



Beyond Desert Storms
MC Radiance

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[Scene I: Tensions across the war-scarred desert run high. On one side of the stage is a wrecked army jeep; on the other side are pieces of a downed fighter jet. This is a campsite, near a desert airport. JACK is a battle-weary, for-hire, American special forces officer. He's just grinning and bearing it, but he's really over it. He and his companions are stationed off the edge of a sporadic battle, but they can never fully relax... Periodically, a jet screams overhead, or a mortar lands nearby. His "men" are GNOMES. They are three young wannabe air force pilots who can't wait to get into the cockpits of those cool American hi-tech machines. No matter how short they are! These GNOMES are locals, picked from a village somewhere over the horizon to be trained as Iraqi pilots.]

[Into the clearing of this desert encampment will stumble a sultry, self-educated Arabic woman, AMINA. She is quite drunk, and she is not used to alcohol. Her head is completely hidden under a burqa that is brilliantly tie-dyed in Deadhead colors. AMINA feels ever bitter, though she is also desperate for any real human contact. JACK knows her from a previous short, tempestuous romance— now long over. His romantic interests have since settled on many women, including VERONIQUE, a glamorous white-skinned Pakistani woman, who is also a socialite among the ultra-wealthy.]

AMINA: (from behind the bushes, to herself, disdainfully) Ai. Is it not Jack, no? (She stands up and boldly flounces into the clearing.)

[All rifles are immediately aimed at the intruder—who might very well be a suicide bomber. There is a rumble of battle off in the distance.

JACK: Stop! (He calmly notes her psychedelic burqa outfit and liquor flask, then snickers.) That's quite a combo.

AMINA: Your desert storm is still raging back there, pig. (Spinning once, she yells to the skies.) Do you not remember me, Jack? I am the goddess of color! (She stomps her foot.) A witch, a doctor, a witchdoctor. And you... you...

[She stumbles towards JACK, and takes a big, drunken swing at him. She misses.]

JACK: Hold your fire, kiddies! I know this woman... Or, I thought I did...

[He grabs her wrists and wrestles them back to her sides.]

JACK: (whispering) You again. How could anyone forget you, AMINA. (She struggles.) Hey now. Relax. (He goes to grasp her with a

forearm clasp.) I am just another your-Self, sorceress. (Pause. They both freeze and lock eyes, through her veil.) Peace. Hi. Hi there.

[AMINA swings at him with the other arm, her flask arm. JACK parries, and flips AMINA, still hidden within her tie-dyed burqa, backwards onto the ground. He steps back.]

JACK: (joking) You look so different these days.

AMINA: (woozily getting up) Ow. Once more, you hurt me, Jack. OW! 15 times have I... risen... on the eye of the Eagle..

[AMINA stretches out her arms like bird wings, and stumbles around some more.]

AMINA: Flange-ing across the waves. (She starts wavy dancing, wobbly and intoxicated. Suddenly, she throws herself again at Jack, fiercely. He is forced to deck her with one professional blow to the jaw. (The GNOMES fidget among themselves, wanting to assist but not comprehending.)

JACK : When did you start drinking, honey? (He bends over her.) Amina. Tell me this. Is there any end in sight to all this v-v-v-v-violence? Eh? Ms. Magician of color?

AMINA

(She pats her bleeding lip.) Ah, the color of blood, how I love thee so much. (She looks at JACK, then turns away sullenly.) I shall tell you what I have seen, JACK. I have seen an endless parade of bad memories, you son of a—

[She kicks at him again. He draws his pistol on her.]

JACK: Right there, AMINA.

[She freezes. JACK cocks the safety and aims at her head, then pats her down. He shakes his head with a heavy sigh, as he slows down the patting procedure.]

JACK: We c-c-c-could, you know, begin again. Our own flow, you and me again, ya know. (His patting almost becomes caressing.) Create our own reality. Right here and n-n-now.

AMINA: Oh you suppose that we all just give in like this, so peacefully? Is that what you think, Yankee?

JACK: Timing. We are adults. (Still caressing) Doesn't it feel good to synchronize your timing with another's?

AMINA: Savvy adults, we are. True.

JACK: Let's move forward, you and I. Beyond any childish, silly revenge f-f-f-fantasies, OK?

[Armed with their midget guns, the GNOMES cluster around AMINA. She can't believe how tiny they are.]

GNOME 1: (insinuatingly) I am quite a savvy adult too. Baby. (Whispering to JACK) What's she look like under the burqa?

GNOME 2: I bet she's hot hot hot. Lady, I am another your-self too, woo-hoo! (The GNOMES laugh madly.)

[JACK's own laughter peters out. He discharges his pistol into the air, the GNOMES shut up and back away. JACK strolls off by himself a ways. He is having a moment. He sighs and listens morosely to the sound of a mortar shell volleys bursting upon some hills and echoing past the encampment. ...An hour passes.]

AMINA: Jack. Jack! What will these henchmen of yours do to me?

JACK: Laugh with you, maybe? Prosperity laughs at us here. And there. But never with us for very long. L-l-l-listen, little ones, did you hear her? Can you see stormy Fortune f-f-frowning upon our chances of survival? (He gets misty eyed, dreaming of happier times. Suddenly incoming mortars nearby make them all hit the dirt.) DUCK!

[Explosions. The dust settles. They pick themselves up one by one.]

GNOME 1: (to GNOME 3) We are all going to die. Allah has forsaken us.

GNOME 3: Who can save our great city, Sorceress?

