

# My Double

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## Scene One

### Image One

The stage is plunged into darkness, pierced by dim lights revealing bodies performing sinuous, snakelike movements, curling into a tight circle, then unfurling and curling up in agony.

The bodies grow calmer and lie sleeping. Two of them rise and, from opposite angles, head upstage, their backs to the audience.

The bodies disappear as the lights go up on the two above.

Slowly, they move closer to one another and face to face, inspecting one another's features closely. The faces move closer, the bodies as well, one pushes the other:

**ACTOR1:** Why have you come?

**ACTOR2:** Because I'm your shadow...

**ACTOR1:** My shadow. I was like that, yesterday...  
(pause)

No, no, long before yesterday. **(He glances at his hand and splays his fingers.)** We were like fingers on the same one hand: never parted, although the air could come between us.

**ACTOR2:** I'm your shadow, believe me... the road you walk on, your journey, the air you breathe, the salt in your food, the water to your bread. I am you, believe me.

**ACTOR1:** You, me? **(shouting loudly)** Bullshit! It's a lie! **(Looks at ACTOR2, approaches him)** We're not made out of the same soil! My mother would never have a child such as you. She would not nurse a creature who betrayed his land and sold his honour.

**ACTOR2:** **(stopping ACTOR1's mouth with his hand, then leaping up to come face-to-face with the audience)** I never

sold my land nor my honour! No!  
**(screaming)** No, no, it wasn't me. I am  
a child of the Cause, I nursed it at my  
mother's breast, I drank it with my  
father's tears; I inherited it from my  
ancestors...

**ACTOR1:** **(leaps at ACTOR2's throat, strangling him and crying,)** "Liar! Liar!  
Spare yourself this duplicity! Liar!"  
**(The two fall to the floor struggling.)**  
Liar!

**ACTOR2:** I am the truth, all others are  
dreamers!

**ACTOR1:** You are the devil!

**ACTOR2:** I am the light!

**ACTOR1:** You are Satan!

**ACTOR2:** You're my fate! You're my fate! So  
get out of my body!

**(ACTOR1 turns his back on ACTOR2, both standing stiffly, not moving with the powerful music. Suddenly they - and the audience - hear loud**

laughter mocking the picture they make. The two part and disappear into the darkness.)

## Image Two

(Bodies talking and expressing themselves in various ways. Insanity reigns. ACTOR1 and ACTOR2 are in different positions; ACTOR1 is writing, ACTOR2 thinking, each in a corner.)

**BODY1:** (speaking a language that is alternately intelligible and unintelligible) I am a nubikh. I am selfish. I am foolish. (He repeats the same things, facing alternately one interlocutor and then the other.)

**BODY2:** (speaking in his turn after BODY1 has subsided) I am a woman... no, no, I am a man, a man or a woman. (Laughs.) It's all the same. (He repeats the same thing and comes face to face with BODY1) I am a khubikh. No, no, you are a khubikh.

I am a woman, I am a man, I am a man and a woman (**He starts making feminine motions, then masculine motions**) You are a khubikh. You are a nubikh. I am a man with breasts, I am a woman. (**Laughs hysterically.**) (**Goes in circles around ACTOR1, still writing, takes his book, and calls on the other bodies, who form a circle around ACTOR1, the writer, laughing. Some of them bring a table; they place him on it and tie him up as he shouts.**) What are you doing? What is this? This is madness.

**BODIES:** (**shouting**) We're the madmen of the world! Madmen of the world, unite!

(During this, **ACTOR2** stands watching, unmoving, as the bodies turn the table with **ACTOR1** (the writer) on it, now prone on his back, in a circle.)

**BODY1:** Write, author.

**ACTOR1:** I am no author.

**BODY2:** Write about the day they strung you up by your intestines, dunked your face in salt water, and stuffed a dirty towel in your mouth...

**BODY3:** Isn't that the stuff of poetry? Or did your Leila leave you no room to think of the pain you suffered in that space sullied with the feet of strangers?

**BODY1:** Seems our writer prefers the sweet to the bitter.

**BODY2:** (madly) Pleasure, pain... (Placing his hands on sensitive areas of his body) Ah, they scourged me with a thousand lashes for a kiss from my Leila.

(At this point, the actor moves aside, and the mad bodies start to sing and dance leading to a wild, atavistic and hysterical climax where the bodies appear to reach the peaks of pleasure/pain, and the two merge to communicate deprivation. Lighting effects.)

