

A
MANIFESTA-
TION
OF
GOD
IN
HIS
UNITY

by Alina Jacobs

CHARCTERS

AL-HAKIM B'AMR ALLAH—The Leader by the Order of God, Caliph of the Fatimid Empire from 996-1021AD

A CHORUS of Tourists, Lifers, Florida Men, Monotheists, etc. including:

CHORUS 1/SITT AL-MULK—The Lady of the Kingdom, Al-Hakim's sister.

CHORUS 2/BOY—Ali Az-Zahir, Al-Hakim's teenage son and future Caliph.

CHORUS 3/AD-DARAZI—a Persian preacher and alleged multiple-time heretic

CHORUS 4/ANA—A local girl, born on the beach

.....

A “percussion interlude” as noted in the text should sound like this:



It can be played on any surface, as long as it's resonant.

// within a line of dialogue indicates the overlapping start of the next line

.....

We are in a parking lot. It is a hot day turning into a somewhat more bearable night. The parking lot is connected to another building that is technically closed, but is available to the audience for restroom purposes. The audience occupies three or four large parking spaces. Chairs are placed in staggered semicircles, and there are two or three large picnic blankets for those who don't mind sitting on the hard ground.

At our disposal we have a pair of bright electric lights, controlled by a dimmer. We also have a small handful of little speakers strewn about the audience area.

.....

Special thanks to the book *The Visible Hand of the Market: Economic Warfare in Venezuela* (2017) by Pasqualina Curcio Curcio

.....

We have not been granted a permit for the beach

I am sorry about that, I know you were all looking forward to it and may have found yourself tricked (though no one meant to trick you!!) by the promotional material.

But the municipal authorities were charging way too steep a price! I mean look at those lounge chairs they don't let you park your ass there for a second!

Anyway, these are our circumstances, which are, obviously and unavoidably, given. History marches on, like an engine, or whatever...

So imagine the asphalt of this parking lot is the beach.

Or don't let me tell you what to do!

Whatever!

There is still a bit of natural light left this evening, we need not turn on our electric lights quite yet. Sound of the ocean, birds, etc. Tourists and Lifers going about their business.

AL-HAKIM B'AMR ALLAH lies supine on the beach, hands firmly at sides, two children, one holding a stick, come into view.

The child pokes Al-Hakim's thigh with the edge of the stick, but he does not move, does not register.

The child pokes his glute, upper arm, then, more urgently, the bottom of the foot, the hip joint, and at last in between the eyes. Al-Hakim twitches, so we know he's alive. The two children run off.

A long moment.

Al-Hakim wakes up with a scream.

Birds go silent.

CHORUS 1

Tourists in wonder

CHORUS 4

The Lifers, exhausted, their eyelids too droopy to register

CHORUS 1

Imagine them, still caring

CHORUS 3

(perhaps they do a little bit)

CHORUS 4

Maybe their hands twitch

CHORUS 2

A barely perceptible twitch

CHORUS 3

Maybe they inhale disapprovingly

Al-Hakim screams again.

CHORUS 1

Ok the Tourists don't care anymore

CHORUS 4

The Lifers are deaf

CHORUS 1

Lost in the wave shifts

CHORUS 4
Been so long now

CHORUS 3
Every minute is an hour, et cetera

CHORUS 4
Simulated world reflecting upon itself

CHORUS 1
Everything born out of a big disappointment.

A moment. Al-Hakim gets up, tries to stand, collapses. Sits in a crumpled position.

CHORUS 2
This is umm, some guy.

Al-Hakim tries to form words but nothing comes out. He holds his head as though he were in much pain.

CHORUS 1
This is Al-Hakim b'Amr Allah
The leader by order of God

CHORUS 3
From the eleventh century!
The leader of the Fatimid Caliphate,
His empire stretched from the Atlantic Ocean to the Red Sea

CHORUS 4
Long since his final night ride,
He has come back

CHORUS 3
But he doesn't remember who he is

CHORUS 1
Or was

CHORUS 4
He was born in Cairo in 985 AD

CHORUS 3
(375 on the hijri calendar)

CHORUS 2

His succeeds his father as Caliph at the age of eleven

CHORUS 1

In February of 1021, or Shawwal of 411,
he goes off, on his horse

CHORUS 2

Or maybe his pet donkey

CHORUS 3

(he was quirky like that)

CHORUS 4

On a night ride

CHORUS 2

To get some fresh air

CHORUS 1

And is never heard from again

CHORUS 2

His body never was found

CHORUS 3

You'd think that after all this time, he'd simply be rolling in his permanent grave

CHORUS 4

But he has come back!

CHORUS 1

Or maybe he's trapped in purgatory,
With no luck and no reprieve

Al-Hakim gets up, tries to stand, collapses, attempts to roll onto his side, assumes a crawling position. Shakily, he stands. The Chorus crowds around Al-Hakim, they push him around using the synchronized movement of their feet. They shuffle him to and fro, get up in the audience's faces, etc. While this is happening, they speak the following:

CHORUS 1

It's nothing

CHORUS 2

Pretty sure it's nothing

CHORUS 3

Looks like nothing

CHORUS 4

Essentially nothing

CHORUS 2

Practically nothing

CHORUS 1

As I said, I think it's nothing

CHORUS 2

Adequate!

CHORUS 1

(whispered)

We're going to brunch! We're going to collapse upon the brunch table mend ourselves so blightedly easily, we jumped in front of trains but fortunately we jumped too far, our calves were like steel springs. *(short pause.)* Very cruel // to give you that kind of shock! even if just for an instant though of course an instant or even half of an instant can carry on an indefinitely long amount of time

CHORUS 2

Average

Baseline righteous

good enough//

exclusively okay

middling

lukewarm

passable

teetering but not never falling one way or the other

CHORUS 3

(whispered)

You've really done it this time, really undone yourself this time, the next one assured to be so much and even worse, the ropes loose and you can't tie a knot to save your life (and what a thing to save!)

CHORUS 4

(whispered)

It's December almost January though here it is practically impossible to tell where or when or at what point, only a thin gradient // of the weather, anyway, it's December and the Oscars are soon or they feel like they should be, yes quite soon, not exactly sure when after all they keep moving

them back and back because every few years they add another game to the football season, it's true a few decades ago there were only twelve or thirteen in the regular season, isn't that right? The Oscars are soon and we will be inundated in a flood wealth of their information. We turn our heads, and see everything pre-produced, I hear they do a lot of that, in the movie industry...

CHORUS 3

(whispered)

Yes it was a bad deal a deal only an idiot would accept, but you enjoyed those moments of pleasure didn't you, fondly remember them even, a single nontraumatized instance, stretched out. There isn't even a word given to you that you could use to call it, you are stripped of such an ability, in and of itself a kind of privilege, an animal thing. // Childlike consumption, hours of time you wouldn't have spent elsewhere, in the wrong timeline, except perhaps inhaling glue and paint thinning fumes—

CHORUS 2

Both sides
Neither nor
run of the mill
so-so
maashi
o o o kay

CHORUS 3

(whispered)

not a spot of gloopy paint on that wall, nothing overly coagulated, smooth and flat, outside the realm and edge of necessity.

AL-HAKIM

(echoed whisper)

Maashi
Maashi
maaaaashiii
ookayy

CHORUS 1

This is a story

CHORUS 2

About a guy

CHORUS 3

In case you missed such things

CHORUS 4

This is a story about a guy who never gets his groove back.

CHORUS 1
If he ever had it in the first place!

Al-Hakim is dizzy, about to fall down. He struggles to form words.

AL-HAKIM
Who am I?

CHORUS 2
We already said.

AL-HAKIM
Do I have a body?

CHORUS 2
Mmmmm

CHORUS 3
Sounds like a question for somebody else

CHORUS 1
By which he means, yes.

AL-HAKIM
But is it mine?

CHORUS 2
I don't get it

CHORUS 1
You've reincarnated

CHORUS 4
Or something

CHORUS 3
You came back for a reason

AL-HAKIM
Is my body, me?
(he shudders)
Might this world be not impermanent??
Answer me! Please.

*Only now they are silent. Al-Hakim faints.
Chorus 1 becomes SITT AL-MULK.
Sitt Al-Mulk sleeps propped up on her side. She sleeps with both
eyes open, or with realistic eyes painted onto her eyelids.*

CHORUS 2
This is Sitt Al-Mulk

CHORUS 4
The Lady of the Kingdom

CHORUS 3
Al-Hakim's sister and rival

CHORUS 2
Her real name has been lost to time

CHORUS 3
Sitt al Alam

CHORUS 2
Sitt al Kebed

CHORUS 4
Sitt al Kul

CHORUS 3
Sitt al Azma

CHORUS 4
Sitt az Zebala

CHORUS 3
Two years after Al-Hakim's disappearance she was lost to dysentery

CHORUS 4
Deflated and sagging

CHORUS 3
And how wonderful fat she had been before

CHORUS 2
Dressed in her father's vestments

CHORUS 3
Practically bouncing down those long hallways

SITT AL-MULK

I played all sides, but one of them mostly (mine)

CHORUS 4

Unallowed to marry, she maintains a tight grip on Al-Hakim's young son Ali Az-Zahir

CHORUS 3

An ambition untempered by wifely submission or humbled domesticity

CHORUS 2

It is no secret that she hates her brother and wants him dead.

SITT AL-MULK

(to the audience)

I do not hate my brother

Despite his faults,

It is in fact because of my not-hate, the absence of hate, that I have tried, once or twice, here and there, to see him deposed.

