

A New Dress for Mona

by
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Based on the life of Mona Mahmudnizhad (1966–1983)

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ACT I, SCENE 1 - MONA'S HOME

[A soft light illumines MONA, alone.]

MONA

Iran, Iran--Once the pearl of the world, exalted among nations. You lit the Sacred Fire. You rebuilt the Holy Temple. Placed gifts before a newborn King. You took on the Prophet's mantle and embraced His family. Iran, my Iran--what has happened to you now? You raise up your enemies and mow down your friends. You lock up wisdom and lift the foolish. You reward thieves and sacrifice your heros. How far you have fallen, Iran... and how ever will you rise again?

[A night bird is heard. Lights come up. We see a large rug, a window frame, a tape recorder on a table, some candles and matches, plus a large poster board, paint, photos, scissors, and other crafts. MONA is now on the rug and plays a recording of herself chanting. She lights three candles as she speaks the following names.]

MONA

Ehsán Mehdizádeh. Sattár Khushkhú. Yadu'lláh Vahdat.

[As she lights each candle, three blindfolded men are illuminated upstage one by one.]

MONA

Friends, what can I offer up for you? I'd say my life, but I don't think God is interested in that. So I will paint you a picture.

[She starts to paint. An execution scene starts to play out around her. The three men are in light, but the GUARDS are not. They wear masks covering their mouths and noses.]

GUARD 1

Traitors! Heretics! You are to be executed now because of your crimes against Faith and Country. What do you have to say?

MR. KHUSHKHU

O God! Take me!

MR. VAHDAT

Guard! Come.

[GUARD 1 motions a younger guard, ARAM, towards MR. VAHDAT.]

GUARD 1

Go.

[He goes.]

MR. VAHDAT

You think I'm a traitor? My name is Vahdat. I was a Colonel in the army.

GUARD 2

You were a colonel, then you became a... what was it?

GUARD 1

(taunting)

Auxiliary Board Member!

GUARD 2

And for that you die! Plus the rest of you!

MR. KHUSHKHU

O God!

MR. VAHDAT

Take off my blindfold. I'll watch the bullets come.

[ARAM looks back to GUARD 1, who gestures him on. He removes the blindfold.]

MR. VAHDAT

(softly)

Just don't aim for my heart. That does not belong to you.

MR. KHUSHKHU

O God!

GUARD 2

Be quiet!

EHSAN

Guard, take mine off too. I will also welcome the bullets.

[ARAM, with clearance, goes to EHSAN and loosens his blindfold. The GUARDS are edgy, as if they're being mocked.]

GUARD 1

Okay!

[ARAM turns to go.]

EHSAN

Wait. Give me your hand.

[EHSAN kisses ARAM's hand. MONA's vision of the execution seems to pause and we see this detail disturbs her.]

ARAM & MONA

Why did you do that?

[The execution resumes.]

GUARD 2

No use begging for mercy! It's time to die!

GUARD 1

(to a bewildered ARAM)

Get back here, stupid!

[ARAM returns.]

GUARD 1

Ready!

MR. KHUSHKHU

We thought the days of the martyrs had ended.

GUARD 1

Aim!

GUARD 2

Aim for the heart!

[The GUARDS rain bullets on the men. ARAM is unable to raise his gun. Mona's MOTHER has entered.]

MOTHER

Mona?

[MONA has dipped a paintbrush into red paint and now brushes it liberally on the picture she is making.]

MOTHER

My God, girl, what are you doing?

MONA

Remembering the martyrs.

MOTHER

We don't know that it's true, Mona. That woman who brought the news, she's a very emotional type.

They'll run you up and down the wall if you let them. Watch the rug. Look, your father has gone to find out what really happened. So until he comes, just put it outside your mind.

[MONA dips her hand in the red paint and begins to smear it over her picture.]

MOTHER

Now you're just trying to provoke me. Let's get your clothes ready for tomorrow. You haven't worn this green dress in a while, does it even fit now you're filling out?

(No response.)

What color are you going to wear?

MONA

Black.

MOTHER

(takes a deep breath)

Don't you have homework?

MONA

I have an essay on how Islam brings freedom into our lives.

MOTHER

And?

[MONA looks at her as if the answer is self-evident.]

MOTHER

So talk to them about true Islam, not the regime, but the teachings of Muhammad: pray to God, give to the poor...

MONA

Why do you think Ehsan kissed the guard's hand?

MOTHER

We don't know that's true.

MONA

Who would make up such an odd detail?

MOTHER

Someone who wants attention! When people want attention, they embellish stories...

(seeing the photos)

You cut up all our pictures? Okay that's it.

(blows out the candles)

You need to just stop this and go to bed.

MONA

Mom, our friends have given their lives. What small sacrifice can we make?

[She lights a match to relight the candles. The FATHER is at the door.]

FATHER

Allah-u-abha.

MONA

Dad.

[She blows out her match.]

MOTHER

Tell us something good.

FATHER

(after a beat)

They're free.

MOTHER

What? What do you mean they're free? Free-free?

MONA

They're gone, Mom.

MOTHER

What?

(to FATHER)

Then why didn't you say that? O God! I don't believe they killed them.

(Goes to leave.)

I don't know why you said that, Jamshid.

[She is gone. MONA has lain down on the carpet. The FATHER comes to her. They are quiet a while. He wipes her hand, caresses her hair.]

MONA

You're next, aren't you?

FATHER

We don't know that.

MONA

After Mr. Vahdat, you're next in line.

FATHER

Maybe things will calm down.

[She hears the gunfire.]

MONA

(without emotion, at first)

So we're just supposed to lie down and let them roll right over us, mow us down one by one because we're a peaceful people they can scapegoat, we don't just not put up a fight, we welcome death, we welcome the bullets, we kiss their hands...

FATHER

Don't go too far now.

MONA

I'm not kissing anyone's hand.

[She kisses his. He strokes her hair.]

FATHER

Don't talk about this with your mother, okay?

MOTHER

(entering)

What?

FATHER

(smiles gently)

We have a funeral to arrange.

ACT I, SCENE 2 - MONA'S SCHOOL

[A school for girls. A STUDENT fervidly reads aloud her essay. MONA is drawing a picture. Nearby is her friend, FARAH.]

STUDENT

Heaven opens its gates and calls out "Enter me!" Blood gathers on the ground and calls out "Avenge me!" The Revolution gathers momentum and calls out "Serve me!" Islam is the tree planted by Heaven watered by the blood of Revolution and its fruit calls out "Eat me!"

[Some students giggle at this, including FARAH. She turns to MONA, who is intent on her drawing.]

FARAH

(Quietly.)

You're not drawing flowers today.

(MONA shakes her head.)

Is that you?

(MONA nods her head.)

You have fire in your eyes.

MONA

So watch out.

FARAH

What's going on?

MONA

(changing subject)

Do you have your essay?

FARAH

Yeah. My brother wrote it.

MONA

I thought you were going to write this one yourself.

FARAH

I tried--swear to God, but the topic is so boring, so unrelated to my life. Just get me through this school year, and I'll live a hundred percent honest life.

(she smiles)

TEACHER (UNSEEN)

Farah, would you like to read your essay?

[FARAH stands to read.]

FARAH

"'The fruit of Islam is liberty and freedom of conscience, but you must taste it to understand.' Our great leader, Ayatu'lláh Khomeini, has brought us back from the dangerous path of westernization the Shah was pursuing. We are returned now to the path of Muhammad, the Imams, and the law of Qur'an. The West teaches that sweetness is found in boundless freedom, in material possessions, in satisfying the appetite, in alcohol, drugs, sex...

(She grimaces.)

Here they offer us a fruit that looks sweet, but tastes bitter, as they spread around the world this lie they call liberty when they only seek to enslave other nations in order to gain more themselves. But here is true sweetness, like a bite of ripe pomegranate: to submit to God's decree. May the righteous live forever with seventy-two virgins... And may the infidels burn until they turn black as coal."

(a beat.)

Sorry I got a little carried away at the end there.

TEACHER

Mona?

[MONA stands. She is timid at first, but soon grows impassioned.]

MONA

"Freedom. Of all the great words in this great wide world, freedom is the greatest. Throughout history, people have craved liberty. They've written about it, sung about it, fought for it, died for it. And yet, some men,...

[We see, in the background, the silhouette of a religious cleric, MULLA, ascending a pulpit.]

MONA (CONT'D)

... out of some perverse element of their soul that craves power and control, have insisted on denying liberty to others. They became like animals, like wolves in their pursuit, hunting down helpless gazelles, and they kill them, and roll in their blood, and their eyes roll back in their heads and so are blind to the evil they perpetrate...

TEACHER

I think that's enough.

MONA

(facing off)

Why do you deny liberty to Baha'is?

[Silence.]

TEACHER

Sit down, Mona.

MONA

We are your countrymen, the same blood. Don't we have the right to live and believe what we will?

TEACHER

Stop right there.

MONA

What are you afraid of? That we'll steal away your freedom?

TEACHER

Students, turn your backs and put your fingers in your ears.

MONA

Or that we'll steal this veil you're hiding behind?!

TEACHER

Farah, you too! Right this minute.

[The TEACHER is now there, just outside of the lighted area. FARAH reluctantly turns her back on MONA.]

MONA

(with fire in her eyes)

Throw down that veil!

[She throws down her paper. The STUDENT who first read her essay traps it beneath her foot. Jump to next scene.]

ACT I, SCENE 3 - A MOSQUE

[The Islamic call to prayer is heard. The Shí'ih Muslim cleric, MULLA, from the previous scene speaks, addressing a congregation.]

MULLA

The Revolution is triumphant! The light of Islam is spreading throughout the land! Praise be to God! He has sent our supreme leader, Ayatu'llah Khomeini, and has cast down the tyrant Shah. Many years we waited, many years while corruption festered, while he suppressed us and squandered the wealth of our nation on his passions and western friends. How does it feel now, Muhammad Reza? Now you are king over a few cubic meters of foreign dirt? (Pause.) Let us talk about a quiet corruption, let us talk about Bahá'í. Now Baha'is don't fight, and they don't force. They smile, and they help, and they trickle in like oil into your well water, like a potion in your tea. This corruption must be eradicated from this land. Where is the faithful believer who will assist me? For this is not only a revolution, but the Judgment, when the righteous and the sinners must be separated, and when those in the middle--who fail to take a side--will be hacked in two by the sword of God.

[The crowd chants "Allah-u-akbar" (God is great!) with exuberance. The MULLA comes and joins GUARD 1, who attends as if protecting the MULLA as he walks through a crowd. The MULLA points out a woman.]

MULLA

See how beautiful this woman is? See how her beauty acts on you? How it starts bringing up your desire, driving your thoughts toward sexuality? This is the power of the devil. Not to say she's the devil, exactly, but her allure the devil uses to lead us astray. This is why we make hijab universally applicable. Now it's true most women don't get the fire going, but here in Shiraz, there are enough girls, a man can't walk in the street without seeing them with the short skirts and T-shirts. It's a good thing I have a robe like this, but a plain-clothes brother on the street...

GUARD 1

I think she wants to speak to you.

MULLA

(gestures him away)

Flee the devil.

[The GUARD exits. The MULLA is approached by a MOTHER and the STUDENT from the school scene. Both are shrouded in dark chadors and their voices cannot be heard.]

MULLA

Sister, I'm very happy you've come. This is your daughter, she must resemble more your husband. Of course, you can kiss my hand, but it's the Imam in me that accepts, other wise those lips

(She kisses his hand.)

... could give a horn to a holy man.

(The daughter hands him Mona's paper.)

What is this?

(Looks and listens.)

And the name of this Baha'i girl? Hmm. I'll certainly look into that. You know, daughter, you should work in the company of men, your appearance is highly conducive to an atmosphere of chastity.

(Another kiss for the hand.)

Another kiss then? Oh, and the daughter. Well, okay.

[The two are gone. GUARD 1 returns with ARAM.]

MULLA

These Shirazi women!

GUARD 1

Your eminence, you remember my cousin, Aram?

MULLA

He looks like he needs some sleep. What's going on with these Baha'is? What happened at the cemetery today?

GUARD 1

(caught off guard)

Nothing, things were fine, we were in control.

(a beat)

People get emotional sometimes.

MULLA

(unsatisfied, to ARAM)

Were you there?

ARAM

Yes, sir.

