

A DRESS FOR MONA  
(Abridged Edition)

By Mark Perry

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## Setting

Shiraz, Iran. The early years of the Islamic Revolution (c. 1979-1983 C.E.)

## Cast of Characters

Mona (Mahmúdnizhád)	16; friendly and bright, not yet a saint
Father (Yadu'lláh Mahmúdnizhád)	Middle-aged; devout, with youthful exuberance
Mother (Fárhundih Mahmúdnizhád)	Middle-aged; anxious, strong-willed
Árám (Husayní)	16; self-assured, a bit peculiar, in love with Mona
Young Man	Ageless; Mona's guide and Animus
Religious Magistrate (Áyatu'lláh Qazá'í)	Older; powerful, dominating, fanatical
Mr. Alízádeh	Middle-aged; charismatic, Mona's teacher
Áqá Husayní	Middle-aged; a religious cleric, adamant
Farah (Ja'farí)	16; bold and worldly, Mona's friend
Mrs. Khudáyár	Middle-aged; a snooping neighbor
Head Prisoner (Fakhrí)	a political prisoner, shrewd
Zahrá	a drug addict in withdrawal, young
School Secretary	a woman longing for the days of the Sháh
Guard	a man not yet grown into his gun
Girl (in Mr. Alizadeh's class)	a blabbermouth on a hair trigger

*Minimum cast requirements: 4 female; 4 male*

## ACT I

### Scene 1 - Mona's Dream

*Darkness. The sound of water. MONA, a young woman in her teens, strikes a match to light a candle. She walks and we see a large, empty picture frame illuminated center stage. Mona goes to the frame and looks into it as if it were a mirror. Behind the frame, a ROBED FIGURE is illuminated.*

A VOICE

A gift from God.

*[The ROBED FIGURE gestures right. A red dress is revealed. Whispers. MONA takes the dress and holds it up to herself. There is a sudden reveal of a girl being hanged.]*

MONA

No!

*[The image is gone as quickly as it came. The ROBED FIGURE gestures left. A black dress is revealed. Whispers. MONA again holds the dress up to herself. Reveal of a scene with a girl moaning, as if starving.]*

MONA

No! I don't want that either.

*[The image is gone. The ROBED FIGURE comes forward and reveals a blue dress. Whispers. MONA slowly takes it and holds it up to herself. The ROBED FIGURE whispers in Mona's ear. The light around her grows brighter. Another hush falls.]*

MONA

Yes. This is the dress I choose.

*[The ROBED FIGURE removes his hood, unveiling a handsome YOUNG MAN. MONA is captivated. As he speaks he eventually moves back behind the frame.]*

MONA

Who are you?

YOUNG MAN

Look for me.

MONA

What?

YOUNG MAN

I am there when you look for me.

MONA

When I...?

YOUNG MAN

In the face of others--

MONA

I don't know what you mean.

YOUNG MAN

Look for me.

MONA

Who are you?

*[Mona's MOTHER's voice is heard, calling to her.]*

MOTHER (*Off.*)

Mona!

YOUNG MAN (*Behind the frame.*)

I am...

MOTHER

Mona, my dear, wake up. You've left the light on.

*[The YOUNG MAN pulls the hood back over his head and exits into the dark with the dress as the scene shifts to Mona's room.]*

MONA

Mother. I'm awake. (MONA *puts out the candle. A beat. Her body still appears to be gripped by the lingering effect of her dream. She struggles to say something.*) Shopping. I want to go shopping. (*Pause.*) Farah. Let's go shopping.

FARAH

You know I'm game.

*[Mona's friend, FARAH, pokes her head in. MONA gets up and they exit.]*

**Scene 2 - A Street in Shiraz, Iran**

FARAH and MONA enter. FARAH is in the middle of a story.

FARAH

Little boy, I said, two things you need to know. One, don't ever do your lips like that again. Two, you get nothing unless you got a ring for this finger. You want the control you get from Islam, but you like the freedom of the West too. Give me a veil or give me a mini-skirt. But keep your controlling hands off Farah unless you're ready to buy the whole package.

MONA

Sounds like shopping.

FARAH

Exactly, but this item is not on sale. He wants me, he pays full price. So where are we going?

MONA

Huh?

FARAH

Dreaming again?

MONA

Mmm.

FARAH

Right, but I don't get it exactly. I mean what was the word you used?

MONA

Service.

FARAH

You have to live a life of service, but what does that mean?

MONA

It seemed very clear in the dream.

FARAH

It seems really vague. Maybe you can ask God to give you the dream again and this time He could go into some more detail. I mean, how are you supposed to serve?

MONA

I don't know.

FARAH  
But you think shopping is the first step.

MONA  
Yes.

FARAH  
I like the way this girl thinks.

MONA  
Farah, I want my life to mean something. I don't want it where I just look after myself.

FARAH  
Well, personally, I don't mind looking after myself, but then I have no crisis of conscience.

MONA  
For the moment.

FARAH  
You're sixteen years old. The world is full of war, death and unspeakable poverty that the leaders of the world can't fix... What are you supposed to do?

MONA  
I don't know yet!

FARAH  
What are you supposed to buy?

MONA  
That's a surprise.

FARAH  
Maybe you're supposed to get married.

*MONA looks at FARAH in disbelief.*

FARAH  
No, listen! Maybe it was a wedding dress.

MONA  
A blue wedding dress?

FARAH  
Your favorite color, besides white is going out, everyone knows that.