For everyone's sake.

When our beloved father died,

I had a plan to unseat my brother, who was only eleven at the time,
but I was betrayed at the last minute by a treacherous eunuch

CHORUS 3

It happens!

SITT AL-MULK

Now the situation is more dire,

Conflicts with the Abasiyya in the East and the Maghariba to the West

The Byzantines looming nearby

My brother, meanwhile, issues nonsensical edicts in the name of establishing God's law on Earth

He forbids Christians and Jews from riding horses, he shuts up women in their houses

He's cracked down on fermentable fruits

Everyone says he's lost his mind—and they're right!

It's a political nightmare, to say the least

CHORUS 4

And now she's got a new problem

*Chorus 3 becomes AD-DARAZI, he goes to sleep and wakes up
with a sunburst of human energy.*

CHORUS 4

This is Muhammed bin Isma'il Nashtakin Ad-Darazi

CHORUS 2
A Persian

CHORUS 4
From Bukhara

CHORUS 2
Which is pretty far away!

CHORUS 4
Nobody knows why, but he shows up one day, in Cairo,
With something unexpected to say

AD-DARAZI
Our king and emperor, Al-Hakim b'Amr Allah,
khalifat al khalafa
Is that
but not only—
he's a divine being,
the mahdi, assuredly, but not only—
Al-Hakim is the personification of God on Earth!

Chorus 2 becomes the BOY aka Ali Az-Zahir. He sleeps on the beach, curled up fetus-style. Opens eyes, closes them, rolls back to sleep. Does this multiple times.

CHORUS 4
This is Ali Az-Zahir
Al-Hakim is his father, but he pays little attention to him
He's just a kid
He will be Caliph one day but now he's just a kid.

Sitt al-Mulk sits beside the Boy, she occasionally touches his hair.

SITT AL-MULK
My father would not let me have a family of my own, so I will steal Mansour's,
Turn his own son against him
Keep him amongst the girlies,
his hands will be soft, unblemished,
I will teach him to wield his schemes on the tip of his fingers,
instead of on the backs of disposed viziers.
He will take on a feminine bent as ruler
under the guidance of his aunt
and in the shadow of her droopy tits.

Percussion interlude.

Al-Hakim struggles to stand, he breathes heavily. His eyes start to open fully for the first time. He does some simple stretches, his body makes sharp cracking sounds.

AL-HAKIM

God and Satan are fighting a war over me
 at least that's what I think is going on
 every night I am tormented by dreams but I refuse to give in to the Image
 it is only of the dunya
 it isn't proof of anything.
 It only makes sense that I would have physically already died,
 not that I can remember what happened,
 but that is the logician's conclusion.
 Sometimes instinct is the best indicator
 But sometimes not.
 Two angels would sit on my chest and tempt me with falsehoods
 and I would lie there, trapped, and refuse to renounce the oneness of god, subhanuhu wa ta'ala
 but is this the dunya or is this barzakh?
 or is this hell itself?

CHORUS 1

Al-Hakim is pitifully confused
 He cannot remember most things

CHORUS 2

Your father

CHORUS 3

Your mother

CHORUS 4

Your cousin

AL-HAKIM

Where was I born?
 I beg to see my reflection,
 Here there are not even shadows,
 Everything is too bright and—

CHORUS 3

Turn your head and—

He sees something in the distance. His body starts to shake.

CHORUS 2

Fuck!

CHORUS 4
There it is—

CHORUS 3
Turn head back

CHORUS 2
Look down at your feet—

He does so.

CHORUS 3
Ah there they are, the old two constants, still there, rotate the toes, heel, et cetera

CHORUS 4
Touch the ankles together, then move them apart

CHORUS 2
Look straight, forward

CHORUS 3
Maybe it wasn't actually really there—but you saw it, did you not?

CHORUS 2
But maybe you didn't?

CHORUS 3
Maybe it was a trick of the eyes?

CHORUS 2
Or a waking dream?

CHORUS 4
Turn head and—

He does so.

CHORUS 2
Ah fuck there it is again

CHORUS 3
Now don't panic it's not what you think it is

CHORUS 4

After all how could it be

CHORUS 2

That??

CHORUS 3

It's plainly absurd

Just so utterly unlikely, it's beyond all semblance of logic and reason, pure unrefined unfiltered nonsense, absolutely impractical from start to finish

CHORUS 4

And yet

CHORUS 2

And yet

CHORUS 3

And yet

The thing in the distance, is, unsurprisingly, revealed to be Sitt al-Mulk.

CHORUS 2

Oh it's just a big old seagull

No wait—

Whispered shouts from the chorus:

CHORUS 3

Watch out Al-Hakim!

CHORUS 4

Don't go for that night ride!

CHORUS 2

Your treacherous sister!

CHORUS 4

And the knives that seek you everywhere!

SITT AL-MULK

(to the Chorus)

Look,

he disappeared of his own accord,

who knows what really happened?

I've lacked the satisfaction of the confirmed kill, I cannot admit to anything,
 except maybe for trying...
 Maybe he fell from his horse and dislocated a disk,
 maybe that's all it was.
 Sometimes you receive an austere blessing, good luck disguised as more good luck.
(to Al-Hakim)
 Mansour, my brother...
 You look terrible.

He gazes at her, totally blank.

SITT AL-MULK
 Perhaps you need some rest.

AL-HAKIM
 My sister, whose name has been lost to time...

SITT AL-MULK
 What?

AL-HAKIM
 Your name—

SITT AL-MULK
 No it hasn't
 Lost to you maybe!

AL-HAKIM
 Remind me
 Remind
 me....

*She cannot.
 Percussion interlude.*

Al-Hakim wanders along the beach. ANA approaches him.

ANA
 You look lost—
 Is there anything I—

AL-HAKIM
 Do I have a body?

ANA
 Oh, sure you do.

Like, of course!

AL-HAKIM
What do I look like?

ANA
Uhh... Fine?

AL-HAKIM
What is this place?

ANA
I'm really glad you asked, in fact, I'm really qualified to talk about one thing.
Which is that!
Come with me
Let me be a guide—

They stroll along the beach, she leads him by the arm.

ANA
I know a lot of programs, new and declassified
I know a lot of painted houses,
a lot of fresh-mowed lawns and chemical scents
And if you look down that way, there's an ice cream parlor with guava, papaya, all kinds of
flavors
In my home country, so to speak, you couldn't buy earnest pornography,
for instance.
If you asked a bunch of youths, "where is the pornography?" they'd show you the insides of an
upright piano
of course, over there, the wifi was soo slow, you couldn't even download an image
and streaming, forget about it
anyway, here, it's quite different,
consumer choice has never been stronger.
The toilet paper section of the store has never been so robust as it is now
Are you here for a long time?

AL-HAKIM
A long...
Oh
Oh
Cover me oh lord

ANA
It's okay you'll get used to it,
It can be a lot at first you know,

Sometimes it rains like type of rain you've never seen, like the type of rain you think the world is ending and it's time for the last judgement, but then just five minutes later it's all gone without a cloud in the sky.

Takes some getting used to.

Hey—

Do you want a job?

AL-HAKIM

A what?

ANA

A job, sense of purpose, a bit of slack, a bit of girth in your wallet?

CHORUS 2

Don't do it Al-Hakim—

CHORUS 3

What other choice do you have?

CHORUS 2

You have no idea what you're getting into

CHORUS 1

It's do this or swim into the ocean

CHORUS 3

And maybe everything happens for a reason.

AL-HAKIM

I have tried to rectify my past mistakes

But I can't even remember what—

I—I think...

He places a hand on his forehead and closes his eyes. He attempts to think of words but they do not come. In a weak voice:

AL-HAKIM

I think we should all just get along.

ANA

That's so true!

Percussion interlude.

SITT AL-MULK

A mother is an anonymous thing

Mine was a Melkite, an Umm Walad,
 A title suggesting there must have been an infant mortality along the way,
 a male infant,
 whom I did not know—
 My father loved her dearly
 And Mansour's mother was just a faceless concubine.

(pause)

I'm waiting for them to call my name, repeatedly thinking I heard it but I haven't,
 stone skipping in my chest, but it is something else it is always something else,
 until one realizes, until *I've* realized—I don't know what I'm supposedly waiting to hear, and
 that I've possibly never known.

Percussion interlude.

*You may not have noticed the near constant buzz. But it's there
 and still going. Al-Hakim dazed and walking, Ana follows him with
 a clipboard.*

ANA

So like

It's not even really particularly hard

You just sit in front of a computer

Yeah, sounds nice right? Haha. No more food service yay, no more getting your hands dirty!

I mean physically dirty...

Are you listening? *(He's not, but she doesn't notice)*

Anyway so you sit in front of a computer and watch numbers

Basically like all day

And if the numbers go too high

You have to ring a little bell,

but not literally, you have to just send mister supervisor an email.

(A confession) I've been getting some very angry emails, from just, people, random people

I don't really know what's—

Anyway, does this make any sense?

AL-HAKIM

What is that buzzing...?

ANA

Hmmm?

AL-HAKIM

The constant *(gestures to indicate "you know")*. What is it?

ANA

Oh, yaa,

Yaa for sure.

I just, don't hear anything?

There definitely is, at least, a low frequency rumble. Perhaps it is someone's car, after all, we are truthfully in a parking lot, maybe it is the humming of the sky you hear when you listen really closely on a summer night. Or perhaps it is Definitely Something Else.