GNOME 2 : Who shall we pray to now?

AMINA: Pray to your Selves, friends. Ha! I am only another your Self. Remember? I am... only what I say I am. (She gets an idea.) I am a mystery... I am more than a doppelganger...

[The stage lights flash 6 times, and each time she appears to be in a different location, in a different pose. However, JACK is self-involved and doesn't even notice.]

AMINA: But back to reality again. Pssst. (The GNOMES are still rubbing their eyes in disbelief. She winks at them.) That was called S-s-s-snakeshifting.

GNOME 3: Snakeshifting?

GNOME 2: No such word, 'snakeshifting'. Where's the dictionary?

[AMINA nips from her flask, unconcerned.]

GNOME 3: (To GNOME 2) Either she's trashed, or she's magic, or we are TRIPPING!

GNOME 1: Can you make heads or tails of her? She has the madness.

AMINA: Here's a secret. (She leans towards them.) Here's to madness! I am on a musical quest now! I am like a UFO now! Give me some room, friends! And 15 times now, let us whirl high! Like eagles upon the hot wind!

[AMINA begins dancing and spinning and belly-dancing. In mid dance, as if retrieving an arrow from a quiver, she pulls a flute out from behind her, out of her rucksack. She slips the mouthpiece under her veil and begins fluting a dirge as she twirls.]

[Behind the stage: a video MONTAGE of buzzards soaring and spiraling upon mountain thermals—and of human corpses being carried down a wind-swept road.]

[Suddenly, JACK notices a James Bond-ish blade. It is sneakily "growing" out of the end of AMINA's flute. With a run and a flying Kung Fu kick, JACK knocks the flute-weapon out of her hand. He knocks AMINA face-down to the ground, and holds her there with his boot across her neck.]

JACK: AMINA, you're one psycho bitch. (His knuckles are bleeding a bit.) Enough's enough, AMINA. ya crazy coot, it's time to get earth bound-b-b-b-bound. Down here, among the regulars, let's go.

[JACK waves GNOME 2 over to tie AMINA's hands behind her.]

GNOME 3: (examining the flute) Cool. Where'd she get that knife thing made, ya think?

[Once AMINA is properly handcuffed, JACK takes his boot off her neck and goes back to dreamy-eyed mode again. GNOME 1 dusts off a huge magick book of medieval verse, one of a couple that have fallen out of AMINA's rucksack.]

GNOME 1: Wow! (He pages through the beautiful calligraphy, the gold leaf illustrations, and the weird symbols. He is humbled and hushed.) Compared to this, my legacy is tiny. If only immortal words could preserve my big ideas...

[GNOME 2 wanders over.]

GNOME 2: Well? What's the verdict? Are they GOOD words or are they BAD words?

GNOME 1: Good, bad, whatever! Who cares? They are written, they are published words! Immortal words. (Sighs.) If only I knew how to write like this. I too could leave behind something real valuable... I too could be immortal.

JACK: Interesting, that. How certain names just last forever....

AMINA: You best all be exceptionally careful with my Book. If you do not know to use it, you will become cursed forever!

[JACK strolls over and casually reads the tome for a while over GNOME 1's shoulder, then he stares towards the Ziggurat of Ur off in the distance.]

JACK: (Darkly) Beyond my grave, beyond small mounds of stone, beyond short-lived pyramids! (Gesticulating)... Beyond all these, our immortal memories might survive! But not so our bones. (He loudly cracks his neck. There is a dull roar, and the ground starts to tremble.)

GNOME 3: No no no. Another earthquake.

GNOME 1: Or they're blowing shit up underground!

GNOME 2: Oh Allah, if it's not one thing, it's another. (They hit the ground. As it shakes, GNOME 2 admires the texture of the ground.) Sweet earth! (The tremor abates.) Don't we just love these constant reminders of our mortality?

GNOME 3: I don't want to be mortal, I want to be immortal! I want them to talk about how divine I was, forever!

AMINA: That makes no sense. Anyway, I am sure you three shall forge down any path that is dictated to you. By your supposed 'higher power.' (The GNOMES look at her quizzically. She nods over at JACK.) Guided, you know? By your ranking officer. Your higher power over there.

[JACK bursts out laughing, unwinding for the first time. The daytime fighting seems to have let up as the sun sets.]

AMINA: (undefeated) I say let us all go sailing away into the sunset, away into the future, upon a unicorn, through the element of air, on the wind of words, through clouds of forgiveness, to the sun of love! (AMINA works herself up into a kneeling position.) Love especially. YES! Love is an Art, my friends. For Time is the evolution of Love. (She manages to get to her feet.) And oh, it is getting late. Must be meeting and greeting new lovely friends!

[AMINA makes a dash for it. She doesn't get far. JACK charges after her into the scrub. He easily overtakes her and tackles her. The GNOMES catch up. With twine they tie her up by the ankles and wrists. Then they all carry her back to the campsite on a pole, like a trophy deer.]

[SCENE II. The GNOMES have built a healthy fire. They eat dinner and/or do their chores. Whilst they are working, a white woman on a white horse rides up. She seems extremely chummy with JACK and so no-one bats an eyelid that she is there. AMINA is tied hand and foot.]

VERONIQUE: Bonsoir, mon amour.

JACK: Veronique! Well, well, well. (With obvious pleasure, he helps her dismount her steed.) A variety of cum—a variety of com-c-cum-c-company is probably my favorite pleasure.

AMINA: (Hissing, for she can't believe the respect this lady is getting, compared to her own animal treatment. Quietly) Moreover, AMINA misses JACK...