[EHSAN, the martyr from Scene 1, has entered, now as an apparition. He stares at ARAM.]

MULLA

And?

ARAM

I was just trying to keep calm.

MULLA

So they were making trouble?

GUARD 1

We had it under control.

MULLA

Not you.

(to ARAM)

They were angry?

ARAM

They were mourning. Some were angry.

MULLA

The Baha'is?

[EHSAN has opened his coat to reveal blood.]

ARAM

I couldn't tell Baha'is from Muslims.

MULLA

You can always tell.

(points to his own eyes)

Would you like me to teach you how?

ARAM

I like to learn.

MULLA

Oh, he's slippery. That wasn't what I asked you.

GUARD 1

He's a poet-type, sir.

MULLA

A poet? So, Hafez, let's hear one.

ARAM

My memory's not so good.

MULLA

So compose one. I'll give you a subject: the Baha'is. Who was it you were following?

[EHSAN has come close to ARAM.]

ARAM

Ehsan.

MULLA

Last name, I mean.

ARAM

Mehdizadeh.

MULLA

Good memory. So describe him--no poem necessary, just a word.

[EHSAN takes ARAM's hand to kiss.]

GUARD 1

Say something, Aram. He was a spy, a traitor.

MULLA

(to GUARD 1)

Shut up.

(to ARAM)

Hafez?

ARAM

(after a pause)

Mystifying.

GUARD 1

(hits ARAM on the head)

Idiot!

MULLA

Shut up! Go bring me my rug. It's time for prayer.

[GUARD 1 goes to kiss the MULLA's hand, but he's waved away.]

MULLA

You live in your thoughts, don't you, young man? Yes, some of the Baha'is seem to embody remarkable virtue, whether forgiveness, courage... tolerance for pain. But true virtue is born of submission to God's will, you see?

[ARAM gestures as if he has heard and is considering the matter. He watches EHSAN move away.]

MULLA

Okay, Hafez, I'll be looking for a job for you, one we wouldn't want to waste on just any lughead.

[GUARD 1 is back with the prayer rug. The MULLA offers his hand in dismissal to ARAM, who goes to shake it. The MULLA is surprised, but not phased. When ARAM goes to pull away his hand, the MULLA holds it, twists it just so, looks it over.]

MULLA

Soft. What would people say if they saw that the Revolutionary Guard had such soft hands?

[The call to prayer has begun again. The MULLA goes into his preparations. GUARD 1 gives ARAM a look.]

ACT I, SCENE 4 - MONA'S HOME

[MONA and her MOTHER enter. The MOTHER with a dark chador, which she removes and folds up upon entering.]

MOTHER

Your father already has so much on his mind with the martyrs needing burial and the guards refusing us going in to the cemetery... It's only because he pleaded with that man that you weren't expelled.

MONA

You should have let them do it.

MOTHER

Are you so ungrateful? You're one of the few Baha'i children still in school.

MONA

What am I learning? Propaganda! It's not like I can go to university anyway.

MOTHER

Look, we are going to get through this. These mullas can't stay in power long. The people will see the violence and they'll say enough is enough.

MONA

We can't just wait to be rescued while they sweep into our homes and take what we love.

MOTHER

They won't. God won't let them.

MONA

God let them into Mr. Vahdat's home. Being a Baha'i is no protection--that goes for Dad too

MOTHER

Your father is going to be fine! People were mad they couldn't go pay their respects to the dead. The Muslims, I mean. They will push back...

MONA

In one hundred forty years, when have the people of this country ever stood up for us?

(a beat)

We have to sound the alarm, remind them that this is Iran, the land of Cyrus the Great, the founder of human rights! That's what I was standing up for today.

MOTHER

Did it work?

MONA

Did what work?

MOTHER

Your wake up call.

MONA

No, because the teacher made them put their fingers in their ears.

MOTHER

And this is what they will continue to do if we speak to them harshly.

MONA

What does God want us to do, Mom? If He just shows me the path, I'll go. I just don't understand why there has to be so much pain.

(waits for an answer)

MOTHER

Why are you looking at me?

[A knock. The door opens. It's Mona's sister, TARANEH, 23 and pregnant.]

MOTHER

Taraneh!

TARANEH

Hey, I got here as soon as I could.

MOTHER

You need to talk some sense into this sister of yours.

MONA

Ah, ah, ah, ah, ah....

[MONA goes right for TARANEH's belly. She kneels and touches.]

TARANEH

Hi darling.

MONA

(absorbed in TARANEH's belly)

I can't believe this is you, Taraneh. There's a little creation forming inside of you.

TARANEH

Yeah, I'm inflating like a balloon. God, I hope I can save my skin.

MONA

(in her own world, but not
leaving TARANEH's belly)

But imagine what the baby is going through, no idea where life is leading. Bahá'u'lláh says we're like the baby in the womb and the spiritual world is all around us. You know, like we're inside, hidden by this veil...

(indicates her belly)

All warm, we'd stay inside there forever.

TARANEH

All your meals delivered, I can't believe what food this kid orders, things I never would eat, but she wants it, she gets it.

MOTHER

She?

TARANEH

Did I say that? I keep telling myself not to.

(tears well up)

I don't even want a girl. I think Sírús's family wants a boy-- they won't say it, but they keep calling it a "he."

MOTHER

We need a boy in the family.

[MONA has her ear up to TARANEH's belly.]

TARANEH

What do you think, sweetie?

MONA

I'm listening.

(addresses the baby)

Who are you? Helloooo.... Hellooooo.....

[A shift where focus comes in on MONA and TARANEH's belly and off the MOTHER and TARANEH's actions. MONA sees a beautiful WOMAN IN WHITE.]

MONA

Who are you?

[The ceiling seems to open and light starts coming down--a glimmering of the possible.]

WOMAN IN WHITE

(with gentle authority)

Prepare yourself. Just like the expectant mother, just like the babe--prepare yourself.

MONA

For what?

[The WOMAN shrugs as if to say "what else?"]

MOTHER

Mona?

[Shift back to the physical plane.]

TARANEH

Ouch. Honey, you're squeezing a little tight there.

MONA

(coming back to herself)

Huh?

TARANEH

What's wrong? You see a ghost?

MONA

(standing)

No, I'm fine.

[MONA exits.]

MOTHER

What am I going to do with this girl? She's in her own world half the time, and who can blame her? This one is such a mess, but I'm really starting to worry. What if they come for your father? She's so attached to him. I catch them sometimes just staring at each other as if they're reading each other's minds. I think they don't want me to know how they're feeling, like it will crush me. It won't!

(She sits)

I don't know that we shouldn't get out of Iran altogether at least until this whole thing blows over.

TARANEH

Have you talked to Dad?

MOTHER

When do I see him? Anyway, he won't talk about it.

TARANEH

Where is he now?

MOTHER

Where is he ever? Out feeding the poor, healing the sick...

TARANEH

Mom.

MOTHER

I'm sorry, but what about us? And now I see Mona going the same way--you know she's going to this orphanage three times a week now, these tiny neglected kids call her "Mommy Mona," and she just melts. Then she comes home, the smell! I mean, that's fine, it's great, but the girl doesn't communicate with me! We never had that trouble, you and me, did we?

[MRS. KHUDAYAR, a neighbor, enters.]

MRS. KHUDAYAR

Well, are you coming?

TARANEH

Hello, Mrs. Khudayar.

MOTHER

Coming where?

TARANEH

The birthday party, Mom. I'll get Mona.
(exits)

MOTHER

I can't believe I forgot. What time? Wait til you hear...

MRS. KHUDAYAR

He's just about to cut the cake.

[REZA's voice is heard from the hall.]

REZA (O.S.)

Is she coming?

TARANEH

(having reentered)

Maybe a little later.

REZA

(poking his head in)

Why not now?

TARANEH

Happy birthday, Reza.

MOTHER

Mona has some thinking to do.

MRS. KHUDAYAR

Thinking, huh?

REZA

(exiting)

Fine.

MRS. KHUDAYAR

I keep telling him to get it out of his head, but listen to me? God help us, these little boys grow to be men.

TARANEH

Well, shall we get some cake?

MRS. KHUDAYAR

Well, well, Taraneh, look at you. Wait, wait.

(She feels her hair, hikes up
her skirt to look at her
ankles and legs, feels around
her stomach and chest, etc.
Then when the exam is over:)

Definitely a girl!

[They exit. MONA reenters, checks the door and peeks around where the WOMAN IN WHITE appeared. Finding nothing, she makes a decision and starts to set up her art supplies in a way reminiscent of the first scene. She plays her tape recorder, lights a candle and begins to paint.]

ACT I, SCENE 5 - MONA'S DREAM

[MONA is stretched out asleep. The WOMAN IN WHITE from the previous scene enters, radiant. A number of figures, SPIRITS, enter. ARAM is upstage center, a white shroud thrown over him. The WOMAN IN WHITE wakes MONA and brings her to her feet.]

WOMAN IN WHITE

I have something for you. A gift. But you must choose.

[As MONA orients herself, three SPIRITS with gift boxes come forward. The WOMAN IN WHITE gestures MONA to the first. MONA opens the box and pulls out a beautiful red dress.]

MONA

Ooh.

SPIRIT 1

Red. The final testimony, indisputable truth; blood spilled presents its own proof. Red is a fire, a lover, a warning. The sun descending has no finer adorning.

[MONA holds the dress up to herself. There is an instant scene shift to a girl being executed by hanging. MONA shudders and pushes the dress away.]

MONA

No!

[In an instant, the scene shifts back and that dress is whisked away. The WOMAN IN WHITE gestures MONA towards the 2nd box. MONA goes and pulls out a black dress of the same pattern.]

MONA

Lovely.

SPIRIT 2

Black. Wrapping itself about, the jealous lover douses all other color. Pupil of the eye, closed lid of night; black is nothing without light.

[She holds this dress up to herself. An instant scene shift where several people are suffering intolerably, from torture or deprivation. MONA pushes this one away as well.]

MONA

No, I don't want that one either.

[The scene shifts back, but MONA is hesitant to open the third box. The WOMAN IN WHITE smiles and opens it for her. She pulls out a blue dress.]

MONA

I like blue.

(She takes it, but hesitates to put it up to herself.)

But what is it?

SPIRIT 3

Blue is the beginning, sea and sky, renewal. A soul alone, a stone, a pool. Ripples and reflections that sparkle over faces, good deeds that light up darkened places.

[Here the WOMAN IN WHITE comes close and whispers in her ear. MONA hears, holds the dress up to herself.]

WOMAN IN WHITE

Do you want to remove the veil?

[MONA looks at her with all sincerity and nods. The WOMAN IN WHITE nods as well. All attention shifts to the shrouded ARAM. MONA walks up to him and with a breath pulls off the veil. An unworldly power and radiance rolls off him, and MONA is awestruck. All others look away out of reverence. MONA has dropped to her knees and stares.]

WOMAN IN WHITE

Enough!

[The dream is over. Lighting shift. All leave except ARAM and MONA, who tosses in sleep on the rug and cries out as if falling. Her FATHER is there at the door.]

FATHER

Honey?

(He goes to her.)

Wake up, sweetheart.

MONA

(waking, crying out)

Ah! Ah! Dad, Dad...

FATHER

It's okay, sweetie. It's just a dream.

MONA

Dad, I saw Him. I saw Him.

FATHER

It's okay...

MONA

I saw His face.

[ARAM has remained in the same place,
as if he's still in MONA's sight.]

ACT I, SCENE 6 - A CLOTHING SHOP OFF A BUSY STREET

[A SHOPKEEPER fiddles with a tape recorder that plays music by Dariush, a popular Iranian singer. He sings aloud to a sad, albeit Western-influenced song. MONA enters energetically, interrupting him.]

MONA

Salaam.

SHOPKEEPER

(wary, turning down the music.)

Salaam.

[MONA is on a mission, searching through the clothes. FARAH enters.]

FARAH

Mona, why didn't you wait up for me?

SHOPKEEPER

Salaam.

FARAH

Hi.

(To MONA.)

Are you still mad about the class?

(no response)

I'm sorry, but what was I supposed to do? Everyone was freaking out, looking at me with all this hate, and the teacher singled me out...!

SHOPKEEPER

Girls, we just got in some nice scarves...

MONA

No thank you.

FARAH

Look, if anyone should be mad, it should be me. You're the one who made a scene, and they all know I'm your friend.