AL-HAKIM

It's definitely something, making that sound.

CHORUS 3

Maybe he's got saltwater in his ears

Al-Hakim tilts his head from side to side as though emptying out his ears.

CHORUS 2

Akshully it wouldn't be in the ears, but in the auditory cortex in the temporal lobe of the brain

CHORUS 3

(taunting)

It's the subjects of your empire, Al-Hakim!

CHORUS 1

They're weeping over the ruins of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, big guy.

AL-HAKIM

It must be said, if not now then not ever,
that the Byzantines were using the Church of the Holy Sepulchre to launch operations against me.

And I paid for the repairs.

ANA

Oh, um, cool!

Are you good with numbers?

AL-HAKIM

I coined the currency.

The Fatimi dinar, based on gold.

ANA

Currency, yes! So that's, that's actually kind of—

Millions of ordinary Venezuelans want to exchange their currency for dollars

But the government won't post the official exchange rate on the internet

So our website provides an alternative exchange rate for the Bolivar

So you have to watch the numbers, to keep the rate from getting too low

Obviously this is all very illegal
 Not illegal here though!
 Just for our Venezuelan users, but they're all really smart and know all about VPNs
 So no one gets in trouble,
 I think.
 So unless, unless you have any more questions?
 Welcome to "Lechuga Verde"

CHORUS 1
 Dolor, today, and tomorrow

CHORUS 3
 y buendía

CHORUS 1
 y igualmente

CHORUS 2
 y igualmente

CHORUS 3
 y igualmente

AL-HAKIM
(whispering the syllables to himself)
 Lechuga... verde...

Ana attempts to shake his hand. Al-Hakim is confused. She sort of touches his hand like it was a piece of litter from the ground and daintily lifts it and then releases it quickly.

ANA
 Oh by the way, do you speak any Spanish?

Percussion interlude.

AL-HAKIM
 God and satan or maybe it's satan and jesus are doing battle over who gets to have my soul,
 I waited for an angel, even a false angel to come and tempt me to renounce the faith
 but it has not happened,
 only this constant buzzing,
 and the corpse smell, which is in fact, the only thing i smell,
 and happens, just so, to be everywhere
 as though it were the inside of my nose that smelled that way.
 Could it be that I've been alive the whole time
 and just walked into—

whatever this is—?

CHORUS 3

This is a wasteland

CHORUS 1

This is the wasteland of memory

CHORUS 4

This is a sub-tropic, undefined

CHORUS 3

A syntax error

CHORUS 2

This is the beach!

In case you forgot...

CHORUS 4

In my home country the wifi was sooo slow

CHORUS 1

In my home country the wifi was sooo slow

CHORUS 3

In my home country the wifi was sooo slow

CHORUS 2

Took forever to download an image

But now...

Al-Hakim sits behind a laptop, he stares in horror at the screen.

Behind him, the theatricality of a protest.

Chorus 1 holds a sign that reads "SCHIZO-GENIC ONLINE COMMUNITY"

Chorus 2 holds a sign that reads "ACTIVE DENIAL"

Chorus 3 holds a sign that reads "ABOLISH THE UNDERSEA TUBES"

Chorus 4 holds a sign that reads "PERMANENT COUNTERREVOLUTION"

They march in a circle, a silent protest.

We hear the sound of a car, which sounds closer than it is.

Everyone tenses as if to flee, but it's fine. Here, everyone parks safely or not at all.

AL-HAKIM
Where am I?

CHORUS 2
You're on line

AL-HAKIM
'ala l-khat...
but what line?

CHORUS 4
You've been netted

CHORUS 1
you're skimming like a stone on a pool of all entangled use values

CHORUS 2
Practically gliding

AL-HAKIM
My foothold in Italy

CHORUS 3
Sicily

AL-HAKIM
In Sicily

CHORUS 4
All gone now

AL-HAKIM
What is this?

CHORUS 3
It's the relay chat—

CHORUS 2
It's the User interface

CHORUS 1
It's the oN-Line systems

CHORUS 4
shabkat ARPA

CHORUS 1

We're protesting, if you couldn't tell.

AL-HAKIM

Oh.

CHORUS 2

But we're doing it quietly.

AL-HAKIM

Why?

CHORUS 4

Because our silence empowers us.

CHORUS 1

It's more of an idea.

CHORUS 2

A moral highground.

CHORUS 3

A crystallization of our intentions.

AL-HAKIM

As-samt.

(pause)

I would like silence. But it's never silent here.

The chorus members step forward one by one and present their signs. As promised, they never get particularly loud.

CHORUS 1

(raising their sign)

Like everyone I spent my childhood on the forums

My sense of self was obliterated in a battle for my soul

But it wasn't a battle of good versus evil, it was just a battle.

Pertinent images ascertained their relevance to me,

as a kind of sophisticated triggering for its own sake

as if pre-ordained, so to speak.

Nowadays I cling to ironic personalities picked out of a hat for me

I get to wake up and be something different

But I don't get to choose

Even though it feels like it sometimes, it's never actually a choice.

CHORUS 2

(raising their sign)

My bones were conducted,
 I stood underneath a ray of light and heard something meant for me
 And when I stepped away I couldn't hear it anymore
 but the damage was done.
 A digital clock and its hyperlocalizing, hyperstabilizing force,
 like you might find in a GPS,
 ticks endlessly within my skull.
 Sometimes I stop and notice it.
 Sometimes I don't.
 Anyway I'm sterile.

CHORUS 4

(raising their sign)

If you were smart you would place a hermetic firewall around yourself and all your people.

AL-HAKIM

(some misplaced grief)

My people.

CHORUS 4

Look

We will not be using the oppressor's discarded ammo casings to grow our tomato plants,
 for instance,
 because they're full of toxic metals that shorten and worsen our lifespans.
 Forgiveness is a hole in the collective pocket
 Not every tool can be simply repurposed for the good of society
 Especially not that which is, in effect, the brainwashing force of the universe
 There is an Original Sin,
 A sin of a monopolized world order, with no sustained counterbalance,
 A line that leads through where we are now
 The splitting and re-splitting of humanity

CHORUS 3

It's all good fun until you do your homework and come to think of why and how we got here to
 where we are now.
 The psychic's casual dream to be everywhere at once realized at once too big and too fast.
 I would like to reassure you that it's all good fun and games but it's not
 It's a physical network of tubes on the ocean floor
 and rooms of computers singing to each other when we're not looking
 Libraries full of strips of metal that that hold all the Information

CHORUS 1

What do we want?

CHORUS 2

We want our agency package re-installed.

CHORUS 1

Where do we want it?

CHORUS 3

(points to forehead)

Right here.

CHORUS 1

When do we want it?

CHORUS 4

At a reasonable interval that prioritizes efficacy and equitability.

AL-HAKIM

Unnatural.

CHORUS 1

And yet nature does nothing to stop it.

AL-HAKIM

Unreal.

CHORUS 2

And yet reality cannot be torn away from it.

CHORUS 4

Maybe you want to see

CHORUS 3

Maybe you want to see what's going on

AL-HAKIM

How, how do I—

CHORUS 1

In the eyes behind your eyes.

CHORUS 2

This is you—

The chorus turns the laptop around and presents us with a video game version of Al-Hakim, presumably from some kind of turn-based strategy empire simulator.

AL-HAKIM
That's—

CHORUS 1/2/3/4
You!

AL-HAKIM
My body?

CHORUS 3
No, but look—

CHORUS 1
You can plan your empire

CHORUS 2
Conduct diplomacy

CHORUS 3
Bed concubines, produce heirs

AL-HAKIM
As myself?

CHORUS 1
Yes.

Horror. Al-Hakim slaps his face.

AL-HAKIM
I need to wake up
Wake up! Wake up!

CHORUS 2
Don't want

CHORUS 4
To disappoint but

CHORUS 1
You're already awake

CHORUS 3

And this is real

CHORUS 4

Or as close

CHORUS 1

As you're gonna get

AL-HAKIM

But what can I do?

What can I do to stop it?

A procession of flagellators walks through. They are tethered by the waist and scratching themselves with long acrylic nails. They do not make a sound, suffering in ascetic silence.

Percussion interlude.

Ana follows the Boy around, he's gathering rocks on the beach.

ANA

How do we know each other?

BOY

Huh?

ANA

It's not a riddle.

I'm asking you.

BOY

Oh.

ANA

Where did you come from?

BOY

The beach.

ANA

Yeah me too—

BOY

But I don't know how I got there

ANA

I'm always talking about a home country that's not here, where the wife was like, so slow
But really that's where my parents are from, where my cousins and stuff live.

I was born here on the beach.

Where are you from?

BOY

I don't know.

ANA

You don't know?

BOY

I know, but, I don't know what to call it.

ANA

Oh.

What letter does it start with?

A moment. He thinks.

BOY

I don't know.

ANA

You're a tourist?

BOY

No... I'm not sure.

ANA

I'm sure you'll love it here, it's like the eighties never ended.

BOY

I think I'm here because my dad caused a lot of problems.

ANA

Oh that sucks!

BOY

I don't want to talk about it.

ANA

Oh well! Must have been bad!

BOY

Who are you?

ANA
I'm Ana

BOY
You're ??

ANA
Ana

BOY
Ana ??

ANA
Right I'm Ana.

BOY
(slightly frustrated)
Ana ... ??

ANA
Uh Ana Luisa technically.

