

A NEW DRESS FOR MONA

By

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This script is a major revision of “A Dress for Mona” (2002) and incorporates new historical accounts acquired since then.

Draft 2.1

[December 27, 2007]

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A NEW DRESS FOR MONA

A country in revolution

A dream of three dresses

16 year-old Mona is finding out the meaning of love

Shiraz, Iran. 1982. Fanaticism runs rampant in the streets, and Mona, as a Bahá'í – a member of Iran's largest religious minority – is the fanatic's prime target. One night, she has an important dream. It is a dream of three dresses, each representing a different direction her life might take. In her dream and in her waking life, Mona makes her choice – a choice that will lead her straight into danger's path. Based on a true account, this full-length drama raises fundamental and challenging questions about life, faith and sacrifice for all to consider.

Setting

Shiraz, Iran. 1982-83
(A few years into the Islamic Revolution)

Cast of Characters

Mona (Mahmúdnizhád)	16; bright, passionate, not yet a saint
Father (Yadu'lláh Mahmúdnizhád)	Middle-aged; gentle, loving, with a youthful exuberance & a compelling manner.
Mother (Fárhundih Mahmúdnizhád)	Middle-aged; anxious, strong-willed, tender-hearted.
Young Man	20ish. Quiet, with a poetic streak.
Mr. Alízádeh	Middle-aged; charismatic, Mona's teacher
Farah (Ja'farí)	16; bold and worldly, Mona's friend
Mrs. <u>Khudáyár</u>	Middle-aged; loyal, a close neighbor
Áqá Husayní	Middle-aged; a powerful mulla (Islamic religious cleric), adamant
Shopkeeper	An opportunist who believes he is principled. (Role may be doubled with <i>Alizadeh</i> or <i>Aqa Husayni</i> .)
Guard (Male)	Tough guy, loud and proud (Role may be doubled with <i>Alizadeh</i> .)

Cast requirements: 4 female; 4 male

Act I, Scene 1 – Mona’s room

It’s the middle of the night. MONA sits on the floor looking at a photo of a group of people. Nearby lies her abandoned schoolwork. In front of her, there are ten unlit candles arranged on a little table. MONA lowers the picture and presses play on a tape recorder: music is heard. She speaks aloud as if invoking the presence of the spirits of the people in the picture.

MONA

Friends, eight members of the National Spiritual Assembly, Mona congratulates you. You have chosen well—*(Striking a match.)*—to burn away in the fire of the love of your Lord.

As MONA recites the following names, she lights a candle for each one.

MONA

Kámrán Samímí. Zhínús Mahmúdí. Mahmúd Majzúb. Jalál Azízí. Mihdí Amín Amín. Sírús Rawshání. Izzatu’lláh Furúhí. Qudratu’lláh Rawhání.

As she does this, her little room has begun to open up as if merging with the next world. Figures gather around, as if drawn by her invocation.

MONA

Number nine is for my father, Yadu’lláh Mahmúdnizhád.

She brings the candle close to her heart. Her MOTHER is at the door.

MOTHER

Do you know what time it is?

No response. The figures recede some.

MOTHER

Why aren’t you looking at me?

MONA

Is Dad home yet?

MOTHER

No.

MONA *(Lowering the candle.)*

I am praying for the martyrs.

MOTHER

I don’t get you, Mona. Look at your sister—she just had a baby and she looks better than you. This halo you’re working on over your head is giving you circles under your eyes.

MONA

I'm supposed to be writing an essay for my religious literature class, but I was getting upset, so I decided to pray.

MOTHER

So write it tomorrow.

MONA

I have plans tomorrow.

MOTHER

What plans?

MONA

I'm going shopping with Farah.

MOTHER

I told you I need you here. There are a thousand things to do around this house, and with your father gone so much—

MONA

—anyway, it doesn't matter when I write it, because the problem is the topic. They're making us write about how Islam brings freedom into our lives.

MOTHER

So?

MONA

So, they kill our friends, force us to wear scarves at school and then expect us to swallow this propaganda? I thought about not writing it, but then my teacher's going to fail me and get me kicked out of school.

MOTHER

Look, it's a paper for school—they're not interested in your thinking. They want to know if you can spell or put a sentence together. Just write something and be done with it.

MONA

What am I supposed to write?

MOTHER

Tell them what they want to hear.

MONA

What they want to hear is a lie.

MOTHER

Fine, talk to them about real Islam. We don't have any problem with that.

MONA

What do you mean?

MOTHER

When you say "Islam," don't think about the regime, think about the spiritual teachings of Muhammad—pray to God, give to the poor...

MONA

But they'll think I'm talking about them and what they believe, so it's a lie.

MOTHER

No, you're telling the truth, and in your heart you know that.

MONA

But isn't it a lie if I'm not communicating my real feelings?

MOTHER

You're over-thinking this.

MONA

This is important. I need to know what God wants me to do.

MOTHER

It's not that simple, Mona. God doesn't just send us down answers like that.

MONA

I think He will. I think He will answer me if I ask in the right way. But I have to be willing to accept whatever answer He gives—I think that's the price of getting your questions answered.

MOTHER

Why do you have all these candles? You only needed eight.

MONA

The man gave me ten. Number nine was for Dad, whose destiny is to become a martyr.

MOTHER

I told you I don't want you talking like that.

MONA (*Lighting a match*)

And the tenth I light in my willingness to join them...

MOTHER

Stop this nonsense! (*She tries to blow out the candles and keep Mona from lighting her own candle.*) Just like your father, so ready to sacrifice yourself for others—you don't know what you're talking about! Here in your room, in the dead of night, yeah, it's so easy to say. You're going to have me awake all night with this morbid talk of yours.

MONA

'Abdu'l-Bahá says we should be like the moth that throws itself into the fire.

MOTHER

It's a symbol, you're not supposed to take it literally.

MONA

So what does it mean?

MOTHER

I don't know, ask 'Abdu'l-Bahá.

MONA

That's my plan.

MOTHER

You enjoy seeing me like this? I want you to put this all away and go to bed.

MONA

I have that paper to write.

MOTHER

No. No prayer, no paper, go to bed. Turn out that light and sleep. (*Softening.*) You pray too much, leave prayer for when you're old and gray, like me. Now you have your beauty, and you need your sleep.

She exits. MONA has gotten into bed.

MONA

Daddy, come home.

Mona turns over, and before long, the scene transitions to Scene 2 "Mona's Dream," which was hinted at by the appearance of the figures earlier in Scene 1.

Act I, Scene 2 - Mona's Dream

MONA wakes to find herself in the presence of a majestic HOLY FIGURE, whose face and person are hidden from view. Others stand about, ready to serve.

A VOICE

A gift from God.

[The HOLY FIGURE gestures and a red dress is offered. MONA takes it and holds it up to herself. There is a sudden reveal of a girl being hanged. MONA shudders, pushes the dress away, but restrains herself from outright refusal.]

MONA

If it be your will.

[The dress and the image are gone as quickly as they came. The HOLY FIGURE gestures and a black dress is offered. MONA again holds the dress up to herself. Reveal of a scene with a girl moaning, as if in great distress. Again, MONA pushes the dress away, and again she tempers her response.]

MONA

How beautiful the tears that are shed in your path.

[The black dress and the image are gone. The HOLY FIGURE brings forward a blue dress.]

MONA

I like blue.

[MONA takes the blue dress and holds it up to herself without any trepidation.]

A VOICE

The choice is made. The choice is Service.

[MONA then catches a glimpse of the face of the HOLY FIGURE. It's the face of a YOUNG MAN, a kind face, with a power emanating from it that derives from no mortal charm but from another, far greater source.]

MONA (Awestruck.)

Aaaaaah!

HOLY FIGURE

Look for me.

MONA

Aaaaaah!

HOLY FIGURE

I am there when you look for me.

MONA

Who are you?

The voice of Mona's MOTHER is heard from off.

MOTHER (*Off.*)

Mona!

HOLY FIGURE

In the face of others—

MONA

I don't want to wake up...

HOLY FIGURE

Look for me.

MONA

I'm not done—

MOTHER (*Entering.*)

Honey, are you okay?

[The HOLY FIGURE is gone with the dress and all, and the scene has shifted back to Mona's room.]

MONA

Aaaahhhhhhhhh!

MOTHER

It's okay, Mommy's here.

MONA

Aaaah.

MOTHER

Speak to me. What is it?

MONA

A dress. I need a new dress.

Her MOTHER looks at her, befuddled. End of scene.

Act I, Scene 3 - A clothing shop off a busy street

MONA moves quickly to a rack of dresses and begins moving through them. FARAH, her friend, follows after. The SHOPKEEPER is a middle aged man, who is persistent, but maintains a safe distance from the girls.

FARAH

Okay, you're killing me, this is the tenth shop we've been to.

SHOPKEEPER

Hello girls, we just got in some nice scarves...

MONA

I know what I want, and I know it's out here somewhere.

SHOPKEEPER

Very good prices.

FARAH

I don't get it exactly, what was the word you used?

MONA

He said 'service.' The first one was red, it meant martyrdom. The middle one was black, it stood for a life of pain and suffering.

FARAH

There's a choice there?

SHOPKEEPER

What color do you like?

FARAH

No thank you. What about the last one?

MONA

The last dress was to live a life of service.

FARAH

What about a life of fun?

MONA

That wasn't an option.

SHOPKEEPER

These here are very fashionable and still modest.

MONA
Sir, we're not looking for veils.

FARAH
Hey, hey, that's it! Maybe you're supposed to get married.

MONA
What!

FARAH
Maybe it was a wedding dress.

MONA
A blue wedding dress?

FARAH
White is going out, everyone knows that.

MONA
Farah, that's not it at all.

FARAH
Was there a guy in this dream?

MONA
Yes.

FARAH
There's your future husband!

MONA
Forget it, this dream is NOT about marriage.

FARAH
I'm just saying, there's a dress, a man and a service.

MONA
I didn't say a service!

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

SHOPKEEPER
God willing.

FARAH

Are you listening to our conversation?

MONA

That is not what it was about. It was a very spiritual dream, Farah.

FARAH

Look, you're always going here and there helping your father, visiting your people when they're down. You do the housekeeping, then there's all your orphan kids—you're always making me walk with you to save your cab fare just to buy them crayons and cheese puffs! What more are we supposed to do?

MONA

I don't know, but something is missing.

FARAH

You're too good, that's your problem. It's a wonder I even like you. I usually can't stand good people. Why do I like you? Do I like you?

MONA

None of these are right.

FARAH

What style are you looking for?

MONA

(Finding a blue dress.)

Wait a second, this one here. This is just like the dress from my dream.

In turning, MONA glimpses the face of a YOUNG MAN, who has been hanging around the door. It's the same face as the HOLY FIGURE from the dream, but without the power. After a moment, he turns away.

FARAH *(Seeing dress.)*

Oh, that's cute.

MONA

Do I know that guy? He looks familiar.

FARAH

How do I know? *(To shopkeeper.)* Excuse me, do you have this dress in her size?

SHOPKEEPER

That's a nice dress, a beautiful dress! Look at that, look how that will look on you. And with a scarf like this...

MONA

No thank you, just the dress.

SHOPKEEPER

Some of these men, they are not good Muslims. He sees you without a scarf, your hair, your neck, he starts to get aroused.

FARAH

What are you, a guard?

SHOPKEEPER

I'm a man, I have the power of imagination.

FARAH

You need to control your imagination.

SHOPKEEPER

I'm not saying me, I'm saying others... Then if a gentleman of the clergy were to come walking by here and see me talking to you like this, as if it were the time of the Shah....

MONA

All right, while we're in the shop. *(She takes the scarf and puts it on.)*

FARAH

(To MONA.) Why did you cave in to him? You've got to stand up for yourself! *(Putting on a scarf, to SHOPKEEPER.)* You should wear the scarf and use it to cover your eyes!

MONA

How much for the dress?

SHOPKEEPER

For you, Miss—this dress was made for you. This designer had a vision from God and said I must make this dress for this girl. This designer is European, you know.

FARAH

European? The label says Afghanistan.

SHOPKEEPER

So he didn't design the label, I'm talking about the dress. Look, I'll charge you only what I paid. Maybe... 100.

FARAH

Rial?

SHOPKEEPER

Rial. 100 Tuman.

FARAH

You didn't pay 100 tuman for this dress!

MONA

Sir, I don't have that much.

FARAH

She'll give you 10.

SHOPKEEPER

Sister, I paid 85 for it, at least! How much do you have?

MONA

I have... maybe 30.

SHOPKEEPER

Maybe your loud friend has some. Okay, 50 more, 80 all together, and I'll throw in the scarf for 10. (*To YOUNG MAN just outside the door.*) Excuse me, young man, I see you keep looking in the shop, what can I do for you?

YOUNG MAN

Nothing.