JACK: (ignoring her) True entertainment is ch-ch-cheap and willing, eh, my friends? (JACK and VERONIQUE make out. The GNOMES rush about her knees, in a mad crush to feel her velvet skirts.) Well, expensive but 'willing'... (He laughs throatily.) Veronique is here, be nice now.

GNOME 2: We are sooooo into new fashions.

GNOME 1: Pricey diversions, oh my.

GNOME 3: Ahhh, don't you remember those good old days, VERONIQUE, ha ha, back at the Babylon brothel...

[VERONIQUE chuckles. AMINA, hogtied, is trying to get over herself and recover her one remaining card: her dignity.]

AMINA: Well then. Best amused is the host, isn't he? (Deep breath.) And it seems that my host today is JACK FARR. How about that...

[The GNOMES throw up a cheer for their leader! VERONIQUE lets JACK go take charge. He smiles grimly, spits, then paces in a circle around the applauding group.]

JACK: Thank you. Thanks all. But, alas. (He holds up his hand as a stop signal. They stop applauding.) Your so-called host has been pacing, around and around. In his own in-in-inner mind. In his heavy heart.

[AMINA is sobering up enough to realize she can use her mind as a strategic tool.]

AMINA: Do not be sad, JACK! You have been Rumi-Nating! (She laughs.) You have been soaring across the secret poet's planet. The one that you birth. (JACK, startled, wonders how AMINA could know about his secret poetry.) Just as I have traveled across the one that births me! (Pause. She hops over to a spot between JACK and VERONIQUE. To JACK) We have so much in common, you and I... (JACK is hesitant.) Let those war sounds drift away... far away (She is luring him in, hypnotically.) All the pain can fade away into the distance... and soon, we can dine together... on your tastiest... most brilliant poetic words! (JACK is flattered; he starts smiling.)

[VERONIQUE clears her throat and walks back over to JACK.]

VERONIQUE: And who is the insolent prisoner in the dirty burqa?

JACK: No ordinary p-p-prisoner. You know what, Ms. AMINA? You always were quite p-p-perceptive. (He turns back to VERONIQUE and pontificates.) The more we s-sav-savor our own p-p-p-present lives? The better we can endure its resistance! (JACK sweeps VERONIQUE up once more into a bear embrace.) And I really hate resistance. (She giggles, and they make out again. AMINA tosses her veil backwards.)

AMINA: (Straining at her cuffs, she squeezes her eyes shut, muttering.) Ahem! The key is Imagination! We must not settle for mere survival! I advocate using 15 TIMES the usual dose of Imagination! (She opens her huge eyes.) See there? There! I can see future freedom, granted to us all, to all humanity! Can't you see it, little ones? There!

[The Gnomes blankly scan the horizon for this invisible dimension.]

GNOME 2: Future freedom? Psh. I doubt it.

AMINA: Oh yes, future freedom! JACK. I have something I wish to share with you... Some gold of mine. Take it! (Behind her back, her tied-up hands are inching a small pouch out of a pocket in her burqa. JACK is incredulous. He goes over, and takes the pouch somewhat suspiciously. He opens the cord and empties out a number of gold coins onto his palm. All eyes in the clearing immediately focus on the gold.

GNOMES (ALL TOGETHER): Wow! She has gold? (The GNOMES go weak-kneed at the mention of the word.) Gold! Gold! Hooray!

[SCENE III. A Fantasy Bank. The GNOMES are corporately dressed and dancing ring-around-a-rosie, wearing pig masks! They are playing inside a bank vault, holding a New Year's party.]

VOICE OVER: (seriously) In the olden cities, there were always taxmen. There have always been Federal Reserve Sultans. Theirs have been the rituals of control. They hide out of sight, deep down in their ancestral tombs. Dancing as fools. There, where powerful treasures usually lie silent, frozen in vaults, in golden mausoleums. From age to age, control is maintained by greedy hoarders such as these.

[The pig-masked bankers are merrily tossing around gold ingots. Suddenly, there is a loud explosion! The bank fantasy melts away like a mirage, and we are back at the desert campsite. The GNOMES dust themselves down and stand up again from the last blast.]

GNOME 1: They never know when to stop, do they?

VERONIQUE: Nothing wrong with a little dust... Or a little gold, I say.

AMINA: Of course, those coins in my pouch are not my true gold. (The GNOMES all moan in disappointment.) My real gold is my storehouse of worldly wisdom! Golden poetic insights! Seeds for future ages, for those less... blessed. (AMINA turns her fierce glare towards VERONIQUE, and squints her hate into that perfectly dolled-up, wealthy face.) The day will come, you know. One day when the rich, when the ignorant but needy upper classes and their despots shall be pried open like oysters, by us poor insolent desert rats... Us... (She tries to put aside the bitterness, to summon up some pride and some positivity.) Us... sharing... explorers! (smiling broadly) Yes, Jack? We shall spy upon the super-greedy, will we not? I can picture it. So clearly.

[The desert scene melts back into the Fantasy Bank. The desert explosion has blasted open a hole through the wall of the fantasy vault—and now it's a bank heist! The party music has stopped. Veiled gunmen leap through the dust, grabbing and then holding the pig-masked bankers hostage. The looting begins. Gold ingots get tossed back down the line of gunmen. The ingots are passed out through the hole. It's all very fast... we slowly dissolve back into the campsite scene once more.]