BOY
(as if coming to a relieved conclusion)
...Luisa

ANA
Technically Ana Luisa Lucientes Cortez
or technically technically Ana Luisa Lucientes Cortez Mendoza *(slight pause)* Kleinschmidt y
Cruz
But yeah.
What's your name?

BOY
Ali.

ANA
Who's that woman you're always with?

BOY
My aunt, but
her name has been lost to time, so...
You and I, we—
I don't think we know each other

ANA

None of it makes sense, but I really feel, I really feel we just might.
Are you lost?

BOY

Very lost

ANA

I'm a guide, part-time
I know everything about this area,
I can even get you a job.
Do you like numbers?

BOY

(braincontrolled sputter)

pop screamer implant
dead ly visible cumthroat
fuss y femme
aerodynamic children
and

she isn't even
isn't even a

blue whale
mommy mommy mommy

ANA

Oh that's... unusually cute!

The Boy has gone totally blank. The rocks fall from his hands to the ground. Ana picks up the rocks and places them in his hands.

CHORUS 3

You may remember—
A different Anna
Anna Oswiecimowie
And her brother Stanislaw

CHORUS 1

(from Krosno)

CHORUS 3

Half siblings, in perverse love,
Preserved in their mid-seventeenth century cathedral,
the brother seeks permission for legal, consecrated marriage
goes all the way to Rome

the Pope, shifting from foot to foot,
 trying to make up his damn popemind,
 deciding okay, tentatively halal, sure is kind of weird but we'll look the other way for umm
 maybe political reasons, better if they do it married, I guess?
 But in any case it was much too late—Anna dies from the strain of waiting.
 Hearts cooked in antifreeze

CHORUS 1

Real slow.

CHORUS 3

And that, my friends, is why we have our
 Flow!
 Of!
 Information!

ANA

Do you like me?
 Don't ever leave me
 I can be everything to you

Percussion interlude.

AL-HAKIM

I'm back, but powerless
 I'm sitting in front of a computer 12 hours a day manipulating the Venezuelan currency, the
 BOLIVAR, on Khas Akhdar
 Watching numbers on the screen
 I can no longer fly into a kingly rage, much less an empirical one, something has left me,
 something has flown out the side of my eyes, fallen through a hole in my pocket, I am another
 dead eyed s r i zombie, I piss straight poison, in the wrong color, I am choosing from a stock
 image menu of what to have for dinner, my eyes glaze over the side dishes. God and Satan no
 longer rage over my soul, they have deliberately put me aside for the time being, exiled from all
 sense and ability, reaping the frozen seeds
 And now I'm so far away from home, cannot even bring myself to weep over what has been
 presumably lost forever
 Nothing comforts me, the rage of righteousness withers and pales,
 I was never mad.

CHORUS 1

Baseet

CHORUS 2

So simple, almost drearily so

CHORUS 1

Exchange rate is more of a flexible malleable idea

CHORUS 4

Than say, the boiling point of a liquid

CHORUS 2

Which is more or less fixed

CHORUS 3

And the black market rate is even worse than the official rate at which the currency is supposed to be traded

CHORUS 2

A parallel world

CHORUS 4

Spectral currency, unlimited

CHORUS 1

A price ascending towards a terminal Right

CHORUS 2

The perceived amount of reserve currency in a country determines the international demand for the currency

CHORUS 4

Thus influencing the international exchange rate

CHORUS 3

Imports must be bought with foreign exchange

CHORUS 4

Therefore a manipulated exchange rate

CHORUS 1

Inflates domestic prices

CHORUS 2

Especially when you import almost everything

CHORUS 4

Because you have very little in terms of domestic manufacturing

CHORUS 1

And even certain seeds have to be imported by farmers

CHORUS 3

Everything is based on lies and big wishes

CHORUS 1

And massive debt schemes.

CHORUS 4

Currency of belief and goodwill.

CHORUS 2

Echoing all the way up the chain

CHORUS 3

The supply and demand chart.

They position their bodies to become the supply and demand chart.

Percussion interlude

Sitt Al-Mulk and Ad-Darazi sit on lounge chairs, wearing sunglasses. They speak without ever really looking at one another.

SITT AL-MULK

Such an unfortunate candidate

I mean really,
if you had to pick.

AD-DARAZI

He's a sayyid

SITT AL-MULK

Well obviously.

We both are.

Would you like some tea

AD-DARAZI

With all due respect, it's sweltering
and he even has a miracle or two under his belt

SITT AL-MULK

He hates you, you know that

It's absolute shirk, to him

pure ridda

I of course, don't care about any of that,
just find you annoying

AD-DARAZI

Look

he's had me killed a hundred times,
and yet?

Here I am, back, we're all back
the tinaasikh

The cycles going round

SITT AL-MULK

First of all he only killed you once,
And, trust me, he's still as crazy as ever,
He's not going to change his mind about you
Or your quirky cult

But believe what you want.

Who knows,

Maybe I have been granted another chance to kill that son of a bitch
Because it is God's Will

(pause, silence)

What?

AD-DARAZI

(unconcerned)

Might rain soon.

SITT AL-MULK

If I'm bitter

it's only because I feel like—

I deserve a better nemesis.

Chorus 2 and 4 come to evict them from their lounge chairs. After some resistance, they relent.

Percussion interlude.

Al-Hakim is again at his laptop. He regards it suspiciously, tries to open it up and look inside but can't quite figure how.

CHORUS 3

(taunting)

It has a soul

CHORUS 2

No it doesn't you're just messing with him now

CHORUS 3

Well how would you know?

How would you know whether it did or it didn't?

CHORUS 2

Okay fair

AL-HAKIM

I've dyed myself in indigo, as they say.

A gharqan of great import

and now,

just sinking

not a diver but a stone

more A-rab than A-rab

more words I've never heard

what could have been

to be drowned in honey,

that is, to have all my senses surgically removed

would be a better fate

Enter Ana, with her clipboard.

ANA

Oh don't look so sad.

You're doing great

All the articles are saying the regime will collapse any day now

You wouldn't believe how much a banana costs down there today

If you can even find a banana

AL-HAKIM

I feel unclean

There is a hardened substance under my fingernails

No water seems to get it out.

ANA

Oh sweetie

There's no need to let it get to you like that.

Let's take a walk.

They stroll. Al-Hakim points to something in the distance.

AL-HAKIM

What is that?

Is that where the sounds are coming from?

ANA

That's just the contemporary arts center

They just finished renovating it.

Cool right?

Al-Hakim screams (a very very short scream)

ANA
What?

AL-HAKIM
I don't know why I did that. I don't know

Ana rejoins the chorus. A drone at D

CHORUS 2
(harmonized sing-talking)
Unusual headaches, tending towards the chronic
You were Triggered by sounds of an unknown origin

AL-HAKIM
Yes...yes...

Drone modulates to Eb

CHORUS 2
(harmonized sing-talking)
Overnight nosebleeds? Dizziness and nausea?
Falling down for no good reason?
Bordering rogue states
Or the embassies thereof?
And no doctor can tell you what's wrong?
You may be a victim

AL-HAKIM
Victim...

Drone modulates to F#

CHORUS 2
(etc)
...and may be entitled to compensation

The drone ends.

AL-HAKIM
Compensation... for victims.
Victims of what did they call it?

CHORUS 1
Humana system...?

CHORUS 4
Heaven and sandstorm?

CHORUS 2
Helium syndicate?

CHORUS 3
Hermetic stripmall?

CHORUS 1
Vee two kay?

CHORUS 2
Repurposed whale communication technology?

CHORUS 4
Craving the beach!

Al-Hakim dazedly puts his hand on his chest.

AL-HAKIM
I might be entitled to compensation.

The chorus members snicker and sneer.

CHORUS 1
As if

CHORUS 4
In your dreams

AL-HAKIM
I could be a victim. I could call the number.
Someone could... help me out.

CHORUS 2
Hmhhh

CHORUS 1
No

CHORUS 3
You fool

You won't get any compensation
 You'll be in the nine o'clock with an empty vacant stare!

AL-HAKIM
 O this is unbearable.

CHORUS 3
 They'll be zooming in on your backpack and baseball cap!
 Analyzing your goddamn family history!
 And then they'll forget all about you!
 Like
 Bye bitch!

AL-HAKIM
 I am beset amongst the unbelievers!

Percussion interlude.

An episode of the Chorus, they speak as a bunch of confused tourists, moving through space with bulky maps, tacky sunglasses, snapping photos and acting generally credulous and antsy. Ana leads them.

ANA
 ...our friends at Eglin (*points generally West*), in Okaloosa County, are actually the biggest posters out there, the studies show that, web traffic wise, they just love to post! Almost as much as they like to fly their fighter jets!

The chorus makes a whoosh sound, as though they were individual planes taking off.

CHORUS 2
 Ooh Eglin isn't that the motherfucker who stole the Parthenon

ANA
 Umm no...

CHORUS 3
 Did you just arrive here?

CHORUS 2
 For my laptop job!

CHORUS 1
 Is there still a flower in your hair?

CHORUS 3

Is there a still a light behind your eyes?

They laugh.

CHORUS 2

My salary is on the blockchain! Don't make fun of me!

They laugh even more maniacally.

ANA

And in Cape Canaveral, you have—

CHORUS 3

The space Nazis! We know that!

CHORUS 2

Oh even I knew that.

Chorus 2 sips an impossibly blue liquid from a plastic cup.

CHORUS 2

You know they're selling cocktails for 0.000004 [currency symbol], which is uh (*calculates*) 28 dollars

CHORUS 1

For a cocktail?