I really doubt it.

MONA

Was there a guy in this dream? Maybe you saw your future husband.

FARAH

There was...

MONA

Yeah? A guy? What'd he look like?

FARAH

Well...

MONA

Did you recognize him?

FARAH

Wait. Where are we?

MONA

You're the one who led us here.

FARAH

Oh, no.

MONA

Great, now we're lost.

FARAH

Hold on a second. You think this dream is about marriage.

MONA

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

FARAH

Not a service!

MONA

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

FARAH

You know... This is the way to the house of the Báb.

MONA

FARAH

House of the what?

MONA

I've come here since I was small. I must have just unconsciously walked this way.

FARAH

If we take this alley up here, we'll get back on track.

MONA

Farah, I think I need to stop by this house here.

FARAH

Why?

MONA

It's a holy place.

FARAH

Okay, and why are we going there?

MONA

You can come if you want, I just thought you might not want to.

FARAH

I might not. I have problems enough in my life without being seen at one of your holy places.

MONA

That's fine.

FARAH

But then I might want to come.

MONA

Farah.

FARAH

Maybe if you tell me why you're going and stop being so elusive.

MONA

This dream is very important. Now that I'm here, I'm thinking I should go and pray for an answer. Or some guidance for what it might mean. Who knows? By the time I come out, the answer may be staring me in the face.

FARAH  
Fine.

MONA  
Okay?

[MONA approaches the house and immediately changes her aspect, becoming reverent. Silence. She speaks in a hushed tone.]

MONA  
This is it.

FARAH  
Oh. But wait, hasn't this been confiscated?

MONA  
(Slipping off her shoes at the gate.)  
They still let us come and go. Are you coming in?

FARAH  
I don't know if I should. What is this place again?

MONA  
This is where my faith began.

FARAH  
Oh.

MONA  
A hundred and thirty five years ago.

FARAH  
Oh. It's nice.

MONA  
Are you coming in? Because if you stay out here, they'll probably see you and ask you who you are and what you're doing here.

FARAH  
Who?

MONA  
The mullas in the mosque across the street.

FARAH  
What?!

MONA  
Do you want to come in?

FARAH  
No!

MONA  
Do you want an orange?

FARAH  
What?

MONA  
There's a tree in here.

FARAH  
Oh. No. I'll be over by the mosque.

MONA  
Okay, I'll find you.

*[MONA prostrates herself at the threshold of the house and then exits into it. A young man, ARAM, appears, sitting at the gate of the house. He is played by the same actor who played the Young Man in Mona's dream. MONA reenters with an orange. Time passes. She is then startled when she sees ARAM.]*

MONA  
Who are you?

ARAM  
Marry me.

MONA  
What?

ARAM  
Be my lover.

MONA  
What are you talking about?

ARAM  
You should probably tell me your name first.

MONA  
I don't even know who you are!

ARAM  
Sure you do, I'm the man of your dreams.

MONA  
Farah!

ARAM  
She left.

MONA  
You have no right cornering me like this. Farah, help!

FARAH  
What's wrong?

MONA  
There's a man at the gate.

ARAM  
*(Keeping his eyes fixed on Mona.)*  
Hi Farah.

FARAH  
Aram, what are you doing here?

ARAM  
I was just introducing myself to your friend...

FARAH  
He's only a boy that lives on my street.

ARAM  
I am a man!

FARAH  
A little boy with some whiskers. Don't let him scare you, Mona...

ARAM  
Ah... Mona!

MONA  
He didn't scare me.... I just didn't know who he was.

FARAH  
Let's get out of here.

ARAM  
Mona-Mona-Mona.

MONA  
What?

FARAH  
Aram, did you follow us?

ARAM  
Mona-Mona-Mona...

MONA  
Yes this is my name.

ARAM  
Your name is Mona-Mona-Mona?

MONA  
Just the one.

ARAM  
You said “Mona-Mona-Mona” was your name.

MONA  
No, I didn’t. You said that.

ARAM  
You said this is my name.

FARAH  
Aram, when are you going to grow up?

ARAM  
I like “Mona-Mona-Mona.” And that’s what I’m going to call you.

MONA  
Fine. But it’s not my name.

FARAH  
You have no right following us. We’re leaving.

ARAM  
Farah, I took one look at your friend and decided that destiny is not something to run away from. Nothing can hold it back or frustrate it. This one is mine.

FARAH

Mona, he's always talked like this. Everyone knows he's an idiot.

ARAM

Farah, you love me too much to think rationally.

FARAH

Yeah, right!

ARAM

I must admit that I'm only interested in your friend at the moment. Maybe if she and I don't work out, you and I can take another stab at it.

FARAH

Oh, you wish!

ARAM (*To Mona.*)

She's still sorry that I stole a kiss from her.

FARAH

We were *ten years old*, playing in the street, and this little Mulla comes up and plants one on my cheek.

[*He kisses in her direction.*]

FARAH

... When I'm not looking!

ARAM

Just think, Mona-Mona-Mona, you may be so lucky.

MONA

You think I'm going to kiss you?

ARAM

I know you will.

FARAH

Go home, Aram, before your father finds you here and kills you.

ARAM

I'm not really worried about my father right now. Besides, I'm interested in why the two of you are here.

[*A beat.*]

FARAH

This house belongs to one of Mona's relatives...

MONA

Farah...

ARAM

Really? As I understand it, this property was sacred to a certain religious sect that all pious Muslims deem "unclean." And I know Farah isn't deep enough to be part of some esoteric cult...