(MONA looks at her.)

Got you to look.

(MONA looks away.)

Come on, don't be mad at me.

MONA

I'm not mad. If no one will stand up for us, even our friends, when things get tough, that's fine.

FARAH

I told you I was sorry.

MONA

So I forgive you.

FARAH

But you're still mad. You can't forgive someone and still be mad at them.

MONA

I don't want to talk about it. If you want, you can help me look for a dress.

FARAH

Okay.

(A beat.)

How about a red one?

(MONA looks at her, a little spooked.)

Red for anger.

SHOPKEEPER

Very good prices on these scarves--the best in the city!

FARAH

No thanks!

MONA

I don't want red, I want blue. I had a dream last night and I was offered a choice of red, black or blue dresses, and so I chose blue.

FARAH

Offered by who?

MONA

By God. I think.

FARAH

Wow. Why do you think God wants you to have a blue dress?

MONA

The dresses symbolized paths I could choose in my life.

FARAH

Okay.

MONA

The red one meant martyrdom and the black one suffering.

FARAH

Someone would choose those paths?

MONA
I chose the last one, which was service.

FARAH
So...

MONA
I chose a life of service.

FARAH
What about a life of fun?

SHOPKEEPER
(approaching)
How can I help you girls?

MONA
Do you have any dresses this color?

SHOPKEEPER
Sure. Over there.

[MONA moves to the indicated area. The SHOPKEEPER sees ARAM standing just outside the shop door looking in, and he goes to switch cassette tapes.]

SHOPKEEPER
How did that tape get in there? That music's unclean!
(switches tapes to something more Islamic.)

Much better.

[ARAM seems to take no notice, but stares at MONA. He wears nothing that might distinguish him as a guard.]

FARAH
So maybe you're going to get married.

MONA
What?

FARAH
How else do women serve in Iran? They keep the rice cooking and the babies coming.

SHOPKEEPER
(Back to help)
God willing. How about this one?

MONA
Mmm, that one.

[She chooses a blue closer to the dream color and turns to the mirror. FARAH browses, then approaches her.]

FARAH

So was there a guy in this dream?

[MONA, having seen ARAM, stands transfixed, and points to him. He sees her point and looks away.]

FARAH (CONT'D)

What, him?

MONA

(folding up)

Maybe we should buy this and go.

[ARAM is still in sight. MONA glances at him as she goes to pay.]

MONA (CONT'D)

How much?

SHOPKEEPER

For you: 100.

FARAH

Rial?

SHOPKEEPER

(Sarcastic)

Rial. 100 Tuman.

MONA

Sorry I don't have that much.

SHOPKEEPER

Why don't you ask your boyfriend?
(indicates ARAM)

MONA

He's not my boyfriend.

FARAH

Who made you a mulla to judge?

SHOPKEEPER

I have a reputation to keep. Girls like you come in with no scarves, flirting with boys, acting like this is the time of the Shah? Now if you covered your hair like chaste Muslim girls...

MONA

(calmly.)

Well, I'm not a chaste Muslim, I'm a chaste Baha'i. And I can offer you 20 tuman.

FARAH

(flummoxed)

You don't need to tell him that.

SHOPKEEPER

Bábí?

MONA

Baha'i. They stopped calling us Babis a hundred years ago.

SHOPKEEPER

Bábí Báhí, I don't care!

(He takes the dress back.)

200 tuman! Final price.

MONA

Sir, be fair. All religions teach that much.

(She pulls out her money.)

Now how much is the dress worth? I have twenty-five tuman.

[A beat. He looks at her money.]

SHOPKEEPER

Out.

MONA

What?

SHOPKEEPER

The dress is not for sale, Bábí girl!

MONA

It's Baha'i. Baha'i, Baha'i, Baha'i, Baha'i!

[FARAH walks away.]

MONA

What is the big deal that no one can stand to hear that word?

SHOPKEEPER

Get out!

MONA

Fine. See you, Farah.

[On her way out, she passes by ARAM. They have a moment, then she turns and leaves.]

FARAH

Wait up, Mona!

(to ARAM)

What are you staring at?

[She leaves. ARAM pulls a photograph from a small notebook, looks at it. EHSAN is now there, but ARAM avoids looking at him.]

SHOPKEEPER

You go now, you'll lose your girlfriends.

[EHSAN is gone. ARAM walks into the shop and picks up the cassette tape of Dariush the SHOPKEEPER was playing. He shakes it and puts it up to his ear as if to listen to it. He then raises his eyebrows at the SHOPKEEPER, who freezes.]

ACT I, SCENE 7 - MONA'S HOME

[Mona's MOTHER and FATHER sit quietly in their living room. There is tension in the air, as if he's delivered some news she did not want to hear.]

FATHER

Aren't you going to say something?

MOTHER

What do you want me to say? You're not coming to me asking me my opinion on this.

[He is silent.]

MOTHER

Have you thought about the impact this will have on Mona?

FATHER

Yes.

MOTHER

She needs a father.

FATHER

Farkhundih.

MOTHER

I am not blowing this out of proportion--

[MONA enters through the front door, mumbling under her breath. She slips off her shoes.]

MONA

Allah-u-abha.

[She heads towards her room.]

MOTHER

Mona, come back here, please.

MONA

(returning)

What's going on?

MOTHER

You told me you'd be back before this. This place needs to be cleaned. I'm going shopping. I'm writing a list for you. I want you to get started right away-

MONA

Okay.

MOTHER

I'm not happy about you being gone when there's so much to do.

(exits to bedroom)

MONA

What happened?

FATHER

It's okay.

(exits to kitchen)

You want a little tea?

MONA

(sits on the carpet and holds her head)

I don't know.

(a beat)

I saw God today... on the street.

FATHER

(reentering)

You did.

[The FATHER has put the kettle on and now somewhat distractedly tries to straighten up the apartment, which in truth is already quite tidy.]

MONA

There's this path opening in front of me, but it's totally dark. I can't seem to open my eyes wide enough to take it in.

MOTHER

(entering, moving to the door.)

Here's the list, Mona, so don't forget.

(at the door)

There's a package here. Maybe it's a bomb.

[She kicks it inside the door and leaves. The FATHER winces some and grasps his stomach.]

FATHER

Mmm.

MONA

Your tummy? Here, let me do that

(She takes the broom.)

FATHER

I'm okay, I'll just get the tea.
(exits)

MONA

(starting, then stopping the
sweeping)

Here's what I figure. I'm not supposed to have that dress. It's just a symbol. I mean, obviously, He told me it stands for service. So I don't need the actual dress for that. It's better that I don't have it.

FATHER (O.S.)

Uh-huh.

MONA

The young man is a symbol too. He's... the "man on the street" --meaning, I'm supposed to serve everyone, no matter where I am. And... I don't have to go looking for it like I did with the dress. Service will find me. What do you think?

FATHER

Sorry, honey, the kettle is making noise.

[He enters with a tray with tea, then
turns away to wipe a stray tear.]

MONA

Are you sure everything's all right?

[A knock at the door.]

MRS. KHUDAYAR (O.S.)

Hello?

MONA

(at the door)

It's our neighbor.

FATHER

(uncertain what to do with the
tea tray)

I better not.

(exits back into the kitchen)

MONA

Dad, come back.

FATHER (O.S.)

Mona, we can't push people.

MONA
 (shakes her head and opens the
 door)
 Hello, Mrs. Khudayar.

MRS. KHUDAYAR
 Am I interrupting?

MONA
 No, Dad was just making some tea.

MRS. KHUDAYAR
 (so the FATHER can hear--)
 No thank you!

FATHER (O.S.)
 Hello, Mrs. Khudayar.

MRS. KHUDAYAR
 So, Mona, your mother was telling me about your dream--three
 dresses, that's wonderful!

MONA
 Well, it wasn't about the dresses really...

MRS. KHUDAYAR
 Oh?

MONA
 It was really about choices in life...

MRS. KHUDAYAR
 Mona, if you just say yes to this boy, these dreams won't
 haunt you any more.

MONA
 What?

MRS. KHUDAYAR
 Oh, as if...! Oh! (Aside to MONA.) Your father doesn't know
 yet? (Hushed.) The boy who's following you. It's been days
 now I've seen him.

MONA
 What does he look like?

MRS. KHUDAYAR
 See for yourself.

[She indicates the window. MONA walks
 over and looks out the window, sees him
 and responds by pulling away and then
 looking again.]

MRS. KHUDAYAR

(excited)

Oh, oh, oh--do you know him?

MONA

(almost to herself)

That's the same young man as was in my dream.

MRS. KHUDAYAR

Oh, that's so precious. Run away with him! I mean, with your parents' permission and all--

MONA

That wasn't really the spirit of the dream. He was just...

MRS. KHUDAYAR

Just what?

MONA

A symbol.

MRS. KHUDAYAR

Symbol! I don't know about you girls today, with so many boys swarming around you, you take it for granted, then you become my age and you're invisible and have to get your pleasure by watching others, but you're giving me absolutely no pleasure!

MONA

Dad, isn't that tea ready yet?

MRS. KHUDAYAR

Girl, how old are you?

MONA

Sixteen.

MRS. KHUDAYAR

When I was sixteen, I was already married with a loaf in the oven. You're not going to get any more beautiful, my dear.

[The FATHER enters with the tea, still fighting off his stomach pain.]

FATHER

Here we are...

MRS. KHUDAYAR

Look at the time, and I just dropped by to give you some mail, which they delivered to the wrong address. There's one for you, Mona. It arrived unsealed--those goons with the Revolutionary Guard can't admit they're censoring the mail so they try to put it off on me.

MONA
 (taking the envelope.)
 Wait, won't you have some tea with us?

MRS. KHUDAYAR
 (going)
 That son of mine is going to be home any moment. He was so disappointed you missed his party--Such a lovely rug!

MONA
 Mrs Khudayar, why don't you ever have tea with us?

FATHER
 Mona, if she needs to go...

MRS. KHUDAYAR
 I have tea at home.

MONA
 I know, but we always offer and you never accept.

FATHER
 Mona dear.

MRS. KHUDAYAR
 No, it's okay. The truth is that from the time I was a little girl, I have been told that your tea--Bahá'í tea--is a potion that brainwashes people to become Bahá'ís.

MONA
 But that's silly.

MRS. KHUDAYAR
 I know, but what can I do? I guess I'm brainwashed myself.
 (leaving)
 Looks like a package here. Maybe it's from an admirer.
 (she winks and leaves)

MONA
 Don't say anything, Dad. We have to confront these people... as a service to them.

FATHER
 (not convinced)
 What's the letter?

MONA
 It's been opened.

FATHER
 Who's it from?

MONA

(opens the letter and reads)

It's from the Baha'i children's committee.

FATHER

Yeah?

MONA

They want me to teach a children's class.

FATHER

Let me see.

MONA

(Moved)

It's happening, Dad. I asked Him to show me the path and He's doing it.

FATHER

(taking the letter)

I'm just surprised the committee didn't hand-deliver it.

MONA

(goes for the package by the door)

Could be from an admirer. Could be a bomb.

(picks it up)

Why was Mom so upset? Before I die.

FATHER

I've been appointed to the Auxiliary Board.

MONA

(after a beat)

That's such an honor.

FATHER

And she's worried, obviously, about the exposure.

MONA

Just leave me your books--Taraneh wants them too, but I'll use them more.

FATHER

Mona, I know it's scary, but you know this path God is laying out before you? I have mine too. And your mother has hers. And if God decides that our paths should diverge, I need you to be strong. Okay?

[He kisses her and turns to go. She opens the package and pulls out the blue dress from the shop.]

MONA

Dad.

(he turns)

Farah must have gone back...

(holds it up to herself)

FATHER

It's as if Bahá'u'lláh picked it out Himself.

[Shift of scene. MONA comes forward as
if to a mirror with the dress.]

MONA

It's a new dress for Mona. And a new Mona must step into it.

ACT I, SCENE 8 - A STREETS IN SHIRAZ

[People are coming and going: men freely, women less so. Birds and traffic are heard. ARAM waits, apparently for MONA. He is preoccupied, apparently writing a poem in his notebook. He recites some lines aloud to test them out.]

ARAM

In a perfect world... In a perfect world, there would be no... No...

(searching for the word)

Division? Distance? No you and me, but only we.