CHORUS 2

Under the current rate of exchange
It could be a good investment!
It's a shade of blue so importunately gleamy,
I thought it couldn't be real

CHORUS 3

I was taught everything I know by a screaming bear on a tablet screen
My childfinger slipped and I was put through the Regressor.

CHORUS 1

Wow, so was I!

ANA

So was I...

CHORUS 2

So was I!

(puts hand on head gently)

This cocktail has been suffused with Something Else.

CHORUS 3

Give me a sip!

Chorus 2 gives Chorus 3 a sip of the drink.

CHORUS 1

Miss Ana!

ANA

Yes?

CHORUS 1

Which way, is, *(sneaky laughter)*, you know!

CHORUS 2

You mean Guantanamo Bay.

CHORUS 3

We're so close right? Aren't we like soooo close?

ANA

Oh uhh, yes, it's right, right down the corridor, actually, don't make a wrong turn now!

The Chorus laughs inappropriately.

CHORUS 3

I hear the hot dogs there are really good

CHORUS 1

I'd go crazy for a hot dog

CHORUS 2

Ana Miss Ana Señorita Ana

ANA

Yes?

CHORUS 2

Can you tell us where the lost imports are??

CHORUS 3

Don't be silly, everyone knows they're sitting in storage containers in the border regions near Colombia, no one can touch 'em, everyone knows that—

CHORUS 1

Well, akshully, technically they're being hoarded in warehouses, fire insurance long ago purchased, ready to burn at any minute, or otherwise they've been long ago unceremoniously dumped into the ocean, whole mini-islands of corn flour and Panadol are forming in the Caribbean as we speak!

ANA

Maybe, just perhaps, maybe, the lost imports are, here—

She places her hand to her chest, the chorus of tourists embraces her from all sides.

ANA

(accepting the warmth of their embrace)

You know... in my home country, the wifi was sooo slooow...

Couldn't download an image

it just took too long

Percussion interlude.

Al-Hakim sits on the ground, his eyes wild, his arms laid flat out in front of him.

AL-HAKIM

(quietly to himself)

Here I sit, on a watchlist,

and all around me is the illusion of time, which I, stricken, can only perceive linearly
eternity is being gatekept from me

CHORUS 3

Time to update your browser!

Little increments of things, not necessarily punishments, you would not call them punishments per se, just little things that move in increments *(uses fingers to indicate a small amount of something)* that push your memories out of the way, so slowly that you do not even notice really but, eventually all your memories are molded

AL-HAKIM

(in quiet prayer)

This world is just an illusion.

CHORUS 3

They push you further and further along, a long march to the, you know where, years of conditioning that suggest where we're going, but not the way there, a destination of no journey, because this, here, is the journey, bitch!

AL-HAKIM

Here I sit, on a watchlist

CHORUS 3

He's on like ten watchlists by now.

Just slipping, under the radar,

And well, it's not simply a watchlist in the sense that you're exclusively being watched rather they're always (yes, always) pinging their little recognizers against you like ping ping ping ping ping

AL-HAKIM

It follows from this now:

I have borne witness to the horrible head reaching forth from the birth canal of time— it is a satanish mass meant to drive the human race out of the light of Allah and back into the jahl— then into jahannam itself, which is the place, the method by which we get there, and the punishment—which is, of course infinite—all in one. A unity of purposes.

Pause, he thinks for a moment

AL-HAKIM

I have come to realize all my interlocutors are they themselves unholy creations of this web of sin, false as the illusions who, at the time of death, pose as angels and try to tempt you into renouncing Islam.

In the false light of the inter-net, the light of the deen appears dull in comparison.

The devilish re-translators of this world are worse than the Nazarenes, about whom I've maybe gained a new perspective? They will have their day, by the end times, when the ground splits open—a day that can only be very, very close.

CHORUS 4

In my home country the wifi was sooo slow

CHORUS 1

In my home country the wifi was sooo slow

CHORUS 3

In my home country the wifi was sooo slow

CHORUS 2

Took forever to download an image

CHORUS 3

And streaming? Forget about it.

CHORUS 4

But here the wifi is so fast

When you turn on the faucet you can hear other people's conference calls.

Percussion interlude

Al-Hakim turns around, again is shocked to recognize Sitt Al-Mulk.

CHORUS 3

Hackable cars

CHORUS 2

Don't get behind that wheel!

AL-HAKIM

You would never do anything to actually hurt me

SITT AL-MULK

Oh

Sure...

AL-HAKIM

I don't remember my physical death

SITT AL-MULK

Enough of this.

Can you be normal for a second?

You're impossible to talk to—

AL-HAKIM

But—

SITT AL-MULK

Your debased cruelties against the Christians are making waves in Europe

The stories are being augmented

They say you've gone mad

AL-HAKIM

So-called "Europe" has nothing to say to me

I would have conquered all of them but it wasn't even worth it

Let them say what they want.

I've made diplomatic relations with China,

I've coined a solid gold currency.

"Europe" who's that?

Seen it on a map but couldn't put my finger on it

They're not even really Christians in the way that ours are

Whole different type of kufr going on

SITT AL-MULK

Mansour—

AL-HAKIM

Sorry, people of the book, whatever.

(pause)

Do you remember dying?

SITT AL-MULK

Dying?

(reluctantly)

I remember being crouched over the latrine for days
and being very thirsty

But every time I drank water, there was a burning sensation in my lower abdomen
and by the third day I didn't notice smells anymore

And then—

(pause, thinks)

Then, I was very tired.

I closed my eyes, I saw your son from far away, dressed in your clothes
and I slept for a long time

AL-HAKIM

There's so much I can't remember

SITT AL-MULK

Al-Hakim,

Talk to your son.

AL-HAKIM

Who?

SITT AL-MILK

Your son!

AL-HAKIM

Ugh he's too young, he can't understand.

He's here too?

SITT AL-MULK

Of course.

AL-HAKIM

And what is here?

SITT AL-MULK

What do you mean?

AL-HAKIM

Look around, everything is different,
Cairo is now a prehistorical memory
And I'm not sure if I have any memories
As though they've been crossed out with a line of black ink
and then crossed out again.

SITT AL-MULK

So you really are just as insane as everyone says

AL-HAKIM

I might have made some mistakes

SITT AL-MULK

Such a brave admission
And yet you fired not one arrow towards those Hellenic bastards,
for all your plucky talk

AL-HAKIM

They were too heavily armed, the time was just not right

SITT AL-MULK

Your name is cursed in the streets.
You don't even want to hear the epithets, the sobriquets, the jokes
especially not the jokes

AL-HAKIM

Look, as I said, I might have made some mistakes.
But I'm working on a form of ecumenism that will unite the ummah
(*pause*)
And you can't make everybody happy!

CHORUS 3

How trite

AL-HAKIM

My sister, whose—(*thinks otherwise*)
What I'm trying to say is
There is something worse than all that
and I watched it be born

SITT AL-MULK

What the hell Mansour

AL-HAKIM

And it's all coming through these tubes under the ocean
 And I'm not sure if it's a matter of cutting a cord or is it something else
 All I know is that it has to stop
 Or we're all doomed to hell on earth

SITT AL-MULK

Mad khalifa
 Majnoun
 Majnoun

AL-HAKIM

(weakly)
 Please I—
 I was never mad.
 It's all a grave misunderstanding.

Percussion interlude.

*A flashlight, perhaps in a funny color, is pointed at the boy.
 A phone rings from within the audience area. Nobody picks
 it up.*

BOY

(as if talking on the phone)
 I don't get it I don't get it
 What do you mean which way the—
 Yes the windows swing open—
 I don't know which—
 Towards??—
 Uhh
 No wait
 Yes, towards you
 Could it be both?
 Does that make any sense?
 And there's usually a bolt lock of some kind
 Uhh
 What do you mean
 What do you mean
 Kind of an out of body experience
 Yes sir
 Yes sir I see myself from far away
 Is it really me?
 I don't know I don't know
 Yes sir I hear the ocean
(pause)
 What message

Oh uh
 No I um
 No I don't remember
 But it all sounds verrrry rreal

The flashlight turns off.

Percussion interlude

SITT AL-MULK
 You've been following us around.

ANA
 I have nothing better to do.

SITT AL-MULK
 Oh?

ANA
 I mean, this is where I'm from, I'm just here.
 I didn't mean to follow around your son just kinda happened.

SITT AL-MULK
 Nephew.

ANA
 Right.
 I just want to say—
 I have a lot of respect for women in leadership positions.

SITT AL-MULK
 Everything's politics.

ANA
 Like—

SITT AL-MULK
 He's a child

ANA
 It's not like that

SITT AL-MULK
 He's fourteen
 And how old are you?

ANA
Twenty

SITT AL-MULK
A permanent twenty

ANA
Ya
I can do things though

SITT AL-MULK
Oh?

ANA
I can read and write

SITT AL-MULK
Nobody needs your skills

ANA
I can recite the surat al-fatiha
I can dance the Charleston
I can fit half a bar of soap in my vagina

SITT AL-MULK
Can't everyone?

ANA
We laugh at the same jokes and know exactly when to stop. We stop laughing as soon as they're no longer funny, when they've become tiresome. We never get tiresome. If he was made of asbestos I wouldn't mind, I'd breathe him in until my lungs were all discolored and my tracheal tube was full of tumors.

SITT AL-MULK
Get a grip.

ANA
Our two hearts beat as one!