FARAH

Watch it.

ARAM

So I'm trying to piece this together. I see my radiant damsel in this den of moral darkness and I can't figure it out. How can this be unless you are... alas... a Baha'i?

[*Silence.*]

MONA

I didn't come here for more questions.

ARAM

Destiny, Mona-Mona-Mona! Think about it.

[*MONA has left.*]

FARAH

If you breathe a word of this! Mona, wait up! (*She exits.*)

ARAM

Ciao. Have fun shopping. (*He hops down from his perch and walks towards the house.*)  
Shiraz, Shiraz, my city of roses! From what muck has this one sprung?

[*He grabs the orange MONA has dropped and begins to peel it. AQA HUSAYNI, a religious cleric (a "mulla"), enters from the area of the mosque.*]

AQA HUSAYNI (*Calling.*)

Aram! Aram!

[*ARAM panics and hides. AQA HUSAYNI stops and looks disdainfully at the house, then exits. End of scene.*]

### Scene 3 - Mahmudnizhad's Apartment

*A modest apartment. Mona's FATHER, Yada'llah Mahmudnizhad, is typing, one finger at a time on someone else's typewriter. He wears reading glasses. MONA enters with a shopping bag and stops just outside the door to the apartment. At the foot of the door is a long stem rose with a note. She picks up the flower and reads the note. She ponders the note, then goes to open the door. She hears the typing then pauses. She hides the rose by placing it down the front of her shirt. A thorn catches her skin and she winces and adjusts. She enters the room. Her FATHER looks up from typing, peering over his glasses to see her. They have a silent exchange. MONA then walks by him, leaning away a bit. She falters slightly in her stride, pricked by a hidden thorn. Her FATHER turns to watch her as she exits. He returns to typing. MONA reenters. She goes to the kitchen, retrieves a bottle of Pepsi and returns.]*

FATHER

Did you find what you were looking for?

MONA

Huh?

FATHER

At the house of the Bab.

MONA

How did you know?

FATHER

It's where I would have gone. So?

MONA

I'd rather not talk about it.

FATHER

Okay.

MONA

We went to the house and I went in and prayed, but when I came out this guy was there and he kept staring at me and he told me he wanted to marry me, and...

FATHER

So maybe this was the sign you were looking for?

MONA

I don't think so.

FATHER

I'm sure I don't know. (*He breaks and types.*) So why'd you turn away the first dress, the red one? This is a gift from God, right?

MONA

Look at the option.

FATHER

Martyrdom. Would you like some tea? (*He goes to the kitchen.*)

MONA

Death, Dad! It was the death part that got my attention. No tea.

FATHER

Mona, I am not judging you. None of us knows what we would do under that circumstance.

MONA

Maybe God was showing me that I'm not strong enough. I'm only strong enough for service.

[*The FATHER reenters.*]

FATHER

Do you think it's easy to serve? We're not talking about tea.

MONA

I know that.

FATHER

You're committing your life to helping others, encouraging others, suffering for others...

MONA

I know, I know. But, you know, it was the way the dress felt when I put it up to me. Bleah!

FATHER

And the black one?

MONA

It was just too heavy.

FATHER

It's a hard choice.

MONA

But it wasn't a real choice. You know how dreams are. If Baha'u'llah appeared to me right now and said, "Do this!" or "Do that!" that'd be different.

FATHER

In the dream the heart speaks.

MONA

Yeah... But I don't know if I like that.

FATHER

Mona, do you want to die?

MONA

No, but that's not the point.

FATHER

It's exactly the point, you want to live!

MONA

Of course.

FATHER

You like being alive!

*[The kettle whistles. Their neighbor, MRS KHUDAYAR, unable to restrain herself any longer, knocks on their patio door. MONA goes to open it.]*

MONA

Daddy, your water. Hello, Mrs. Khudayar.

MRS. KHUDAYAR (*Entering.*)

Am I interrupting something?

FATHER

Please come in. You'll have something to drink.

MRS. KHUDAYAR

No thank you.

FATHER

We were just discussing a wonderful dream that Mona had. I'll bring some tea for us.

MRS. KHUDAYAR

No, I couldn't. A dream? What kind of dream, Mona?

FATHER

What's a cup of tea between neighbors?

MRS. KHUDAYAR

Just a cup then. You were saying, Mona?

MONA

Well, in the dream... someone wanted to give me a gift. There were three dresses and I had to choose which one.

MRS. KHUDAYAR

Dresses?

MONA

Yeah, but...

MRS. KHUDAYAR

What did the labels say, dear?

[*The FATHER brings her tea.*]

MRS. KHUDAYAR

Thank you. So which dress did you take? (*Low.*) Mona, you can tell me...

MONA

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

MRS. KHUDAYAR

I know, honey.

MONA

It was really about choices...

MRS. KHUDAYAR

Life choices, Mona?

MONA

Exactly. One was... death.

MRS. KHUDAYAR

Don't want that one.

MONA

Another was sorrow, a life of pain and suffering.

MRS. KHUDAYAR

Mona, if you just say yes to the boy, these dreams won't haunt you any more!

MONA

What are you talking about?

MRS. KHUDAYAR

Oh, as if...! Oh! (*Aside to MONA.*) He doesn't know yet? Sorry, honey, my lips are sealed.

MONA

I don't think I understand.

MRS. KHUDAYAR

Of course not.