SHOPKEEPER

You know these girls?

YOUNG MAN

No.

SHOPKEEPER

You better get them to start wearing hejab, or I can't sell to them anymore.

YOUNG MAN

I'm sorry, I don't know them.

The YOUNG MAN can barely look at MONA. He turns his face but doesn't go away.

FARAH

She'll offer you 20 tuman.

SHOPKEEPER

This is your boyfriend you want to look good for?

MONA

I don't have a boyfriend.

SHOPKEEPER

I was giving you a good price, 90 tuman...

FARAH

You said 70.

SHOPKEEPER

...assuming you were a good girl, a chaste Muslim.

MONA

Well, I'm not a chaste Muslim, I'm a chaste Bahá'í.

FARAH (*Cautioning.*)

Mona...

SHOPKEEPER

A what? Bábí?

MONA

Bahá'í. They stopped calling us Bábís a hundred years ago.

SHOPKEEPER

Babi, bahi, same difference. (*He takes the dress back.*) 200 tuman.

YOUNG MAN

Look, I don't know these girls—

SHOPKEEPER

Then mind your own business. 200.

FARAH

So her money is a different color now?

SHOPKEEPER (*Not directly to Mona.*)

A mulla comes here, he sees me giving her a good deal, he thinks I am Bábí, closes my shop, maybe I go to jail.

YOUNG MAN

Look, sorry if I caused any of this problem.

MONA

Have I seen you somewhere?

YOUNG MAN (*Taken aback.*)

I'm trying to help you here.

SHOPKEEPER

I see what's going on.

YOUNG MAN

Look, I'm just out here waiting for my brother. (*He walks away.*)

MONA (*Aside to FARAH.*)

O my God—Farah, that's the guy who was in my dream.

FARAH

In your dream!

MONA

Shhh.

YOUNG MAN (*To himself.*)

Her dream?

SHOPKEEPER

Enough of your little play—this dress is no longer for sale.

FARAH

30 tuman and that's it!

SHOPKEEPER

Go on, get out.

MONA

Excuse me?

SHOPKEEPER

You heard me—out!

MONA (*To FARAH.*)

Now wait a minute: God sends me the dream: there's the guy, there's the dress, but now I can't buy it?

[MONA *squares off to confront the SHOPKEEPER, who waits for her best shot.*]

SHOPKEEPER

What are you going to do, Babi girl? Cast a spell on me?

MONA (*Turning to leave.*)

Forget it. I need to stop by some place on the way home.

SHOPKEEPER

And stay out!

FARAH (*To SHOPKEEPER.*)

Fine! She doesn't want your Afghani rag anyway!

MONA exits followed by FARAH. The YOUNG MAN watches them go off, then comes back in the shop.

SHOPKEEPER

You go now, you'll lose your girlfriends.

YOUNG MAN

Let me see that dress.

SHOPKEEPER

Are you deaf? It's not for sale!

YOUNG MAN

Don't make a scene.

SHOPKEEPER

Neither you nor those two are going to touch this dress without a note from the Ayatollah himself.

End of scene.

Act I, Scene 4 – Mahmudnizhad Home

Later that afternoon. Mona's FATHER and MOTHER sit quietly in their living room. There is tension in the air, as if he's delivered some news she was not expecting.

FATHER

Aren't you going to say something?

MOTHER

What do you want me to say? That I'm happy for you? It doesn't matter what I say.

FATHER

Of course, it does.

MOTHER

You're not coming to me asking me my opinion on this. You've already made up your mind.

He is silent.

MOTHER

Have you thought about the impact this will have on us? On your daughter?

FATHER

Yes.

MOTHER

She needs a father.

FATHER

Farkhundih.

MOTHER

I am not blowing this out of proportion—look at the Vahdat family—

MONA enters through the front door. Her FATHER stands to greet her, while her MOTHER tries to stifle her own emotions.

MONA

Hello.

FATHER

Hello, my dear one.

MONA

Mama, can I wear my shoes inside today?

MOTHER

What?

MONA

I don't want to take my shoes off.

MOTHER

I don't know that it matters, the house is such a mess—you told me you'd be back by noon.

MONA walks in, carefully, paying very deliberate attention to her feet.

MONA

It took me longer than I thought.

MOTHER

Why are you walking like that? I just don't get you sometimes, either of you.

MONA

What's going on?

MOTHER

Sit down, your father has news for you.

MONA

Good news?

FATHER

I've been appointed to the Auxiliary Board.

[A beat.]

MONA

Wow, Dad, that's such an honor. *(She hugs him.)*

MOTHER

He didn't stick out enough as it was, now he has a new title.

FATHER

A new level of service.

MOTHER

I'm sorry, it's wonderful, I know it is—I'm going shopping. Mona, I wrote a list for you and put it on your bed. I want you to get started right away—

MONA

Okay.

MOTHER

Right away, I'm not happy about you coming home so late when there's so much to do.
(*She exits.*)

FATHER

She has a right to be worried.

A few moments pass with MONA and her FATHER not speaking. They seem to communicate—not through any external signals, but through a silence that is grounded in deep trust. The FATHER gets up and begins to straighten up the apartment, which in truth is already quite tidy.

FATHER

You were walking as if on rose petals—what happened?

MONA

Well, I found a blue dress just like the one in my dream.

FATHER

You did?

MONA

But the shopkeeper wouldn't sell it to me when he found out I was a Bahá'í.

FATHER

How did he find that out?

MONA

I told him is how.

FATHER

Of course. (*Referring to the couch.*) Help me move this back.

MONA (*Helping.*)

Then there was this young man outside the store, the same one who was in my dream, who gave me the dress.

FATHER

Really!

MONA

Yes.

FATHER

Look at that! He said, “Look for me” and you found him.

MONA

So you think it’s not about the dress, but about him?

FATHER

(Retrieving a broom.)

God knows.

MONA

You know Farah thought the dream might mean...

FATHER

Yes?

MONA

(Having stopped helping with the cleaning.)

No, it’s silly, but you know I’m thinking—you weren’t born a Bahá’í and look at you.

FATHER

What do you mean?

MONA

You do so much for the Faith, and I mean, you used to be a Muslim and into politics...

Mom could have passed you on the street and never spoken to you. I mean, think about the possibilities of this life, Dad! You found the Faith, you went pioneering to all these Arab countries, you married Mom. And now you’re, you’re one of the most wanted men in Shiraz. I’m sorry, but you know what I mean? You were my age, you had no idea any of this would happen.

FATHER

So maybe this is your future partner?

MONA

I’m not saying that! I mean, but how could I know? My partner is out there somewhere, I guess... and it could just as very well be some guy I pass on the street, but I wouldn’t know that. Think about my life, Dad—There’s this path in front of me, and it’s totally dark. I can’t open my eyes wide enough to take it in.

FATHER

So this explains the way you're walking?

MONA

No. I was mad about the dress, so I went to the House of the Báb to pray.

FATHER (*Pleased.*)

That's where you've been!

MONA

I walked on the rubble and I prayed. I just wanted to keep my shoes on to keep that feeling with me. You know, Dad, somehow I feel now that they've destroyed it, it's even holier than before.

FATHER (*Quietly.*)

Oo— (*He winces, grasps his stomach.*)

MONA (*Not having noticed.*)

What do you think?

FATHER (*Disguising his pain.*)

I think the rest of the world looks and sees only ruins and broken glass. I think you are seeing with a different eye.

MONA

But I feel like I'm blind— (*Noticing her father's pain.*) Your tummy? Here, let me do that. (*She takes the broom from him.*)

FATHER

I'm okay, I'll just make some tea. (*He exits.*)

MONA

(*Starting, then stopping the sweeping.*)

Here's what I figure. I figure I'm not supposed to have that dress. The dress is just a symbol. Obviously, I mean, He told me it stands for service. So I don't need that actual dress for that—

FATHER (*Off.*)

And the young man?

MONA

He must be a symbol too. In the dream, he was holy, like being in the presence of God, but with a young face.

FATHER (*Off.*)

So he stands for God?

MONA

No, that doesn't make sense. There must be a reason he had the face of someone I would see the very next day on the street—Wait, he's the 'man on the street!' Meaning, I'm supposed to serve everyone, no matter where I am, in the here and now. I don't need to go searching for it like I did with the dress, because that just leads to trouble... service will find me. What do you think?

FATHER (*Off.*)

Sorry, honey, the kettle is making noise.

MONA

So I have to take each situation I am presented with, and I need to do something to make that situation better. For example, I have this paper due. (*Retrieves the paper from her bag.*) I could look at this as just a ridiculous assignment forced upon me by a narrow-minded teacher OR I could do as Mom said and just tell them what they want to hear OR I can look at it as a chance to serve. So this is it: the dress, the guy, just symbols. God says: Serve, Mona, wherever, whatever. Don't wait.

FATHER

(*Bringing in the tea.*)

Sounds like it'll keep you busy.

MONA

Yeah.

FATHER

You don't sound completely convinced.

MONA

No, just that it would have been nice to have had the dress.

FATHER

Help me move the couch back?

MONA

Okay.

[They move the couch back where it was.]

FATHER

You did sweep underneath?

MONA

Huh?

[There's a knock at the door. We hear the neighbor, MRS KHUDAYAR.]

MRS. KHUDAYAR *(Off.)*

Hello!

MONA

(Going to the door.)

It's Mrs. Khudayar.

FATHER

Mrs. Khudayar... okay. *(He takes the tea back to the kitchen.)*

MONA

Wait, Dad. Bring it back.

FATHER

Honey, we can't drink tea in front of her.

MONA

Here's an opportunity. I want us to offer Mrs. Khudayar tea, and for her to accept it.

FATHER

You know she won't do that.

MONA

It's time for a change. That will be my service to Mrs. Khudayar.

FATHER

Well, I'll have to make a little more.

[Mona opens the door.]

MONA

Hello, Mrs. Khudayar!

MRS. KHUDAYAR

Hello, my dear.

FATHER

Please come in.

MRS. KHUDAYAR

Am I interrupting something?

FATHER

Not at all, we were just discussing a wonderful dream that Mona had—

MONA

Yeah, and Dad just made some tea.

FATHER

I'll get it. (*He exits.*)

MRS. KHUDAYAR

No thank you. Your mother was telling me, Mona—three dresses, that's wonderful!

MONA

Well, it wasn't about 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 do you mean? What boy?

MRS. KHUDAYAR

Oh, as if...! Oh! (*Aside to MONA.*) Your father doesn't know yet? (*Hushed, pulling out a wrapped package.*) The boy who left you this.

MONA

What's this?

MRS. KHUDAYAR

Open it and find out.

MONA

Where did you get it?

MRS. KHUDAYAR

In front of your door, that boy who's been following you left it there.

MONA

What boy?

MRS. KHUDAYAR

Haven't you noticed? It's over a week now I've seen him walking after you.

MONA

What does he look like?

MRS. KHUDAYAR

But aren't you eager! See for yourself. You can probably spot him out that window.

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

MONA

Mrs. Khudayar, that's the same young man as was in my dream.

MRS. KHUDAYAR

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

MONA

That wasn't really the spirit of the dream.

MRS. KHUDAYAR

Girl, how old are you?

MONA

(Moving away from window.)

Sixteen.

MRS. KHUDAYAR

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

MONA

So?

MRS. KHUDAYAR

So open the package.

MONA

You know I can't accept this from a boy I don't know.

MRS. KHUDAYAR

I'm not saying accept it, just open it. See what this man of your dreams has to offer.

MONA

It doesn't matter because I know what the dream means now... he was just...

MRS. KHUDAYAR

Just what?

MONA

A symbol.

MRS. KHUDAYAR

Honey, that's no symbol standing out there staring at your window.

MONA

So he's been following me?

MRS. KHUDAYAR

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, but you're giving me absolutely no pleasure! Give me the box, I'll open it.

MONA

But I have to return it!

MRS. KHUDAYAR

Fine, but at least know what you're returning.

MONA

I don't want to return it opened.

MRS. KHUDAYAR

What are you afraid of? What's the worst—you might open it, and it would be something you want to keep?

MONA looks at the package, tempted. Her FATHER enters with tea.

FATHER

Here we are...

MONA *reflexively hides the package behind her.*

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. (*hands letter to 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

(*Putting down the package.*)

Wait, won't you have some tea with us?

MRS. KHUDAYAR (*Going.*)

That son of mine is going to be home any moment. Such a lovely rug!

MONA

But won't you stay, just a couple of minutes?

MRS. KHUDAYAR

I really need to go.

FATHER

Mona, if she needs to go...

MONA

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

MRS. KHUDAYAR

Don't be silly, I have plenty of tea at home.

MONA

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

FATHER

Mona dear...