SITT AL-MULK
Luisa

ANA
Ana

SITT AL-MULK

Do you ever think of your grandfather's expropriated casino?

ANA

All the time.

All the time.

Percussion interlude.

Al-Hakim alone.

AL-HAKIM

Wretched fornicators, bile absorbers, white stains on your carpet, torn hosierys,
famously traumatized, and now, unheard of,

departed from wit, all gone now

pursuant to the clause of,

tucked away forever,

in a dream,

which is, by now, something Else, unidentifiable,

a memory of something being born,

a split in the door when kicked in with rage, that one time,

It's not too late to repent

It's not too late to get back in line

To get a little closer, at least

A vale of petrified dreams, a forest that I cannot leave,

where, akin to the desert, no straight lines can be forged,

but in God everything is theoretically possible

In this I affirm:

I will not jump the gun

I will imagine a grand redirection of the Nile and its floodwaters

I will shut the eyes that are hiding behind my real ones

I will do battle against the inter-net

I will raise an army of diasaffected wastrels and burntbrained subjects, as every prophet at some point did

I will be like a wave, ascending terminally

And when I crash it will be finally over

God is Great

God is Great

Percussion interlude.

Again, the theatricality of a protest, not so silent this time. Ana and Chorus 2 on one side, Chorus 1 and 3 counter-protest (or maybe it's the other way around, hard to tell).

ANA

(manic reaganismo)

Failed state!

Time for your shit to get picked up by the big dogs!

Renounce your failed currency!

Submit to the dollar!

CHORUS 2

(leftish concern)

Oh umm well it's uhh you really gotta consider the umm material uh

uh but of course it's not Real Socialism or anything

but uh yeah so i mean in the interests of like the uh

yoo yoo yoo yooman rites so like

of course we we don't want a coo or nothing

that's soo like violent and stuff

but i mean... they were kind of...

it wasn't very decolonized mind of them to do that

to the umm foreign investors and private enterprises

in fact it was kind of uh author—author—

Of course we all want a better future for everyone!!!

And that's why we have diplomatic pressure measures which are umm uh

not so v-violent and

um

(with some confidence)

International

Law

ANA

What I think my friend is saying is:

Freedom.

Remember her?

CHORUS 3

Freedom to starve

CHORUS 1

Freedom to be exploited

CHORUS 3

Freedom of toilet paper brands

ANA

Yes that's fucking right that's fucking correct

I would fight and die for the TP brands in their numerical abundance

CHORUS 3

You want the people of the world to be slaves to the dollar

ANA

Look,
 where I came from,
 generally speaking,
 if you asked the average person,
 who lives on rations and scraps,
 and doesn't have a single car
 or even a bank account in most cases,
 Yes, they would love that.
 They would give up their so-called nanny state in half a second for a GWbill and unlimited
 data
 (that goes fast)
 You, in your first-world, privileged armchair
 Simply cannot imagine

CHORUS 2

C-c-call your representative!

Cars honk in the distance.

Percussion interlude.

Al Hakim and the Chorus.

CHORUS 1

Shoot your dog ☺

CHORUS 2

Oh that's kinda—

CHORUS 3

Shoot your dog ☺

CHORUS 2

Kinda fucked up?

CHORUS 4

My dog?

CHORUS 1 and 3

Yes, your dog ☺

CHORUS 2 and 4

Oh!

AL-HAKIM

I—

Allegations...

The allegations stack so neatly when you put it like that.

CHORUS 1 and 3

Thanks!

AL-HAKIM

Their barking became abhorrent to me,

I might have slipped and overreacted

And the Nile turned red, again,

with the finally silent dogs

CHORUS 1

But you did it very humanely

AL-HAKIM

Just a slit, in their throats, a singular motion, by deft, unshaking hands

They barely felt a thing

CHORUS 3

And the women, at funerals.

AL-HAKIM

Their weeping! And those terrible ululations!

Also unbearable.

But not as bad,

not as bad as whatever this is.

CHORUS 2 and 4

We don't hear a thing.

CHORUS 1

Why don't you listen to the waves?

Percussion interlude.

Sitt Al-Mulk is brushing the Boy's hair or maybe tying his shoes.

SITT AL-MULK

You'll eventually be where he is, you will eventually have all these great and terrible responsibilities, you've never struggled a day in your little life and you will learn what struggle means

BOY

No I won't.

SITT AL-MULK

What do you mean, of cou—

BOY

My cousin, father has appointed a cousin as his successor
Do you notice that sound?

SITT AL-MULK

What sound?

BOY

Isn't it nice, when you can make the pitches (*gestures*)

SITT AL-MULK

What?

BOY

When you can make them dance?

SITT AL-MULK

What are you talking about?

BOY

When there's two of them and they sort of (*searches for a word*) interact yes, and make a third one

Silence (or not exactly?)

SITT AL-MULK

Ali, habibi

You're not prepared for any of this

which, fine, you're young, I mean, your father has been at this since he was younger than you are now

but you've lived a different life, and you're not prepared

BOY

He doesn't notice me, he never has.

SITT AL-MULK

I don't want you seeing that girl, the one with the stretchy black fabric that clings to her fowl-like thighs

BOY

Auntie,

there's a screaming
a screaming

The Chorus convenes as Lifers playing cards/dominos and smoking.

CHORUS 3

Ok, one second, one second
I'm trying to get this straight

CHORUS 4

Don't bother, don't bother
You won't get very far

CHORUS 3

So, so, like, Al-Hakim, right, he looks east, establishes trade with China I guess? And now his son's getting the microwave frequencies too

CHORUS 2

Or like maybe is getting primed to go postal 'cause he's a boy

CHORUS 4

And they don't really prime the girlies to do that, they're primed to ponder and pontificate on their girlie soapboxes

CHORUS 1

Okay, guys, there's no such thing as microwave weapons, it's just not happening, that's not what's going on here

CHORUS 3

Okay then what the fuck is all that buzzing? Tropical crickets? Coqui frogs??

CHORUS 4

And who is priming young Ali az-Zahir?

CHORUS 1

Don't you think, this could all be, and I hate to put it like this—
all in their heads?
Couldn't they perhaps be doomed by mere suggestion?

Percussion interlude.

CHORUS 1

It's all there Al-Hakim

CHORUS 2

Everything you want

CHORUS 3

It's all just beyond the horizon line

AL-HAKIM

Do you think I haven't tried?

Every time I approach one of those hideous buildings, they flatten into nothing
just slipping out of perception

CHORUS 1

So what are you waiting for?

CHORUS 2

He's waiting for a nice guy to take him by the hand

CHORUS 3

He's waiting for the zionists to invent falafel

CHORUS 4

He's waiting for the tides to recede into zero, so he can walk straight back to Cairo

AL-HAKIM

Leave me alone.

CHORUS 1

In some ways Cairo is closer than you'd think, closer than ever before

CHORUS 4

But it's not the Cairo you know

CHORUS 3

In fact, every place is here

CHORUS 2

In the mall food court

CHORUS 3

Each nation a kiosk, a drop down menu

CHORUS 1

A dialed in number

AL-HAKIM

...entwined in the shabka

CHORUS 4

Yajooj and Majooj, remember them, one and another following,
electrical pulses in rapid short succession

CHORUS 1

Maybe you want to speak to speak to someone who appreciates you?

AL-HAKIM

I can't imagine...

Chorus 3 becomes Ad-Darazi

CHORUS 1/2/4 + AD-DARAZI

Muhammed bin Isma'il Nashtakin Ad-Darazi

Al-Hakim puts his head in his hands.

AL-HAKIM

Okay fine.

Fine!

Say what you want to say!

Get it over with.

Ad-Darazi bows before Al-Hakim, who is unamused. He doesn't say anything for a long time.

AD-DARAZI

Words escape me.

CHORUS 1

Imagine!

CHORUS 2

Words escape him!

AD-DARAZI

What am I supposed to elucidate?

You know everything already

And if you don't, you, in your infinite power and grace, are but temporarily tricking yourself
(pause)

Your sister is trying to kill you

She'll never forgive you for appointing your cousin as your successor over your son

AL-HAKIM

Nonsense

Her schemes and subterfuge are but relics of this world of illusions, as is she, herself, an illusion,
sprung forth from the demonic web of links and electro-radiation pulses,
Which among other things, have left me in a state of unceasing agony

AD-DARAZI

With all due respect,
Your war against the internet is pointless.
Look, some bid'ah is okay, it's fine, it's kind of good even
You know that
And will realize it again, in a continuous cycle-fashion
You can make so many new friends.

AL-HAKIM

I've killed you a hundred times, and yet, you're back, and so am I, and so is my sister
Why is that?

AD-DARAZI

You perform miracles, it's proof of my hypothesis

AL-HAKIM

Why can't I die?
I think I know
But it is too horrible to say.

Percussion interlude.

ANA

Did you find any good rocks?

The Boy looks down at the rocks in his hands.

BOY

They all look the same.
You can have them.

ANA

I don't think your aunt likes me.

BOY

She doesn't like anyone

ANA

She loves you
She's obsessed

BOY

I guess.
 She mostly just wants to kill my dad.
 But I don't blame her.

ANA
 Do you want to kill your dad?

BOY
(shrugging)
 Everything's politics.
 Take these rocks I don't want to carry them anymore.

ANA
 Fine.

He hands her the rocks.

Percussion interlude

CHORUS 4
(to the audience)

We're going to ask you all for a small favor! We all love the beach, or whatever you would call this expanse of shared space, and we would like you to help us clean it up!