JACK: Phew. I'm glad that there is some redistribution of wealth, somewhere. Anyway, in my experience, the Super-greedy? They are the most super-sadistic. (He rubs his fingers on a large scar wound down one leg.) See this Veronica? By my life, Bismillah, this is my reminder.

AMINA: But my gold coins are real, Jack. And you could use some time off to heal your heart, yes, Jack?

JACK: (Looking for his own whiskey bottle) I must proceed-seed-seed to heal, true. (JACK puts AMINA's coins back into the pouch.) You keep your 'bribe', AMINA. (He casually tosses back the gold pouch onto the sand next to her. The poor GNOMES eye the pouch like hungry dogs over a big steak—but they all know they had better not jump on it. Just yet. JACK is still hunting for his bottle.)

GNOME 1: Bloody fighting... bloody meat... All for bloody gold...

JACK: They can keep their gold Frankly, I'd rather be healing. Among other creators. (Toasting with his bottle) To those who create! To those who bear golden artistic apples! To those who teach us how to share each others' talents! (To VERONIQUE) That is more precious than all your jewels, or anything them gold coins can buy.

GNOME 3: Snap back to reality, JACK!

GNOME 2: Until a day when no orphan cries, we ALL need gold. And we shall be forced to defend our families and friends for it, to defend them with WAR!

JACK: What a hideous invention it is.

GNOMES (unison): War! War! War for gold! War for black gold! Alas, forsooth! War's chill/ shall ever still/ our descendents' heartbeats, as Allah is the Truth.

JACK: NO! NO! We c-c-can not think like th-th-that! (Pause.) You know, Sorceress, you were correct. We really n-n-n-need to believe in our future freedom more! Picture it until we can s-s-s-see it with our own two eyes.

[To the shock of the GNOMES, JACK unties AMINA! To their further distress, she re-pockets her gold coin pouch. JACK winks over at the GNOMES.]

JACK: Don't run, AMINA. Stay, and teach us.

[AMINA stretches her legs gratefully, rubs her wrists. Suddenly, she throws off her burqa headgear backwards, and shakes out her mane of hair, revealing her Arabic beauty. The GNOMES are stunned—and so is VERONIQUE. AMINA feels relief. She follows JACK, and when he turns, she goes nose-to-nose with him.]

AMINA: So JACK... you who are a student of freedom... Freedom from war... do you suppose it will look strange? What will it look like, Yankee? (She won't let him look away from her eyes.)

JACK: I suppose it might be stranger than f-f-f-f-friction.

AMINA: A world with no militaries, without their propaganda, that is what you dream of, yes, do you not? (She leans in ever closer) Oooo. That you deeply long for. (Pause. VERONIQUE is starting to feel awkward jealousy pangs.) And for the peasants, will this peaceful world be also magical?

VERONIQUE: (getting in AMINA's way) Yes. MAGICAL. Just as we all already are!

[JACK notes VERONIQUE's glare. He rolls his eyes, turns away, and wanders off to examine the stars again.]

[SCENE IV. A grocery store. Daytime. AMINA is wearing an exotic robe. In the aisles, JACK is carrying the huge magick book. He leafs through it while VERONIQUE, AMINA and THE GNOMES do some shopping.]

JACK: Just look at this book, VERONIQUE. The magical writings of the wise. These may be the only legacies our pos- our pos-posterity will not squander away...

[JACK surreptitiously glances over at AMINA, trying to remember something.]

AMINA: (to VERONIQUE) You CANNOT imagine, lady, how many times in history, some of the most beautiful (She eyes VERONIQUE up and down.) and richest, um, libraries in the world have been torched! All those riches! Burned! (Spitefully) To the very earth.

GNOME 2: Bravo! Burn baby burn!

GNOME 3: Hey, AMINA! We GNOMES are poets, also! We just can't get any respect.

GNOME 1: But we've been known to kill... some time with pen and ink. Space out and write at will... and later stop to think. Ha! That was good, right?

JACK: (They all load out of the store, and climb into JACK's car. Silence.) Thank God for pen and paper. We all got private wars... that need to be dealt with also... (He offers AMINA a sip from his whiskey bottle. THE GNOMES refuse to partake.)

AMINA: (Swigging. Silence.) Just sitting here musing, are ya, you little poets? Ha... A-musing me with all your (AMINA licks her lips.) self-control issues is more like it. Ha ha! Look at us. (They all look at each other.) What a mess we are. Is this a complicated pow-wow or what, JACK?

GNOME 1: (bashfully) Everyone in here is karmically challenged, AMINA. (JACK starts driving again.) That's life.

JACK: NO NO that's no excuse! We're not crippled, we're not paralyzed, we HAVE to step up! (He sounds disgusted as he weaves through traffic.) Why are so few observant p-p-people willing to take up the Real Challenge? To take on a starring role in...(he hunts for the right words, then shouts them out his driver-side window) ...in the preservation of life on Earth?

VERONIQUE: (Pause.) I don't know, JACK. Why not?

GNOME 3: Because we are all easily confounded?

GNOME 2: Because we are blinded by peer pressure?

GNOME 1: Because we easily give up hope?

GNOME 2: And start to believe all those nasty opinion polls!

VERONIQUE: Who'd even want to step up to preserve this world, JACK? Be a leader of such sheep?

AMINA: Such a world, though. Such a maze of Thought! (Pause. JACK pulls over by a park.) Now heed me! We are in such an amazing, endless time of creation! And eternal re-creation, under the sweetest guiding light of the Muse. (The GNOMES are poo-pooing her.) Shut up, you little buggers. Listen and witness! The sound of War has disappeared behind us... forever.