FATHER (*Approaching.*)

Mrs. Khudayar, it's a wonderful dream, isn't it?

MRS. KHUDAYAR

I had a class once where we talked about psychology and dreaming. Sounded fascinating. Absolutely no practical benefit. Everything was death and sex, death and sex! Who needs to dream? It's our waking world, girl! Nice class though. (*MRS KHUDAYAR drinks.*) The tea is delicious, Yadu'llah.

FATHER (*Moving to kitchen.*)

Would you like some to bring home?

MRS. KHUDAYAR

I wouldn't think of it. (*Aside.*) Mona, I saw your little present. At the door. Is he handsome?

MONA

What?

MRS. KHUDAYAR

Run away with him, honey! Oh, to be young again!

FATHER

It's only a package of tea.

MRS. KHUDAYAR

We don't drink much tea anyway. (*Aside.*) Mona, when I was sixteen, I was already married with a loaf in the oven. You won't get any more beautiful, my dear.

FATHER (*Bringing her package.*)

Here you are...

MRS. KHUDAYAR

*(Taking package, getting up to leave.)*

Thank you. Remember, Mona. Get out while you can.

MONA

Okay.

MRS. KHUDAYAR

Such a lovely rug! Oh, I almost forgot. Yada'llah, they delivered this to the wrong address.

I swear to you, it arrived unsealed. Those goons with the Revolutionary Guard can't admit that they're censoring the mail so they try to put it off on me.

FATHER

We have consummate trust in you.

MRS. KHUDAYAR

That's your problem, you trust too much! But they're watching you!

FATHER

You didn't finish your tea. Please take it with you...

MRS. KHUDAYAR

I'll bring the cup back.

FATHER

As you always do.

MRS. KHUDAYAR *(Exiting.)*

Goodbye.

FATHER & MONA

Goodbye, Mrs. Khudayar.

FATHER

She always finds us at the strangest times. I'm joking or carrying on, shouting...

MONA

Paper walls.

FATHER

Hmm. Now tell me, 'cause I'm dying to know! Who was it from?

MONA

The letter?

FATHER  
The flower.

MONA  
Dad! How do you know about that?

FATHER  
You don't have to tell me.

MONA  
I don't hide things from you, Dad.

*[She exits. He watches her exit, then turns to the typewriter and pulls out the paper, signs it and begins stuffing it in an envelope. MONA reenters with flower and hands it to her father.]*

FATHER  
That must have hurt. *(Reading note.)* Ah! From the "man of your dreams."

MONA  
Exactly! But how could he know where I live?

FATHER  
Are you afraid of him?

MONA  
Not afraid.

FATHER *(Getting up.)*  
Well, my dear, answers come in very different forms.

*[He hands her the envelope he has sealed, which she opens. He gets up puts the rose in the Pepsi bottle and exits.]*

MONA  
Dad, is getting married a kind of service?

FATHER *(Off.)*  
Getting married!

MONA  
Just hypothetically.

FATHER  
Could be.

MONA (*Reading.*)

Dad, why didn't you tell me this?!

FATHER (*Reentering.*)

This is a request from the Baha'i community. As secretary, I was only supposed to type it up.

MONA

So this is it? Teaching is how I serve.

FATHER

It's a good start.

[MONA *is absorbed in thought.*]

FATHER

So who do you think the young man was? In the dream.

MONA

I think I'm confusing him with someone else that I've seen. He reminded me of you. But younger. (*She exits.*)

FATHER

You have to look at this dream as a great gift, Mona. Service to mankind. The dress was blue. The young man was dashing.

MONA (*Off.*)

I didn't say "dashing."

FATHER

You said he looked like me!

[*Music begins to play loudly from the other room. MONA reenters with the shopping bag she brought in earlier. With a flourish, she pulls a blue dress out of the bag.* ]

FATHER: A-haaaaaaa! Very nice.

[*MONA holds the dress up to herself and begins to dance. Her father begins to dance along with her. Soon thereafter, Mona's MOTHER enters with groceries. They try to get her to dance, but she appears anxious. The FATHER exits to shut off the music.*]

MONA

Hi Mama. What have you got? (*She gets up to look.*)

FATHER

Farkhundih? (*He reenters.*)

MONA

(*Jumping onto the couch with a bag of groceries.*)

Chocolate!

FATHER

Farkhundih, are you okay?

[*The MOTHER has dropped her other bags and now trembles.*]

MONA

Mom, what's wrong?

MOTHER

Where in hell are we living??!! (*She covers her mouth in shame.*)

FATHER

Please, my dear, sit down.

MOTHER

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

FATHER

What happened to you?

MOTHER

I was coming back from the market with the bags the wind was blowing my chador, and this... man, this mulla, stops me and shouts at me for not having my neck covered up. I'm unchaste and desecrating the name of Islam.

MONA

Did he know you were a Baha'i?

MOTHER

He said if he were my husband, he would have me whipped.

MONA

What did you do?

MOTHER

Mona, what could I do? I have no power. Who am I? I'm nothing to him. Nothing.

[*Mona's FATHER embraces his wife. A beat.*]

FATHER

Farkhundih, what was his name?

MOTHER

His name? I don't know what his name is...

FATHER (*Breaking away from her.*)

Could you point him out if you saw him again?

MOTHER

What are you asking me?

FATHER

Answer me, would you know him if you saw him?

MOTHER

Yes, but he's a mulla. He's a powerful man.