MRS. KHUDAYAR

No, it's okay—she deserves an answer. 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. (*Aside to MONA.*) Let me know what's inside. (*She goes.*)

FATHER

Goodbye, thank you again. (*After she is gone, he sits and speaks to MONA with patience and equanimity.*) So what do you think of this new approach to service?

MONA

I think it's an uphill battle. These people accept whatever the clergy tells them, even when they know it's not true. (*Opening the envelope.*) And look at this—they've opened it already. You know, this essay I have to write for Religious Literature class, the topic is "The fruit of Islam is freedom of conscience and liberty, whoever tastes it is benefited." This is their idea of freedom? (*Reading.*) I just got so mad when I read that.

FATHER

Who is it from?

MONA (*Shifting tone.*)

The Bahá'í children's class committee.

FATHER

Yeah?

MONA

They're asking me to teach a Bahá'í children's class, starting right away. (*Moved.*) It's happening, Dad: service is coming to me.

FATHER

Well, what do you say?

MONA

What can I say but yes?

FATHER

That's wonderful. (*Taking the letter from her to inspect.*) I'm just surprised they didn't hand-deliver it.

MONA

This is a moment of significant change for me. A path is opening before me. From now on, it's more than just following you, going here and there, doing this and that. (*Picking up the box.*) Service is a garment I have to wear. It's a state of readiness to say what is true, and stand up for what is right.

FATHER

(*Seeing the package.*)

What's in the box?

[*Mona's MOTHER enters with a single grocery bag.*]

FATHER

You're back soon, everything okay?

MOTHER

Where in hell are we living?

FATHER

What happened to you?

MOTHER

Hate. Hate. Everywhere, hate. These people, they hate. They're filled with hate, and I don't know why we stay.

FATHER

Please, dear, sit down.

MOTHER

Mona, why aren't you working? What is going on around here?

FATHER

Talk to me—You're all stirred up.

MOTHER

It's nothing, nothing abnormal these days. Just being shouted at in the street, walking out of a shop, the wind blowing my chador, and this man, this mulla, stops me and shouts at me for showing my neck and desecrating the name of Islam.

MONA

You should have told him you were a Bahá'í.

MOTHER

That would have helped, while he's screaming how my husband should whip me.

MONA

See, Mom, you can't let them get away with that.

MOTHER

What can I do?! I have no power.

MONA

Of course you do.

MOTHER

I'm nothing to him, nothing.

MONA

But you're something to yourself, and you have to stand up for that.

MOTHER

I don't want to stand up for myself! I shouldn't have to. It shouldn't be like this. My husband should stand up for me, but what does he do? He sticks his head in the noose and tells them to pull the rope!

FATHER

Farkhundih.

MOTHER

Mr. Vahdat was tortured and shot to death, then they whip his wife until her spine is jelly, is that what you want for me?! How can I fight them?! I can't do it alone.

[A beat.]

FATHER

Very well. (*He walks over to the phone, picks it up and dials the operator.*) Hello, operator, I need some help locating someone.

MOTHER

What are you doing?

FATHER

What was the name of this man who stopped you on the street?

MOTHER

His name? I don't know his name.

FATHER

What was the name of the shop, then?

MOTHER

I don't know—put down the phone.

FATHER

I'm going to find this guy. (*Into phone.*) Okay, operator, I am looking for a religious cleric, okay, who accosted my wife coming out of a shop— No, I'm not kidding—what kind of a shop was it?

MOTHER

It doesn't matter—hang up the phone!

MONA

(*Taking the shopping bag from her mother.*)

Ah, chocolate!

FATHER

It was a chocolate shop—so Mr. Mulla has a sweet tooth!

MOTHER

Hang up, you're going to get us in trouble!

FATHER (*To Operator.*)

So you say you don't know Mr. Mulla? That fearless protector of the chastity of women? How am I going to find him otherwise so I can THANK him?!—She hung up. (*Hanging up the phone.*) Oh yes, I need to thank Mr. Mulla for reminding me of my duty as a good Iranian citizen to beat my wife into line. Woman, come to your husband this instant!

MOTHER (*Moving away.*)

What are you doing?

[MONA, *laughing, has opened the chocolate.*]

FATHER (*To MONA.*)

You, saucy girl—give me that! (*He takes her chocolate.*) It's time I showed the women in this house who's who! (*Breaking off a piece of chocolate and slamming it on the table in front of MOTHER.*) Take that! How do you like that, woman?

MOTHER (*Taking it.*)

I guess I like it.

FATHER

You what? Then take another! (*He slams down another piece of chocolate.*) And, you, saucy girl, I'll teach you to laugh! (*He slams down a piece for MONA.*) I need to thank Mr. Mulla, and, by God, my women will thank Mr. Mulla too!

MONA & MOTHER

Thank you, Mr. Mulla!

FATHER

More lashings to go around! (*Slamming down the rest of the chocolate.*) Oh, Mr. Mulla, how your lash has made everything right in the world! It just makes me want some too!

[Before he tastes his own piece of chocolate, he gets very quiet and draws his wife and daughter closer to him.]

FATHER

Only God knows the future. The time that we do have together, let's make it sweet. (*He places his own chocolate in his wife's mouth, and she dissolves into his arms.*) No tears—come on, now.

[The FATHER hugs the MOTHER very tenderly. MONA has picked up the gift box and walked to the window. Her parents' attention falls on her.]

MOTHER

Look at the woman she's becoming.

[MONA opens the box and pulls out the blue dress.]

MOTHER

Hey, you found your dress!

[MONA turns to show them, but she herself seems to lack enthusiasm.]

FATHER

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

MONA

Yeah.

MOTHER

But what's wrong, why do you look sad?

MONA

Because I know I can't keep it.

[End of scene]

Act I, Scene 5 - A Mosque & A Public Secondary School for Girls

The Islamic call to prayer is heard. A Shí'ih Muslim cleric, AQA HUSAYNI, speaks as if addressing a congregation.

AQA HUSAYNI

Praise be to God! The Revolution is triumphant! We stand now at the dawn of a new day for Iran! 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. Many years we waited, many years while corruption festered under the reign of the Shah. How does it feel now, Muhammad Reza? You thought your armies would keep you safe, while you suppressed your people, while you squandered the wealth of our nation on your passions and your western friends. How does it feel now you are king over a few cubic meters of foreign dirt? (*Pause.*) Let us talk about another corruption, let us talk about Bahá'í. Now Bahá'ís don't fight, and they don't force. They smile, and they serve, and they trickle in like oil into your well water, like a potion in your tea. People come up to me: "Aqa Husayni, I see them, they buy their tea the same place I do." It's not the tea they pour in the cup, stupid. It's the words they pour in your ear that is the poison. Bahá'í says it is a religion. Islam says Bahá'í is a political sect. The Twelfth Imám has returned, Bahá'í says. My friends, if the Twelfth Imám had returned, I should not be standing here. He should be here, and I should be on the floor in humility like you. (*A beat.*) This corruption must be eradicated from this land. Who will help me? This is the moment of decision. For Praise be to God! He has not only delivered us 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. So which of you is a faithful believer, and which of you is already infected by this corruption?

Scene shift to MONA who stands to read an essay before her religious literature class (not visible). She wears a head scarf.

MONA (*Reading.*)

“Among the radiant words existing in the world, ‘Freedom’ is the most brilliant.

Humanity has always desired—will always—desire liberty. Why, then, has he been

stripped of it? Why, from the beginning of human history, has there been no freedom?

Always, there have been powerful and unjust men who for the sake of their own interests

have resorted to all kinds of oppression and tyranny...

FEMALE TEACHER

I don’t know if I like where this is going.

MONA

“Why don’t you let me be free to express myself, to say who I am and what I believe?

Yes, liberty is a Divine gift, and this gift is for us also.

The students are starting to grumble, and the teacher tries to defuse the situation.

FEMALE TEACHER

Stop, Mona—okay next.

MONA

“Why don’t you let me speak freely as a Bahá’í? Why don’t you want to know about this new religion? Why don’t you push aside that thick veil from your eyes?”

FEMALE TEACHER

That’s enough—you will stop this instant!

The students and the teacher are now speaking loudly, still MONA can be understood over them. She no longer reads from her paper.

MONA

Maybe you don’t think I should be free, but God has given me freedom, and you can’t take it away!

The class descends into a shouting match and MONA storms out.

Act I, Scene 6 – Same school, different class

MR. ALIZADEH *is leading his English class, which includes FARAH. The students are all female and they all wear head scarves. They speak the “English” phrases with a Persian accent.*

MR. ALIZADEH

And again... (*Repeating along with class.*) “I would like to buy a kidney pie for my wife.”

THE CLASS (*Simultaneously.*)

“I would like to buy a kidney pie for my wife.”

MR. ALIZADEH

Not “vife”! Wa-wa-wa. Wwwwwwife—speak it like an Arab! “I would like to buy a kidney pie for my wife.”

THE CLASS (*Simultaneously.*)

“I would like to buy a kidney pie for my wife.”

MR. ALIZADEH

Now what about this word ordering? Notice that the subject comes first. Now, class, is it necessary to include the word “I”?

THE CLASS

“Yeeeeesss.”

MR. ALIZADEH

Class, is it not like Persian where you can just add the pronoun if you feel like it?

THE CLASS

“Nnnoooo.”

MR. ALIZADEH

The English are very impatient, you know. They don’t want to wait til the end of the sentence before they figure out who’s doing what. Now what comes next, after the subject? Yes, the verb! Those English need to know right away what’s happening and who’s doing it. Where’s the poetry in that, I ask you?! Persian, you see, is a circle. You need the whole of it to understand any of it, but the English, the English are in such a hurry, they hear the headline, the “who” and the “what” and—bam!—they’re off to colonize another part of the world, and you’re not even finished with your sentence.

MONA *enters, looking dejected.*

MR. ALIZADEH

Well, well, where have we been?

MONA

The principal's office.

MR. ALIZADEH

Oh, yes, we all heard about your outburst. Is it true you were jumping and down, swearing like a Turk?

MONA

No.

MR. ALIZADEH

Is it true that you threatened to steal your teacher's baby and roast it like kebáb?

MONA

No.

MR. ALIZADEH

So the reports we're getting are all incorrect?! Now I know it's not true that—you didn't, did you... claim the right to free speech?

She smiles.

MR. ALIZADEH

Lesson one of Life, my dear: I will remember at all times where I am, and act in my own best interest.

MONA

Sometimes you have to speak the truth.

MR. ALIZADEH

So what's the sentence?

MONA

I may never mention my religion again at school.

MR. ALIZADEH

And you agreed to this?

MONA

The other option was being kicked out.

MR. ALIZADEH

Can you live up to this agreement?

MONA

I only have eight months left. They can't keep me locked up forever.

MR. ALIZADEH

Maybe not, but for the time being, I'll remind all of you—you have two occasions for free speech: number one, in your room where no one can hear you, and number two, this English class, and then only in the abstract, you understand, as an exercise in the cultural-linguistic tradition of the language we're studying.

[*A man's voice (AQA HUSAYNI's) comes over the intercom speaker.*]

AQA HUSAYNI

Mr. Alizadeh?

MR. ALIZADEH

(*Shouting at the intercom speaker.*)

What do you want, disembodied voice?!

[*The class laughs.*]

AQA HUSAYNI

Please come down to the main office.

MR. ALIZADEH

Disembodied voice, I'm in the middle of an important lesson!

AQA HUSAYNI

Come down right now.

MR. ALIZADEH

I'm a-comin! Miss Ja'fari, watch this one carefully, I want nothing subversive here—at least until I get back. (*He exits.*)

FARAH

How are you feeling?

MONA

I'm fine, I'm just getting a little tired of people taking things away from me.

FARAH

You know I'm all about speaking up for myself, but there are limits.

MONA *sees the YOUNG MAN in the hall, looking in the window.*

FARAH

Hey, that's the guy that's been following you. Mona, he can't be here!

MONA

I don't know what he's doing here.

FARAH

I think you two are in love.

MONA

I don't know about that, I seem to see him wherever I go though. *(She takes the dress box out of her bag.)*

FARAH

You still have the dress?

MONA

I've been trying to give it back, but he hasn't let me get close enough to hand it to him.

FARAH

He's got you chasing after him now—you're totally in love.

The YOUNG MAN knocks on the window, and MONA gets up to go to him.

FARAH

Where are you going? You're going to get in trouble!

MONA

I won't bring up religion.

MONA opens the door and holds out the dress. He doesn't take it.

MONA

I can't keep this.

YOUNG MAN

I'm not here for that. Can I talk to you, maybe in the hall?

MONA

Please take it back.

[MR. ALIZADEH reenters the hallway, followed by AQA HUSAYNI. The YOUNG MAN scoots inside the door, MONA returns to her seat. The girls are on alert and watch the YOUNG MAN, as he watches MR. ALIZADEH and AQA HUSAYNI who speak in the hallway. MONA can't hear the conversation.]