## Image Three

(The bodies disappear. The actors stay on stage, ACTOR2 in the same position, thinking, and ACTOR1 upon the table, still bound.)

**ACTOR1:** Comrade! **(Silence)** My comrade of yesterday!

**ACTOR2:** Do you not want to rid yourself of this denial of our commonality?

**ACTOR1:** I called for you to untie me. Or do you want to leave me bound, and do what you will in my space?

**ACTOR2:** I don't know. But your clinging to a dream that's dead disturbs me. I haven't quite decided just now what I'm going to do yet.

**ACTOR1:** Say it. Do you want to do it? To leave me bound? Or must I say we have come to a parting of the ways?

**ACTOR2:** **(angrily)** The way must be the same!

**ACTOR1:** And if it isn't?

**ACTOR2:** (turning the table in circles again, gripping his friend's head in both hands, closing his eyes) You must close your eyes. You must become just a statue.

**ACTOR1:** And if I don't? How will you respond?

**ACTOR2:** Not I, comrade. The response will not come from me. Did you not know that?

**ACTOR1:** Who, then? Say it. We can discuss it, come to an agreement. Who then?

**ACTOR2:** Do you really not know, or are you making fun of me?

**ACTOR1:** We're making fun of one another. Or making others laugh at us. Go on, untie me. Go on, what are you waiting for?

**ACTOR2:** Don't be hasty. Be patient. You're always quick to anger and offense. Be patient, for I shall untie you slowly and calmly. I want you to

know how long it takes to get rid of one's bonds, while it was so easy to tie your hands.

**ACTOR1:** It was an insane thing to do. You were a witness.

**ACTOR2:** There's no longer any difference between sanity and insanity; it's all the same in this desolate place.

**ACTOR1:** I see that the sight of me in my current situation pleases you.

**ACTOR2:** No, no, comrade. On the contrary, I want to teach you what it means to be bound.

**ACTOR1:** And to be free. **(he adds)** Do you know, you rat, that only now more than ever before, I've discovered you don't know the meaning of the word, 'freedom'?

**ACTOR2:** And do you not know, you who live in the past, that every concept is turned on its head? **(He moves, be-**

coming a professor lecturing the audience.)

- Democracy, ladies and gentlemen of the audience, is to kill children, the aged and women in the defence of freedom of thought and expression...
- Human rights, dear citizens, are to drop your heavy bombs upon civilian homes, so that the world may all speak one language, and all of us repeat, "I love you."
- Freedom of thought and expression means that I should dictate to you what to express, and that you submit your opinions to me in documents you have memorized. Your understanding is irrelevant, it is the last thing to take into consideration. You must know that you are a machine like other machines. Nothing matters as long as the mill keeps turning.

**ACTOR1:** And you're content to be a ma-

chine?

**ACTOR2:** And do you believe, you who live in the past, that things will change if you aren't?

**ACTOR1:** Haven't you thought of what brought us to all this; haven't you asked yourself the question, servant?

**ACTOR2:** I am a servant, in fact... and you are, in-force! Ha ha! **(Laughs)**

**ACTOR1:** You're backward. You have no sense of your own dignity or privacy, no sense of your own potential to even try and resist this feeling that you're done for...

**ACTOR2:** **(turning round and round on the spot)** I don't exist. I'm a creature... I'm dead... I'm the shadow of an era yet to come, no doubt about it, the remains of a human being who was here. Now I am there, and there is here. I am a bound slave. I did not

travel for months, as my ancestors did, to arrive in a land where I was to serve my masters; I am a bound slave, traveling from one identity to another; all unlike me, but they use me when necessary.

**ACTOR1:** Have you gone mad, comrade? Come here and untie these ropes. They won't let me move, and they're chafing me.

**ACTOR2:** You have ropes on your hands that chafe you, and I have ropes inside me that chafe me. Look, comrade. **(He turns upside-down)** "The world thus walks turned on its head, yet it walks. But not with every head. It walks with only one head; so tell me, comrade, who can return things to their natural state?"

**ACTOR1:** It needs a strong will and deep belief in one's principles...

**ACTOR2:** **(laughing)** Principles! Ha, ha, ha! **(He**

turns to the audience.) Principles, he says! (He dances to the word 'principles') Principles are falling down, My Fair Lady! ...Old McDonald had a principle, E-i-e-i-o!