FATHER

I'm going to track down Mr. Mulla if it's the last thing I ever do... (*He picks up the phone.*)

MOTHER

Yadu'llah, you're a Baha'i for God's sake!

FATHER

I'm going to track down Mr. Mulla and I'm gonna...

MOTHER

We don't seek revenge!

FATHER

I'm gonna thank him!

MONA

Mom, you fall for him every time!

MOTHER (*To father.*)

Why you... !

FATHER (*Into phone.*)

Operator, give me Mr. Mulla on the phone right this instant. What? You don't know who Mr. Mulla is?! That fearless protector of the chastity of women?! (*Hanging up the phone.*) I need to find Mr. Mulla, and to thank him for setting my wife straight, for setting me straight and reminding me of my duty as a good Iranian citizen to beat my wife into line. Woman! You!

Come to your husband this instant!

[MONA *is laughing.*]

MOTHER

*(Getting up, moving away from him.)*

Yadu'llah! What are you doing?

FATHER *(To MONA.)*

You! 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 *(Eating.)*

Oh, 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.)* Oh, yes, 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!

*[The three of them are shouting, eating, laughing and slamming the table. Pounding on the door. Instantly, they are silent. MRS KHUDAYAR pokes her head in.]*

MRS KHUDAYAR

Am I interrupting something?

*[She shows her empty cup. End of scene.]*

#### Scene 4 - A Mosque in Shiraz & Mona's home

*The chanting of a prayer is heard. The large picture frame is center stage. In front of the frame, a man (AQA HUSAYNI from Scene 2) prostrates himself. MONA enters, carrying the blue dress from the previous scene. She comes behind the frame, looking into it, as if assessing the fit of the dress in a mirror. AQA HUSAYNI rises and turns. He speaks as if addressing a congregation.*

AQA HUSAYNI

Praise be to God! We stand today at the threshold of a new Iran! We were cursed with a tyrannical government, now the love of the Islamic Revolution is spreading! The Shah is dead and Ayatu'llah Khomeini has returned, leading us into this new day, into this new Iran! (Pause.) We are honored today with the presence of an esteemed brother in God's revolution, the Religious Magistrate of the Revolutionary Court. Please welcome Ayatu'llah Qazá'í.

*[He exits. The doors to the back of the house fly open. The RELIGIOUS MAGISTRATE enters. He is played by the same actor that has portrayed the "Young Man" and Aram, but he now wears a beard and a large turban. He walks straight towards MONA, who has opened her eyes with a start. They are locked in a stare as he comes closer. He walks until he is just opposite her through the mirror frame. He puts on a pair of eyeglasses, and her stare is broken as if the vision of him has vanished. She breaks away. He turns.]*

MAGISTRATE

Let us talk about Baha'i. Baha'i says it is a religion. Islam says Baha'i is a political sect. The Twelfth Imam has returned, Baha'i says. My friends, if the Twelfth Imam had returned, I should not be standing here. He should be here, and I should be on the floor in humility like you. But here I am, and I ask: Where is Imam? (A beat.) This plague will be eradicated from this land. Starting now. And you will do it.

*[During the MAGISTRATE's speech, Mona, now wearing the dress, has returned to stand before the frame. Chanting begins as the MAGISTRATE finishes. He turns and prostrates himself, in effect, bowing before MONA. MONA addresses herself in the mirror, practicing her delivery.]*

MONA

My name is Mona. I was asked to come and act as your teacher. I've never done this before so... maybe we can start by getting to know each other better.

*[The MAGISTRATE rises and goes. MONA's attention seems distracted by something she sees in the mirror. Her hand goes up to her head. She puts her fingers in her hair and pulls out a strand to examine.]*

MONA

O my God.

*[End of scene.]*

### Scene 5 - A Public Secondary School for Girls in Shiraz

MR. ALIZADEH's English class with MONA, FARAH and some other girls. All the girls wear thick clothing and a head scarf. The students speak the "English" phrases with a Persian accent.

MR. ALIZADEH

And again...

THE CLASS

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

MR. ALIZADEH

Not "vife"! Wa-wa-wa. Wwwwwwife! Speak it like an Arab!

THE CLASS

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

MR. ALIZADEH

Now what about this word ordering? Yes, Miss Mahmudnizhad.

MONA

The subject comes first.

MR. ALIZADEH

And what is that subject... Miss Ja'fari?

FARAH

*(Breaking out of a daydream.)*

Sorry, sir?

MR. ALIZADEH

The subject?

FARAH

Yes, the subject, sir... the subject is "I."

MR. ALIZADEH

Correct. Now, class, is it necessary to include the word "I"?

THE CLASS

Yeeeeesss.

MR. ALIZADEH

Are you sure? Miss Ja'fari.

FARAH

Yes, sir.

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. Miss Mahmudnizhad, please continue.

MONA

Next comes the verb.

MR. ALIZADEH

The verb comes next! Exactly, those English are so impatient they 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 *raises her hand.*]

MR. ALIZADEH

Yes.

MONA

Then why teach?

MR. ALIZADEH

Excuse me?

MONA

Why teach English? Why teach something that you don't care about?

[*Pause. The SECRETARY's voice comes over the intercom speaker.*]

SECRETARY

Mr. Alizadeh?

MR. ALIZADEH

*(Shouting at the intercom speaker.)*

What do you want, disembodied voice?!

*[The class laughs.]*

SECRETARY

Please come down to the main office.