AQA HUSAYNI

Excuse me, we're not done.

MR. ALIZADEH

Sure, they're all spies for Israel—I have a class waiting.

AQA HUSAYNI

That girl is propagating an illegal organization.

MR. ALIZADEH

Teaching a class of six year olds?

AQA HUSAYNI

Now making speeches in the school!

MR. ALIZADEH

So go ahead, Aqa. Who's going to stand in your way?

AQA HUSAYNI

I need to know that the faculty will not put up resistance.

MR. ALIZADEH

You want to expel one of our best students.

AQA HUSAYNI

This girl needs to know there is a line she has crossed.

MR. ALIZADEH

She's already agreed not to do it again.

AQA HUSAYNI

That's not a punishment—the other girls in that class were shouting because they know what's expected of them, but they're watching now.

MR. ALIZADEH

Aqa, I have fought and fought for years for freedom in the classroom—that's the only place I care about. You can have the rest, but leave me my classroom, with the girl in it.

AQA HUSAYNI

I have other means at my disposal, Alizadeh.

MR. ALIZADEH

What if you just let her alone?

AQA HUSAYNI

She's part of a much larger problem and I think you know what I mean.

The YOUNG MAN enters from the classroom. AQA HUSAYNI sees him, speaks to him in a familiar way.

AQA HUSAYNI

What are you doing in there?

YOUNG MAN

Nothing.

The end of class bell rings. AQA HUSAYNI makes the decision to leave.

AQA HUSAYNI

All right, come on.

AQA HUSAYNI exits, followed somewhat reluctantly by the YOUNG MAN. The students await MR. ALIZADEH's dismissal.

MR. ALIZADEH

Have a nice day... Don't forget about the exam tomorrow!

MONA

Exam? I completely forgot.

FARAH

Don't mind her, Mr. Alizadeh, her head is in the clouds.

MONA

Farah.

FARAH

"I see him wherever I go."

MONA

You're completely twisting my words!

MR. ALIZADEH

Well, I'm flattered.

FARAH

Sorry? Mona's making all this noise.

MR. ALIZADEH

Nothing—but Miss Mahmudnizhad, I would like to talk to you.

MONA

Oh, sure.

FARAH

I've got to go.

MONA

You wait, I'm not done with you.

FARAH (*Exiting.*)

I'm going to be late for class.

MR. ALIZADEH

(*Writing on a slip of paper.*)

I need you to give this note to your father.

MONA

My father? Do you know him?

MR. ALIZADEH

In fact I do.

MONA

What's it about?

MR. ALIZADEH

It's better if it's just him that sees it.

MONA

Oh.

MR. ALIZADEH

You know you're very special to me.

MONA

Oh, thanks.

MR. ALIZADEH

Yes, we'll leave it at that. These things come and go. (*He exits.*)

MONA *goes out into the hall when the YOUNG MAN comes back in.*

MONA

I'm going to leave it on the floor, okay? (*She places the box with the dress on the floor.*)

YOUNG MAN

Wait.

MONA

I need to go to class.

YOUNG MAN (*In her path.*)

You go to the orphanage after school, right?

MONA

I'm sorry I need to go.

YOUNG MAN

Maybe it would be better to see the children another day.

MONA

They're expecting me and so is my next teacher. (*She goes by him.*)

YOUNG MAN (*More forcefully.*)

Go tomorrow. Tonight it's good to go somewhere. Do you have family outside the city?

MONA

What are you saying?

YOUNG MAN

Just go out, with your father and the rest of your family.

MONA (*Coming back.*)

What do you know about my father?

He leaves MONA alone with the dress. End of scene.

Act I, Scene 7 — Mahmudnizhad Home

Mona's MOTHER sits and sews, distractedly. MRS. KHUDAYAR walks by their door, notices something different about it. She knocks and the MOTHER comes to the door.

MOTHER

Who is it?

MRS. KHUDAYAR

It's your neighbor. What's going on here?

MOTHER (*Opens door.*)

Hello, what do you mean?

MRS. KHUDAYAR

This, what's this?

MOTHER

It's a peephole. Some friends encouraged us to get it—in case someone comes, you don't have to open the door.

MRS. KHUDAYAR

Like your neighbor?

MOTHER

No, like the revolutionary guard.

MRS. KHUDAYAR

So you're just going to not open the door and hope they go away.

MOTHER

I know it's silly. They were trying to help and Jamshid didn't want to make them feel bad.

MRS. KHUDAYAR

What you need is to turn it around so I can see what's going on inside.

MOTHER

Yes, we could do that.

MRS. KHUDAYAR

That was a joke.

MOTHER

Oh, sorry.

MRS. KHUDAYAR (*Coming in.*)

Look at you, worried to death. What can I do to help you?

MOTHER

Nothing—what can anyone do? They're going to come, they're going to arrest him and there's nothing I can do.

MRS. KHUDAYAR

Maybe he could go into hiding.

MOTHER

I've talked to him about it, but he just won't budge. I don't know how I'll protect Mona—Oh, my throat.

MRS. KHUDAYAR (*Comforts her.*)

Oh, Farkhundih—None of us knew the revolution would turn this way. We all thought once the Shah was gone, it would be democracy and peace and freedom for everyone. They tricked us, they really tricked us.

MOTHER (*Sipping her tea.*)

Excuse me for drinking in front of you.

MRS. KHUDAYAR

Of course—but you know, suddenly, I'm quite thirsty.

MOTHER

I'll wait for you to come back. I'm getting nowhere with this sewing anyway.

MRS. KHUDAYAR

But I'm feeling tired, very very tired.

MOTHER

Oh, you know I would offer you something...

MRS. KHUDAYAR

Of course—

MOTHER

It's just, it's been eight years now—

MRS. KHUDAYAR

Perhaps it is God's will—He has made me both thirsty and tired at the same time.

MOTHER *exits to kitchen.*

MRS. KHUDAYAR

When they come, they're going to trash this place. They're going to ruin this rug, I just know it.

MOTHER (*Off.*)

What can we do?

MRS. KHUDAYAR

I know! I know just what I can do for you—I will take all the furnishings that are precious to you and keep them in my home.

MOTHER (*Bringing tea.*)

Mrs. Khudayar, you've always been so kind, you don't need to do anything for us.

MRS. KHUDAYAR

I insist. I insist on helping you in some way.

MOTHER (*Referring to tea.*)

Are you sure you want this?

MRS. KHUDAYAR

Certain. (*She takes the cup, but hesitates drinking.*) Please let me take some of your things.

MOTHER

I suppose I can speak to Jamshid about it.

MRS. KHUDAYAR

Where is he now?

MOTHER

(*Watching Mrs. Khudayar struggle with the tea.*)

He's just walked our friends out to their cars—the second part of their meeting is always saying goodbye.

MRS. KHUDAYAR

I would like so much to help.

MOTHER

Okay, maybe the rug, maybe a few other things—You don't have to drink that.

MRS. KHUDAYAR

No I do. (*She drinks.*)

MOTHER

What's it like?

[*Pause.*]

MRS. KHUDAYAR

Like tea. (*Pause.*) Do you have a little sugar?

MOTHER

Of course!

The MOTHER exits. The scene shifts to MONA and FARAH who are just outside Mona's apartment building. MONA has the dress box in hand.

MONA

I don't know what to do with this! Why don't you take it?

FARAH

Oh no—anyway, the problem isn't having it, it's that he thinks you accepted it.

MONA

Well, I don't know where he is, for once he's not following me. Anyway, I gotta go—see you Farah.

FARAH

Mona, wait.

MONA

What is it?

FARAH

I don't know.

MONA

What do you mean?

FARAH

I just have this funny feeling.

MONA

I'll see you tomorrow.

FARAH

Stay with me.

MONA

Farah, I need to go. My dad is the one we need to be worrying about.

FARAH
Wait!

MONA
What's wrong?

FARAH
I'm just worried that one day I'm going to lose you.

MONA
What? Oh— (*hugs Farah, then—*) Look up at the sky.

FARAH
Why?

MONA
Choose a star.

FARAH
Okay.

MONA
See that star right there, the bright one near the moon.

FARAH
Yeah.

MONA
That's mine. Look at it whenever you want to remember me. Which one did you choose?

FARAH points to a star lower on the horizon.

MONA
Good, that's yours. That will be the one I remember you by—if we ever get separated.

They say goodbye and part ways. Scene shifts back to the apartment, where Mona's MOTHER and MRS. KHUDAYAR are rolling up the carpet.

MRS. KHUDAYAR
Maybe some of your books too. We'll keep them under our bed.

Mona's FATHER enters.

FATHER
What's going on?

MOTHER

Mrs. Khudayar was kind enough to offer to take some of our things in case the guards come.

FATHER

That's very kind, but I don't think that's necessary.

MRS. KHUDAYAR

Oh, it's no problem at all.

FATHER

(Starts to move the carpet back into place.)

Please no, that's not necessary.

MOTHER

Jamshid, please—she's very kind to do this.

FATHER

Her kindness was never in question.

MOTHER *(Aside to FATHER.)*

She drank some of our tea.

FATHER

So?

MOTHER

So what about the peephole? That doesn't help us either. I was doing it to make her feel better, and I thought you'd be proud of me. It's just a rug.

FATHER

You think I care about this rug? By God, no! This is all His anyway. But do you want me to be ashamed in His presence for not having offered up anything in His path? You want me to sacrifice my home empty of its carpets? What here could I possibly value?!

MONA *enters.*

MONA

Hi everyone. Hello Mrs. Khudayar! *(She hugs her, then her parents.)*

MOTHER

Excuse us, Mona, we're in the middle of something.

The FATHER *takes his daughter's hand and moves to MRS KHUDAYAR.*

FATHER

Let's say, Mrs Khudayar—hypothetically speaking—your son were to go ask for the hand of a beautiful girl, like, say, Mona...

MRS. KHUDAYAR

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

FATHER

Just for example—and if he brought a beautiful engagement ring, just...just right, would he skimp on the box? It might cost a little extra for a nice box to put it in. He could keep it in his pocket and hand it to her like this, no?

MRS. KHUDAYAR

He better not! Cheapskate.

FATHER

(Putting his arms around his wife and daughter.)

Mrs. Khudayar—these are my diamonds, and this *(pointing to things around him)* is all just a box.

MRS. KHUDAYAR

Of course, you're right. I'm sorry. *(Getting up to go.)*

FATHER

No need, and may God bless you for your pure intention.

MONA

Wait, is that tea in your cup?

MRS. KHUDAYAR

Yes, and to tell you the truth, I was expecting a little something more.

[They laugh and MRS. KHUDAYAR exits.]

MOTHER

Well, I'm exhausted, I'm going to get a bath—oh, you both need to have your dinner...

FATHER

You go ahead. I'll put together a little something.

[MOTHER exits. FATHER exits into kitchen.]

FATHER *(Off.)*

What happened at school today?

MONA

I got sent to the principal's office and now I can't mention the Faith anymore.

FATHER

What?

MONA

Remember that essay I told you about. I wrote exactly how I felt, everything I was angry about, and I read it out loud.

FATHER (*Off.*)

So do you think it helped?

MONA

Helped what?

FATHER

Whatever you were trying to achieve. (*He enters with a plate of bread, olives and cheese.*)

MONA

I wasn't trying to achieve anything. But come on, Dad, there comes a time when you see injustice, and you've got to stand up and call it what it is!

FATHER

Mona, when that moment comes, you will not need to be angry. Justice itself will speak through your mouth and will shake you with its fury—but anger slips easily into hate, and hate is a poison that has no place in a heart dedicated to service. (*Referring to his plate.*)
Want some?

MONA

No. Oh, Mr. Alizadeh wrote this note for you. He told me not to read it.

[She hands him the note, and he reads it.]

MONA

What does it say? (*She takes a piece of his bread.*)

FATHER

“Close call at school today, call me,” and there's his phone number here.

MONA

That must be about my essay. He said he knows you?

FATHER

Yes, from some time ago.

MONA

I really like his class. We should have him over for dinner some night. I bet he'd be...
What did I say?

FATHER

Nothing, I'm just remembering something from the past. *(He exits briefly.)*

MONA

(Looking at Alizadeh's note.)

Something else happened today. You know that guy who's been following me...

FATHER *(Off.)*

He's not bothering you, is he?

MONA

No, but he said something today, he said that tonight we should go away, get out of the house, and visit a relative. I mean, he never says anything to me. Maybe he knows something.

FATHER

(Reenters with a glass of heated milk.)

Where would we go?

MONA

We can go visit some Bahá'í friends, stay the night. Maybe outside the city, maybe you can get a decent night's sleep.

FATHER

But I thought you were ready to sacrifice me, send me off to the Abhá Kingdom.

MONA

Don't say that. There's a difference between wanting something and knowing it's going to happen.