(The dance ends. ACTOR2 goes back to ACTOR1. He turns the table left and right alternately, saying) Let me shake you down a bit, comrade; I might shake the principles loose from your head and your body, make you sane in a time of madness...

**ACTOR1:** I said untie me! Untie me, you lunatic!

**ACTOR2:** Which of us is the lunatic, you or I?

**ACTOR1:** Untie me and I'll tell you. Perhaps we're both touched in the head. I said untie me, stupid!

**ACTOR2:** I will when you explain to me what's going on.

**ACTOR1:** I shall. Untie me first. **(Pause.)** Come on, comrade.. come on, we're sure to reach a middle ground and we'll explain to one another what's going on. **(Pause.)** Come on, come on... **(At this precise moment, ACTOR1 calms down and starts to move towards his friend slowly and hesitantly.)** Come on, do it. Untie me. Come on, my friend. **(ACTOR2 starts to untie his friend. ACTOR1 leaping up)** I knew you were touched in the head, but I never imagined it would go this far.

**ACTOR2:** Come on, explain it to me. What's happening? Who turned the world into a "bloodbath" as the human rights people say? How can we all accept, millions of us, such a bare-faced contradiction? **(ACTOR2 expands on his subject, calling for an explanation; however, ACTOR1**

bows his head and shuffles off-stage, dragging his feet. ACTOR2 cries out, to the audience this time, continuing his speech) How can we ever accept this state of affairs? (He goes down into the auditorium and exits via its door, still shouting) How can we ever accept this state of affairs?

## Scene 2

### Image One

The stage is divided into small spaces, each containing a group of three actors conversing together, making three groups in total. Far up-stage, in silhouette, soldiers watch the groups, which ignore what is happening behind them. The lights go up in succession to illuminate the features of the groups that bear signs of different affiliations:

the first group wears white, wearing skullcaps and long beards. The second is of young men in contemporary clothing, smoking and drinking, although their faces are filled with anger at someone or something. The third group seems moderate, in ordinary clothes, speaking with great self-assurance.

A member of Group One rises and goes to Group Two.

**ACTOR1:** What are you doing? Drinking is a sin!

**ACTOR2:** (rising from his group and blowing a plume of cigarette smoke into the face of the bearded man) What business is it of yours? What do you want, you...?

**ACTOR1:** It is my right as a Muslim to tell you that drinking alcohol is a sin, and call upon you to abandon it.

**ACTOR2:** (turning to his group) He says it's a sin to drink! (Turning to **ACTOR1**) Who said we were drinking alcohol, anyway? (Offers him the glass) Here, have a sip and find out what's in the glass. Go on, have some!

(**ACTOR1** looks at him with rage, as though he would like to strangle him) Go on, drink some of it.

(**GROUP2** laughs as though to provoke a reaction. **GROUP1** rises, preparing for attack. In a moment, they start to tangle, and the fight escalates.)

**GROUP1:** You are infidels! Enemies of Allah! Atheists! It wouldn't be a sin to kill you! With the power of Allah, we shall prevail! We shall make an example of you! You'll see!

**GROUP2:** Terrorists! You subjugate the world to your desires, your interests! Your tricks won't help you, you distorters of religion!

(At this point, **GROUP3** intervenes to break up the fight and prevent fisticuffs, only the struggle proves beyond its abilities. Some fall to the floor, then all fall, then rise once more. **SECURITY** intervenes amid the shouts and yells of both groups, accompanied by lighting effects. Blackout.)

## Image Two

(Both groups are onstage, one in each corner, behind prison bars. Each group moves forward in a phalanx formed by one actor with the other two behind him.)

**ACTOR1:** Right, now we're in the same boat. What do you say to that, infidel?

**ACTOR2:** You are alone in the dark, within and without this prison. Your darkness hides from you the fact that you are human, but have distorted religion, stained your hands with the blood of innocents, killed the aged, murdered women and children. They had done you no harm, but you sacrificed them as payment for continuing your dark deeds...

**ACTOR1:** Shut up, delinquent, drunken bastard. Us, murderers? Is that what you think? We are soldiers in the service of Allah. We shall raise the

flag of Islam high!