[Silence. They park at an oasis. They listen to the quiet evening. Eventually, they get out and go for a stroll.]

JACK: My old friend, AMINA. The most precious gift you bring? It is your mind. But more than that, it is your excellent optimism. I like it. I wish it were more contagious.

GNOME 3: Look at her! She does seem to have the happiest light, somehow!

JACK: With the most mature reflections, to boot. (AMINA blows JACK a kiss. VERONIQUE hisses.)

GNOME 2: O God, it is hard to be around such old fucking companions.

AMINA and JACK: What do you mean, 'old'?

VERONIQUE: (glowering at GNOME 2) What do you mean, 'fucking' companions?

GNOME 2: O, I didn't mean 'old' old, I mean... I meant your 'long experience' rubs off on us and, er, it makes us wish to emulate your nobility! (JACK and AMINA laugh.)

JACK: Nice save, GNOME. And thank you.

AMINA: We shall play... and play together yet! (She winks at JACK, and very casually begins to unbutton her robe.) Or I am not the hot sorceressssssss...

[As if it were too hot, AMINA peels the top of her robe down and ties it around her waist. She is wearing only a black lacey brassiere underneath. JACK's mouth drops. GNOME 3 tries to crawl under AMINA's robe.]

JACK: (trying to distract himself, talking to GNOME 2) Old, huh? Not too damn old, yet, believe you me. (He goes back to making out, extra passionately, with VERONIQUE.)

[SCENE V. Nighttime, and the five principals are passing the hookah around an outdoor village tobacco café.]

AMINA: (Smoking) Thank you, also, wee ones. And have you noticed all this? (She indicates the Milky Way.) All this staggering display overhead? This is all god's alchemy.

GNOMES: (in unison) Alchemy! What's that?

AMINA: You do not know the alchimie. It is illegal. Because it is being like the Creator! It is the creating of new realities. Alchemy is when you commune with a substance. You wrestle with it: be it paint, or wood. Or golden starlight, or plastic, or gold. Or flowers carved from lead! Or even atomic energy. The substances of creation.

GNOME 3: This wrestling, it's not like real wrestling, right?

AMINA: It is 'only' the best test of a great humanist. Alchemists, artists, merge themselves, fearlessly... with anything in the universe! In order to shape the next universe!

GNOME 2: Right on, that sounds like a Tantric Truth. (Gives a high 5 to GNOME 3.)

AMINA: Alchemists are intellectual chameleons! And, guess what? I've seen a few. They have two heads!!

GNOME 1: (trying to picture them) No way... So when are these weird alchemists going to show up to lead our great city?

GNOME 3: Yeah! And who should we pray to in the meantime?

GNOME 2: Yeah! If the old Military world really is fading away, then who shall be our new god?

GNOMES: (in unison) WHO SHALL BE OUR NEW GOD?

[SCENE VI. Out in the silent desert, the morning is warming up nicely. GNOMES 1 & 2 are playing a dumbek and a djembe—slowly at first. The ritualistic, ponderous beat opens up other worlds. AMINA and VERONIQUE are in bikinis.]

JACK: Remember when you just showed up that night, AMINA?

AMINA: (She listens a while to the drumbeat and slowly slips into trance.) I do remember... the beat.

I remember.

I remember the wounded also...

I remember.

Oh how I remember. (moodily standing) How I recall the tears of Great Spirit Eagle! (She pauses, then pacing.) Set free, inside me, all around me! At a holographic ceremony! beneath a pyramid (She begins belly-dancing) I burst into an out-of-body flight! I left the painful flesh behind! I headed off into the astral, with my ghostly eagle guide. (VERONIQUE stands and joins her, dancing.) And high over the great seas and cosmic dimensions we soared! We wore glorious brown feathers as we rose so high above the dancing sunlit waves! The sparkling, the dazzling waves. Yet there were tears in my eyes, JACK. For I knew, above all, that my Yankee lover and his nightmares would be leaving me soon. How my heart broke. But somehow I kept flying, flying, up and away!

[The GNOMES are so impressed, they stop the beat and break her trance by applauding.]

THE GNOMES: Up and away Junior Birdman!

[A jet suddenly screams overhead, very low to the ground.]

JACK: No peace for the wicked. Bastards got no sense of timing.

GNOME 1: Bastards! Hey. We are trained pilots, but WE are still not being allowed to fly. When do we get to fly? You are an old pilot, JACK, can't you put in a good word for us?

VERONIQUE: He prides himself on how many missions he has flown. A seasoned veteran must have some clout.

JACK: As the winds of sand blow through his OLD, OLD blood. (He gets up in GNOME 1's face.) But it's a whole NEW Age d-d-d-down here, kid. (He begins pounding the djembe) On hard, f-f-f-financial ground! It's not about lives. It's about who runs the bank. Come on ladies, don't stop dancing! Come on!

GNOME 2: (pissy) JACK FARR makes sure that JACK FARR gets to keep flying. Fine. Leave us on the ground. Face that eastern star for us, brother!

GNOME 1: What other hope will all the little people have? (GNOME 1 takes over the djembe from JACK without missing a beat.)

JACK: (Whispering into GNOME 2's ear) Actually, I weep for you, you novice fliers, trapped below, waiting.

[There is laughter. Suddenly a bomb explodes in the mid-distance. The party banter stops cold. A long silence.]

VERONIQUE: Suicide bomb? Someone stepped on a landmine?

