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CHAPTER ONE: WHO ARE THE KURDS?

NARRATOR:

There is a saying among the Kurds: “No friends but the mountains.” For, indeed, the world has scarcely noticed when century after century, conqueror after conqueror has driven these once nomadic tribes deep within their beloved mountains to preserve their culture, their language and their lives.

Hidden in the shadows of history, resistance against repression became the Kurdish way of life, until atrocities inflicted by a dictator named Saddam Hussein sent shock waves throughout the world causing people of every nation to ask, “Who are the Kurds?”

For many, awareness arrived on ‘Bloody Friday’ in March of nineteen eighty-eight when Saddam dropped poisonous gas on the Kurdish city of Halabja killing five thousand within minutes, followed by seven thousand more as the bombing continued for days.

Halabja was not Saddam’s only chemical attack against Iraq’s Kurds, it was simply the worst, captured in all its horrific detail, making it a symbol of the atrocities committed by Saddam Hussein.

INTERVIEW: RIZGAR HAMA WANDI, KURDISTAN DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION (KDC)

Saddam tried to wipe Kurdish people from the face of the earth. The people in Kurdistan are so happy because of the liberation and because now they can live in peace and free.

NARRATOR:

To trace the history of the Kurds, one must begin at the beginning – for it was here, in the land some believe was once the Garden of Eden, that this resilient ancient people first left their mark upon the world.

Nourished by the headwaters of the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers, archeologists believe it was within this Cradle of Civilization that Kurdish ancestors first pioneered agriculture, animal husbandry, weaving, metal work and the making of pottery.

NARRATOR:

For visitors, a trip through the land of the Kurds is a trip through Biblical history. The great prophets Nahum, Jonah, Habakkuk, and Daniel are all buried within the vast borders of what came to be known as Kurdistan.

The city of Amadiya still stands, marking the place many believe wise men known as magi began their journey to follow a great star that appeared in the sky.

As centuries passed, these tribes would fall to the forces of Alexander the Great at the Battle of Gaugamela...and later rise to their zenith as traders along the legendary Silk Road.

In time the Mongol hordes would make them prisoners...followed by the Ottomans who would make them princes.

But whether their occupiers were good or bad, killers or saints, the Kurds would learn to do what they must to survive.

At the end of World War I the Kurds were finally promised independence with the dismantling of the Ottoman Empire and the creation of new nation-states. Instead, with the stroke of a pen, Kurdistan was parceled out among Turkey, Syria, Iran and Iraq.

Today, the world's thirty million Kurds, equivalent to the population of Canada, make up the largest ethnic group in existence without a recognized state of their own.

INTERVIEW: DR. ALI SAEED MOHAMMAD, PROFESSOR

We are neither Arabs, nor Turks, and not Persians. We are Muslims, but we are a different nation. We have our own language, our own history, and our own folklore, and everything.

INTERVIEW: JANO ROSEBIANI, KURDISH FILM MAKER

The fact that we Kurds are a completely different ethnic group than the Arabs and the Turks and even the Persians...because of that background and also because of all of the suffering they have seen, they have a completely different mindset.

INTERVIEW: PROFESSOR NAZAR AMIN

At the time when the central Iraqi regime - before the toppling of Saddam Hussein, was busy with creating weapons of mass destruction, we were busy planting trees and creating new classes at our universities and opening new departments and building centers of education for our children and for our youth.

We are trying to build a nation. We are trying to improve the scientific standards of our community. We are trying to spread democracy. We are trying to teach the people how to respect each other and accept the rights of children and women in general.

INTERVIEW: NEHAD LATIF QOCHA

This country is a peaceful country. The people are very, very lovely. I don't think that our region will be a dam between us and other countries and other cultures.

NARRATOR:

The Kurds are an ancient people who've lived their entire lives at the crossroads of the world, accustomed to living with people of many different religions. Today, as in the days of old, you will find in the hearts of the Kurdish people ethnic and religious tolerance.

INTERVIEW: JANO ROSEBIANI, KURDISH FILM MAKER

Today, for instance, in Kurdistan you see churches beside mosques in the Kurdish cities. We have Christians, we have Armenians, we have Yezidies, we have Muslims, we have Jews. We have all types of religions and ethnic groups and we've been living together for ages and that shows how tolerant the Kurdish people are.

NARRATOR:

In the cities of Kurdistan you will see, not only Kurds, but Arabs, Turkmen, Assyrians, Armenians, Chaldeans, Shia, Sunni...all living peacefully side by side because this is who they are. This is how Kurdistan has always been, long before the country of Iraq ever existed.

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