FATHER

That's very good.

MONA

I didn't mean it to come out like that. *(She embraces her father.)*

FATHER

“I have been, most of the days of my life, even as a slave, sitting under a sword hanging on a thread, knowing not whether it would fall soon or late upon him. And yet, notwithstanding all this... We render thanks unto God...”

MONA

Bahá'u'lláh?

FATHER

I asked myself what He would do, and I knew: Despite danger to self and to family, He stayed. He didn't hide. He trusted in God, and He had no fear. Now Mona, I'd be lying if I told you I have no fears... but I trust that He'll shelter me and that He'll watch over you and your mother and Taraneh and little Nura, even if I can't.

MONA

It might not happen, Dad. Sometimes I see myself being martyred too, but that doesn't make it so... I'm not God. Maybe in a few months or so, we'll be able to go pioneering, even to get out of Iran. What do you think?

FATHER

Have an olive. *(He puts it in her mouth.)*

MONA

It's bitter.

FATHER

Yes, but it's better for you than chocolate.

A moment of tenderness and warmth passes between the two.

MONA

I wish I could make this moment right here last forever. But I have a test tomorrow.

FATHER

Yes.

MONA exits. The FATHER sits down and begins to write when the MOTHER enters, looking refreshed.

MOTHER

Well I feel better.

There is a loud knock at the door. This is not a neighbor and they know it. Among the guards at the door are AQA HUSAYNI and the YOUNG MAN.

MOTHER (*Going to the door.*)

Maybe someone... just... they have a question—or something. Who is it?

GUARD

Revolutionary Guard, open up!

MOTHER (*Hushed.*)

Oh, no—the peephole!

The FATHER is closing his eyes, saying a prayer, preparing himself.

MOTHER

I was supposed to use the peephole.

MRS. KHUDAYAR (*Entering.*)

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

MOTHER

It's Mrs. Khudayar... she's telling them we're not home.

GUARD

Oh, I think they are home.

MRS. KHUDAYAR

I saw them go out

The guards begin to force their weight against the door.

MOTHER

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

FATHER

Hiding behind that door would never save me.

MOTHER

What do I do now?

FATHER (*Rising.*)

Open the door and let them in.

The MOTHER opens the door as the FATHER joins her.

FATHER

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

GUARD

We are from the Revolutionary Court of Shiraz. We have a warrant to enter your house.

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

FATHER

Please come in.

[They enter brusquely. The YOUNG MAN is a bit gentler and he looks around, surprised not to see Mona.]

GUARD

(To Father.) You sit there, and *(to Mother)* you over there.

AQA HUSAYNI

Just you two? Check those rooms for the girl.

[The YOUNG MAN looks around, then is confronted by MONA who is coming out from the bathroom.]

MONA

You—what are you doing here?

YOUNG MAN

Please go sit on the couch.

MOTHER

Come on, Mona, come sit over here.

GUARD

You be quiet.

MONA

You're with them?

YOUNG MAN

Please, go sit.

MONA

I think I need to cover myself, my hair I mean. *(She moves towards her room.)*

GUARD

Come here, girl.

MONA

I have to obey the rules of the country and cover my hair.

YOUNG MAN

Forget about it, just go and sit down.

MONA

You are not my father and you're not my brother, and, according to Islamic law, I have to cover my hair in your presence.

MONA goes into her room, wraps a scarf around her hair, and picks up a few books. The YOUNG MAN stands at the door of her room.

AQA HUSAYNI

(Having been looking through the father's books and papers.)

Get her out here, we don't have all night!

YOUNG MAN *(Quietly.)*

I tried to help you.

MONA

Thank you so much. *(She heads for the couch.)*

GUARD

What do you have there?

MONA

They're school books, they're not dangerous.

AQA HUSAYNI

Go sit down. *(To YOUNG MAN)* You stay here and watch them. *(To the other guard(s).)* You, come with me.

They begin to tear through Mona's room with no regard for the care that has been taken in putting it together. They tear off sheets, throw things on the floor...including her blue dress. MONA is ignoring this and trying hard to focus on her English homework.

MONA

May I ask my father a question about my homework?

The YOUNG MAN nods his assent.

MONA

How would you use the English word 'injustice' in a sentence?

MRS. KHUDAYAR *pushes open the door.*

MRS. KHUDAYAR

Excuse me?

YOUNG MAN

Hey, hey, I need some backup in here!

The GUARD comes back into the room.

GUARD

Go away!

MRS. KHUDAYAR

No trouble, I just want to help.

GUARD

Go back to your home! Don't come back out until midnight.

MRS. KHUDAYAR

Maybe while you're searching, I can take them to my home.

GUARD

They are unclean!

MRS. KHUDAYAR

They're good people!

GUARD

Get out of here!

MRS. KHUDAYAR

Maybe I'm Bahá'í!

GUARD

You don't know the first thing about it!

MRS. KHUDAYAR

How do you know?

GUARD

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

FATHER (*Rising.*)

Mrs. Khudayar, thank you so much. We'll let you know when they're done.

AQA HUSAYNI

What's going on out here? (*To FATHER.*) You sit down until we're ready to take you.
(*To MRS. KHUDAYAR.*) You want your son to go fight in Iraq?

MRS. KHUDAYAR

God no.

AQA HUSAYNI

Go back to your home and lock the door.

MRS. KHUDAYAR *obeys.*

AQA HUSAYNI (*To YOUNG MAN.*)

What's wrong with you?

YOUNG MAN

She just walked in.

AQA HUSAYNI

Lock that door. No one moves from here on. (*Returns to his searching.*)

MOTHER (*Shivering.*)

O God, Jamshid, they're going to take you.

GUARD

Quiet!

The FATHER is saying prayers quietly but fervently.

MOTHER (*Whispering.*)

Jamshid!

The FATHER emerges from his prayer to point to a picture of 'Abdu'l-Baha and gesture to the MOTHER to pray.

FATHER (*Audibly.*)

"Is there any Remover of difficulties save God?..."

YOUNG MAN

You've got to be quiet.

FATHER & MONA

"Say: Praised be God..."

YOUNG MAN

Please.

FATHER, MONA & MOTHER

“He is God! All are His servants, and all abide by His bidding.”

GUARD

What’s going on out here? Keep them quiet.

The family is much comforted by this prayer of theirs, and remain quiet a while. MONA opens her book and begins to work. The MOTHER and FATHER exchange looks of love, concern and encouragement.

MONA

Excuse me, may I ask a question of my father?

YOUNG MAN

No.

MONA

I have an exam tomorrow. You’re going to leave, and I am the one that has the test.

YOUNG MAN

No more questions.

MOTHER

Mona, put your book away. It’s not important right now.

AQA HUSAYNI and the GUARDS return from Mona’s room with a plastic bag full of Mona’s writings.

AQA HUSAYNI

We’ve got what we need. (To FATHER.) You and the girl, you’re coming with us.

FATHER

The girl?

MONA

Me?

MOTHER

You’ve got to be kidding.

AQA HUSAYNI

No, we’re not kidding.

MONA stands with a look of surprise, but also with a feeling of honor.

MOTHER

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

GUARD

Just a child? Have you read these things she's writing? She could set the whole world on fire!

AQA HUSAYNI

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

MOTHER

All right then, take me instead!

MONA

Mom, calm down.

GUARD

Woman, we don't want you.

MOTHER

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

MONA

Mom, why are you begging them? Look at why they're taking me—I haven't bombed a bridge or set a bus on fire, there are no drugs or guns in my room, I've committed no crime. Look what they've found. They're taking me because I am in love—with the Blessed Beauty, Bahá'u'lláh. There's no need to beg them. I'll get my coat.

She goes into her room to fetch her coat. Her FATHER has been watching MONA with great tenderness and with pride in her courage. He then turns his gaze to the MOTHER, who has sunk into the couch.

FATHER (To GUARD.)

My friend, may I have a moment with my wife?

GUARD

Yeah.

FATHER

Farkhundih, not a leaf falls from a tree unless it is by the Will of God. And now, if the entire world rose up to keep us from walking out this door, they could not do it. We will

FATHER (Cont'd)

leave this day, this hour, this minute, this second—because this is what the Will of God has ordained for us. See you soon.

The FATHER walks out with AQA HUSAYNI, and the other GUARD(S) follow, carrying off all kinds of things, including books and photo albums. The YOUNG MAN remains, waiting on MONA, who has reentered wearing her coat. She has a blue dress in one hand and a dark chador in the other. As she passes the YOUNG MAN, she pushes the dress into his hands, then walks to her MOTHER.

MOTHER

You look like a queen.

The MOTHER solemnly helps MONA put on her chador, which wraps around MONA and covers up all her color.

MONA

Mother, where I'm going is not a prison, but an open square! Not a hole in the ground, but a mountain top, and I can almost touch the moon. Don't worry—God willing, we'll see each other soon.

MONA walks out without looking at the YOUNG MAN, who closes the door on the MOTHER, who is left alone.

END OF ACT I

ACT II, Scene 1 – Prison; an interrogation room

MONA *stands blindfolded. She is refusing to answer questions of her interrogator, AQA HUSAYNI. The YOUNG MAN stands guard nearby.*

AQA HUSAYNI

Tired yet?

[She doesn't answer, but it's clear she is tired. She remains standing while the scene shifts to FARAH, who reads a letter in front of MR. ALIZADEH's class.]

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

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.”

[The scene shifts away from the classroom, and back to the Interrogation room.]

AQA HUSAYNI

Let's try again. Describe your Bahá'í activities.

MONA *doesn't respond.*

AQA HUSAYNI

We just need you to answer some questions and then we can arrange your release, okay?

Still no response.

AQA HUSAYNI

You're young—I know this isn't really your religion as much as it is your parents. Sorry, do you have something to say to that?

MONA *swallows her response.*

AQA HUSAYNI

Let me guess: You believe you're a Bahá'í of your own choice. Of course, they tell you to say that, just like they told you not to say anything here. All your choices seem to be made by other people! Why are you grinding your teeth? Tell me if I'm wrong.

Still, MONA refuses to speak.

AQA HUSAYNI

What if I brought your father in here to persuade you to answer these questions for us, would you do it? But you know your father wouldn't do that, right? (*To YOUNG MAN.*) Go get him. (*To MONA.*) Of course, it's good to think such things about your parents, and your father took many days, many days of special attention. But since then, he's been quite useful to us.

MONA

You're lying.

AQA HUSAYNI

What's that?

MONA

You'll never break my father.

AQA HUSAYNI

Oh no? Do you realize I just broke you?

MONA clamps up.

AQA HUSAYNI (*To YOUNG MAN.*)

Bring him in.

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

AQA HUSAYNI

Mahmudnizhad, your daughter is here.

FATHER

Mona dear?

MONA

Dad?

AQA HUSAYNI

Stay where you are.

FATHER

Yes, honey it's me.

MONA

I can't see. They said sometimes they tape the voices of family and then play it back.

FATHER

No, I'm here. I'm still here.

AQA HUSAYNI

Tell her.

FATHER

Answer their questions, honey.

MONA doesn't know how to respond.

FATHER

Tell them what they want to know, Mona. Tell them the truth as you understand it.

MONA

In what capacity are you asking this of me?

AQA HUSAYNI

As Secretary of the Assembly and as Auxiliary Board Member.

MONA

Those positions are outside the prison right now. My father is a prisoner like myself and has no authority.

AQA HUSAYNI

Well maybe this whip will have some authority for you.

MONA

I am ready.

FATHER

Wait, wait, please don't.

AQA HUSAYNI

Oh I will.

FATHER

Let me talk to her, she'll understand.

MONA

Dad, what have they done to you?

FATHER

Don't worry about me.

AQA HUSAYNI

Why don't we take the blindfold off and show her?

YOUNG MAN (*Quietly.*)

Wait.

AQA HUSAYNI

What?

The YOUNG MAN objects, silently and demurely.

AQA HUSAYNI

What? You don't want her to see him? Or you don't want her to see who you are?

MONA

I know who he is.

AQA HUSAYNI

Yes, with your special powers.

MONA

I know because he's not as cruel or rude as the other guards.

AQA HUSAYNI

What, do you think this is—a resort, girl?! Fine, leave the blindfold. You'll just have to imagine the soles of your father's feet being struck with a rod time and again as the pain shoots up through the whole body right into the brain.

FATHER

Your honor, you don't need to share this with her.

AQA HUSAYNI

Oh, I do. You see it's more effective and much cleaner than the back lashes you've been getting, because you know it takes several days for the feet to start to bleed. When they do bleed, they bleed from the nails. Girl, have you ever seen anyone's feet bleed?

MONA

What makes you people so sick?

AQA HUSAYNI

Sick?—you are sick, and you force us to resort to these means to cure you!