GNOME 1: Bloody west winds shall ever claw our backs!

GNOME 3: Well before it's too late, let's live, I say! Let's get drunk! Let's boogie! Shake it!

[The drummers strike up a faster dance beat.]

VERONIQUE: These still young fliers that you are training, you shall have to forgive their enthusiasm.

JACK: Oh, actually, I like their 'tude. Why else would I even put up with them? Can't be for the money. It reminds me of when I also felt enthusiasm.

[SCENE VII. Near the same location, but later in the day.]

AMINA: Your poor ole war stories. Why reminisce? Do it later, when these GNOMES are gray-haired, and grounded for good.

VERONIQUE: I don't much feel like a party, JACK. Time hasn't yet healed this particular WAR saga.

AMINA: This evil status drama. Of course. Still. I am AMINA, I am young, I am here, alive! And I do like to party. With sophisticated nobles. And even with their attractive friends.

VERONIQUE: Do you? Well now. As we all project Honesty and Truth towards each other, who knows what we might feel? A warmer sharing?

AMINA: A returning to our own hearts. Touché, Ms. VERONIQUE. I appreciate your comment. Not to mention your sexy bikini.

VERONIQUE: (Taking AMINA's hand.) Likewise! We don't have to hate.

JACK: And soon all can be had! (He swigs from the perennial whiskey bottle.) Cheap and good, eh? (He throws a rough arm around AMINA's shoulder, and the other arm around VERONIQUE. The three laugh.)

GNOMES: (to each other) All can be had?? Without bags of gold?

GNOME 3: No military god ever taught us to share like that.

JACK: That's because air force generals have no actual conscience, you see. About what's really important in life...

GNOME 1: And they do pay us poorly. Pay us with contempt. While they live in expensive account up on their hills. (He spits.)

VERONIQUE: Don't you worry about the silly old generals. Those truths that they bow to? They're very old school.

AMINA: (Dusk has descended.) They bow to tombs, tombs of heroes, tombs of the dead. They worship the dead, you see! All in the name of victory. They are necromancers, alas. Not alchemists. Yet they rule the cities.

VERONIQUE: But we are here now, and excited to be surviving!

AMINA: Such a healing and ecstatic evening it shall be!

JACK: (tipsy) Getting' jiggy wid it, with both my lay-deees...

VERONIQUE: Ha ha, let's all do a ring-around-the-rosies!

AMINA: Joining hands like Hopis! (The five of them whirl in a fast circle together.)

GNOME 1: Bid farewell to the harsh spirit sun!

GNOME 2: We will fly f-f-f-f-faster than b-b-bullets from a gun! (The GNOMES all fall down. The circle breaks apart amid laughter, except for JACK.)

JACK: (To GNOME 2) You do not mock my st-st-stammer, you pest. (A bit too seriously, to all the GNOMES) Don't you get it? America is on your side! And I am no longer your boss, OK? We are all equals under the skin. But! (Pause. Confidentially) I am certainly not your B-B-BITCH either. GOT IT?

VERONIQUE: Temper, temper, Jack.

GNOME 3: No tempers allowed. Big money fighting never stops because of tempers.

JACK: FUCK all these prohibitions, and rules and religions! (Yelling to the rulers) And down with your sacred bl-bl-bloodlines! (He punches his fist into the air.) Fuck your sacred LAWS and your sacred bloodlines, you fucking c-c-control freaks!

VERONIQUE: Do not turn into a raging American hypocrite, JACK.

GNOME 2: Still, if there are no demonic overlords, then there would not be any devilish underlings!

GNOME 3: No freaking underlings first, THEN no demonic overlords after...

AMINA: One way or the other, no more necromancers on the wing!

VERONIQUE: No more bloody sacrificing!

GNOME 1: No more draining sacrifices, no, not today!

GNOME 2: No more freedom sacrifices, no, no we ain't gonna pay!

GNOME 3: We ain't gonna pay! We don't wanna die that way!

GNOME 1: Free from the Federal Reserve and their war taxation devices, yay!

GNOME 3: No way, we ain't gonna pay!

GNOME 2: Free from the World Bank, hooray!

GNOME 1: ... and its slow failure to rebuild our cities, hey!

JACK: Quit yer whining and show some gratitude.

AMINA: Come on, JACK, do you want to shimmy or not? Laugh with us! Walk like an E-gyptian. Dance, dance, dance!

[They dance to the drums into the evening until they are exhausted. Then they collapse and try to catch their breaths.]

AMINA: I have a beautiful idea. Let us trek over to the Ziggurat. Let us go climb the pyramid of UR! Babylon is breath-taking from the top! Trust me. You will see absolutely everything up there! (She winks.) Can you handle that?

[They climb into the car and ride merrily away towards the Ziggurat.]

[SCENE VIII. In the temple atop the pyramid of UR. The GNOMES can't quite see over the top of the stone railings.]

GNOME 2: What a view!

GNOME 3: Up in here, even the stars seem closer!

AMINA: Don't be so mesmerized by elsewhere, JACK. (She places his hand on her ass and begins moving it up her body and then between her breasts.) Despite the crosswinds, eagles have nonetheless been inching their way higher and a-higher! (The GNOMES start jumping up like dogs, trying to sniff at her ass.) What is this annoying updraft, eeeee! (Gesticulating wildly, trying to brush off the GNOMES.)

VERONIQUE: I suppose you wish to share my man, do you?

AMINA: (squatting down before JACK) I wish to serve you both, actually.

