGE: Sure, yeah...

JOE: You got on the right escalator George. I'm glad.

GEORGE: Thank you sir.

JOE: I have to say I was skeptical about your tactics but they worked.

GEORGE: Sir?

JOE: Yes?

GEORGE: What's going to happen to him?

JOE: We've got to hand him over to the Iraqis. He's their problem now. This report, we're gonna share it with them. You did good George. You gave him the rope and he tied the noose around his own neck. You showed the people at the top that just cause a man is born an Arab, it doesn't mean his loyalty is always to his tribe, so to speak. I think they'll be very plea-

GEORGE: With all due respect sir.

JOE: Yes.

GEORGE: I don't give a rat's ass what they think. I did what was asked of me, that's all.

JOE: Right. Well... thank you, George.

*They shake hands. Joe exits.*

## **SCENE 9**

*GEORGE enters the small enclosure. SEAN is watching SADDAM who is running his fingers over his wilted flowers.*

GEORGE: Could you give us a moment Sean.

*SEAN nods, exits.*

GEORGE: I have some news for you, Mr. Saddam.

SADDAM: None of the flowers I planted have survived.

*SADDAM gets up, shakes the soil off his palms.*

Please, just call me Saddam. What is your news?

GEORGE: Your legal custody has transferred to the Iraqi government. You will be facing a trial.

SADDAM: I see.

GEORGE: I brought you something.

*GEORGE takes out a cigar from his pocket and offers it to SADDAM. SADDAM takes it, sniffs.*

SADDAM: What about you?

*George takes out another cigar, looks around.*

SADDAM: Surely they won't fire you for smoking.

GEORGE: I suppose not.

*GEORGE lights the cigars. They take a puff, relax.*

SADDAM: Sit down, George. Sit down.

*They both sit. SADDAM puffs on the cigar.*

SADDAM: Cohiba. The best. Castro used to send me these.

GEORGE: I know.

SADDAM: You know everything, don't you Mr. Piro?

GEORGE: I wouldn't say that.

SADDAM: Did you also know that Castro sent me a parrot and a banana tree?

GEORGE: ...That, I didn't know.

*SADDAM takes a puff. Pleased with himself.*

GEORGE: Why?

SADDAM: No fucking idea. My analysts pondered over that for weeks, thought it was some kind of coded message.

GEORGE: Was it?

SADDAM: I don't remember. I didn't always listen to what they said.

GEORGE; Maybe you should have.

SADDAM: Hmmm, next you'll be telling me I should have implemented democracy.

GEORGE: That is not of interest to my bosses. They just wanted to know about-

SADDAM: WMDs. I know. I know. You Americans have a one track mind. Let me try to understand this democracy of yours, If I may. You have your business elites, they choose a candidate every four years.

GEORGE: That's not how it works. The people-

SADDAM: Sure, sure...the people choose, yes, I know. But who funds the campaigns?

GEORGE: Well...

SADDAM: And this democracy, what has it offered to your poor?

GEORGE: They have the choice to elect whoever they please, whoever they think will serve their interests.

SADDAM: But do they?

GEORGE: ...look, this is a ridiculous conversation. Democracy is obviously better than what you had-

SADDAM: Why?

GEORGE: You killed whoever opposed you or at the very least sent them to-

SADDAM: Guantanamo Bay?

GEORGE: That's different.

*Light change.*

JOE: In a democracy, people are free to choose.

RAGHAD: Between two well funded candidates, that on the whole, do not really represent their interests.

JOE: Free to express themselves.

RAGHAD: In fringe theatres... sometimes.

JOE: They can write whatever they want.

RAGHAD: For small independent publishers, always on the verge of extinction.

JOE: Criticize the government, bring about regime change, without the need for bloodshed.

RAGHAD: You mean switch from party A to B or B to A? No, you've really convinced me.

JOE: It's better than your fucking dictatorship!

RAGHAD: Sure. But at least in a dictatorship, people don't have the illusion of being free.

JOE: You're a fucking bitch, you know that?

RAGHAD: Wow, you know I can see it, I'm not blind.

JOE: What?

RAGHAD: You've got a hard on.