MR. ALIZADEH

Disembodied voice! I finally get a student to ask a question and you interrupt!

SECRETARY

There's a man here who wants to see you. He's a... um....a man. He wants to see you.

MR. ALIZADEH

Okay, that's a big help.

*[The class laughs again.]*

SECRETARY

What was that?

MR. ALIZADEH

I'm a-comin! Miss Mahmudnizhad, I leave you to watch over the class while I'm gone.

*[He exits. FARAH sighs.]*

FARAH

It's a shame.

MONA

What?

FARAH

That he's so old.

MONA

He's not that old. Farah, look.

*[MONA pulls out a strand from underneath her head scarf and looks at it. As she does this, a MALE FIGURE is silently climbing through the classroom window.]*

FARAH

What?

MONA

A gray hair!

FARAH

So who's going to notice now we're wearing these nasty scarves all the time?

MONA

I notice! It means I'm getting old!

MALE FIGURE

Don't believe it, Mona!

*[The girls scream. The MALE FIGURE comes forward. It's ARAM.]*

FARAH

Aram! What are you doing here?!

ARAM

Mona, I would love you even shriveled up and decayed with only wisps of white hair.

MONA

Shut up!

FARAH

Aram! You can't be here.

ARAM

No, listen.

FARAH

Get out!

ARAM

I have to talk to you.

MONA

I have nothing to say to you, Aram!

*[A beat. ARAM appears shocked.]*

ARAM

Who is he, Mona?

MONA

What?

ARAM

The other man. Tell me who he is and what he does for you! Whatever it is, I'll do you better.

[*A slight beat.*]

MONA

He gave me a dress.

ARAM

Is that all? Mona-Mona-Mona, I'll give you three!

FARAH

(*Coming and swinging a pointing stick at him.*)

Get out, Aram! ....

ARAM

Easy, Farah! (*To Mona.*) Just go to the house!

MONA

What?

ARAM

I'll try to meet you there. Ow!

FARAH

Get out!

[*She drives him back to the window. Scene shift. MR. ALIZADEH reenters followed by AQA HUSAYNI.*]

MR. ALIZADEH

That girl is as much a spy for Israel as I am.

AQA HUSAYNI

The Baha'i sect is an illegal organization in this land and that girl is actively propagating it.

MR. ALIZADEH

Teaching a class of six year olds.

AQA HUSAYNI

Poisoning their minds against Islam.

MR. ALIZADEH

If you ask me, the clergy is the real threat to Islam.

*[Aqa Husayni gives him a dangerous look.]*

MR. ALIZADEH

Why do you come to me? I'm a foreign-language teacher. Why do you need my approval to kick out one harmless girl from school?

AQA HUSAYNI

It has to do with a certain teacher's union you belong to.

MR. ALIZADEH

Oh... that.

AQA HUSAYNI

Alizadeh, you stand there with your cocky, Marxist politics and hollow European values, and think you can judge the rest of the world from your perch. But you are not my judge. We're in the midst of a revolution... The Judgment, when the righteous and the sinners are separated, and those in the middle -- who fail to take a side -- are hacked in two by the sword of God. *(A beat.)* But what I'd like to know is if this girl is expelled, the teachers will show up for school tomorrow.

MR. ALIZADEH

The people who unlock the doors are not in our union.

AQA HUSAYNI

You should know that this is not my only recourse to action.

MR. ALIZADEH

What if you just let the girl alone?

AQA HUSAYNI

The girl is part of a much larger problem and I think you know what I mean.

*[End of scene.]*

### Scene 6 - The Site of the House of the Bab

*The ruins of the House of the Bab, destroyed only the night before. MONA and FARAH enter.*

MONA

I can't believe it. Farah, it's not there.

FARAH

I know, Mona.

MONA

No I mean it's not there. I can't see it.

FARAH (*With gentleness.*)

This is the third time we've walked around the lot and you keep saying you don't see it. What am I supposed to say? The house isn't there anymore.

MONA

No, I mean I can't see it. In my head... I'm trying to remember, but it's gone.

FARAH

Okay, so you don't want to turn around, there's a group of religious men coming this way.

*[Some men have entered, including AQA HUSAYNI and ARAM, dressed in a clerical outfit. He appears uncomfortable in his new apparel. The men survey the site and AQA HUSAYNI is pointing out other houses in the area.]*

MONA

What more can they do to me, Farah? (*She turns.*) Wait, isn't that Aram?

FARAH

Where?

MONA

Why is he dressed that way?

FARAH

I don't know. Aram!

AQA HUSAYNI (*To ARAM.*)

Do you know those girls?

FARAH

Going to a parade, Aram?

ARAM

They're just some girls.

AQA HUSAYNI

Come.

ARAM

Wait, father. *(He walks back towards FARAH and MONA.)*

MONA

Here he comes.

FARAH

My friend has no interest in...

ARAM *(Over the top, to FARAH.)*

You have something to say to me, you stupid girl!

FARAH

Whoa!

ARAM

*(Low.)* Mona, get out of your home. *(Loud.)* Be happy I don't have a stick!

MONA

What are you talking about?

ARAM *(To Farah.)*

You must learn to respect the man!

FARAH

Excuse me?

ARAM

*(Low.)* Mona, your family is in danger. *(Loud.)* You will learn to respect the man! *(Low.)*

Tonight. *(Loud.)* Be thankful these respectable gentlemen are here, or I'd show you what I'm talking about!