GNOME 1: Watch out for the engine of our powerful sky-god! It's huge!

AMINA: I meant eagles of thought. (She runs her fingers all over JACK's body. Veronique watches intently.) Darting and dodging. Sometimes gli-i-iding off into many different possibilities. Into different dimensions. New chambers of time. Both hands exploring upon various winds—

GNOME 3: AMINA, you are the light in Life!

AMINA: (She now turns and runs her fingers all over VERONIQUE's body.) Savoring new, mad, fresh, windy flavors! You might find yourself also flying, through unprecedented areas... (AMINA exposes VERONIQUE's fine breasts.) ... all over the globe. (She kisses VERONIQUE's nipple.)

GNOME 1: Who's gonna kiss ME? Watching them make me feel so dirty.

GNOME 2: They got me climbing down into the core of my oldest memories. I feel so ugly down in there.

GNOME 3: I feel too short.

AMINA: I can't be with you GNOMES, or any soldiers like you... in case you slay me. (Laughs sarcastically.) Understand?

JACK: Understand! Suddenly we're in fu-fu-future total recall! Hold that look of shock, kiddies...

[AMINA, VERONIQUE & JACK begin undoing each other's clothing.]

AMINA: Our minds wander, do they not?

VERONIQUE: My eyes wander too, I admit it.

JACK: I myself have wandered. Among strange sciences and bizarre souls. (To the GNOMES) And I have wondered sometimes: how some survive, against the odds? Tempting fate by following me around all the time until one night in their sleep they brutally die because they didn't know when to get lost!

VERONIQUE: Hush JACK. (She cracks up.) Future freedom! B-but soon all our horizons better open wide, yes? (She spreads AMINA's thighs.)

AMINA: We are big girls! Big appetites. Big desires.

VERONIQUE: Big panthers.

AMINA: You want to taste my cat essence?

JACK: (To VERONIQUE) Holy cow! She wants you to spin a yarn with your t-t-t-tongue. Get a new per-cep-tion of the love ques-tion. (VERONIQUE touches AMINA's body.)

AMINA: (To JACK) You, too. Come here, deeper into my world, JACK. (She puts JACK's fingers into her pussy, then whispers into VERONIQUE's ear.) It is good to feel something, no? Better than to feel nothing. Please fondle me, JACK.

JACK: We feeel that the vibe among us is ultra sweet.

VERONIQUE: Yes... although...

JACK: So how good is 'good' gonna get, you foxy ladies? It seems that t-t-t-timing is the key question, isn't it?

VERONIQUE: Actually I don't know about all this. Perhaps another night would be better? Maybe after a big evacuation... I might be more comfortable going downtown then.

AMINA: What is wrong, VERONIQUE? Do not think because I am poor I am dirty down there. Trust me, it won't kill you.

JACK: Yeah, I know I wanna mack on some tasty yoni.

VERONIQUE: (Deadpan) I can't wait... (mumbles) I hope it's clean.

JACK: Girlfriend wants to mack some yoni, girlfriend wants to mack poonani, alright!

GNOMES: (Acting like frat kids, barking etc.) Show us, show us, show us.

AMINA: (Shouting) Sultanness, forget them. I want to feel your power! (whispers) Sultan, hear me... deeply... pining for you! (She pulls out JACK's cock and begins to suck him.)

JACK: We're all on the same page. Let's synchronize watches, he he. (Now he goes down on VERONIQUE.)

VERONIQUE: The breathing of Time... together.

AMINA: Our adult pacing... together.

JACK: Gonna be one holy fleshpile, fuck yeah! (The girls roll their eyes. They give in to the pleasure a while.)

AMINA: Atop this ziggurat, with mother moon a-spinning, like a healthy recording of love, we pray for an exotic tale, one with ever-expanding pages of joy. Hot, wet joy... (She releases JACK's erection and turns to treat VERONIQUE.)

VERONIQUE: (loosening up) JACK you're not really planning to bang us, here, right now, in front of all these GNOMES, are you? Maybe 'later'-

AMINA: Later? Come on, VERONICA. This is now.

[VERONIQUE joins AMINA in giving JACK a blowjob for a while.

AMINA: (to VERONIQUE) I want you now. I don't know anything about 'later.' For I might be like desert wind under wings. Here and (cooly) gone like a black panther, gone like... lost chances into the night... (She gets up and starts drifting away. The DRUMS stop. However, a GNOME continues to play a BAMBOO FLUTE. VERONIQUE tip-toes after AMINA.)

VERONIQUE: I do want you too. It's just... I need to feel comfortable. I need a certain... finesse.

JACK: (behind AMINA) Fuck subtlety! Screw artistry! Oh yeah. (He blows tenderly on VERONIQUE's face.) Subtle. (VERONIQUE shivers.)

AMINA: No more mack-some-yoni attitude.

JACK: It's all so VIVID in my head, what can I say!

[The ladies break out into broad grins and start kissing: a seemingly never-ending kiss. After some time, Jack busts in.]

JACK: I'm not sure I should be tolerating-rating-rating-rating (While speaking, he keeps looking from one woman to the other. AMINA smacks his face to make him stop.) Oi.

AMINA: Chill, big warrior. (to VERONIQUE) Tsk, tsk, impatient men!

JACK: Tsk, tsk, inconsistent women! (To himself) How I hate to love 'em. (He turns away, arms folded.)

VERONIQUE: JACK. Don't pout. Lose your way now with us, JACK.

