

The Giaour

1600s. Peasant rebellion in Greece. Ottoman commander Hassan rescues 10 year-old Laertes from his soldiers, but not before Laertes witnesses the rape and murder of a village woman.

Hassan takes the boy home to Baba, the chief guard of his father's harem. The boy is too old to live in the harem; Baba puts Laertes in girls' clothes and calls him Leila, hiring a tutor and enrolling him at a horse-riding school – as Laertes – at the Hippodrome, and his double life begins.

In Istanbul, Hassan's Jewish lover David gives him an illuminated book of poems, with which Hassan teaches Persian to Leila. Leila grows, protected by Baba and Hassan.

Hassan's affair with David is discovered by the Agha (captain) of the Janissaries (foreign-born soldiers), who whips and rapes David. David tells Hassan he is marrying. As they embrace for the last time, David's back is still bleeding inside his robe.

Detecting Hassan's sadness, Leila surprises Hassan with a hug. The following night, he confesses his love to Hassan. When they make love for the first time, however, Leila's hallucinations begin.

In a flashback, a Serbian boy is taken in as a human tax (*Devsirme*). His father forbids him to return, believing that those who renounce Christianity become vampires. Brought to Istanbul to be schooled, the boy's pain and anger turn into ruthless ambition; he becomes the Agha.

Hassan and Leila make love, but Leila's trauma manifests in a violent physical reaction. Hassan remembers a dying wolf, brought from the Carpathian mountains by his father, and Baba's story of two Wallachian Princes — one loving the Sultan, the other hating the Turks.

In Istanbul, the Agha reveals to Hassan what he did to David. Overcome by an irrational fear, Hassan hurries home — a journey of a night and a day-and-a-half — to see Leila.

Laertes and his friends from the Hippodrome discuss sex and politics at a Taverna. A transgender waitress serves them wine, and Laertes wonders what he is.

Hassan comes to see Laertes at the Hippodrome in Baba's absence and the other boys sense their intimacy. The next day, the boys call Laertes Hassan's *malakos* (bitch). Laertes kills a boy in the ensuing brawl, and flees on his black horse.

Baba and Hassan prepare an effigy of Leila, and with a fisherman's help, sink the carpet bundle in the sea. Baba claims Leila was an adulteress, and knows this will overshadow the death at the Hippodrome, and explain the disappearance of Leila.

A group of Arnauts (Albanian bandits) takes Laertes to their camp and Laertes sleeps with a dancing girl.

Two years pass. Hassan leads his soldiers in a policing expedition against the Arnauts. As he prepares to leave, Baba sees Hassan's mother's ghost and follows Hassan. The Arnauts ambush Hassan's party. Hassan and Laertes lock blades and Laertes kills Hassan. Baba catches up and curses Laertes; he is now the cursed Other, the Giaour. Laertes flees again, and takes refuge in an island monastery.

Two centuries later. Lord Byron visits the monastery and reads Laertes' manuscript. *The Giaour* becomes a best seller. One night, a stranger visits Byron and introduces himself: it is the Giaour.