**ACTOR2:** Your deeds have plunged your Islam into the gutter.

**ACTOR1:** We fight for the phrase, "There is no God but Allah, and none other!"

**ACTOR2:** You are fallen from grace, murderers...

(Simultaneously, the two actors emerge from their cells and head towards one another; they meet center stage, face to face.)

**ACTOR1:** (punches **ACTOR2**.)

**ACTOR2:** (returns the blow. The fight resumes until they are both on the ground in a primal crouch, curled around one another.)

**ACTOR1:** Is this what you wanted?

**ACTOR2:** I'll tear you limb from limb! I shall feel the crunching of your bones between my teeth! I'll kill you!

**ACTOR1:** I shall burn you alive, I'll reduce

your body to ashes. I shall throw you into the sea. I shall destroy you.

(The fight resumes and escalates. The PRISON GUARDS arrive; they kick both groups and the situation degenerates into chaos with all three parties fighting. Blackout.)

### Image Three

(The stage is the same as last scene. Prison. The two groups are back to their original position, behind bars. The two groups of actors move forward, leaning on the iron bars and look at one another in complete silence. After a moment, they begin to speak.)

**ACTOR1:** You there, comrade!

**ACTOR2:** (laughing) 'Comrade'? How come?

**ACTOR1:** You're my comrade in prison, aren't you?

**ACTOR2:** Comradeship implies something in

common.

**ACTOR1:** Don't you think we have anything in common?

**ACTOR2:** By no means.

**ACTOR1:** Have a think. But put your anger aside.

**ACTOR2:** Which of us is angry, anyway?

**ACTOR1:** Let's not quarrel again.

**ACTOR2:** That means we shall start a dialogue.

**ACTOR1:** I believe we already have...

**ACTOR2:** I don't believe we have a choice...

**ACTOR1:** Who does, then?

**ACTOR2:** The ones who kicked us down. They divided us into peoples and villages, cities of the East and West. We cannot choose to meet in these cities; they bear us in our multitudes to their cities to contract us for whatever they want to contract us

for...

**ACTOR1:** That means we shall sit at the negotiating table here. But not in your space.

**ACTOR2:** I know you are forbidden to enter it, but it is a space I inhabit within, and I can take it to any other space that doesn't suit me. Are you aware that my imagination is capable of summoning it even inside this cell—this cell I'm in because of you?

(The **ACTORS** emerge and go to centre stage. The lighting focuses on them as they sit on the floor. Their dialogue continues, accompanied by music, with gestures indicating that the two **ACTORS** are coming to some sort of agreement. A few moments later, two **SOLDIERS** with rifles creep in, watching, one from the left and the other from the right, each aiming his rifle at one of the **ACTORS'** heads. The latter start to resist. The **GROUPS** emerge from behind bars and start to struggle with the **SOLDIERS**, wres-

ting them to the ground, taking possession of the weapons and coming out of the cells. They leave the stage.)

## Scene Three

### Image One

(At the back of the stage, on a big screen covering the wall facing the audience, a scene of a sandstorm. Through the storm, from the screen, come the BODIES dressed all in white, running in circles on the stage, their movements frightened, expectant. With the music, the movement escalates, and the desert sands become more intense, amid sounds that indicate that the search for the two GROUPS has been started by unidentified SOLDIERS.

Darkness falls. Candles appear on stage carried by the BODIES, meeting and parting and meeting again in an expressive dance. Finally they meet and exit stage rear in single file. Blackout.)

## Image Two

The stage is faintly lit; the BODIES are scattered about the stage, as though recovering from some sort of war. Enter the two ACTORS, one from stage left and the other from stage right, watching the BODIES with a disappointed gaze, while music plays in the background.

The music decreases in volume to allow ACTOR1 to speak. As the music fades, the conversation starts.

ACTOR1: They're sleeping.

ACTOR2: They're resting from yesterday's battle.

ACTOR1: Is this any time to rest?

ACTOR2: They chose to.

ACTOR1: Is this any time to choose?

ACTOR2: What are you trying to say?

ACTOR1: Damn those who put the time out of joint, painting our bodies with

the dyes of this age of artifice.

**ACTOR2:** We're the ones who put the time out of joint.

**ACTOR1:** What fault is it of ours, if with the best of intentions we let strangers into our homes?

**ACTOR2:** You're speaking in a language that's done for.

**ACTOR1:** I'm speaking in a language that's done for? We're the ones who're done for! The language of the past and the present—neither can help us any more!