*JOE covers his crotch.*

RAGHAD: Is that for me?

JOE: Fuck off.

RAGHAD: That's so sweet!

*Light change.*

SADDAM: I really missed the taste of these cigars.

*SADDAM and GEORGE are puffing on the cigars. They sit in silence for a while. Sound of birds.*

SADDAM: I think it was those birds that ruined my flowers.

*GEORGE smiles.*

SADDAM: What?

GEORGE: I don't think so, sir.

SADDAM: Of course it was. They come, they go, they do as they please. This courtyard should've been covered with a wire mesh to keep them out. I kept telling O'Shea but he doesn't listen.

GEORGE: It was not the birds that ruined your flowers.

*Saddam wants to continue his denial but then suddenly the wind goes out of his sail. He slumps in his chair. Puts out the cigar.*

GEORGE: I also brought you a new suit. For the court. It's in your cell.

SADDAM: Thank you. You know I have probably spent more quality time with you than I ever did with my own flesh and blood.

*Awkward silence. Suddenly, SADDAM stands up. So does GEORGE.*

SADDAM: Well, I'm sure we'll be seeing each other again.

*GEORGE knows that is not true. SADDAM approaches closer and kisses GEORGE on the cheeks three times in the traditional Iraqi manner. There are tears in his eyes.*

## **SCENE 10**

*SEAN transforms into a member of a TV crew, he places a mic on GEORGE. JOE transforms into an interviewer, listening to GEORGE. RAGHAD is watching him.*

GEORGE (*giving a TV interview*): ...I was in Chicago, preparing to watch the Chicago Bears play the Green Bay Packers. It was a Sunday night game. New Year's eve. The stadium was full. There was a lot of excitement. I'm very aware that was the day Saddam was to be executed. I actually didn't wanna witness the execution. Now I truly believe that the punishment was just, appropriate and fair for the crimes Saddam had committed. But on the other hand, I personally didn't want to witness it.

JOE: Why is that?

GEORGE: I saw a different side of Saddam, I saw the human side of Saddam. I saw Saddam the man vs. the brutal dictator. The evil leader of Iraq who gassed his own people. I did watch Saddam's execution that evening. It was aired on television.

JOE: How did it make you feel?

GEORGE: I didn't gain any pleasure out of it. I turned off the TV, and I went out to celebrate New Year's Eve.

JOE: George Piro. Thank you for being on the show.

GEORGE: Thank you.

*SEAN takes off the mic.*

*(To the audience)* They offered him blindfolds. He refused them. The masked executioners hurled insults at him. He kept calm. I thought I caught a glimpse of this other Saddam on the gallows, one who might have been capable of acquiring wisdom before old age. But it was of course far too late for that. Halfway through reciting his prayers, the trap door opened like a full stop cutting him off in mid sentence. If I'm honest... I felt a tinge of sadness. I'm fully aware that I only saw what he wanted me to see. But then I did the same with him. And no, that doesn't make us equals.

***The End***

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***Hassan Abdulrazzak*** is of Iraqi origin, born in Prague and living in London. He trained as a cell and molecular biologist and worked at the Imperial College and Harvard University. His first play, *Baghdad Wedding*, premiered at the Soho Theatre, London (2007). Other productions were at the Belvoir Theatre, Sydney (2009) and Akvarious productions in India (2012). The play was also broadcast on BBC Radio 3. It also had a staged reading by the Golden Thread Theatre in the USA in 2014. His second play, *The Prophet* was staged at the Gate Theatre, London, and had a reading by Noor Theatre in NYC (2012). He has written several short plays including *The Tale of Sindbad* and *the Old Goat* that was part of the multi-author play *Arab Nights* (produced by the Metta Theatre), which premiered at the Soho Theatre (2012) then toured the UK. and *You Don't Have To Be American To Get Laid But It Helps*, part of *Waiting for Summer*, produced and directed by the Swivel Theatre Company (2014). He has also written two full-length screenplays and translated several plays for the Royal Court Theatre (Arabic to English).

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[arabstages@gc.cuny.edu](mailto:arabstages@gc.cuny.edu)

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