FATHER

Mona, they beat me and after a while I don't feel the pain anymore.

MONA

But the agreement.

FATHER

Mona, we have no secrets and no hidden motives. If we serve the community, we are only fulfilling our religious obligation. Therefore, you should state clearly how you served. Let them know the truth: that we are faithful to our country, and our meetings have nothing to do with politics.

AQA HUSAYNI

That's right, and so your ties to Israel and America aren't political!

FATHER

They do not have to whip me for me to tell them the truth.

AQA HUSAYNI

We do not whip you to get you to speak. We whip you to punish you! For all these activities, for misleading others, the young people especially, including this daughter of yours. This is why we whip you! (*To YOUNG MAN.*) Do it!

YOUNG MAN

You want me to get 'Abdu'lláh?

AQA HUSAYNI

No I want you to whip him.

YOUNG MAN

I'll go get him.

AQA HUSAYNI

His arm is worn out, you have to do it.

YOUNG MAN

Sir...

MONA

Don't do it.

AQA HUSAYNI

I'll give you an option: you can whip him or you can whip her.

MONA

Do it to me then.

FATHER

Please, no. Do it to me.

MONA

No, you can stand up to them—tell them this is not the way of Islam.

AQA HUSAYNI

We are not here to be informed about Islam by you! Hit him, hit him now.

YOUNG MAN

Hold on.

The YOUNG MAN picks up the whip, and walks over to pick up the Qur'án, which lies open before AQA HUSAYNI. He puts the Qur'án under his arm awkwardly.

AQA HUSAYNI

What are you doing?

YOUNG MAN

I'm trying to get the right amount of force.

AQA HUSAYNI

Lash him!

YOUNG MAN

Am I not supposed to put this under my arm?

AQA HUSAYNI

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

YOUNG MAN

I'll do it!

AQA HUSAYNI

Get on with it, then!

FATHER

I forgive you in advance, son—I'm sure it will be more painful to you than to me.

After a moment, he begins to whip the FATHER's back.

FATHER

Mmmm.

AQA HUSAYNI

Harder!

Another lash.

FATHER

Aaaah!

AQA HUSAYNI

Again, harder!

Another lash.

FATHER

Yá Bahá'u'l-abhá!

MONA

STOP!!! Please, let me see my father.

AQA HUSAYNI

Are you going to talk?!

MONA

Take off my blindfold, I need to see him.

AQA HUSAYNI

You need to start talking.

MONA

Your honor, the eyes are the window to the heart, and if I'm able to see my father's eyes, perhaps...

AQA HUSAYNI (*Sensing victory.*)

There you go.

MONA

Perhaps, I could be moved to accept his request.

AQA HUSAYNI

Take them off.

[*The YOUNG MAN puts a mask over his face, then takes off their blindfolds. MONA and her FATHER go to each other, and hug and kiss each other.*]

MONA

Oh Dad! Look at you, Oh no...

FATHER

Is it really my Mona? My sweet one?

MONA

It's me.

FATHER

I think maybe I am seeing things.

MONA

What have they done?

FATHER

Don't look there—now let me see you.

[*They spend time looking in each other's eyes. MONA scans inside her father.*]

AQA HUSAYNI

Well, tell her.

FATHER

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

MONA *hesitates.*

AQA HUSAYNI

Quick, quick.

FATHER

Tell them to see their captors not as enemies but as friends, with whom they can share by their words and their deeds the truth of our Faith.

AQA HUSAYNI

He thinks he's going to convert us to his religion!

MONA

I just want to make sure, Dad—I mean, for the others—this is the right thing to do?

FATHER

(Smilingly looking in her eyes.)

Do I look like a man with any secrets left?

MONA

I'll tell the others—we have no secrets.

AQA HUSAYNI

Very good. Let me share the good news. *(He exits briefly.)*

The YOUNG MAN is there. MONA gives him an evil look.

YOUNG MAN

Sir, I'm sorry for what I've done to you.

FATHER

My son, I ask God to bless you.

The YOUNG MAN is very moved. MONA looks at her father with surprise.

FATHER

Love, Mona. Only love. You must not hate them or be angry at them.

AQA HUSAYNI *(Reentering.)*

Get him out of here.

MONA

May we have another minute?

AQA HUSAYNI

You've had long enough.

The YOUNG MAN speaks confidentially to AQA HUSAYNI.

YOUNG MAN

Sir, you had said if we could get her to talk...

AQA HUSAYNI

Why are you so concerned?

YOUNG MAN

I'm just reminding you what you said.

AQA HUSAYNI

Free or in prison, it doesn't matter—she's unclean.

YOUNG MAN

I know.

AQA HUSAYNI

Get him out of here. We'll see how well she cooperates.

YOUNG MAN

Thank you, sir. *(He goes to take the FATHER off.)*

MONA

Oh, Dad, I'll pray for you.

FATHER

May my life be sacrificed for you, my dear.

The YOUNG MAN takes the FATHER off. MONA is left with AQA HUSAYNI, who has a paper in his hands.

AQA HUSAYNI

Sit. *(She does.)* See that? That is a release form.

MONA

You're going to let me go?

AQA HUSAYNI

It depends how you answer my questions. *(He hands her a thick file of papers.)* Fill them all out, completely, and then we'll talk about your freedom.

MONA

I'm not going to say anything that isn't the truth.

AQA HUSAYNI

The truth is all I'm after.

[End of scene.]

ACT II, Scene 2 – Outside the Prison Visitation Area

Mona's MOTHER and MRS. KHUDAYAR sit together outside the prison, waiting to come in. They have a basket of fruit with them.

MRS. KHUDAYAR

I still can't believe she's here. It doesn't make any sense to me. Do you know, every time I open my door, I see her face smiling at me. I think I may be losing my mind.

MOTHER

She was just so thin when I saw her.

MRS. KHUDAYAR

Of course, I don't tell anyone this, least of all my children.

MOTHER

But she was strong! She wouldn't cry and told me to wipe my tears away.

MRS. KHUDAYAR

Of course she's strong. What's taking so long?

MOTHER

How do I tell her this news? How can I break her heart like this?

MRS. KHUDAYAR

See, I don't think you know her the way I do. Even now, even right this moment, I feel her so close to me.

MOTHER

I'm just so worried about them both.

MRS. KHUDAYAR

Are you OK? You don't look so well.

MOTHER

(With her hands on her kidneys.)

Aaaeeeee.

MRS. KHUDAYAR

They're taking so long, the fruit is drying out!

MOTHER

O God, the birds are all free, but my little bird is trapped in a cage!

MRS. KHUDAYAR

Hey, let us in!! It's one o'clock!

The YOUNG MAN comes to open the door.

YOUNG MAN

Family only.

MRS. KHUDAYAR

Yes, we're family.

MOTHER

I'm Mona's mother.

YOUNG MAN

Come in. (*To MRS. KHUDAYAR.*) Sorry, you need to go.

MRS. KHUDAYAR

I am her auntie.

YOUNG MAN

Immediate family only.

MRS. KHUDAYAR

I meant sister.

YOUNG MAN

Go on.

MOTHER

Is she there yet? Do I have time to use the rest room?

MRS. KHUDAYAR

Ask her if maybe she could write a few words—

MOTHER

Thank you, Mrs. Khudayar, thank you for waiting with me.

MRS. KHUDAYAR

It's not too much to ask, I don't think.

AQA HUSAYNI (*Entering.*)

Get her out of here.

[*The YOUNG MAN makes MRS. KHUDAYAR leave.*]

AQA HUSAYNI

Follow me, please.

MOTHER

Your honor, can you direct me to the rest room?

AQA HUSAYNI

Just a moment, have a seat in here.

MOTHER

This is not where we normally come.

AQA HUSAYNI

You don't normally have a release form. Why don't you look happy?

MOTHER

Yes, just so much sun, and my kidneys, you know...

AQA HUSAYNI

Well, I'll make this quick if you will.

The YOUNG MAN enters.

AQA HUSAYNI

Bring the girl's file.

The YOUNG MAN exits.

AQA HUSAYNI

So you have come with her bail. What was it, 100,000 Tuman?

MOTHER

Something like that—

AQA HUSAYNI

No it was 200,000, I remember.

MOTHER

Yes, that's right.

AQA HUSAYNI

That's not much, for a girl of her caliber.

MOTHER

Of course not.

AQA HUSAYNI

Well?

MOTHER

You know we don't have much time for our visit.

AQA HUSAYNI

I'll need the money first.

MOTHER

You know I would pay anything—not to say I will pay anything...

AQA HUSAYNI

Did you bring the money or not?

MOTHER

It's a difficult issue, you know.

AQA HUSAYNI

What's difficult? You get a lien on your home.

MOTHER

Well, there is some concern that if we pay 200,000 Tuman now, tomorrow it might be 400,000 and the next day 600,000.

AQA HUSAYNI

You think we're going to cheat you?

MOTHER

Not me, if it were just me, I'd pay it.

AQA HUSAYNI

So someone else made this decision? Was it the Spiritual Assembly?

MOTHER

You're misinterpreting what I'm saying—O my back!—I'm under a great deal of pressure right now and I can't think straight...

The YOUNG MAN reenters with a thick stack of papers.

YOUNG MAN

She's ready.

MOTHER

O God, please let me see her now.

AQA HUSAYNI

I thought you were going to die for kidney failure.

MOTHER

Maybe I am, why are you twisting everything I say?

AQA HUSAYNI

(Taking the thick file of papers.)

It's all here?

YOUNG MAN

Yes, sir.

AQA HUSAYNI

Very good. *(To MOTHER.)* Do you or do you not have the money?

MOTHER

Please just agree that you won't increase bail...

AQA HUSAYNI

You don't.

MOTHER

And I'll pay you, in 24 hours!

AQA HUSAYNI

(To YOUNG MAN.) Keep the girl where she is. *(To MOTHER.)* Now I have some questions for you.

The YOUNG MAN exits.

MOTHER

What? I don't know anything.

AQA HUSAYNI

We'll see about that. Mona has supplied answers to certain questions, I'm sure it will be no problem for you to give us the same answers. *(He pulls out a stack of papers equal in size to the other stack.)*

MOTHER

I just came here to talk to my daughter.

AQA HUSAYNI

So question one: Who made this decision about the bail? I would like names.

MOTHER

I'm sorry, but what more do you need from me? You have my husband, you have my daughter. Maybe I have a few questions for you.

AQA HUSAYNI

I'm not interested in your questions, now sit down and fill these out.

MOTHER

I will not.

AQA HUSAYNI

You will.

MOTHER

I'm not your prisoner.

AQA HUSAYNI

Oh you're not?

[End of Scene.]

Act II, Scene 3 – An interrogation room

MONA waits, sitting in one of two chairs at a table. The YOUNG MAN stands guard at a distance, wearing a mask.

MONA

What's taking so long?

[No response. MONA looks at the YOUNG MAN a while.]

MONA

My father thinks I should see you only with the eyes of love. What do you think?

[No response.]

MONA

The mullas, at least they think they're right and act accordingly. But you know they're wrong and you're just too weak to stand up to them.

YOUNG MAN

If I wasn't strong, the same poison that's got into you, would get into me.

[There's a loud knock from off.]

YOUNG MAN

Don't move.

[He exits. Moments later, footsteps are heard returning, but it is MR. ALIZADEH that walks in the room.]

ALIZADEH

Hello there.

MONA

Mister Alizadeh?

ALIZADEH

Miss Mahmudnizhad.

MONA

It's so good to see you!

ALIZADEH

Look at you, look at you.

MONA

But what are you doing here?

ALIZADEH

I'm here to break you out!

MONA (*Laughs.*)

Yeah that would be good—an actual crime they could pin on me!

ALIZADEH

You may as well commit at least one good one. (*He laughs.*)

MONA

But really, my mother was supposed to come a while ago with word of my release.

ALIZADEH

Mm.

MONA

And I'm surprised they let you by—Normally it's immediate family for a few minutes, but with glass between us. Either that or you're with an interrogator for hours and hours.

ALIZADEH

Well, maybe I boasted a bit about our teacher-student relationship.

MONA

Oh, okay.

ALIZADEH

Look at you, you've lost weight.

MONA

Yeah a little.

ALIZADEH

I mean you look good—

MONA

Oh, how is everyone in the class?

ALIZADEH

They all seem fine, worrying about exams as usual... and you, of course. I can't believe you're here. It was one thing to hear about it, but now to see you...

MONA

So why are you really here?

ALIZADEH

Miss Mahmudnizhad, the release didn't go through.

MONA

It didn't.

ALIZADEH

My coming is a sort of 'Plan B.'

MONA

Okay.

ALIZADEH

I've spoken to the authorities here, and they say they are going to be seeking the death sentence with several of the women here.

MONA

The women?

ALIZADEH

Yes. And naturally I asked if you were one of them. And they said yes.