*[ARAM looks at MONA furtively and walks away. The men exit, laughing.]*

FARAH

That was the strangest thing that I've ever seen.

MONA

What was he talking about?

Maybe he really is crazy. FARAH

He was trying to warn me. MONA

What does he know? FARAH

Was that his father? MONA

This is getting a little weird. Are you ready to go yet? FARAH

No. I'm going in. MONA

In there? FARAH

[MONA *walks into the ruins.*]

Be careful, there might be glass. FARAH

[*A moment where MONA just stands still.*]

O my God. MONA

What's wrong? FARAH

It's here. MONA

What? FARAH

Farah, it's here. I feel it! MONA

You feel what? FARAH

MONA

No, no, this is only rubble. (*She laughs.*) Farah, do you get it? They didn't destroy it! They didn't touch this place. This is holy rubble. This is holy r-- Oh, no, they chopped it down!

[MONA *moves out of sight briefly.*]

FARAH

Chopped it down? What are you talking about? Mona, where did you go? I can't see you.

MONA

Aha!

FARAH

Aha-what?!

MONA

They forgot something.

FARAH

What?

MONA

Catch.

[MONA *tosses FARAH an orange. End of scene.*]

**Scene 7 - Mahmudnizhad's Apartment**

MONA *enters quietly. She looks at her shoes, then at the floor, and hesitates.*

MONA

Mama?

MOTHER (*Entering.*)

Mona, are you okay?

MONA

Is it okay if I come into the house with my shoes on?

MOTHER

There's been more violence tonight – your father went to find you.

MONA

Do you know about the House?

MOTHER

Oh, Mona, it's awful...

MONA

Mama, my shoes...

MOTHER

I couldn't care less about your shoes! You could have been hurt!

MONA

These shoes have tread on holy rubble.

MOTHER

Oh....

MONA

Don't be sad. There's still something there, something they haven't touched.

MOTHER

They destroyed the most sacred place we have.

MONA

Don't you see? If none of this had happened, we wouldn't see how much love we have, or how strong we can be. God took away these outer things to show us...

MOTHER

God didn't destroy the house. It was a group of fanatics! A group of thugs and thieves!

MONA

I didn't see them. I only saw the Baha'is. And the Baha'is were beautiful.

MOTHER

Why do we have to stay here in this hole? Why didn't we get out while we could? O Mona, where is your father? Anything could happen out there, he could get hurt... He went looking for you. Oh, no, someone had to stay behind! It couldn't be him! No, me! Always me!

MONA

Mama. *(She hugs her MOTHER.)*

MOTHER

Why does God put us through this?

*[Silence. MONA starts giving her MOTHER a long, wet noisy kiss on the cheek.]*

MOTHER

Stop it! That's horrible. I don't want to laugh!

*[MONA continues until they are both laughing. MONA breaks. A knock at the door. They are still.]*

MRS KHUDAYAR (Off.)

Hello...

MOTHER

Mona, get that. I'm going to look like a raccoon. *(She tries to sop off her makeup.)*

MONA *(Opening door.)*

Mrs. Khudayar.

MRS. KHUDAYAR *(Hugging her.)*

Oh, honey, I'm so glad you're safe. Don't scare us like that again.

MONA

Mama, did you tell the whole neighborhood?

MOTHER

I didn't tell anyone.

MONA

Then how did you...?

MRS. KHUDAYAR

Oh... I just know these things. The important thing is that you're back. (*She turns to leave. To someone off.*) Can I help you?

MR. ALIZADEH (*Off.*)

Oh, no, I think this is the place. (*He approaches the door.*)

MONA

Mr. Alizadeh?

MR. ALIZADEH

Miss Mahmudnizhad, it's good to see you.

MONA

It's okay, Mrs. Khudayar, this is my teacher.

MRS. KHUDAYAR

Do teachers make house calls these days?

MR. ALIZADEH

I am just hoping to speak to the father.

MRS. KHUDAYAR

Well, he's not here. That is, I assume he's not here... there. Mona, is your father home?

MONA

No...

MRS. KHUDAYAR

See. I'm leaving now. (*She exits.*)

MR. ALIZADEH

Maybe I can come back. When will he be home?

MONA

I'm not sure. Maybe you can come in.

MR. ALIZADEH

That would not be appropriate.

MONA

It's okay, my mother is here.

MR. ALIZADEH

Your mother?

MONA

Please come in.

MR. ALIZADEH (*Entering.*)

Thank you. (*A slight beat.*) Hello Farkhundih.

MOTHER (*Coolly.*)

Hello.

MR. ALIZADEH

You are looking well.

MONA

You know each other?

MOTHER

Mona, take his coat. I'll get him something to drink.

[*A beat.*]

MR. ALIZADEH

Nice rug.

MOTHER

Wedding gift.

[*Silence.*]

MONA

So I take it you two have met?

MR. ALIZADEH

Your father and I went to school together. That's how we met.

MONA

Really? Where?

MOTHER

Mona, come get the teacher his tea.

MR. ALIZADEH

Maybe it's better if he just called me.

MONA

(*Uncertain where her duty lies.*)

Here's your tea. If you want it.

MR. ALIZADEH

Oh. Thank you.

MOTHER

*(Turning to face him for the first time.)*

What is the message? Maybe you can tell us.

MR. ALIZADEH

Well...

MOTHER

Unless it's too delicate for female ears.

MR. ALIZADEH

Very well. This afternoon, we had a visit from a certain mulla who was placing pressure on the school to have your daughter expelled.