(smiles at this, scribbles and continues reading a line he already has)

But now I follow, I follow, I follow behind.

[He then looks up to see EHSAN before him. He looks away, moved, as if the brief moments of respite only refresh the agony. The MULLA enters with GUARD 2. The MULLA has an unopened pomegranate.]

MULLA

Hafez! I've been wondering about you.

ARAM

Hello, sir.

MULLA

So?

(hands GUARD 2 the pomegranate)

Open that up.

GUARD 2 looks at him quizzically. The MULLA focuses in on ARAM, waits.

ARAM

(shrugs)

Just a sweet girl.

MULLA

So she isn't speaking out at all about her religion?

ARAM

Really just going to school, visiting the orphanage... she went shopping with a friend.

MULLA

For what?

ARAM

A dress. I think. Maybe a scarf...

MULLA

(after a beat)

Okay.

(to GUARD 2, who is vigorously going at the pomegranate)

Easy there.

(grabs some seeds and puts them in his mouth. To ARAM)

Let me see her picture again?

ARAM

Oh.

(takes the picture out of his notebook.)

I'd be happy to keep it, I mean keep an eye on her.

MULLA

(looks at the picture, smiles)

I'm sure you would.

(takes back the pomegranate from GUARD 2, puts some seeds in his mouth. To ARAM)

Keep a log of everything she does. It'll help us make a case against the father.

[He exits with GUARD 2. ARAM returns to writing in his little notebook, just as MONA and TARANEH enter. TARANEH wears a loose headscarf and waddles as she walks. MONA, wearing the blue dress, walks with a spring in her step and carries a bag with materials and snacks for her children's class.]

TARANEH

(Offhandedly)

I don't know, you know, she's Mom, and Mom's not Dad. They're not in the same place. None of us are. I don't even know where I am, and carrying this life inside me, literally creating it as we speak, and I don't know the first thing about her, or him... whatever. So you have your lesson for the kids?

MONA

Yes.

(sees ARAM waiting for her)

Hello.

[She and TARANEH walk past. TARANEH
adjusts her scarf.]

TARANEH

You know him?

[MONA doesn't answer as they exit. ARAM
smiles wistfully, finishes a thought he
was writing in his little notebook, and
then walks off after MONA.]

ACT I, SCENE 9 - THE CHILDREN'S CLASS

[MONA tells a story to the children.
She is animated, gentle and luminous
when she is with them.]

MONA

Once upon a time, there was a lover named Majnun and his love was the beautiful princess, Layli. Majnun was a good man, a pure man, and he had no thought but for his Layli. The problem was he had been separated from her for such a long time that he got very, very sad. One night, he was so sad, he went out into the city hoping to die. And he walked and walked the streets, crying, until a watchman saw him. This was one of the guards in the city. So the watchman started to follow him, and Majnun got scared. He thought the watchman was coming to hurt him. So he walked faster. And the watchman walked faster. And Majnun started to run. And the watchman started to run, and then another watchman came after him, and then another. Certainly these men would kill him, he thought. And so Majnun ran and ran until he got trapped with a tall wall in front of him and all the watchmen behind him. So what do you think he did? He ran to the wall, the men came after him, and so he jumped and he climbed, and the wall was very high, and he worked so hard and they could almost reach him, but with his last bit of strength, he threw himself over the wall not knowing what was on the other side. And he fell and he fell and he landed, plop. And it was soft and green. He was in a beautiful garden, and when he looked, who did he see but Layli walking in the garden, a lamp in her hand, searching for a ring she had lost. So what do you think Majnun did? He cried out in joy, and he thanked God and he thanked the watchmen who had led him to his heart's desire, and he understood that these men he thought were mean and bad and scary actually had done him the greatest service. And he wondered, why couldn't I see that before?

[As she has been finishing this story,
ARAM has appeared in the background,
looking in, as if through a window,
then he walks off.]

MONA

Did you like that story? That's a story Baha'u'llah told.
Yes, sweetie.

(A child has a question.)

Well, it means that God asks us to be patient with the difficult things in our lives, because what we love most God will never ever really take away even though it may feel like it. What do you love most? Your Mommy and Daddy?

(smitten and moved)

Me too. So who wants some cheese puffs?

ACT I, SCENE 10 - THE STREET OUTSIDE

[FARAH waits outside where MONA has been teaching. MONA comes in, high as a kite from being around the children.]

MONA

Farah! I didn't expect you here.

FARAH

I was hoping I could catch you.

MONA

Did you see all my kids?? Aren't they adorable? I just love them so much. I tell you, I feel like I'm right there with God when I'm with them, they fill me with so much light.

FARAH

Yeah, they're cute--you're not mad at me.

MONA

How could I be mad?

FARAH

Cause of the shop.

MONA

(She models her dress.)

Look!

FARAH

Is that the dress?

MONA

What do you think?

FARAH

It looks great. So look, I don't have much time, but I have to say something. I felt awful about turning away from you in the shop after the whole school thing. I mean it's hard being around you sometimes. I mean I love you, but this... religion of yours, it's a tough thing. But I made a decision: No matter what, from now on, I'm going to stick by you, okay?

MONA

(wants to believe her)

Okay.

FARAH

(breathes out)

Good, I think I forgot some of the things I was going to say--so how did you finally get the dress?

MONA

How did you get it is my question? What did you have to pay that guy? I mean, I'll pay you back.

FARAH

I don't know what you mean.

MONA

Don't play. You bought the dress and left it at my door.

FARAH

I did?

[ARAM has entered and stands at a distance. He is drawing in his notebook with considerable care.]

MONA

Didn't you?

FARAH

Maybe. Will you be mad if I didn't?

MONA

No.

FARAH

Then I didn't.

MONA

So who did? No one else was there...
(She turns to look at ARAM.)
Oh no.

FARAH

What? Hey isn't that the guy?

MONA

Yes.

FARAH

What, you think he bought you the dress?

MONA

(turns away from him and
collapses some under the idea)
Oh now it makes sense.

FARAH

But who is he? Has he talked to you?

MONA

No, he's following me, but he hasn't said anything. Now I'm wearing his gift he probably thinks we're engaged.

FARAH

Are you going to give it back?

MONA

(torn)

I have to.

FARAH

(looks over at ARAM)

He's pretty good looking.

MONA

Farah!

FARAH

What? Your God is the one who set you two up!

MONA

I've got to get this off. Can you go ask him?

FARAH

What?

MONA

If he gave it to me.

FARAH

Uh...

MONA

I have to know.

FARAH

Fine, but I have to go right after.

MONA

Go, go.

FARAH

All right.

(She approaches ARAM.)

Hey, do you know anything about this dress?

ARAM

(holds up his hand and walks away)

Sorry.

FARAH

Hey, come back, I just want to...
 (returning to MONA)
 He walked away.

MONA

What kind of lover is that?

FARAH

I've got to go, but I'm serious about what I said, okay?

[They kiss each other on the cheek, and FARAH leaves. MONA looks off the way ARAM exited. She slips out of sight. A moment later, ARAM enters, looking around for her. He writes something in his notebook. MONA sneaks up on him and grabs the notebook, startling him.]

MONA

Who are you and why are you following me?

ARAM

Give it back.

[MONA has retreated so a tree or a bench is between them. ARAM tries to walk around, but she evades him.]

MONA

Don't make me look in your book.

ARAM

Don't.

MONA

(reads from his book)

"I follow wherever you go,
 Til the light is spent.
 But then who needs eyes?
 I'll follow your scent."

ARAM

You have no right to read that.

MONA

(relieved, still evading)

So you're a poet. And an artist?

[Some photographs and papers have fallen out of the notebook. MONA bends to pick them up.]

ARAM

Just leave those!

[MONA picks up a photograph and looks.
Lights come up on EHSAN just as when he
was being executed.]

MONA

Why do you have Ehsan's picture?
(Realization. Gunfire.)
You killed him.

ARAM

Give me that back.

[MONA drops the notebook and turns to
walk away as if she has encountered a
great evil, fighting a nightmare's
paralysis. ARAM picks up his things.]

ACT I, SCENE 11 - MONA'S HOME

[Home now, MONA has taken off the blue dress as if it was contaminated. She sits on the rug, shivers, wrapped up in a blanket.]

MONA

O God. O God. O God.

[Her FATHER enters.]

FATHER

Mona? Honey, what's going on?

MONA

(covering up)

I'm fine.

(heaving in fear or with tears)

I'm just cold.

FATHER

Hey, what happened?

(No response.)

Come on, talk to me.

MONA

He's a guard.

FATHER

Who?

MONA

(nods, and shivers)

I think he killed Ehsan.

[She throws her arms around her FATHER and starts to sob, really sob.]

FATHER

What is this?

MONA

O God, Daddy, I don't want to lose you.

[He tries to comfort her.]

FATHER

Come, come. Hey, I'm still here.

MONA

But you don't know! There might be someone following you too.

FATHER

My dear, someone's been following me for years.

MONA

See! Dad, this isn't funny. We should go now, get out of Shiraz, stay with friends until this passes.

FATHER

(listening attentively)

We could.

MONA

Yes, we could.

[He looks at her lovingly.]

MONA

So?

FATHER

So who would take care of those who can't leave? Who would visit them and comfort them, bring them word about the good things their Baha'i brothers and sisters are doing around the world? They live for that.

MONA

So you need to die for it?

FATHER

Honey...

MONA

Do it for me if you won't do it for yourself!

FATHER

What can I say? My life is His, and He can take me.

MONA

So you want to die?

FATHER

No. But part of our Faith demands we change our attitude towards death. It is not the end, and we shouldn't fear it as such. What does Bahá'u'lláh say, "I have made death a messenger of joy to thee. Wherefore dost thou grieve?" So don't grieve, my sweet.

(Hugs her as she starts to
break again)

If it were mine to choose, you think I wouldn't want to be part of your life and see you grow and learn and flourish and marry...?

MONA

(softly)

But you can, can't you?

[He doesn't answer.]

MONA

(shaking her head)

We just want to help, but these people... They have no souls.

FATHER

No, no, no, Mona. They have the very same soul, and the same possibility in their lives. Believe that, see that they are your sisters and brothers, but that they are in grave danger, moral danger.

MONA

It's one thing if they put themselves in danger, it's another if they put us, YOU, in danger.

FATHER

Do you think it's an accident that they target us? Or it's just because we're weak and an easy scapegoat?

(shakes his head)

We're a direct threat to them.

MONA

What?

FATHER

They're devoting every ounce of their might to forging a world with an imbalance of power, governed by fear, fueled by prejudice, fostered in a climate of ignorance. If there were no clash...

MONA

We wouldn't be doing our work.

FATHER

This is the test, isn't it?

(pause)

The world can change, but it will need some of us to stand and point the way.

MONA

So you can't leave.

FATHER

Don't despair. And don't lose hope in people. Transformation can happen to anyone, at any moment. So find the light in each one. Then you will rise from a creature of the earth to be a heavenly being. Then you will be a true Baha'i.

ACT I, SCENE 12 - THE RUINS OF THE HOUSE OF THE BAB

[MONA stands straight and faces forward, with FARAH beside her. Both wear head scarves. The arches of a mosque are behind them. ARAM is there, and he looks anxious.]

MONA

You're sure you want to do this? Someone over here might come after us.

FARAH

(anxious)

Why are we here again?

MONA

I come when I need strength. This is the House of the Báb. This is where my Faith began.

FARAH

I don't see what's controversial. There's nothing here.

MONA

Why else would they knock it down and leave no trace?
(slight pause)

Ready?

FARAH

(referring to ARAM)

What about the guy?

MONA

He can come in if he'd like.

[MONA holds FARAH's hand, closes her eyes a moment, and when she reopens them, she takes a step forward, toward the audience.]

ARAM

Hey!

MONA

He spoke.

ARAM

(more quietly)

You shouldn't go in there.

MONA

Go report me if you want.

[MONA walks in, followed by FARAH. ARAM is not pleased, and he walks off so as not to see what they are doing.]

MONA

So, in the front here was a wall about this tall--like those houses over there--with a door about here. There is a courtyard with the orange tree right there.

(moving into the audience with
FARAH)

Windows all around, and a second floor with a flat roof. Up there with all the stained glass is the most important spot, where it all began.

[MONA seems to be seeing all she describes, but FARAH's focus is on her friend, who seems to be changing before her very eyes.]