Silence.

MONA

Wow.

ALIZADEH

Honestly I think they're just trying to scare you.

MONA

Growing up we would read stories about the early martyrs thinking what heroes they were, if only we could be like them, but always knowing that the heroic age was long past. But it's not. It's here and it's now, and it's me.

ALIZADEH

Really, I don't think they mean it, I mean, they asked me to come.

MONA

Sorry, why are you here again?

ALIZADEH

(Taking out a piece of paper and a pen.)

Just to clarify your options.

MONA

What's that?

ALIZADEH

It's a piece of paper, that's all.

MONA (*Reading.*)

This is asking for a statement denying my faith.

ALIZADEH

Think of it just as an assignment you have to do, for the grade.

MONA

Mr. Alizadeh, I'm grateful for your coming and for your concern, but I'm not going to give up my religion just like that.

ALIZADEH

(*Putting aside the paper and pen.*)

Look, I'm no friend of the clergy. I stuck out my neck to keep them from kicking you out of school. Yeah you didn't know about that. So I'm not here to convert you... but I can find nothing of any worth in you risking your life because of this.

MONA

I understand why you might feel that way, but you are not a Bahá'í.

ALIZADEH

I know something about your religion.

MONA

But even for a Muslim, look at Imam Husayn—didn't he do well in dying for his Faith?

ALIZADEH

My dear, you are not Imam Husayn. Mourners will not put up a wailing every year to remember your sacrifice—

MONA

That's not what I want.

ALIZADEH

—Too many people have already died for causes, thank you, there's no room for you on our calendar.

MONA

I'm not doing this to be remembered by your calendar. Anyway, am I killing myself? If it were up to me, I'd be back in school...

ALIZADEH

But it is up to you!

MONA

How?

ALIZADEH

Just tell them what they want to hear and you're free to go.

MONA

But what about the principle here?

ALIZADEH

Worry about that another time.

MONA

You can't just walk away from that.

ALIZADEH

Then swallow it, scream it into your pillow if you have to—just until the threat is passed.

MONA

It's not enough to scream. It has to be heard and understood. The truth cannot just be pushed down, and the more the leaders of this country push, the more the truth will resist and the more they push me to cry it out.

ALIZADEH

Let's say there were an impartial court here listening to you. You know what they'd say?

MONA

I don't care what they say.

ALIZADEH

They'd call you a fanatic.

MONA

I haven't hurt anyone. I'm not telling anyone what to do or forcing them to see things my way. Or am I a fanatic because I believe in something more than I fear those bullies?

ALIZADEH

No, because you've lost perspective and forgotten what is most precious in life.

MONA

I'm standing up for the most precious thing in life.

ALIZADEH

What, this obscure religion?

MONA

The truth—I thought you'd understand that.

ALIZADEH

Truth-shmooth! What is truth? It's an abstraction!

MONA

You just said you stood up to the clergy for me. Wouldn't it have been easier to let them expel me?

ALIZADEH

No, I couldn't have lived with myself.

MONA

Exactly, and I couldn't live with myself if I were to recant.

ALIZADEH

There is a difference between me putting up with some heat from the clergy and you throwing away your life.

MONA

How do you know they can't burn your house down?

ALIZADEH

They can, but when they do, I'm going to run out of the house and not into it.

MONA

You love your life more than your house.

ALIZADEH

Exactly.

MONA

And if I told you I love my Faith more than anything else in the world?

ALIZADEH

I'd say you're a fool to throw away your life for words.

MONA

Words?!

ALIZADEH

That's all they are! Like words in a book. Close the book and they are gone!

MONA

This book is my life!

ALIZADEH

Precisely. (*A beat.*) Your Faith advocates moderation in all things.

MONA

It also demands truthfulness, absolute truthfulness.

ALIZADEH

And yet 'Abdu'l-Bahá said you could lie to a dying man if it would comfort his mind.

MONA

'Abdu'l-Bahá said that?

ALIZADEH

How do you explain that contradiction?

MONA

Where did he say that?

ALIZADEH

Some Answered Questions, chapter 57, verse 12.

MONA

I need to check that. Still, that doesn't mean I shouldn't tell the truth about my belief.

ALIZADEH

What is the truth, Miss Mahmudnizhad? Show me an absolute statement about any subject in your writings, and I will show you another to contradict it.

MONA

I don't believe you.

ALIZADEH

Try me.

MONA

I don't believe you.

ALIZADEH

I'll prove it to you. Try me.

MONA

In the Bahá'í writings it says that we should investigate the truth for ourselves and that we should ask questions.

ALIZADEH

Bahá'u'lláh: "The most burning fire is to question the signs of God." Words of Wisdom. Verse 18.

MONA

I don't see that as a contradiction...

ALIZADEH

There are no absolutes.

MONA

As Bahá'ís, we don't dissemble our faith.

ALIZADEH

Bahá'u'lláh says you should act with wisdom to avoid persecution.

MONA

Still Bahá'ís don't dis-

ALIZADEH

But what about you, Mona? What does Mona think about it? Investigate the truth for yourself. You say you're not afraid, but maybe you're just a little afraid to think for yourself?

MONA

No.

ALIZADEH

You see, reasonable people ask questions when they're confronted with contradiction. Fanatics become more extreme. (*A beat.*) I heard you had a special dream, with the dresses. Yeah, Farah told me.

MONA

Yes.

ALIZADEH

You chose the blue dress, if I recall... but that doesn't seem right. The blue one was about life and service. You did believe that to be the message?

MONA

Yes, so?

ALIZADEH

So who was this message from? From God? Because God also appears to be the one telling you to die for your faith. Well, which is it? Life or death? Or maybe God is confused?

MONA

How can you say that?

ALIZADEH

Oh, so I'm not allowed to ask questions now that I'm investigating the truth?

MONA

God is not confused—You may be, I may be...

ALIZADEH

But, you see, I don't think it was God sending you that dream. I think it was your own unconscious: it sensed your life was in danger, so it fashioned a creative way of telling you...

MONA

It was more than that.

ALIZADEH

The other option is a confused God.

MONA

That's not true.

ALIZADEH

Are you ready to die for a confused God?

MONA

Why are you doing this?

ALIZADEH

You're my student.

MONA (*A discovery.*)

You were a Bahá'í.

[A beat.]

ALIZADEH

I was, once upon a time.

MONA

What happened?

ALIZADEH

I woke up. It was a nice dream while it lasted.

[A beat.]

MONA

So what do you believe now?

ALIZADEH

I believe in freedom. I cannot believe in a God that contradicts himself, in a God at war with himself.

MONA reaches out and touches ALIZADEH's hand, and almost instantly, her tears well up.

ALIZADEH

What are you doing?

MONA

I had no idea.

ALIZADEH

I don't know what you mean

MONA

It's not God who's at war with himself.

ALIZADEH

(Pulling his hand away a little.)

Let's not get too personal here.

MONA

Two forces are battling in the world right now...

ALIZADEH *(Glibly.)*

Good and evil?

MONA

Love and fear! And fear seems to be winning—fear masquerading as religion is threatening to tear the world in two.

ALIZADEH

Not the world, just Iran. See you've lost perspective.

MONA

Iran is only the beginning.

ALIZADEH

Mona, freedom and thinking and science are everywhere, the rest of the world is moving toward freedom and democracy.

MONA

The rest of the world is in great danger too. Fear knows no borders and it will wear any number of masks as it creeps in like the darkness. But love is powerful, unity is powerful—these are the lights God has chosen to flood the world with. My Faith is a source of love and unity for the world, don't you see? And they're trying to extinguish it!

ALIZADEH

Okay, if that's true, why are you going to lie down and let them do it? Mona, if there's any hope for your Faith, it's in you and your father, and others like you who do love and serve your community. If they kill you, who's going to be left?

MONA

Others will rise up, greater than us.

ALIZADEH

How do you know?

MONA

Because that's how love works! (*A beat.*) Only God can redeem this world, Mr. Alizadeh. I can't do it, you can't do it. I'll be honest with you: I didn't expect to face this situation. But I have to trust Him enough to follow the path He lays out for me.

YOUNG MAN (*Entering.*)

What's going on—did she sign?

The YOUNG MAN takes the paper from Alizadeh, and writes something on it.

MONA

(To herself as much as to ALIZADEH.)

Maybe it's just a different kind of service.

YOUNG MAN

Look, all you have to do is put your signature right here, and you're free.

MONA

What did you write?

YOUNG MAN

It doesn't matter, no one's going to read it anyway—why are you wasting your time in jail?

MONA

(Looking at the paper.)

'I reject my membership in the Bahá'í Faith?' *(She tears the paper up.)*

YOUNG MAN

Why are you so stubborn?

MONA

Why are you so afraid?

YOUNG MAN

Look, I'm the best friend you've got in here.

MOTHER *(Enters hall.)*

Mona? Is that you?

MONA

(Moving to the door.)

Mom?

YOUNG MAN

Come back here!

MOTHER

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

MONA

What are you doing in here?

YOUNG MAN

Who let you back here?!

MOTHER

Aqa Husayni did. They arrested me too.

MONA

Some best friend.

YOUNG MAN

No, this is all just gone too far.

MOTHER

They kept me in that room for hours!

YOUNG MAN (*To MOTHER.*)

Can you just wait in the hall a minute?

AQA HUSAYNI *enters.*

AQA HUSAYNI

I think we're finished here.

YOUNG MAN

Sir, I'm this close to getting her to sign.

MONA

I'm never going to sign that.

AQA HUSAYNI

Take them back, both of them.

YOUNG MAN

(Sighs disgustedly, then in an outburst—)

Well, go on! Get moving!

They exit, leaving AQA HUSAYNI with ALIZADEH.

ALIZADEH

I tried, I did—and I was close. I just, I don't know—

AQA HUSAYNI

Oh, it worked out better than I expected.

ALIZADEH

What do you mean?—she didn't sign.

AQA HUSAYNI

I guess I never expected her to sign. The guard thought it might work, but no, they're a chain now and their strength comes from their solidarity. That's where we take aim now.

ALIZADEH (*Goes to exit.*)

I'll see if I, uh... come up with something... for her. Can you have them open the door?

AQA HUSAYNI

Why the rush?

ALIZADEH

I figure I'm done here.

AQA HUSAYNI

I have a new job for you. I need you to make a statement in front of the prisoners.

ALIZADEH

What?

AQA HUSAYNI

You will say that you were a Muslim, then you became a Bahá'í and a communist and now you are a good Muslim again.

ALIZADEH

I came here to help you.

AQA HUSAYNI

And a fine job you did, she was this close to persuading you!

ALIZADEH

I'm leaving.

AQA HUSAYNI

I have it all taped, the whole conversation with the girl, where you confess to apostasy, atheism and communism. But right now, I don't need another no-good like you crowding up my jail, I need help shaking their solidarity.

ALIZADEH

And if I refuse?

AQA HUSAYNI

Are you strong enough? That girl—she may be. I think you'd crumple like a piece of paper.

[*End of scene.*]

ACT II, Scene 4 – Mona and Mother’s Prison Cell

MONA and her MOTHER in a single cell with one bed. MONA sits on the floor on a blanket, squeezing the juice out of old limes into a spoon. Her MOTHER is wrapped in blankets, shivering, one moment on the bed, the next moment at the bars.

MOTHER

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

MONA

Here, Mom, have another blanket. *(She takes the blanket she’s been sitting on and wraps it around her MOTHER, then returns to her task.)*

MOTHER

Thank you. I’m still so cold. Don’t you have a blanket?

MONA

I’m fine.

MOTHER

Here take this one back. I already have three and you only had the one.

MONA

I’m fine.

MOTHER

Please, Mona, take it back.

MONA

You haven’t eaten your dinner. Mom, you have to eat.

MOTHER

No thank you.

MONA

If you don’t eat this, other people will.

MOTHER

I don’t know who.

MONA

There are women here who need special care.

MOTHER

You’re not talking about those drug addicts? I don’t know how you can stand the smell, I can barely breathe over here.

MONA

You're just not used to it.

MOTHER

I don't know if it's such a good idea you spending so much time with them.

MONA

Mom, listen to me: It's important to keep the right attitude in here, to encourage and comfort the others—

AQA HUSAYNI

Bahá'í prisoners! We bring you another victory for Islam! *(To someone offstage.)* Come in please.

MR. ALIZADEH enters, masked and obviously roughed up. He holds a paper which he prepares to read aloud.

AQA HUSAYNI

This man is going free—right after he speaks to all of you. *(To ALIZADEH.)* Tell them.

ALIZADEH

I was a Muslim...

AQA HUSAYNI

Louder please—share the joy.

ALIZADEH (Obeying.)

I was a Muslim, I became a Bahá'í and a communist. Now, praise to God, I am Muslim again.

