

RAFIL KROLL-ZAIDI: A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE END OF TIME

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Stills from the video *Jewel*, by Hassan Khan, on view last month at The Ungovernables, the New Museum Triennial, in New York City. *Jewel* features two men performing a dance scored by Khan based on interactions he witnessed in the streets of Cairo.

Why was he naked? He wasn't in the habit of sleeping in the nude. The Investigator felt so ashamed that he immediately hid himself, head and body, under the bedcovers. All the same, he couldn't stay there indefinitely. He rolled on the bed, wrapping the sheet around him, got to his feet on the mattress, and started looking for his clothes. There was no trace of his undershirt, his undershorts, his shoes, his shirt, his trousers, his suit jacket, or his suitcase. Vanished, evaporated, gone. And yet they had to be there somewhere.

The Investigator tried to remember where he

possible—as high as his pumy muscles would permit—and wedge the night table under it, and then, if he still had the strength, to raise the bed even higher, jamming the chair between the night table and the bed frame. In the end, the bed was standing nearly vertically on one side, and the bathroom door was free.

He could open it.

To his great astonishment, he found the bathroom a model of refined luxury. He'd never have suspected that such a grandiose space, in



have been built into the walls—came music that mingled the cries of exotic birds, a gently stroked tambourine, soft brasses mimicking the sound of small coins falling on a stone floor, and flutes simultaneously shrill and mellow. In the center of the room, a small fountain threw up a stream of water whose blithe gurgling and steamy vapor sent the Investigator into a reverie of distant seaports of black and naked female slaves, of palm fronds wicked to cool his brow, of big ships anchored in the harbor, of their ebony Moors—

scent, but his cold was so severe that he could smell nothing at all. He settled for reading the labels and decided on *Maure Lilac*.

He let the sheet fall. Once again totally naked, but not feeling the slightest embarrassment on that account, the Investigator poured the entire contents of the soap bottle into his hands and rubbed the liquid into his remaining hair and over his face and body. Then he turned on the two faucets in the shower, and at once a generous stream of water rained down,

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into a shower that scalded him, running until obliged him to breathe through his mouth, at an elevated rate, so that he looked like a goldfish imprisoned in a bowl. A boiling hot shower, or even an icy-cold one, wouldn't do him any harm, he thought. It would give him a boost, stimulate his mind, invigorate his body. All he had to do was get into the bathroom!

Whipped in his sheet, which gave him the air of a short, round-bellied Roman senator, the Investigator thought awhile before coming up with a plan he put into action without delay. The plan called for him to lift up the bed as high as

possible—just as high as his puny muscles would permit—and wedge the night table under it, and then, if he still had the strength, to raise the bed even higher, jamming the chair between the night table and the bed frame. In the end, the bed was standing nearly vertically on one side, and the bathroom door was free.

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served no useful purpose, none at all, whereas cold, precise investigative reports written to give an account of proven facts, to narrow a search for truth, and to draw valid conclusions struck him as a more intelligent—indeed, as the only valid—way of using language and serving humanity. How ill and unserved must be, that the mere sight of an opulent bathroom could set him daydreaming about languorous negresses and palm wine, oriental pastries and belly dances!

A set of crystal shelves held bottles of multi-colored bath salts and liquid soap. The Investigator opened a few and tried to inhale their

fumes almost all the way, waited, and then ventured again to stick his foot into the cascade. It was even wiser! He felt as though molten lead was being poured onto his flesh. He abandoned the shower for the bathtub, turned on the tap, watched clouds of steam rise immediately from the porcelain block, and he didn't dare put his foot in. He made do with basking one hand close to the water and determined that it was flowing out at an atrociously high temperature into the tub, too. His only remaining choices were the washbasin and the bidet. He hurried over to them and turned on the faucets, mixing a little hot water with a great