ACT I, SCENE 13 - MONA'S HOME

[Mona's MOTHER sews distractedly. A knock.]

MOTHER
(anxiously stands)

Come in.

MRS. KHUDAYAR
(opens the door, points to a
newly-installed peephole)
What is this, a peephole?

MOTHER
(As if she's forgotten)
Oh, in case someone comes. Some friends were just here,
Jamshid let them install it--I guess to make them feel
better.

MRS. KHUDAYAR
You should turn it around so I can see what's going on
inside.

MOTHER
Yes, maybe.

MRS. KHUDAYAR
That was a joke. Look at you worried to death: What can I do?

MOTHER
What can anyone do? They're down there now begging him to go
into hiding. There are rumors of arrests--My throat.

MRS. KHUDAYAR
We thought with the Shah gone, it would be freedom for
everyone.

MOTHER
(Sipping her tea)
Excuse me for drinking.

MRS. KHUDAYAR
You know? I'm thirsty too.

MOTHER
I would offer...

MRS. KHUDAYAR
Okay.

[The MOTHER looks at her surprised.
MRS. KHUDAYAR nods, though a bit
uncertainly. The MOTHER then exits to
the kitchen.]

MRS. KHUDAYAR (CONT'D)
When they come, they're going to trash this place. What if I
took your rug and some other things... to hide?

MOTHER
(enters, with tea)
You don't need to do that.

MRS. KHUDAYAR
I insist.

[MRS. KHUDAYAR takes the cup. The
MOTHER watches it go to her lips where
it stops.]

MRS. KHUDAYAR (CONT'D)
Always they told me your tea was a magic potion.
(a slight pause)
Please let me take your things.

MOTHER
Okay.

MRS. KHUDAYAR takes a sip, and then
pauses.

MOTHER (CONT'D)
Well?

MRS. KHUDAYAR
Well, I'm disappointed. It's just tea.

[They laugh.]

MRS. KHUDAYAR (CONT'D)
Come on, let me get that son of mine to help in here.

ACT I, SCENE 14 - THE MULLA'S OFFICE

[ARAM is getting grilled by the MULLA.
GUARD 1 watches.]

MULLA

But why didn't you report it yourself?

[ARAM is quiet.]

MULLA

Why did I have to hear that the girl and her friend were walking on that damned spot by someone else? That's why I have you! To tell me what they're doing. Not to make me look like an idiot when the guy who sits by the shoes and helps wash people's feet knows more about what the Baha'is are doing than I do! What do you have to say for yourself?

ARAM

I didn't think it was that important.

MULLA

It's not your place to think what's important. It's your place to come to me with everything you see and then I decide for you what is and what is not important! Got it?

[ARAM doesn't speak.]

MULLA

Now go get the truck, you've got a busy night tonight.

[He exits. GUARD 1 stops ARAM from leaving.]

GUARD 1

You know what this guy can do to you?

ACT I, SCENE 15 - A STREET NEAR MONA'S HOME

[It's evening. FARAH is latched onto MONA's arm, and they now walk silently, knowing they need to part ways.]

FARAH

I'm not letting go. I'm worried.

MONA

Why?

FARAH

Sorry, all my friends have guard escorts.

MONA

(looking back)

He seems to be gone. It's my father. They don't usually target women, much less girls like me--Don't be sad.

[She squishes FARAH's cheeks into a smile, but it doesn't stay.]

FARAH

You're changing, aren't you?

MONA

What do you mean?

FARAH

I just feel like you're starting to float away from me.

MONA

I'll always be here with you.

FARAH

Promise?

MONA

(smiles, looks up at the sky)

Pick a star.

(pause)

See that bright star near the moon. Look at it and I'm right there with you.

[FARAH points to a star lower on the horizon.]

MONA (CONT'D)

Good, that's yours for me.

[They hug and part ways.]

ACT I, SCENE 16 - MONA'S HOME

[The MOTHER looks about the room that is now missing the rug and a couple of other things. The FATHER is then heard off stage talking to MRS KHUDAYAR.]

FATHER (O.S.)

Thank you so much, Thank you. I'm sorry, we'll just keep these things in here.

MRS. KHUDAYAR (O.S.)

(overlapping)

I insist. Really, it's better we keep them.

[MONA enters, looking down the hall at her father and MRS. KHUDAYAR playing tug of war.]

MONA

What's going on?

[The MOTHER shakes her head. The FATHER enters with the rug and the couple of others things.]

MOTHER

She was trying to be kind.

(stopping him)

She drank some of our tea.

FATHER

So?

MOTHER

So the peephole didn't help us either. I thought you'd be proud of me.

MRS. KHUDAYAR

(entering)

It's no problem.

MOTHER

It's just a rug...

FATHER

(To his wife, at once gentle and firm)

You think I care about the rug?

[MONA watches, in awe of her FATHER whose behavior is difficult to gauge sometimes. REZA is now at the door.]

FATHER (CONT'D)

(to MRS. KHUDAYAR)

Let's say, just hypothetically, that Reza here were to ask for the hand of a girl like, say, Mona.

[MONA and REZA are both embarrassed by this.]

MRS. KHUDAYAR

I've told him to get it out of his head--he's not good enough for you.

REZA

Mom!

FATHER

For example--and if he bought a beautiful engagement ring, just right: would he skimp on the box? Might cost a little extra.

MRS. KHUDAYAR

He better not--cheapskate.

FATHER

(takes his wife and daughter in his arms)

These are my diamonds, and our home and everything in it is just a box.

MRS. KHUDAYAR

Of course.

REZA

(leaving, to his mother)

Why do you have to embarrass me like that?

[MRS. KHUDAYAR exits after him. The FATHER goes into the kitchen.]

MOTHER

I don't understand that man. Just when I think I do, he goes and changes all the rules on me. And I feel like a child.

(turning to MONA)

Even if they do come and arrest him, even if the worst comes. We'll be strong and we'll get through this, okay? If we stay united, we can do it, honey.

[MONA comforts her MOTHER. Her FATHER has been watching this exchange from the doorway. He solemnly and gratefully nods and steps back out of sight.]

MOTHER

You hungry?

[MONA nods. The MOTHER exits into the kitchen and passes by the FATHER, who now enters with a plate of food.]

FATHER

My dear, I didn't greet you properly.
(kisses her and makes to share
the plate with her.)

MONA

You look tired.

FATHER

Thank you. You look radiant.

MONA

I should, I was at the House of the Bab.

FATHER

Mmmm. One day we'll rebuild. If not in my lifetime, then in yours.

MONA

Dad, you might just grow old in this world, and that way, you'll have to take better care of yourself. When I finish school this year, maybe we can look at colleges in other places. We can go to Africa, or America. What do you think?

FATHER

Have an olive.

[He puts one in her mouth. A moment of tenderness before MONA exits. The MOTHER has entered and sits beside her husband, affectionately close.]

MOTHER

Maybe she's right. You remember when the girls were young how we used to move so often, and every time you would go ahead and prepare the house, and you'd dress up in your best clothes and come and wait for me. And I'd arrive and you'd usher me in like a queen.

FATHER

I remember each time.

MOTHER

Maybe we'll do that again some day.

FATHER

No thanks.

[They laugh. There is a sudden pounding on the door. MONA is still offstage. Whirling in confusion, the MOTHER moves to the door.]

MOTHER

Maybe someone... just... has a question or something. Who is it?

GUARD 2 (O.S.)

Revolutionary Guard, open up!

MOTHER

(Hushed.)

Oh no!

[The FATHER closes his eyes and prepares himself.]

MRS. KHUDAYAR (O.S.)

They're not home. Why don't you come back later?

MOTHER

It's Mrs. Khudayar...

GUARD 1

Oh, I think they are home.

MRS. KHUDAYAR (O.S.)

I saw them go out.

[One of the GUARDS begin to force his weight against the door.]

MOTHER

I should have used the peephole! What do I do now?

FATHER

(Rising.)

Open the door and let them in.

[The MOTHER puts on a dark chador and opens the door as the FATHER joins her. He is shaking slightly.]

FATHER

Good evening, friends. What can I do for you?

GUARD 2

We're from the Revolutionary Court. We have a warrant to enter.

[GUARD 2 hands him the warrant. The FATHER looks at it.]

FATHER

Please come in.

[GUARDS 1 and 2 enter brusquely, followed by ARAM. He looks around, surprised not to see MONA.]

GUARD 2

(To FATHER.)

You sit there,

(to MOTHER.)

And you over there.

GUARD 1

Just you two?

(to ARAM.)

Check for the girl.

[ARAM looks, then MONA enters from the bathroom.]

MONA

You.

ARAM

Please go sit on the couch.

MOTHER

Mona, come sit.

GUARD 2

You be quiet.

MONA

I need to cover my hair.

(goes toward her room)

ARAM

Just go sit down.

MONA

You're not my father and you're not my brother, so I have to cover my hair in your presence.

[MONA goes and gets a scarf, and retrieves a book. ARAM waits.]

GUARD 1
 (looking through the father's
 papers.)
 Get her out here, we don't have all night!

[MONA comes out, and GUARD 2 goes in
 and closes the door.]

ARAM
 (low, to MONA)
 Sorry.

[MONA goes to the couch. Just then,
 MRS. KHUDAYAR pushes open the door.
 REZA follows sheepishly behind.]

MRS. KHUDAYAR
 Excuse me?

ARAM
 Hey, I need some backup in here!

MRS. KHUDAYAR
 No trouble, I just want to help.

GUARD 2
 Go back to your home!

MRS. KHUDAYAR
 Sure, but maybe while you're searching, I can take them too.

GUARD 2
 They are unclean!

MRS. KHUDAYAR
 They're good people.

GUARD 2
 Get out of here!

MRS. KHUDAYAR
 Maybe I'm a Bahá'í too.

GUARD 2
 You don't know the first thing about it!

MRS. KHUDAYAR
 How do you know?

GUARD 2
 Because I read your mail and listen to your phone calls.

FATHER

(Rising)

Thank you so much. We'll let you know when they're done.

GUARD 1

What's going on?

(To FATHER.)

You sit down until we're ready.

(To MRS. KHUDAYAR.)

You, you want your son to go fight in Iraq?

[GUARD 2 levels his gun at REZA, who begins to tremble.]

MRS. KHUDAYAR

God no.

GUARD 1

Go home and lock the door.

[MRS. KHUDAYAR obeys, exits with REZA.]

GUARD 1

(To ARAM.)

What's wrong with you?

ARAM

She just walked in.

GUARD 1

No one moves.

MOTHER

(Shivering.)

Jamshid, they're going to take you.

[The FATHER has his eyes closed. MONA has a textbook open, but she's not reading it. GUARDS 1 and 2 overturn everything. GUARD 2 brings in a plastic bag full of Mona's writings and tapes.]

GUARD 1

We've got what we need.

(To FATHER.)

You and the girl, you're coming with us.

FATHER

The girl?

MONA

Me?

FATHER

But why?

MOTHER

You've got to be kidding.

GUARD 1

We're not kidding.

[MONA stands with a mixture of shock and honor. ARAM grabs a black chador from a hook for MONA, but the MOTHER stops him.]

MOTHER

If you want to take my husband, okay! But Mona is just a child.

GUARD 2

The things she's writing? These tapes of her voice? They could set the world on fire.

GUARD 1

What he means is she could lead others into the fire of ignorance. And that's why she's coming with us.

MOTHER

All right then, take me instead!

MONA

Mom, calm down.

GUARD 2

Woman, we don't want you.

MOTHER

(to ARAM)

Swear to God you won't take her! You won't take her!

MONA

Mom, why are you begging them? I'm not a criminal. They're taking me because of my belief.

(to GUARD 2)

I'll get my coat.

[She goes into her destroyed room. Her FATHER goes to his wife and leads her to the men.]

FATHER

Farkhundih.

(Looking into the men's faces.)

These men. I love these brothers like my own sons.

I am sure it is the will of God that they are here now to take Mona and myself away with them. Just leave everything in God's hands and don't worry about Mona. These brothers look on Mona as their own sister.

[The GUARDS are taken in by this. The FATHER indicates he is ready and walks out with GUARD 1. GUARD 2 has thrown books, papers and photo albums on top of the carpet, and he rolls it up, indicating to ARAM to grab the other side. ARAM waits though on MONA, who has reentered with her coat.]