AQA HUSAYNI

If you come back to the true Faith, you too will be free! *(To ALIZADEH.)* Sir, do you believe that Bahá'ís are involved in politics?

ALIZADEH

The U.S. president has defended them. The President of Chile has taken a photograph with the Bahá'ís of that country. And they have their world center in Israel.

AQA HUSAYNI

And so?

ALIZADEH

And so they clearly are spies for the U.S., for Chile and for Israel.

AQA HUSAYNI

That's right. One of your very own has turned to the truth. Learn your lesson, Bahá'ís—
your resistance is caving in!

They exit.

MOTHER

Did you recognize him? I couldn't tell with the mask—Was he really a Bahá'í?

MONA

Maybe.

*The YOUNG MAN drags in the FATHER, then pushes him towards Mona and
his wife. He walks stiffly, trying not to give attention to the great pain.*

FATHER

Hello, hello—Look, look who—

MOTHER

O Lord!

MONA

Daddy!

MOTHER

Look at you, Jamshid. Look at what they've done to you.

[They make room for him to sit, and they just look at each other.]

MONA

You look like a candle... with its cover removed.

FATHER

Just waiting for the breath of God to blow.

MOTHER

No, don't say that—you'll still be okay. You have to be! Jamshid, what will become of
me if you go?

FATHER

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

My wife—are you a faithful child of Bahá'u'lláh?

MOTHER

Yes.

FATHER

Then your inheritance is prison. And next to the Black Pit of Tehran, this is a hotel! (*He laughs.*) And yet I'm so happy to have inherited a portion from him.

MOTHER

Please don't speak if it's hard for you, Jamshid—My heart is breaking.

FATHER

Mine is overflowing. My wife—are you the faithful daughter of the Báb?

MOTHER

I would want to be.

FATHER

From him, we may inherit the treasure of martyrdom.

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

FATHER

These tears from my eyes are the tears of happiness. Please, please don't cry, Farkhundih. This is not goodbye. You remember how when we would move to a new home, I would go ahead and clean and move the furniture in, and then I would shower and dress in my best clothes and then come and I'd bring you?

MOTHER

Yes.

FATHER

Now I do the same. I go to our new home and prepare, and when the time is right, I will come for you.

MOTHER

Oh, Jamshid, I'm going to hold you to that. I'm sorry, I'm so sorry for everything...

FATHER

No tears, no apologies. All is washed clean by the mercy of God.

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 and snapping his fingers.)

Then let's go!

The YOUNG MAN enters. Scene shift as if the FATHER has started his ascent to the next world. MONA sees and speaks to him, but the MOTHER recedes.

YOUNG MAN

Yadu'lláh Mahmúdnizhád.

MONA

Must you go now?

YOUNG MAN

Rahmatu'lláh Vafáí.

FATHER

This separation is only temporary.

YOUNG MAN

Túbá Zá'irpúr

MONA

Why don't they just leave us alone?!

FATHER

Love, Mona. Only love.

MONA

But they're taking you away from me.

FATHER

And leading me to my Beloved.

MONA

They don't know that, they mean to harm you.

FATHER

But this is simply their desire. From a world of such desires, God weaves His web of benevolence.

YOUNG MAN

Come!

MONA

Don't go.

FATHER

Would you hold me here, when He is calling me?

MONA

Just a little longer.

YOUNG MAN

Come now!

MONA

What about me, Dad? Will He call me too?

FATHER

Only come when you're ready, when your dress is finished, and of one color.

MONA

What do you mean?

FATHER

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

MONA

Oh, Dad!! Wait for me!

FATHER

May my life be sacrificed for you, my dear one.

The FATHER leaves with the YOUNG MAN. MONA stands alone.

MONA

Won't you congratulate me, friends? My father has been martyred because of his faith in Bahá'u'lláh. He persevered and stood up to all those who hated him, and I am so immensely proud of him. Won't you congratulate me, friends?

Silence. MONA sinks down and begins to pray.

ACT II, Scene 5 – Prison Cell and Elsewhere

It's the middle of the night. In silhouette, MONA is praying on the floor, and her MOTHER is laying on the bed, weeping or sleeping. 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 nearby. You said you'd be there! Maybe the moon has swallowed you up, swallowed you whole. You made it jealous with your shining. 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. The YOUNG MAN has entered silently and stands in the shadows close to MONA's cell. She speaks as though she is still deep in prayer.

MONA

I don't know what you're doing here in the middle of the night, but I'm not afraid of you.

YOUNG MAN

You've been praying non-stop.

MONA

I'm preparing for a test.

YOUNG MAN

You're not supposed to say Bahá'í prayers here.

MONA

So are you here to punish me?

YOUNG MAN

No, I'm here to answer you.

Lighting and scene shift as MONA realizes this is the YOUNG MAN of her dream. He comes into the cell through the prison bars and sits on the bed. He lovingly puts a hand on the MOTHER's head. MONA has stopped her prayer and takes the hand of the YOUNG MAN and bows her head.

MONA

Forgive me.

YOUNG MAN
Mona, what do you want?

MONA
Perseverance.

YOUNG MAN
What do you want from us?

MONA
Perseverance for all the Bahá'ís.

YOUNG MAN
What do you want for yourself from us?

MONA
Perseverance, perseverance, perseverance.

YOUNG MAN
It is granted.

[He presents her with a wrapped gift, which she opens to find a red dress.]

YOUNG MAN
Do you accept this gift?

MONA
Yes.

YOUNG MAN (*Rising.*)
Now—

MONA
Don't leave.

YOUNG MAN
—Look for me.

MONA
But I've seen you.

YOUNG MAN
I am there when you look for me.

MONA
But it's the same face as the guard, so I've seen you.

MOTHER (*Stirring.*)

Mona?

YOUNG MAN

This is not my face—my face cannot be shown.

MONA

I don't want to wake up...

YOUNG MAN (*With emphasis.*)

This is the face in which you must find me. (*He taps her once lightly on the chest.*)

MONA

Aaaah!

YOUNG MAN (*Leaving.*)

Look for me.

MONA

I'm not done—

MOTHER

Mona honey, what's wrong?

[*The YOUNG MAN is gone, and the scene has shifted back to the prison cell.*]

MONA

Ahhh! His fingers—they touched me.

MOTHER

What do you mean somebody touched you?! What's happened? Speak to me! What's wrong?

MONA

Mother... I'm going to be martyred!

MOTHER

What?

[*MONA nods, tries to catch her breath.*]

MOTHER

What are you trying to do, break my heart? No no no no no no no no, my dear, I harbor so many dreams for you. These past nights I've been trying to imagine life

MOTHER (Cont'd)

without your father—and I've decided I would like to see us freed from this prison, and to see you marry and have children.

MONA

Do you want to know how I know I'll be martyred?

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 let it happen—

MONA

Mom, don't ask that!

MOTHER

Look how beautiful you are. You can't see, but my God! You look like the blessed Mary. Mona, if you were martyred, don't you see what a pity it would be? But then if you stay here in prison much longer, you're going to lose this beauty!

MONA

I want to tell you something, and I want to be frank.

MOTHER

Okay.

MONA

Can you take what I'm about to say?

MOTHER

Of course. Go ahead, say it!

MONA

Mom, if I knew that for every year I'm in prison, a few people or even one person would rise up in service to God's Cause, I would want to stay in prison so long that the entire world would be transformed.

MOTHER

But why now, when you're still so young? Have a family—taste the fruit of your life!—then think about these things.

MONA

That's not what I want. What I want is not marriage and children—What I desire, what I want to see, is the youth of the world taking hold of each other's hands and arising to spread the message of love and unity throughout the world, to become a new race of men the world is waiting for, to prepare and to take every opportunity that presents itself to shine with the light of love and faith. This is what I see, Mom, and it is then that I wish I had not only one life but a thousand lives to give in the path of God! Do you see?

MOTHER

I do. It frightens me, but I do. If only they would come now and take us all to the arena of sacrifice!

MONA smiles. The YOUNG MAN enters.

YOUNG MAN

It's time.

He takes the MOTHER and MONA away to their sentencing trials.

ACT II, Scene 6 – Prison Courtroom and Beyond

It is a makeshift courtroom. AQA HUSAYNI 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. The YOUNG MAN enters with the MOTHER.

YOUNG MAN

Wait there, please. *(He takes up a seat before the typewriter.)* Come in now.

The MOTHER comes forward.

MOTHER

Hello.

The YOUNG MAN 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.

AQA HUSAYNI

Sit down, please.

MOTHER

What's that?

AQA HUSAYNI

Sit down.

MOTHER

Sorry?

AQA HUSAYNI *(Smiling.)*

So now you're deaf? *(To YOUNG MAN.)* 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

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

AQA HUSAYNI

This is not the movies! Sit down.

She does.

AQA HUSAYNI

You are from a Zoroastrian background, right?

MOTHER

Yes.

AQA HUSAYNI

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

MOTHER

Because it was my heart's desire to do that.

AQA HUSAYNI

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

MOTHER

I'm not going to do that.

AQA HUSAYNI

We respect the Zoroastrians. They participate in our demonstrations...

MOTHER

They pretend to be on your side, but you have never been good to them.

AQA HUSAYNI

That was the reign of the Shah, things are changing now.

MOTHER

Look, sir, I will not convert to the Zoroastrian religion.

AQA HUSAYNI

Why not?

MOTHER

Because you want to take me back to two thousand and five hundred years ago. I wish you had asked me to convert to Islam, I would have liked it better.

AQA HUSAYNI

So convert to Islam.

MOTHER

Now you want to take me back fourteen hundred years; no sir, I will neither become a Zoroastrian nor a Muslim, so what is my sentence?

AQA HUSAYNI

Death.

MOTHER

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

AQA HUSAYNI

You will be happy?

MOTHER

Yes.

AQA HUSAYNI

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

The YOUNG MAN starts to lead her out, but she turns and goes back. The YOUNG MAN and AQA HUSAYNI panic think she's going to do something violent.

YOUNG MAN

Stop right there!

MOTHER (*Stopping.*)

I just want to know my sentence.

AQA HUSAYNI

I don't know yet.

MOTHER

Did you think I had a bomb?

AQA HUSAYNI

Get her out of here! Bring the daughter!

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

AQA HUSAYNI

How did it come to this? But then it's very clear: Mona, your parents have deceived and misled you. They have forced you to imitate them in following the Bahá'í religion.

MONA

It's true that I was born into a Bahá'í family, but I have made up my own mind to be a Bahá'í.

AQA HUSAYNI

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

MONA

What more proof of my faith do you want? I was dragged out of school and put in jail and now, have endured all these interrogations for the sake of my religion.

AQA HUSAYNI

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

MONA

I believe in Islam, your honor. But I also believe that God has sent a new Messenger, Bahá'u'lláh, and He has brought new laws...

AQA HUSAYNI

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!

AQA HUSAYNI

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

MONA

I kiss the order of execution.

AQA HUSAYNI

Very well, bring the mother back in!

[*The YOUNG MAN exits. A bird is heard singing outside.*]

AQA HUSAYNI

Why are you smiling?

MONA

The world is waking up.

AQA HUSAYNI

Forget about the world! No one's going to hear what's happened to you here! It all ends right now. We're going to snuff you out—not just you, all of you!

MONA

You cannot destroy us—we're the light of a new day.

[The YOUNG MAN returns, leading the MOTHER in. AQA HUSAYNI looks hard at Mona, then the Mother, then at Mona again.]

AQA HUSAYNI (*To MOTHER.*)

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

MOTHER

Yes.

AQA HUSAYNI

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.

MOTHER

Mona?

MONA

No tears, Mom, remember our talk! Always remember...

AQA HUSAYNI

Get her out of here!

MOTHER

O God, my lovely daughter!

The MOTHER is taken off again. AQA HUSAYNI speaks to the YOUNG MAN, referring to MONA.

AQA HUSAYNI

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.

MONA

Thank you for making me last.

AQA HUSAYNI

Good, so maybe I'll see you back here.

MONA

No, but as the others go one by one on their way, I want to pray for them.

[AQA HUSAYNI leaves. The YOUNG MAN and MONA are left alone.]

YOUNG MAN

I don't want to kill you.

MONA

Do your deed and you will be left with death, not me. You will have this body that my spirit has put off like a winter coat, like an old dress. Go on... I forgive you. I not only forgive you, I kiss your hand in gratitude.

[She goes to kiss his hand, but he pulls it away.]

YOUNG MAN

Don't.

MONA

Don't you see? *(She takes off his mask.)* You lead me to my Beloved.

She kisses his hand and they walk to the site of the execution. The company all comes forward to lay down dresses for each of the 10 women martyrs of Shiraz, as the actor playing the FATHER reads off their names.

FATHER

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

[When her name is called, MONA comes forward wearing her red dress. She lays down her own chador as the final dress.]

END OF PLAY