The Chorus goes around with little trash bags, picking up items and placing them in the bags. The audience is encouraged to take a bag and join in. Probably most of the items will have been strategically placed there already, but it makes you feel included, like you're Doing Something.

Chorus 2 finds a glass bottle with a letter in it.

CHORUS 2
 Guys guys guys
 Oh my god

CHORUS 3
 What

CHORUS 1
 Give me that

Chorus 1 snatches the bottle away from Chorus 2

CHORUS 1
 It's a letter—

CHORUS 2
In a bottle!

The Chorus takes turns reading the message.

CHORUS 2
To whom it may concern:

CHORUS 3
We are the monotheists

CHORUS 1
Real monotheists

CHORUS 4
We have a few choice prophets from history

CHORUS 3
Jethro

CHORUS 4
John the Baptist

CHORUS 1
Salman the Persian

CHORUS 3
Jesus and Muhammed obviously
(‘Alayhum As-salam)

CHORUS 1
The Holy Qur’an has an esoteric double meaning, actually
a secretive inner core

CHORUS 3
The transmigration of souls is real

CHORUS 2
And Al-Hakim is god made manifest

AL-HAKIM
Uuuuuugh not this again

CHORUS 1
And after his disappearance, he will return, as the mahdi,

to signal the end of days

Chorus 3 becomes Ad-Darazi

AD-DARAZI
I've been saying!

CHORUS 4
And this man, this outsider Ad-Darazi

CHORUS 2
Is our first heretic

AD-DARAZI
Oh come on!

CHORUS 1
He says a lot of the same things,

CHORUS 2
A lot of things we agree with,

CHORUS 4
But let's remember,

CHORUS 1
Satan himself is like to appear as a friendly creature,
who says a lot of the right things.

CHORUS 2
Please don't ask us any questions.
If you don't get it, that's fine.
Not everything can or should be general knowledge

AD-DARAZI
This is pure politics!

CHORUS 4
He's talking about his rival—

AD-DARAZI
Hamza ibn Ali ibn Ahmad
A smooth talker who's says everything said before
Well what can I say
I respect the hustle, I guess.

Chorus 1 becomes Sitt Al-Mulk.

SITT AL-MULK

Oh hell to tolerance,
 tolerance is going out the goddamn window!!
 Round up these cranks and have them executed
 Or driven far away from here.
 Ali, do you hear me??
 Ali??

If we spill some blood, so be it—
 If we drive ourselves into a permanent economy of crisis,
 and become addicted to crisis as our manner of Being,
 so be it!
 The mehna begins

*Sitt Al-Mulk “discovers” Ana and the Boy, the latter is lying face
 down in a small pile of sugar, beside him a torn-open sugar bag.
 Ana is verging on and beyond hysterical tears.*

ANA

You're not supposed to see this!
 You're not supposed to see this!!

SITT AL-MULK

What—
 Ali—
 Ali stop what you're doing

*She violently jerks his head out of the sugar pile. The Boy is alive,
 breathing and in ecstasy.*

ANA

(speaking rapidly)

I don't know how this happened.
 It was just a soda you know—
 everyone, everyone here, all the tourists you know how—
 and they're mostly corn anyway mostly everything is basically corn
 I thought he could handle it but—

BOY

(speaking very slowly)

It's better this way
 Auntie,
 Luisa,
 It's better
 It stopped

I don't dream
I don't even hear it
At least not right now...

Percussion interlude.

The chorus huddles in a circle in the corner, whispering to one another. Al-Hakim stands apart from them. The chorus looks over their shoulders at him occasionally. Al-Hakim looks back. He regards them suspiciously. After a moment:

AL-HAKIM
What?
What?

CHORUS 1
Stay out of it.

CHORUS 4
It's none of your business

CHORUS 3
You don't even

CHORUS 2
Want to know

The chorus reconvenes in their huddle. They are rubbing their hands together and starting to shake somewhat.

AL-HAKIM
You look like a bunch of drug addicts

CHORUS 4
How would you know?

AL-HAKIM
I've learned some things!
It's been... It's been...

He starts to count on his fingers but almost immediately abandons the task.

CHORUS 1
Mind your own business

CHORUS 3

If you know what's good for you

CHORUS 4

You'll mind your own business

CHORUS 1

(aside to the Chorus)

He's only good at being wrong

AL-HAKIM

I heard that!

Al-Hakim breaks up the circle, the Chorus has been standing around a laptop. He tries to grab it away from them.

CHORUS 2

Give it back!

AL-HAKIM

You've betrayed me.

Everyone betrays me.

CHORUS 4

Relax asshole!

CHORUS 3

Yeah watch what you're doing

CHORUS 1

Let him see it

Al-Hakim holds the laptop in his hands, looks at the screen for a long moment. We do not see the screen. He hands it back to the Chorus. He starts to laugh.

AL-HAKIM

(laughing)

I was right, now I've caught you.

CHORUS 1

(in a very deep voice)

TOURISTS IN WONDER

CHORUS 2

(in a very deep voice)

TOURISTS IN WONDER

CHORUS 3

(in a very deep voice)

EVERY MINUTE IS AN HOUR

CHORUS 4

(in a very deep voice)

EVERY MINUTE IS AN HOUR

AL-HAKIM

(still laughing)

I've caught you.

A procession of cyclists ride through the parking lot. They are blasting loud music out of portable speakers. Each cyclist plays a different song out of their respective speaker, creating the impression of an indeterminable sound-shape as they pass through.

Percussion interlude.

Al-Hakim alone, really alone.

AL-HAKIM

All this serves to repeat

The cycle keeps restarting,
the loops betray themselves

And when I think it's all finally done,

My soul is re-injected into my mother's womb.

(pause)

My mother...

How the hell did I get here

Enter Chorus 3, dressed as a vagrant.

CHORUS 3

Blessed be the day!

I'm a lucky, lucky guy.

Found a microwave on the side of the highway

AL-HAKIM

What?

CHORUS 3

Loads of copper strands when you open it from the back

And those strands are worth a lot!
 Gonna be sooo loaded...
 Oh it is a fortunate day
(pause)
 You look terrible

AL-HAKIM
 I—
 I'm so tired

CHORUS 3
 Let me show you something.

Chorus 3 leads Al-Hakim to a secluded area of the beach.

CHORUS 3
 This is where I sleep
 The beach police can't find you and bother you
 The sun will come up but you just keep on sleeping
 until you feel like not doing that anymore
 Lie down

Al-Hakim does so.

AL-HAKIM
 Thank you, I—

CHORUS 3
 I'm kind of an angel, you could say.

Al-Hakim shuts his eyes, lays supine and very still. Our electrical lights, which by this point in the evening have become very bright, start to fade out. Sound of waves gets louder. We only sit in darkness for half a moment. The lights pop on again, Al-Hakim is gone. The Chorus has reconvened as their characters.

SITT AL-MULK
 You've gotta be kidding me—

AD-DARAZI
 Real as real, as far as I—

SITT AL-MULK
 So you're saying—

BOY

My father—

ANA

That was your father? I thought he was just some bum.

AD-DARAZI

No sign, no indication, nothing left behind

ANA

Those cruise ships in the distance—

SITT AL-MULK

That bastard disappearing again—!

AD-DARAZI

Again, without a trace—

ANA

Those waves towering higher and higher—

AD-DARAZI

ikhtafa

BOY

ikhtafa

ANA

ikhtafa

SITT AL-MULK

It's all up to you now Ali Az-Zahir

It's all up to you

BOY

Ikhtafa

Ikhtafa

Ikhtafa

We are crassly interrupted by someone in charge of the production, who ushers us (though not ungently) out of the parking lot and into the adjacent building.

It is a small room with fluorescent lights. The audience hopefully can all sit down, some people might need to stand against the wall.

.....

*Wake up in the hospital
Oh this is not the beach
We hear the dry hum of the sad air conditioner, which is always on, even if it doesn't feel like it.
The Patient, who is played by the actor who played the Boy, essentially unseen, waves to trigger the motion sensor light, which turns on after a few attempts. The Patient has a bunch of tubes in his arm .
The Patient wants to scream but can't, there's nothing in here to properly absorb it. Tears form in the corner of his eyes. He screams into the pillow (we barely hear a thing).*

An audience member is handed a notecard and is conducted to read it aloud.

AUDIENCE MEMBER

(reading)

Hi. Umm. Hello. I would just like to say, I really, like I umm really support what you guys are doing here and uh I've really been enjoying this evening so far yeah so like, so I'm just feeling really lucky to be here tonight umm yeah so uh keep doing what you guys are doing, I hope you uh do this umm again sometime soon. And you all seem like pretty cool like pretty cool people in your personal lives so yeah, I would definitely hang out with any of you sometime.

Sound from the corner. A Nurse (played by the actor who played Ana) has in fact been sitting there this whole time. She looks at her phone and laughs. The Patient sits up and tries to get her attention. She does not react.

PATIENT

Hey. *(Pause)* Hi...

The Nurse looks up from her phone and gives him a dismissive nod. She returns to the thing she's watching, which, from the sound effects, seems to be some kind of dinosaur related content.

PATIENT

I'm! Hello!

She turns her head towards him.

PATIENT

Why am I here?

She shrugs and abruptly exits. The Patient flops down on the bed in frustration. An audience member is handed a notecard and is conducted to read it aloud.