MOTHER

You look like a queen.

[The MOTHER takes the black veil from ARAM and helps MONA put it on. It wraps around and covers up all her color.]

MOTHER

(imploring ARAM)

Tell me you won't take her. Ask the one in charge. No one will notice if she's doesn't go. She's just a girl...

[GUARD 2 is dragging the filled carpet off by himself. Only when he's gone does ARAM speak--quietly, dejectedly.]

ARAM

I'm sorry. There's nothing I can do.

MONA

(reassuring her MOTHER)

Mom, it won't be a prison for me, but an open field, a mountain top where I can touch the moon. Please don't worry. We'll see you soon.

[She kisses her MOTHER and, as she goes to leave, she pulls out the blue dress and pushes it into ARAM's hands without looking at him. ARAM then closes the door on the MOTHER, who is left alone.]

End of Act I

ACT II, SCENE 1 - PRISON; INTERROGATION ROOM

[MONA stands blindfolded. She is refusing to answer questions in an interrogation led by GUARD 2.]

GUARD 2

Tired yet?

[MONA doesn't answer, but it's clear she is tired. She remains standing while the scene shifts to FARAH, who reads a letter from Mona in front of class, a bold move for her and the TEACHER.]

FARAH

"I put my trust in God to get this letter to you--and in Mínu who is smuggling it out! We're not supposed to write anything except for all the forms they try to get us to fill out. Forty Bahá'ís, both men and women, were arrested the same night. From what I can gather, I'm the youngest. But don't worry too much about me, I have a wonderful family here with my fellow women prisoners, both Bahá'ís and Muslims. (The Muslims call me 'little prisoner.') Last night, I felt as though I were on a balcony getting closer to the moon, but I kept seeing my mother's face. Farah, please go see her, and my sister and little Nura, and hug and kiss them for me. They visit, but there's a barrier between us. As for my father, I have only seen him once since coming here."

[Scene shift away from the classroom and back to the Interrogation room. MONA's legs are asleep, and she winces to shake them out.]

GUARD 2

Answer me and I'll let you sit. Describe your Bahá'í activities.

(No response.)

We can arrange your release.

(Still no response.)

Look, I know this is more your parents' religion than yours.

[ARAM has entered and whispers to GUARD 2.]

GUARD 2 (CONT'D)

So what if I brought your father in here to persuade you to talk to me?

(getting close)

But you know your father wouldn't do that, right?

(Nods to ARAM, who exits)

He took many days, but since then, he's been quite useful to us.

MONA
You'll never break my father.

GUARD 2
No? I just broke you.

[MONA clams up. Mona's FATHER is wheeled in, blindfolded, ravaged by torture, having been whipped constantly on the back and on the feet. When he speaks, it's with a soft, strained voice.]

GUARD 2 (CONT'D)
Mahmudnizhad, your daughter is here.

FATHER
Mona dear?

MONA
Dad?

GUARD 2
Stay where you are. Tell her.

FATHER
Answer their questions, honey.

[MONA doesn't know how to respond.]

FATHER (CONT'D)
Tell them what they want to know. Tell them the truth.

MONA
Dad, what have they done to you?

GUARD 2
You want to see?

ARAM
(Quietly.)
Wait.

[ARAM objects, showing some backbone.]

GUARD 2
What, are you going soft?
(continuing)
Fine, just imagine the soles of his feet being struck with a rod time and again as the pain shoots up the body into the brain...

FATHER
 (overlapping)
 You don't need to share this.

GUARD 2
 Oh I do. You see it's cleaner than the back lashes, because you know it takes several days for the feet to start to bleed. But when they do, they bleed from the nails.

MONA
 What makes you people so sick?

GUARD 2
 See, you've got it upside down. You are sick, and we resort to these means to cure you!

FATHER
 Mona, after a while I don't feel the pain.

MONA
 But the agreement!

[A beat, while the FATHER gathers the strength to speak.]

FATHER
 We have no secrets, Mona. Our activities are not political, and we are faithful to our country.

GUARD 2
 So your world center in Israel isn't political!

FATHER
 (matter-of-factly)
 You exiled our Prophet there a hundred years ago, locked Him in a stone fortress. Where else is our world center going to be?

GUARD 2
 (To ARAM.)
 Hit him!

ARAM
 You want me to get 'Abdu'lláh?

GUARD 2
 No I want you to hit him.

MONA
 Don't.

GUARD 2
 Shut up! It's either him or her.

MONA

Me then.

FATHER

Please.

MONA

(to ARAM)

You can stand up to him--tell them this is not the way of Islam.

GUARD 2

Don't tell me about Islam.

(to ARAM, as if it's his last chance)

Hit him or I tell the Magistrate.

[ARAM picks up the whip, and then picks up the Qur'án, which lies open. He puts the book under his arm (to limit the force of the lashes).]

GUARD 2

What are you doing?

ARAM

To get the right amount of force.

GUARD 2

This man is an apostate--you hit him like this, this is going to save him from the fires of hell?!

ARAM

Okay!

[ARAM begins to whip the FATHER's back. MONA is torn.]

FATHER

Mmmm.

GUARD 2

Harder! Girl?

[Another lash.]

FATHER

Aaaah!

GUARD 2

Again, harder! GIIRLLL?

[Another lash.]

FATHER
Yá Bahá'u'l-abhá!

MONA
STOP!

GUARD 2
Are you going to talk?

MONA
(after a pause)
Let me see his eyes...

[GUARD 2 senses victory and motions to ARAM, who pulls up his mask, then takes off their blindfolds. MONA goes to her FATHER.]

MONA (CONT'D)
Oh Dad! Look at you...

FATHER
Is it really you?

MONA
What have they done?

FATHER
Don't look there--let me see you.

[They look in each other's eyes.]

GUARD 2
Tell her.

FATHER
Answer them bravely and honestly. We have nothing to hide.

[MONA hesitates.]

GUARD 2
Quick, quick.

FATHER
Tell the women to see their captors not as enemies but as friends, with whom they can share their love.

MONA
What?

GUARD 2
He thinks he's going to convert us!

MONA

But is that right?

FATHER

Do I look like I have any secrets left?

[A beat in which MONA seems to assent]

GUARD 2

(proud of his work)

Let me get the Magistrate.

[He exits. MONA looks at her FATHER's wounds.]

MONA

They're not friends. They're devils.

FATHER

Don't hate them. Don't even be angry with them.

[ARAM is there.]

MONA

(gives him an evil look)

Leave us alone.

ARAM

Sir, I'm sorry.

FATHER

Son, it was more painful for you.

[ARAM is moved. MONA is livid.]

MONA

How can you say that?

ARAM

(Still to FATHER)

I'm going to make sure she's released, okay?

MONA

I don't want anything from you, just stay away!

FATHER

Love, Mona. Only love.

[MONA is speechless, unable to fathom this depth. ARAM starts to push him out one of the doors.]

In a vision, MONA sees the WOMAN IN WHITE at the door, radiant, watching the FATHER wheeled off. Then, the door opposite opens and fire seems to pour in. MONA hides her face just as the MULLA enters. He looks at MONA curiously.]

MULLA

Where's her blindfold?

GUARD 2

She has all the forms to answer.

[MONA has opened her eyes, but she keeps her gaze averted.]

MULLA

(to MONA)

Sweetheart, we're going to let you go. Don't worry, we just need you to do a little paperwork.

[He looks her over and raises his eyebrows to GUARD 2. He then walks out. GUARD 2 hands MONA a stack of papers and a pen. The air returns to the room and she settles in to the burden of paperwork.]

ACT II, SCENE 2 - A PRISON OFFICE

[TARANEH and MOTHER approach the front entrance to the prison. TARANEH carries a baby girl, little NURA. The MOTHER has Mona's release paper in her hand.]

MOTHER

I'm telling you there are no gas stations out here.

TARANEH

We'll walk back! I'm not going to miss getting Mona.

MOTHER

It's not a sure thing they'll release her, form or no form.

TARANEH

(Bangs on the door)

Hello, we have a visit scheduled!

(to MOTHER)

So you have the money?

MOTHER

(referring to baby.)

I can't believe the way she slept.

TARANEH

She's used to Mommy's driving. The Assembly agreed to the bond, right?

(bangs on the door again)

Hey, it's one o'clock!

(The MOTHER appears not to have heard her question.)

Mom?

MOTHER

Sorry, I can't concentrate now. I'm so worried about them both.

TARANEH

(suspicious, takes the paper from her MOTHER)

So first we visit with Mona and then they release her? That doesn't make sense.

MOTHER

(hands on her kidneys.)

Aaaaaaaa.

[GUARD 1 comes to open the door.]

MOTHER

Is it possible to come in? I'd like to freshen up before my visit, you understand.

GUARD 1

Just you.

MOTHER

This is her sister.

GUARD 1

She needs to wait outside.

TARANEH

Go ahead, Mom. I'll... I'll just wait out here.

[She hands the release to her MOTHER and walks off with the baby. The MOTHER is ushered into an office by GUARD 1.]

GUARD 1

It'll be another minute.

MOTHER

Is it possible to freshen up before my visit, you understand?

GUARD 1

It'll just be a minute.

[He is gone. She tries to sit.]

MOTHER

(hands on her kidneys)

Ooohhhhhh.

(She is back up.)

O God, I want my child. I want Mona from you. I want to touch her, to kiss her cheek. The little birds all fly free but my little bird is trapped in a cage. O God, we need a miracle. Bring her to me.

[The MULLA enters.]

MULLA

Please sit.

MOTHER

Please, is there a rest room?

MULLA

I'll make this quick if you will.

[ARAM enters.]

MULLA (CONT'D)

Where's the girl's file?

[ARAM has forgotten this, and exits, embarrassed. The MOTHER goes to hand the release paper to the MULLA.]

MULLA (CONT'D)

So what was it, 100,000 Tuman?

MOTHER

(hesitates with the form)

Something like that.

MULLA

(overlapping, snatching the form from her)

It was 200, I remember.

MOTHER

Can I see her now?

MULLA

Can I see the money?

MOTHER

There is concern if we pay 200,000 now, tomorrow it might be 400, the next day 600.

MULLA

You think I'm going to cheat you?

MOTHER

Not me. If it were just me...

MULLA

Who then? The Baha'i Assembly?

MOTHER

You're twisting my words.

[ARAM reenters with a thick stack of papers.]

MULLA

(to ARAM.)

It's all here?

(He nods.)

And where is she?

ARAM

She's in a holding room, just down the hall here.

MOTHER

She's right here. Please let me see her. Just say you won't increase bail, I'll pay you in 24 hours.

[A beat.]

MULLA

(To ARAM.)

Send the girl back to her cell.

(Hands ARAM the release form.

To MOTHER.)

Now I have some questions for you.

[Flustered, ARAM goes into the hall and he lingers there, looks at the form. The MOTHER is disbelieving.]

MULLA

Who made this decision about the bail?

MOTHER

What more do you need from me? You have my husband, you have my daughter. Maybe I have a few questions for you.

MULLA

I want names.

MOTHER

I'm not your prisoner.

MULLA

No?

(He holds up a form, then takes up a stamp and brings it down on the form, then signs it.)

Now you're my prisoner.

(gets up to go)

You think you can toy with me, woman.

[He walks out to the hall and sees ARAM there. The MOTHER is aghast.]

MULLA

(impatient)

What?

ARAM

(holding Mona's release)

You said you want me to put her back in her cell?

MULLA

You want to toy with me too, boy?

(tears the release in two,
tosses it in the air)

No, no, no, this is all going to change!

[He exits. ARAM picks up the torn
release form. Seeing the devastated
MOTHER, he follows after the Mulla,
stealthily, as if to spy on him.]

ACT II, SCENE 3 - A PRISON HOLDING ROOM

[MONA waits. The sound of screaming from doors down. The door opens; it's ARAM. He looks around, makes a judgment, shuts the door and locks it.]

MONA

(nervous)

A woman needs to be here.

ARAM

We need to talk.

MONA

Am I being released?

ARAM

No.

MONA

Then take me to my cell.

ARAM

I just overheard something: he's going to start executing women.

[MONA sits. He takes out a pen and the torn release, which he has taped.]

MONA

What's that for?

ARAM

If you just write down a few sentences, I think they'll let you go.

MONA

Please take me back to my cell.