**ACTOR2:** We're not done for. We can rise again, if we understand how the game's played.

**ACTOR1:** Then let's.

**ACTOR2:** Come, let us sit down... or wake these bodies so we can all understand the game together.

**ACTOR1:** On one condition. Don't paint me with your faded colours. I'm not like you.

**ACTOR2:** Didn't we agree to a dialogue with respect for each other and for our privacy?

**ACTOR1:** Let's go, then.

**(The two ACTORS start to wake the BODIES, alternately gently and violently.)**

**ACTOR2:** Come on, wake up! ...What, as tired as all that?

**ACTOR1:** Wake up, Filthy!

**ACTOR2:** **(when the BODIES refuse to budge)**  
Wake up, miserable beggar! Wake up, stupid!

**(The BODIES awake sluggishly, listing right and left. They start to form two groups, one stage right, the other stage left.)**

**BODY1:** What's all this ruckus in aid of? Think you're going to liberate the world? **(GROUP1)**

**BODY2:** We're nothing but bands of fugitives, weak, afraid, powerless.  
(GROUP2)

**BODY3:** We're done for as a nation. Our only choices are suicide, or darkness, if you prefer... a darkness as deep as the brightness of all the lights in the world...

**BODY4:** You are deluded, gentlefolk. Those lights are seductive, false, masked...

(Suddenly all the bodies leap up and put on masks—different ones representing animal faces, dominated by the lion, keeping company with the ewe. They dance to music, making gestures signifying strength and weakness.

The dance ends with the removal of the masks. The BODIES remain standing in position. ACTOR2 walks among them, between and through their circles, singing.)

**ACTOR2:** Once upon a time  
In red skies they did shine

They flooded the valleys  
And burned the stalks so fine.  
Once upon a time  
In red skies they did shine  
Once upon a time  
In red skies they did shine  
They flooded the valleys  
And burned the stalks so fine,  
And today they are traitors  
And traders.

(At this point, the BODIES start dropping like dead leaves to sit cross-legged, their heads resting in one hand.

The ACTOR continues his doggerel, taking the hand of each ACTOR and pulling him to his feet in a scene of deep grief over the fate that has befallen the Arab Nation, and its backwardness, the people who have let it down and betrayed the Cause. ACTOR2 adds:)

**ACTOR2:** Once upon a time  
In red skies they did shine  
They flooded the valleys  
And burned the stalks so fine  
And today they are traitors  
And traders.

**ACTOR1:** May you rest in peace, Idris el-Mesennawy! *[A reference to the Moroccan poet Idris el-Mesennawy!]*

**ACTOR2:** What do you say, gentlemen, to a conference in this desert?

**ACTOR1:** A conference in the desert?

**ACTOR2:** I know we are different, but it is certain that our commonalities will outweigh our differences.

**ACTOR1:** I told you before, Mr. Control, I am nothing like you, so don't try to eliminate me with your diplomacy.

**ACTOR2:** Are we not agreed, my colleague, to respect each other and engage in

dialogue as two separate entities?

**GROUPS:** (sitting in a 'ring' of sorts) Yes, yes, that's reasonable. Let's start our dialogue.

**BODY1:** (standing in place, with mocking sarcasm) Dialogue, dialogue, who can have a dialogue with a nation that's ready for its epilogue!

**BODY2:** (standing next to him) You fox. Can't you be serious just for once?

**BODY1:** I can only be serious on one condition.

**BODY2:** What's that?

**BODY1:** To be sure I shall eat, and to have my share set aside from the start.

**ACTOR1:** Opportunist.

**ACTOR2:** What did you expect? We start our dialogue knowing that among us are opportunists and followers and fools, people with a cause, and ones with no cause or principle. We're up

against a world with many different leanings and inclinations and ambitions. Therefore, opportunism is one of the items on our agenda.

**ACTOR1:** And special interests...

**ACTOR 2:** We won't touch each other's interests. We'll look out for one another. But if we come to an agreement...

**ACTOR1:** Right, let's confer then. Come on, you. Yes, you, leper! And you, idiot, and you, fool... Come on. Let our conference live up to our hopes and dreams! Get a move on.

**(The two groups begin to form a circle. The two actors take their positions at its center like traditional story-tellers.)**

**ACTOR2:** Gentlemen, listen. This desert shall be our headquarters, from which our decisions shall be issued, from which we shall go forth as one body, with a single, unanimous opinion...