AUDIENCE MEMBER

(reading)

My desires are basically all dried up, I just call, process the numbers, if that is really what I'm doing, not exactly sure, just kind of sit there, after all, I don't hold anything up, don't use any extraneous parts of my body. Indeed, I do keep up with my shows, if little else, the self closing, caving in, I listen to chiptune covers of songs that otherwise I'd consider just unbearably sentimental shit, songs I would never actually listen to by choice otherwise, but it's 8-bit, so it's safely ironic and detached, I don't really think about the originals, I just hit play. They're kind of good.

The Patient sits upright. He is going to stand up, but then remembers the tubes in his arm, considers them a moment. Enter a Doctor, played by the actor who played Ad-Darazi. He is sipping from a triangular juice box.

DOCTOR

I hope there's something going on. I'm supposed to be on my lunch break. These uh *(he indicates the juice box)* supposed to be for the patients but, I just can't get enough. Besides, they don't like them... and I do.

PATIENT

I don't—

DOCTOR

Pain rating?

PATIENT

I don't remember how I got here.

DOCTOR

Oh that's normal.

Pain rating?

PATIENT

I'm fine. I'm fine but—

DOCTOR

You must be in some kind of pain.

PATIENT

Like?

DOCTOR

You know, pain?

Each number corresponds to a type of illustrated face.

Perhaps you've seen it illustrated, somewhere.

From zero (*makes corresponding face*), to ten (*again.*)

You've seen that nurse?

PATIENT

The one who...?

DOCTOR

Oh she's A1 that girl,

Real Pile Driver,

Arms like country loaves

A veritable barrel roller in her scrubby scrubs and sensible shoes

PATIENT

Ummm...

DOCTOR

A genetically modified Florence Nightingale, purple and veiny.

PATIENT

You can stop now...

DOCTOR

Ass like a forklift—

PATIENT

I—

DOCTOR

Anyway, if you'll excuse me.

It's still my lunch break, I shouldn't even be here.

Why don't you lie down, rest a bit.

PATIENT

Wait.

The Doctor turns to leave.

PATIENT

These tubes in my arm, what do they—?

The Doctor has already left. The Patient lies down. Silence but for the air conditioner. The Patient lets out a low moan without fully

opening his mouth. Time passes. The motion sensor lights turn off. An audience member is handed a notecard and is conducted to read it aloud.

AUDIENCE MEMBER

(reading)

“The modern fear of unhygienic death makes life appear like a race towards a terminal scramble and has broken personal self-confidence in a unique way. It has fostered the belief that man today has lost the autonomy to recognize when his time has come and to take his death into his own hands. The doctor's refusal to recognize the point at which he has ceased to be useful as a healer and to withdraw when death shows on his patient's face has made him into an agent of evasion or outright dissimulation. The patient's unwillingness to die on his own makes him pathetically dependent. He has now lost his faith in his ability to die, the terminal shape that health can take, and has made the right to be professionally killed into a major issue.”¹

Enter a DECREPIT NURSE, played by the actor who played Sitt Al-Mulk. She does not trigger the motion sensor light. She stands over the Patient. They look at each other for an extended moment.

PATIENT

Why am I here

Why am I here

Where was I before

(a cautious pause)

Who was I before?

He rolls onto his side, triggering the motion sensor light. We can now actually get a good view of the Decrepit Nurse, her body is warped and out of proportion. Sores line her face. She rings a little bell. The Patient winces in pain, indicates his back. The Decrepit Nurse exits. The Patient tries to stand, attempts to rip the tubes out of his arm. Enter the Nurse from before.

NURSE

Don't do that!

She intervenes.

NURSE

What were you thinking?

Those tubes are in there for a reason.

Now put them back.

He puts them back.

¹ Illich, Ivan. *Medical Nemesis*. 1975. p. 34.

PATIENT

(trying not to cry)
Am I going to die?

NURSE

Oh just rub it in my face why don't you?!
You trying to punish me, you little sadist??

She leaves and returns, with a triangular juice box.

NURSE

(calmer now)

Think about your body as a network of tubes.
You have an infection in your inner tube, and these tubes *(indicated the arm tubs)* are full of antibiotics—

PATIENT

Antibiotics?

NURSE

And without the antibiotics, you see, the infection will spread to all your tubes which is usually considered a bit of uh, bit of an uh-oh
Now why don't you lie back down, rest while the tubes, you know, do their thing.
Here's a juice box,
to be transparent, it has *(conspiratorial whisper)* high-fructose corn syrup.

The Nurse places the juice box at the bedside, just very slightly out of the comfortable reach of the Patient. She leaves. A moment. The motion sensor light turns off. An audience member is handed a notecard and is conducted to read it aloud.

AUDIENCE MEMBER

(reading)

You were cringe in public. To be sure. Imagine that was your only crime. Anyway now you have to answer for all of them. You spied on me in the employee dressing room through the lens of a supposedly hidden digital camera. It's fine. I know everything now. I know what circulates online. I know the text-to-speech, the text-to-image, the rumors and lies, amped, stretched and collated. And it's fine. Doesn't get to me personally. Whatever. I've seen and done worse. But now it's just fucking awkward when we make eye contact. Could be the reason nothing feels as it did, is because nothing is as it was. And truly, it is no exaggeration, that, as the old song goes, it is a gift to be simple...

Enter the Doctor, triggering the motion sensor light. He is followed by the Nurse. He reads from a clipboard. The Nurse sits in the corner seemingly using some kind of phone swiping app.

DOCTOR

Well we do have to fill out the ledger somehow,
 what with the context,
 the bubbling vat of context
 the historical circumstances, which are, obviously and unavoidably, given.
 and the well of due reprisal.
 Sing a song of Medicaid
 Oh and I have a bunch of car crashers, your spot will be gone by then.

PATIENT

Please, I... Listen. *(Pause.)* I don't know... There's been something hanging over me since before I was born. Please listen to me.

DOCTOR

Well check check boom, everything should be in order,
 See you well never, hopefully never, but, in any case, not before Monday.
(indicates the Nurse) Now listen to the woman, alright? The future is, uh, fem.

PATIENT

(weaker)
 Wait—

The Doctor exits. The Nurse giggles in the corner.

PATIENT

Can you turn on the light?

The Nurse looks up, gives a dismissive nod, and then returns to her phone app.

PATIENT

Hey—
 I said—

NURSE

Uh sweetie, the light's already on. I can make it brighter for you, but nobody ever asks for that.
 It's usually considered pretty bright just how it is.

PATIENT

Oh—
 Just...
 I can't see
 It's all gone black
 umm
 Ummm!

The Patient winces, indicates his leg. The Nurses stands.

PATIENT
Am I going to die?

NURSE
(friendly laugh)
Die? That's so cute! Don't worry cutie!

*She makes more and more lights turn on, it's unbearably bright.
An audience member is handed a notecard and is conducted to
read it aloud.*

AUDIENCE MEMBER
(reading)

Rat poison, thinning the blood, tricking it into forgetting its most inherent clotting mechanism, such a mechanism that was, in fact, dearly coveted by, what's her name, Alexis? Her son going fountainous all over the damn place, an inbred double triple whammy of the Hapsburgs and queen Victoria, the bitch, keeping her indefinite ledger sheet, the likes of which has never been fully, fully completed, each of us totally usured, bonded in peonage, even today, but, then again, of course, only natural to want what you cannot have. And truly, it is no exaggeration, that, as the old song goes, it is a gift to be simple...

The Patient tries to get up, but is met with more pain.

NURSE
That better?

PATIENT
My veins are cinched from lying down
I'm going to fucking die!

NURSE
Oh that's just a—I mean it's a thing that happens, but—
Let's umm, let's get you up, air you out.

*The tubes are removed from the Patient's arm, he cannot stand
unsupported so the Nurse supports him. They are "walking"
towards us, arm and arm,. The light keeps getting brighter.*

NURSE
We're arm and arm now.

PATIENT
I guess we are.
I can hear the birds.

I can hear the ocean.

NURSE

Yes.

PATIENT

(remembering something)

Oh shit.

NURSE

What now?

PATIENT

My car. *(sighs)*

NURSE

It's just a thing.

PATIENT

Yeah. *(Pause)* You wrote this part for someone else.

NURSE

It just kind of happened like that
But you're doing such a good job sweetie

PATIENT

I believed in you a lot.

NURSE

Maybe he fell from his horse and dislocated a disk, maybe that's all it was.

PATIENT

You could have offended a lot of people

NURSE

Offense is a petty reaction
People are offended by their soup broth, by clouds in the sky

PATIENT

It's a sensitive topic for a reason.

NURSE

Yeah, sure, and?

I didn't dispute the oneness of God or whatever, I didn't confirm or deny any theories of anything. I didn't even sing a song, did I?

PATIENT

You made me sing.

NURSE

Oh that was hardly a song.

PATIENT

Could you sing one now? A song, could you sing one?

NURSE

(slight pause) No I don't think I could.

Anyway look I didn't even quote anything that the uninitiated aren't supposed to know
I tried to keep all the options on the table

PATIENT

You've lost your bite.

NURSE

I played my luck on the zeitgeist.

PATIENT

It's empty holes in my mouth by now

A long pause. Sounds of waves, birds, etc.

NURSE

Look

PATIENT

I can't, remember?

NURSE

Oh.

We're arm and arm.

PATIENT

I guess we are.

*The room is impossibly bright, we are submerged in white light,
and a buzzing that engulfs us. At last we hear a faint instrumental
version of "Simple Gifts."*

END OF PLAY