ARAM

It's just a piece of paper.

(a beat)

Look, I've been watching you, and your father, and others. I know it's not right. I know you're good people. But if you let them do this, out of pride or spite or whatever it is that makes you people so stubborn, you are responsible, Mona.

[A beat.]

MONA

(still cold)

What's your name?

ARAM

Aram.

MONA

(maybe not fully believing)

If they kill us, Aram, God will raise up others greater than us.

ARAM

You don't know that.

MONA

I do. That's how it works.

[Someone bangs on the door. ARAM jumps back behind where the door would open.]

ARAM

(whispers)

Hide.

[MONA doesn't. Someone checks the door, finds it locked, and passes. ARAM comes back to the table.]

ARAM (CONT'D)

You had a dream, with the dresses.

MONA

(defenses rising)

You read my file?

ARAM

(not flinching)

Doesn't it make sense that I am here in front of you, apparently chosen by God, to remind you what He has chosen for you? Not death, not suffering, but life.

[ARAM has written something on the paper and pushes it towards her.]

MONA

(Reading.)

"I renounce my membership in the Baha'i Faith"

(pauses)

Here's the truth: I chose the blue dress and I served. I chose the black and I've suffered. As for the red, I don't know if I am ready or worthy, but if you're the face I saw, it's not because you're chosen of God, but it's that, despite the terrible, terrible things you've done, I have to stop hating you !

[She rips up the release paper and
throws it in the air.]

ARAM

Terrible things like what?

MONA

Like killing Ehsan, Mr. Khushkhu, and Mr. Vahdat.

ARAM

No. Your friend, he kissed my hand. I couldn't fire, but I
watched him die, like a hero, and now he haunts me every
waking moment, following me wherever I go. I never killed
anyone.

[ARAM doesn't see that the door has
been opened, and the MULLA stands, keys
in hand, listening to all this.]

MULLA

Is that right?

ACT II, SCENE 4 - OUTSIDE THE PRISON

[TARANEH bangs on the same door as before, little NURA sleeping in her arms. She bangs harder. GUARD 1 comes out.]

GUARD 1

We're closed!

TARANEH

Sorry, I've been waiting for my mother. Do you know where she is?

GUARD 1

No. Come back tomorrow.
(goes to leave)

TARANEH

I don't have enough gas to get home, my mother has our cash. Can you go back inside and ask for her?

GUARD 1

No.

[He leaves. TARANEH is stunned.]

TARANEH

(to sleeping daughter)
What do we do now, sweetie?
(a beat.)
I was in such a rush.

[GUARD 1 reenters. He opens the door, pushes some money (5 tuman) into her hand, then goes.]

TARANEH

Thank you--God.

ACT II, SCENE 5 - PRISON COURTYARD

[It's night. MONA and several other women are blindfolded in a staggered line. The MULLA is there with a machine gun in his hand as he remonstrates with ARAM. GUARD 2 is nearby with a gun of his own.]

MULLA

So why the Revolutionary Guard, Hafez, if you lack the constitution for it? And be honest, a general needs to know where his soldiers stand.

ARAM

I preferred Shiraz to Iraq.

MULLA

Well, that's honest. Shiraz sure beats Iraq!

(laughs)

Yeah, but you know, wherever you go, God will find you out.

(hands him the gun. Speaks to

GUARD 2)

Get 'em lined up.

GUARD 2

Prisoners! Line up, and stand up straight!

[The MULLA nods and GUARD 2 raises his gun, aiming at the women. ARAM hesitates to do the same, so the MULLA indicates to GUARD 2 to level his gun at ARAM. ARAM raises his gun tepidly.]

MULLA

Ladies, you are about to be executed. See if your Baha'i God saves you now.

[Some begin to cry and pray aloud. MONA squeezes the hand of the woman next to her.]

MONA

God help us.

[The MULLA nods to ARAM to fire. ARAM can't. Instead GUARD 2 begins to fire wildly. Screams and bodies falling and writhing. ARAM looks on, stunned, to see perhaps half of the women who remain standing as if nothing has touched them.]

[A scene shift where the WOMAN IN WHITE appears, luminous, as if a protector of these several women. A celestial birdsong.]

[The women look around, blindfolds still on. Are they dead? Moaning is heard, then weeping. The cries come mainly from the ones who have fallen. One begins to rage.]

WOMAN

We're alive! They didn't shoot--this is just a sick, twisted game!

[ARAM is just as shocked as the women. GUARD 2 though was in the know.]

GUARD 2

(smiles, to ARAM)

Aimed over their heads.

ARAM catches his breath.

MULLA

They weren't the real target.

(takes ARAM's gun. to GUARD 2)

Take the ones on the ground to interrogation. The ones standing, bring them to their cells.

(to MONA's group)

Congratulations, ladies, you won that round. Miss Mahmudnizhad, you'll be happy to know your mother will be waiting for you.

MONA

My mother?

[She and the other are ushered off. The MULLA and ARAM are left.]

MULLA

(with a mixture of admiration and impatience)

See that? When they don't fear death any more, we start to run out of options. And then there are things worse than death, right, Hafez?

ACT II, SCENE 6 - PRISON CELL & VISITATION AREA

[MONA is brought to her cell with WOMAN 2, one of those who remained standing in the previous scene. Their blindfolds are removed.]

MONA

Did you see it?

[WOMAN 2 nods.]

MONA

It was like a world of love and light opening up to us. I don't know why we're still here.

[They comfort each other. Her MOTHER is brought in. She is layered with blankets. WOMAN 2 is led off.]

MOTHER

Mona? Is that you?

MONA

Mom?

MOTHER

Oh honey, I love you so much. Oh, let me hug you, let me kiss you!

MONA

What are you doing in here?

MOTHER

They kept me in that room for hours! It was awful. But what's happened to you? Look at you, you're shaking?

MONA

I'm just so happy to see you.

[They hold each other tight. Scene shift to the Visitation Area. The FATHER and TARANEH are separated by a glass barrier and they speak through phones.]

TARANEH

You know Mom is in now.

[He nods. TARANEH begins to cry. He shakes his head.]

FATHER

It's not as bad as that.

TARANEH

Dad, I just feel so helpless and alone. I can't seem to do anything to get you released. I try: I go here, they send me there, I go there, they send me right back. I'm depressed and it's not good for the baby, I know. I feel...

FATHER

What?

TARANEH

I feel left out, like God has forgotten me. Wasn't I worth being imprisoned for my Faith too?

FATHER

My dear, you on the outside are in the harsher prison.

TARANEH

(nodding, then--)

You mean Iran?

[He smiles lovingly. The scene shifts back to the prison cell, where MONA, her MOTHER, and a couple other women sit back to back on the ground.]

MOTHER

Here, honey, take a blanket. I just threw them all on top of me.

MONA

I'm okay. Have you eaten yet?

MOTHER

So cold in here! I don't know how you girls aren't freezing to death.

MONA

Here, Mom, have another blanket. You haven't eaten your dinner.

MOTHER

I don't know who could. And the smell, I can barely breathe.

MONA

You're just not used to it.

MOTHER

You get used to it?

MONA

It's important to keep the right attitude in here--

[An obnoxiously loud VOICE comes over the P.A..]

VOICE OVER P.A.

Prisoners! A victory for Islam! Last night, a husband and wife, recanted the Baha'i heresy. Now they are free!

[Someone groans. The rest seem to hold their breath.]

VOICE OVER P.A. (CONT'D)

To celebrate, we are letting family members in prison meet to talk it over.

[Reactions. The other women kiss MONA and her MOTHER and exit, as if back to their own cells.]

VOICE OVER P.A. (CONT'D)

Islam is the open door!

The FATHER makes his way, barely able to walk, but GUARD 2 helps him. He focuses ahead, trying not to give attention to the great pain, and sees MONA and the MOTHER.

FATHER

Look, look who--Brother, thank you for bringing me this far.

MOTHER

O Lord!

MONA

Daddy!

MOTHER

What've they done to you, Jamshid?

[Arriving, he shakes GUARD 2's shoulders as if to show he is his brother. MONA and the MOTHER make room for him to sit, and for a while they just look at each other.]

MONA

You look like a candle.

FATHER

Just waiting for His breath to blow.

MOTHER

No, don't say that--you'll still be okay. Jamshid, what will become of me if you go?

FATHER

(Speaking with difficulty, but
with dignity and joy.)

My wife, from Bahá'u'lláh, our inheritance is prison. From the Báb, martyrdom.

MOTHER

Please stop--My heart is breaking.

FATHER

Mine is overflowing.

[MONA rises and kisses her father's eyes. They look at each other and tears are falling.]

FATHER

I'm so happy. These tears are from happiness. This is not goodbye. We have a new home, and I am going.

[The MOTHER is overcome, but she nods.]

FATHER

And when the time is right, I will come for you.

MOTHER

I'm going to hold you to that. I'm sorry, I'm so sorry...

FATHER

No, no. All is washed clean.

MOTHER

Please no more. Talk to Mona, you haven't said a word.

[He looks into MONA's eyes lovingly, searchingly.]

FATHER

Are you heavenly or earthly?

MONA

Heavenly.

FATHER

(Standing with a spurt of
energy.)

Then let's go!

[Scene shift as if the FATHER has started his ascent to the next world, embodied by the WOMAN IN WHITE's beckoning. MONA sees and speaks to her FATHER as if across time, but the MOTHER recedes. GUARD 2 has entered.]

GUARD 2
Yadu'lláh Mahmúdnizhád.

MONA
Must you go now?

GUARD 2
Rahmatu'lláh Vafáí.

FATHER
This separation is only temporary.

GUARD 2
Túbá Zá'irpúr

MONA
Just a little longer.

WOMAN IN WHITE
Come.

MONA
Wait. What about me?

FATHER
Your dress isn't finished. It should be one color, just one.

MONA
What do you mean?

FATHER
Love, Mona--This is the real color of your dress.

MONA
Daddy...!

[The FATHER goes with the WOMAN IN WHITE. We see, if anything, the briefest enactment in silence of the hanging of the three.]

FATHER
(just before going)
May my life be sacrificed for you.

MONA

(alone, without a tear)

Won't you congratulate me, friends? My father has been
martyred for his faith, and I am so immensely proud of him.

[The silence is broken by the scream of
the MOTHER, who wanders just offstage,
inconsolable, banging on the bars.]

MOTHER

(barely intelligible)

Where is Mona? Where is my daughter?

MONA

(not addressing her directly,
still with minimal emotion)

Mother, I think I need to be alone.

ACT II, SCENE 7 - PRISON CELL & ELSEWHERE

[It's the next night. MONA is on the floor of their cell, facing away, praying fervidly. Her MOTHER, still grief-stricken, is comforted by other prisoners.]

MOTHER

It's been a full day: she doesn't eat, she doesn't talk. O God, I can't lose her too.

WOMAN

Let her be. Come, Farkhundih, she'll be okay.

[They move her off. Elsewhere, FARAH is searching the sky for Mona's star.]

FARAH

Where are you tonight, Mona? I can't find your star. Are you up there? It's me, Farah. See me, on the horizon-there, at the foot of the bear. I look up, I see the moon, but no Mona. You said you'd be there! Maybe the moon has swallowed you up, swallowed you whole, you made it jealous the way you shine. Can the moon put out the light of a star? No, I know this much: next to a star, a moon is a speck of dust. You'll come back. I'm counting on you to come back.

[Scene shift back to MONA. The prison though has shifted. There's no one around, no sound, and there are hints in the lighting that eternity waits behind these walls. MONA stands. She walks to the wall and kicks it.]

MONA

Let me out!

[She shouts and hits the walls with her fists and feet.]

MONA

(more in pain than anger)

I want out. Why don't you take me? You showed me the other side...Why am I still here where one pointless day leads into another unless for some reason? Does my pain mean anything? Does it...

[She can't finish the thought. ARAM is there in the shadows.]

ARAM

Say it.

MONA
 (startled)
 What are you doing here?

ARAM
 (finishing MONA's thought)
 Does it please Him to see you in pain?

[He has come more into the light; he is a wreck of abuse and wears a mask. He is weak and leans against a wall to keep balance.]

ARAM
 That's what you can't bring yourself to say.

MONA
 You don't belong here.

[The crack of a whip and ARAM buckles. He lurches closer, struggling here and throughout to stand upright.]

MONA
 Stop! Stay back!