AMINA: Yes. With a peaceful vibration
ommmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmm

(She gives him a 'hummer.')

JACK: (He can't fake that he's not sulking) Aw, shucks. You yummy sexy goddesses, I am going to have to sex you DOWN!

VERONIQUE: No, I am going to sex YOU both down. Such a good boy and a hot brown lover deserve it. (She rides JACK'S cock for a while, while AMINA watches.)

AMINA: So you see? (To JACK's face) Hard? (To VERONIQUE's face) or soft? It doesn't matter to me! Peace or rebellion! Love or fantasy, I want to be creating everything!

VERONICA: (catching her breath) You have total love, all the time? For your predations? I mean, your erotic creations?

AMINA: Just obey well my instructions, gorgeous angel. Feel the rhythm. Breathe with me. JACK is getting hotter. Catching up with you. Oh I adore being the budding director!

GNOME 1: She's no director. She weaves stories while she works it!

GNOME 3: VERONIQUE re-enacts temple rituals while she jerks it!

GNOME 2 : They make my jealousy memories persevere, curse it!

[JACK makes love to VERONIQUE until she begins to climax...]

AMINA: So start praying. To Allah, or to the director, or to what you will. No one will save us now, my lovers.

[JACK makes love to AMINA until she climaxes...The threesome rest awhile, then continue to make love atop the pyramid of UR. Hours go by. The GNOMES all pass out, but the three lovers are relentless. Finally, dawn cracks the horizon. The three are snuggled together, dozing on the stone. It is very silent, very present. JACK abruptly vaults awake from a nightmare.]

JACK: Nooooooo!

AMINA: What is it?

JACK: I'm I'm I'm h-h-h-h-h-haunted: look, he's still there!

VERONIQUE: Who's still where?

JACK: Can't you see him? Me! My ghost! Standing right over there by the pillar! P-p-plain as an intergalactic hologram! Holy shit! M-m-m-my own ghost! (He throws his bottle at the spot, and it explodes against the wall behind it.)

GHOST VOICEOVER: Jack. Murderer. Jack. Foreigner.

VERONIQUE: You're still drunk, honey. I see nothing.

JACK: I haven't died and gone to heaven! Oh God, I'm just a walking zombie in a desert storm, trapped and going n-n-n-nowhere! I can never ever get out of this Babylon! I'm going to die here!

GHOST VOICEOVER: Jack. Murderer. Jack. Foreigner.

JACK: I'm no m-m-m-mur... Oh, God, Oh God oh hell... I've got to get myself out of this damn country. What I wouldn't trade for some sweet peace of mind!

AMINA/ VERONIQUE: (aghast) What????

AMINA: Oh no, you do not, JACK. You don't leave me again.

VERONIQUE: Please, don't do that JACK. We only just began exploring!

[Jack walks offstage.]

AMINA:

Oh, you traitor! You... you man! I should have known! Oh, we have not even started the heartbreak yet...

EPILOGUE - a few ideas about the second fall of Babylon.

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Babylon is the underground Middle Eastern empire. The one that you no longer see in your atlas. Underneath the surface of memory, however, the Babylonian Empire stretches from Egypt north to Turkey, from Saudi Arabia through Iran up to Soviet Georgia.

In the middle of the Babylonian Empire are Iraq and Israel, Syria, Lebanon and Palestine. A collective memory of autocracy, and it is clearly falling apart.

Babylon fell once before, you know, around 600 B.C. Can you feel that kingdom crumbling again?

You see, Babylon's over-extended empire has a predicament. It has become addicted. Through time, it has become addicted to a cycle of war. Extreme control causes extreme pain that provokes extreme, righteous anger. Extreme revenge provokes extreme paranoia and rigid control. Which is suffocating to the point of pain, and starts the cycle once again.

This cycle is seriously sado-masochistic.

Addiction, in fact, IS the idolatrous god of the Babylonian overlords. This, their one almighty god requires not only religious/ethnic enslavement of their imaginations as well as the economic colonization of their bodies, but also self-abasement of their souls. [With forced smiles, too.]

Yet we ALL know what humanity really needs. Equality and liberation! Love and pleasure! Accomplishment and a deep appreciation of our planet! All these things, given and received.

So this play, *Beyond Desert Storms*, might help to heal this moment in history. This work was born out of a word collaboration I had with a certain Max El-Saud, an affable black American Muslim that I met in Venice Beach.

Max told me he was “vertically integrated”, i.e. he had open ACCESS to all of America’s strata. He maintained contacts from the lowest echelons of street people to the highest doorways of money and power and on, into the secret governments around the world.

This access gave him a unique perspective on life—in particular, on the topic of Art.

Max told stories. Was he sticking to the truth, or was he a brilliant 007 impersonator/production manager? He definitely had both a light side and a dark side.

Yet his undisguised passion for the Arts was inspiring. He and I agreed that the Theatrical Arts can be a device for social activism and even for sexual awakening. It can be a harbinger of spiritual commitment and a bearer of much-needed clarity.

When I began the process of creating this work, I tried interweaving Max’s poetry and my own poetry, DNA style, into dialogues.

Later I rounded out the cast with other persons. Character development grew out of various symbolic archetypes.

To have maximum impact, I picture this play-ritual should be rehearsed in Europe, and then be performed on location, in Babylon, Mesopotamia. Using Saddam’s now empty palaces and the Ziggurat of Ur.

Time to spread the word: create your own realities, ladies and gentlemen! But for now, enjoy the tricky stage we have to go through.

* * * *

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