(As ACTOR2 is talking on, ACTOR3 runs on-stage, shouting.)

**ACTOR 3:** *Gentlemen! Gentlemen! The village elder tells you to leave the desert immediately! At any moment, the Soldiers of Peace are arriving to dump their toxic waste here in our great desert! Don't say I didn't warn you!*

(The announcement is repeated as ACTOR3 circles the stage. As the two groups look on in puzzlement, he begins to exit, slowly.)

**BLACKOUT**

## Scene Four

### Image One

(The BODIES are curled in on themselves, seated. The space is small (this can be achieved by means of black-and-white lighting in the form of closed circles). Between the circles, the actor, AL-BOHALI, walks around. He wears loose, flowing clothing and his hair hangs free to his shoulders; he fills the space with smoke from his censer, hanging by a triple cord from his hand. The actor, controlling the censer, passes it over the heads of the folded BODIES, in a silent scene relieved by music.

As the music gradually fades out, ACTOR3 attempts to waken the BODIES by stamping three times on the boards, indicating that we are indeed in a theatre. He draws close to some of the BODIES and looks at them, contemplating their apathy and introversion.)

ACTOR3: You, on your way to your families.

People of this land, people of shame.  
Can you take just a moment from  
your travels to hear me out?

**(adding)** People of this land, people  
of shame. Can you hear me?

**(turning to the audience)** They're deaf  
and dumb. They don't understand that  
they're dead! **(He pushes the corpses  
with his foot. The BODIES change  
position. ACTOR3 goes around the  
bodies repeating the same thing. He  
turns to the audience)** Won't you help  
me wake them? Go on, do it if you can.  
**(Weary of speaking, he curls up and  
sits with the others. At this mo-  
ment, the BODIES get up one after  
the other, starting to walk in circles  
around ACTOR3.)**

**(BODY1 stands behind the ACTOR, holds him close.  
ACTOR3 awakes. He is embraced by BODY2, and  
the game starts with everyone in succession, ac-  
companied by music and light effects.)**

- BODY2:** (to **ACTOR3**) Are you still with us,  
O Time that binds us in chains?
- BODY3:** What do you want?
- BODY4:** Who showed you where to find us?
- BODY5:** Who told you we were here?
- BODY1:** No, who asked you to defend them  
from us?
- BODY2:** This is a secret space, where we  
meet to talk amongst ourselves.
- BODY4:** No, to purify ourselves.
- BODY1:** I want to know who let our secret  
out: who made this private place pub-  
lic, our sanctuary that we have cho-  
sen to meditate upon our situation.
- BODY2:** Don't forget that we retain part of  
this BOHALI, and that part must  
have wanted to rejoin us. That's  
why he's here.
- BODIES:** (laughing) Secret! Public! (laughter)  
What's he saying?

**BODY1:** It's absurd!

**BODY2:** It's foolery!

**BODY3:** It's madness!

**BODY4:** It makes perfect sense.

**ACTOR3:** **(turning to the BODIES that fell when he screamed at the top of his voice)** People of reason and people of madness, I have come to your space, because, as you know, I adore your silence that gives me the opportunity to infiltrate you as I have, as I still am and have been for ages! For ages! Ha ha ha! **(The ACTOR takes up his censer again, walking around the BODIES, saying:)** I am the master of your silence, I am your absurdity, I am your everlasting insecurity, I am Godlike.

**BODY1:** **(standing up to him and saying in his face)** You are a myth. You are the devil. You are the part of us

that's dead, our darkness, our real absurdity. But you're done for!

**ACTOR3:** (placing the censer over the heads of BODY1, then BODY2 and BODY3)

I am your homesickness, what you go back to—your backwardness, if you say so, but I am your truth—your truth that you announce in secret, and hide in public. Change me if you can. I don't need you anyway.

**BODY5:** You're our darkness, our defeat. You're what we've come to, you're what's split us up. You're our weak link.

**ACTOR3:** (laughing all the while) Me? I'm all that? Whatever shall we do? (His laughter continues. The BODIES form a circle, talking amongst themselves, suddenly, they turn in a circle to the music with the ACTOR, who falls to the floor screaming) I am your truth!