ARAM
You need to stop!

MONA
 (pushing back at him)
 Me?! You're threatening me!

[Another crack of a whip.]

ARAM
 (falling back from her)
 Look at me!

[ARAM takes off his mask; his face is beaten black and blue. He struggles to stand upright.]

MONA
 (repulsed)
 Yaggh...

ARAM
 Look at what you did!

MONA
 I didn't do that. Help!!

[The WOMAN IN WHITE is revealed with several other SPIRITS.]

WOMAN IN WHITE

Aram.

[ARAM goes to her, as if seeking her protection.]

WOMAN IN WHITE

Oooh...

[She touches his face and looks to MONA, who is astonished. Sensing she's being blamed, MONA shakes her head "no." The WOMAN IN WHITE smiles gently. There is a surging of light from beyond the prison walls. The WOMAN IN WHITE and the others turn towards the light.]

MONA

Are you here to take me? To where you are?

WOMAN IN WHITE

I'm here with you.

MONA

But you're not. You're... illumined.

WOMAN IN WHITE

This is the world of light.

[There is another surging of light, brighter than before.]

MONA

Then why is he here?

[The whip again.]

ARAM

Stop hurting me!

MONA

(advancing on him)

You're the guard, you're the man--even though you have no spine...

[The whip punctuates each statement.]

ARAM

(In agony)

She's doing it again!

[Overcome, he's attended to by the SPIRITS.]

MONA

I don't understand.

WOMAN IN WHITE

The rules are different here.

(a beat)

What is it that you want?

MONA

(bracing herself)

I would like to trade my blue and black dresses for the red.

ARAM

(comes up to her)

No! No! You can't!!

MONA

Do it!

[She opens her arms as if bracing for death, but he doesn't touch her. Instead, the WOMAN IN WHITE does.]

WOMAN IN WHITE

Mona, he can't hurt you here. Here you are strong.

[The lights swell again. The MULLA is wheeled across the back of the stage in a lamentable, comatose state. All turn to watch as mourners would a coffin.]

MONA

(with awakened anxiety)

So this is the next world? Why does it look like a prison?

WOMAN IN WHITE

(smiles gently)

Friends...

[She motions the SPIRITS over. They gather around MONA as the prisoners had earlier. Silence as they listen.]

SPIRITS

(speaking alternately)

Flowers. Air, fresh air. Sky. Water. Kebab.

(They laugh.)

Love. Family. Companionship. Children

(all together)

Children!

(One by one, again)
 She loves children.
 (MONA laughs.)
 Healing. Peace. Freedom.
 (Several agree.)
 Freedom.

MONA
 (thrilled but anxious)
 But how is love for flowers or children or freedom bad?

[The SPIRITS resume listening, and only speak with reticence. They do not wish to look at the negative and are careful to mitigate.]

SPIRITS
 Some fear. Anger. Often overcome through prayer. Need for justice. Retribution.

MONA
 So is it a bad thing to want justice?
 (No response)
 Come on, look what they've done.
 (moved, tears)
 They killed him. O God, they killed him, and now I can't see him anymore unless you let me come here.

SPIRITS
 (so gently)
 Heartbreak.

ARAM
 It's despair.

[He comes forward. The SPIRITS do not object, but withdraw from the discussion. This is the darkness.]

ARAM
 Despair that you are forgotten. And that even if God is there, He doesn't care about your pain. So to save yourself you kick and scream and flail at the night.

MONA
 You see that in me?

ARAM
 I see it in everyone. I try to avoid it, but, in my heart, I don't feel Him.

MONA
 I do.

ARAM

Even when you look at me?

(a beat)

God can work through me too, right, Mona? You're so... beyond where I am. If you don't see any hope for me...

[He gestures "how can I?" but in such an innocent, childlike way. MONA breathes in, and there is a crack and the prison walls begin to move. The light starts to shine in.]

MONA

My father showed you such kindness, and I didn't understand. I saw what you'd done in darkness. He saw who you are, here.

WOMAN IN WHITE

It's time.

MONA

I'm not ready to go back. I don't know if I'll be able to hold onto this.

[The vision is nearing an end as the light has reached its peak. ARAM stands, more sturdily than before. Someone comes forward with a package. It has a red bow.]

WOMAN IN WHITE

What is it that you want?

MONA

(after a moment)

Perseverance.

[The SPIRITS gather around.]

WOMAN IN WHITE & SPIRITS

What do you want from us?

MONA

Perseverance for all the Baha'is.

WOMAN IN WHITE

What do you want for yourself from us?

[The scene is painfully shifting back to the physical realm, back to the prison cell.]

MONA

(under the strain of reentry)
Perseverance, perseverance, perseverance.

WOMAN IN WHITE

We will be watching.

[She is gone with her companions. It is now morning. MONA sits on the bed, bathing in the light of a new day as it pours through an upstage window. Everywhere else is dark.]

The MOTHER wakens to see MONA looking like a vision in light.]

MOTHER

How radiant you are.

[MONA turns and smiles.]

MOTHER

So you're back?

[MONA turns back to the light. The MOTHER sits on the bed.]

MOTHER

I've been trying to imagine life without your father, and all I can think of is how I want us to be free and you to have a family.

MONA

I need to tell you something.

MOTHER

Okay.

MONA

I'm going to be executed.

MOTHER

Don't say that.

MONA

Do you want to know how I know?

MOTHER

I don't want to know anything about that!

MONA

If you don't let me tell you, you will regret it later.

MOTHER

O God, you know a mother's heart, you created it and you see it breaking, don't you? Please don't let Mona be executed, please don't--

MONA

Mom, stop.

MOTHER

Look how beautiful you are. You can't see, but my God! If you died, don't you see what a pity it would be?

MONA

That's okay.

MOTHER

But a family! Children! A loving husband!

MONA

(a discovery)

Maybe a family is not what I want or need.

(pauses, more discoveries:)

What I really want is bigger than that. I want to see this world changed, Mom. I want freedom and love and opportunity and joy and light for all the people of the world. And I want the children and the youth to take the lead. If they rose up and overcame the barriers that have separated us, if they learned to meet hatred with love, they could become a new race of men that the world has been waiting for, dying for! The world needs them, desperately, and I believe somehow, if I am strong enough to take this path before me, it will help them on their path. And they'll change this earth into heaven. That's what I want really. That's my dream, Mom. And for that dream, I wish I had a thousand lives to give.

(pauses)

Do you see?

[The MOTHER is changed by MONA's vision.]

MOTHER

I do.

[MONA smiles.]

MOTHER

It frightens me, but I do.

(standing up)

If only they would come now and take us all!

GUARD 2

(entering)

It's time.

ACT II, SCENE 8 - PRISON COURTROOM

[A makeshift courtroom. The MULLA sits at a large table. At the corner is a chair and a typewriter. There is a chair in front of the table meant for the accused. GUARD 1 leads the MOTHER forward.]

GUARD

Wait there, please.

(He takes up a seat before the typewriter.)

Come now.

[The MOTHER comes forward.]

MOTHER

Hello.

[The GUARD types it ('hello'). The MOTHER goes to the chair but doesn't sit down; instead she stands with her hand on the chair and pretends to be deaf.]

MULLA

Sit down, please.

MOTHER

What's that?

MULLA

Sit down.

MOTHER

Sorry?

MULLA

(Smiling.)

So now you're deaf? (To GUARD 1.) This is the wife of the man who kept saying they have to tell the truth.

[He laughs, and goes through her file. The MOTHER is edified and gives up the deaf pretense.]

MOTHER

So is this all? I've seen courtrooms and hearings at the movies, and there is always a defense attorney and witnesses.

MULLA

This is not the movies! Sit down.

[She does.]

MULLA

You are from a Zoroastrian background, right?

MOTHER

Yes.

MULLA

Why did you leave such a good religion as the Faith of Zoroaster and convert to Bahá'ísm?

MOTHER

Because that's what my heart told me to do.

MULLA

This is not a matter of the heart! If right now you declare you are Zoroastrian, I will set you free.

MOTHER

No sir, I will neither become a Zoroastrian nor a Muslim, so what is my sentence?

MULLA

Death.

MOTHER

(defiant)

I am not worthy of martyrdom, but it would make me very happy. As God is my witness, it will make me immeasurably happy.

MULLA

You will be happy?

MOTHER

Yes.

MULLA

We are not here to make you happy! Take her.

[The MOTHER is taken away. MONA is brought in. Same business as before.]

MULLA

Your parents have deceived and misled you. They have forced you to imitate them.

MONA

It's true that I was born into it, but I have made up my own mind.

MULLA

Girl, you don't know the first thing about religion.

[MONA raises her gaze, which until now was lowered, and smiles.]

MULLA

Why are you smiling?

MONA

What more proof do you want? You took me out of my parents' home, out of school, brought me to this prison, put me through these interrogation and hardship, you killed my father--what haven't I suffered for my religion?

MULLA

Stop. Stop moving your arms and body like that--you're trying to distract me from my duties!

(a beat)

What harm did you find in Islam that you turned away from it?

MONA

I believe in Islam. I also believe that from time to time God renews His religion when it becomes darkened--and so He has sent a new Messenger, Bahá'u'lláh, with new laws...

MULLA

Muhammad is the Seal of the Prophets--There will be no more Messengers!

MONA

(Overlapping.)

Now if by Islam you mean the hatred and bloodshed going on in this country, now that is the reason I'm a Bahá'í!

MULLA

Silence! (Pause.) We must obey the Qur'an. Accept Islam or face execution.

MONA

(moved)

I kiss the order of execution.

MULLA

Very well, bring the mother back in!

[GUARD 1 exits. A bird is heard singing outside.]

MULLA

You're smiling again!

MONA

The world is waking up.

MULLA

Forget about the world! No one's going to hear what's happened to you here! We're going to snuff you out--not just you, all of you! Somebody find that bird and kill it.

[The MULLA tries to regain his composure, calculates. GUARD 1 returns, leading the MOTHER in. MONA and her MOTHER stand side by side and hold hands in solidarity.]

MULLA

(To MOTHER.)

Mrs. Mahmúdnizhád, you wanted to know what your sentence was?

MOTHER

Yes.

MULLA

We have killed your husband, we will now kill your daughter. Your sentence is your freedom. You are free to go home and spend the rest of your days mourning their loss.

[This was unexpected.]

MOTHER

Mona?

MONA

No tears, Mom, remember our talk!

MULLA

Get her out of here!

MOTHER

O my lovely daughter!

[The MOTHER is forced out of the room. The MULLA speaks to GUARD 2, referring to MONA.]

MULLA

Take her, put her with the other nine. Hang them one at a time from oldest to youngest. This one will be the last. Perhaps the sight of the older ones choking and flailing about will encourage the younger ones.

[All are gone. The MULLA sighs.]

[Scene shift to a solitary confinement cell, the size of a dog cage. ARAM is in it, though we can't recognize him at first. He whines like an animal. The MULLA comes up and crouches down.]

MULLA

I have a job for you if you're ready to come out.

[He sticks his hand close to the bars, and ARAM crawls to kiss it.]

ACT II, SCENE 10 - AN ABANDONED POLO FIELD AND BEYOND

[MONA stands still, praying. ARAM enters, masked, bruised and beaten all over. He approaches MONA.]

ARAM

I don't want to kill you, Mona.

MONA

(without looking at him)

Do your job.

ARAM

(takes off his mask)

I had a vision of you, in my cell.

MONA

I'm sorry.

ARAM

You were nursing my wounds.

[Something inside MONA lets go. She looks up at ARAM with great love. Her FATHER and the WOMAN IN WHITE are now present. MONA takes ARAM's hand, which he pulls back, but she gently insists.]

MONA

I see why now. You have made my dream come true.

ARAM

(moved)

I'll tell them what you've done here.

[She kisses his hand and they step upstage. The company comes forward to lay down dresses for each of the 10 women martyrs of Shiraz, as the actor playing the FATHER reads their names.]

FATHER

'Izzat Ishráqí. Nusrat Yaldá'í. Táhirih Síyávushí. Zarrín Muqímí. Mahshíd Nírúmand. Shírín Dálvand. Símin Sábírí. Akhtar Sabet. Roya Ishráqí. Mona Mahmúdnizhád.

[When called, MONA comes forward wearing the red dress and lays down her chador as the final dress.]

END OF PLAY