**BODIES:** (in response) You're our devil!

**ACTOR3:** Your devil is a woman!

**BODIES:** No, our devil's male or female. Male or female.

## Image Two

(Enter **ACTOR**, together, onto the stage, lit with different colours, forming a story circle. Then enter the **STORYTELLER**.)

**STORYTELLER:** Lovers of poems and tales...

**ACTORS:** Here we are! We've been waiting for you.

**STORYTELLER:** Do you want a story from the past or the present?

**ACTORS:** (talking amongst themselves) Past... present...

**ACTOR1:** And what do you mean by that, storyteller?

**STORYTELLER:** I aim to please. I have found that customers are turning away

from my circle; not too far into the future, I shall find myself alone.

**ACTOR2:** We want a story from the past.

**ACTOR1:** No, no, we want one from the present.

**ACTOR3:** We want one from past and present.

**STORYTELLER:** Come to an agreement among yourselves, and I shall do whatever you wish.

**ACTOR1:** Let's start with the past.

**STORYTELLER:** Good, good. Let us start.

Once upon a time, long, long ago, there was a man called Shahtan bin No'man...

**ACTOR2:** Enough! (*In a Maghreb dialect*) I'm fed to the teeth with this. We wanted a tale with a sting in the tail!

**ACTOR1:** And with what they call 'something sunny for a time neither Shiite nor Sunni'

**ACTOR3:** what do we want with religious talk in this story circle? Why d'you want

us to fight again?

**ACTOR1:** Listen, storyteller, why don't you just tell a tale of the present?

**STORYTELLER:** Right, what do you say to a tale of democracy in the time of the Demo Crappy?

**ACTOR3:** Uh-uh, we start to talk of politics and we'll all end up behind bars! You're nothing but trouble!

**STORYTELLER:** I, nothing but trouble? Well, in that case! Oh, all right. What do you say to a tale of war?

**ACTOR1:** Iraq or Palestine?

**STORYTELLER:** Ssh! Walls have ears!

**ACTOR2:** What use is a tongue to a speaker?  
*[to quote Murad al-Qadiri]*

**STORYTELLER:** To speak. **(He walks among the actors, adding)** To tell the tale of Baghdad's people in olden times; if he wants to get a share of the audience and make

people gather around, let him hawk by shouting, "Remember the Battle of Khaybar, Israel, Remember the Battle of Khaybar, Jews, Remember the Battle of Khaybar, all you Americans who aren't native Americans! An army born on a plain shall someday return to the plain!"

**ACTOR3:** What's all this rambling and scrambling! Are you a spy or a fly, on the wall, a double-agent, storyteller?

**ACTORS:** A spy, a fly... what's to be done?

**(The STORYTELLER readies himself to flee from the circle. The actors carry him in a circle and carry him offstage as he yells and screams.)**

### Image Three

**(The stage is a dancefloor for atavistic dance. Incense rises, right and left, going into the bodies, mingling with the space, affected by the atmosphere. In the foreground is BO-**

**HALI, singing along with the refrain of "Ahl el-Hal" by the band Nass El Ghiwane.)**

**BOHALI:** Ahl el-Hal, Ahl el-hal  
When will things ever improve?  
Ahl el-hal, Ahl el-Hal  
When will things ever improve?

**ACTOR1:** (to BOHALI) It's never going to get better, believe me.

**ACTOR2:** (jumping up into BOHALI'S face)  
You're a dreamer. This is no age for dreams.

(BOHALI seems puzzled, walking among the ACTORS.)

**ACTOR3:** Don't believe them. Dreams are master of reality! We will prevail, believe me!

**ACTOR1:** The storm's too much for our small bodies!

**ACTOR4:** Who said our bodies were small?

**ACTOR1:** Don't you realize we're all time bombs?

**ACTOR4:** Who said anything about bombs?  
Do you want them to call us terror-  
ists?

**ACTOR1:** I heard the word 'terror'! Who said  
that? Who said terrorist?

**ACTOR2:** Individual terror or state terror?  
(Opens his arms to the audience.)  
Terror of the major states!

(The stage becomes a battlefield. The BODIES  
drop to the floor, plus lighting effects. The  
speakers reverberate with sounds of battle.  
The stage becomes a ruin as BOHALI repeats  
the song over and over)

**BOHALI:** Ahl el-hal, Ahl el-Hal

When will things ever improve?

*(The Nass El Ghiwane song plays)*

**BLACKOUT**