MONA

Really? Me?

MR. ALIZADEH *(To Mona.)*

You have to know that no free thinker is safe in this world.

MOTHER

What was the reason he gave?

MR. ALIZADEH

He mentioned that she was teaching a Baha'i children's class.

MONA

Did he mention me by name?

MR. ALIZADEH

Yes.

MONA

Wow!

MOTHER

When was this?

MR. ALIZADEH

During school today.

MOTHER

And...

MR. ALIZADEH

And?

MOTHER

Is she expelled?

MR. ALIZADEH

No. The little clout that I have in our school prevailed. For the moment.

[*A beat.*]

MOTHER

Thank you.

MR. ALIZADEH

It's only for the moment. What we're dealing with here is an organized campaign to exterminate your religion.

MOTHER

*My religion?*

MR. ALIZADEH

Yes. And there's nothing I can do about that.

[*MONA has been wandering around, absorbed in thought.*]

MONA

Mama, this means I might be persecuted.

MOTHER

It's nothing to be proud of.

MONA

He actually mentioned me by name. (*With a thick Arabic accent.*) "Bismulláh'u'l-rahmán-i-rahím! Mona Mahmudnizhad must go!"

MR. ALIZADEH

This is not a matter to make light of.

MONA

I understand why you might think that, but really... we're okay.

MR. ALIZADEH

No, in fact you're not. You are in very great danger.

MONA

Do you want me to tell you how I know we'll be okay? I had a dream not too long ago...

MOTHER

Mona, I'm sure he doesn't want to hear about your dream.

MONA

Mama, I feel we owe him an explanation.

MOTHER

You don't have to explain yourself to him.

MONA

It's my dream and I want to share it with my teacher.

*[The MOTHER is silent.]*

MONA

Mr. Alizadeh, would you like to hear my dream?

*[A beat.]*

MR. ALIZADEH

Sure.

MONA

Good. In my dream, God offered me three choices. But they appeared as three dresses. The first was red, and it meant that I should die for my beliefs. I did not take that dress. The second was black and it meant suffering. I didn't take that dress either. The last was blue and it meant service, and that was the one that I chose. So, you see, I know I'm safe. I understand it might be hard for you to accept this dream because you are not a Baha'i, but to me, Mr. Alizadeh, that dream was more real than you sitting there in front of me.

*[A beat.]*

MR. ALIZADEH

Thank you for sharing your dream with me.

MONA

You're welcome. *(She smiles to her MOTHER.)*

MOTHER

Mr. Alizadeh, would you mind waiting a moment on the patio?

MR. ALIZADEH

Uh...

MOTHER

Please. It's a nice view of the city.

MR. ALIZADEH

Okay.

MOTHER

Please. *(She closes the door behind him.)* Mona, you disobeyed me.

MONA

I was teaching my teacher.

MOTHER

Do you think that I am stupid? That I say things for no reason?

MONA

No.

MOTHER

Do you think that it was for nothing that I asked you not to tell him your dream?

MONA

He's my teacher...

MOTHER

Fine, he's your teacher. Let him teach you English. But you are my daughter and you will obey me.

MONA

But, Mama...

MOTHER

He's dangerous. *(Pause.)* Go to your room.

*[MONA leaves. The MOTHER takes a moment to regain her composure. As she is moving to the patio door, the FATHER enters.]*

MOTHER

Yadu'llah!

FATHER

Farkhundih, why are you upset? Is it Mona?

MONA

Daddy??

FATHER

Mona?! Is that you?

MONA

It's me.

*[He falls to the ground and kisses it.]*

MOTHER

Yadu'llah. We have a guest.

FATHER

Our daughter is now a guest? Mona, where are you? Come out here so I can see you.

MONA

I can't.

FATHER

Why not?

MONA

I'm not supposed to.

FATHER

Who says?

MONA

Mama.

MOTHER

Yadu'llah...

FATHER

Farkhundih, what's wrong? Our daughter is back. You don't know what I've been through tonight. Going through the streets, the alleys. Finally, all I could do to keep my sanity was to give her up. I did! I gave her up. I gave her to God! You don't know how hard that was for me. But now, God has returned her again to our safe keeping. Be happy, my wife, my dear wife, because you are married to a very happy man! Mona, come out here! I don't care

what your mother says!

MOTHER

We have a guest.

FATHER

Why do you keep saying that?

MR. ALIZADEH (*Entering.*)

Hello, Yadu'llah.

[*The FATHER looks at MR. ALIZADEH, then at his wife, and then at MONA, who has entered.*]

FATHER

I don't think I understand

MONA

Dad, he came to warn us...

MR. ALIZADEH

Yadu'llah, you and your family are in danger.

FATHER

We are Baha'is in Iran. We are always in danger.

MR. ALIZADEH

I understand, but we had a close call at the school today. You know I wouldn't have come.

FATHER

Yes, I thank you for your concern.

MONA

Dad. (*Taking him aside.*) Listen, I ran into a boy I know. He was with a group of religious men and he told me that we were in danger also.

FATHER

Did he?

MONA

But he said tonight.

FATHER

Mona, I appreciate your concern...

MONA

Daddy, it's you I'm worried about. They might try to have me expelled again, but you're Secretary of the Shiraz Assembly. They can arrest you, or worse...

FATHER

What would you have me do?

MONA

Maybe we could just go out of town for a couple of days. Maybe this is a message from God telling us something.

FATHER

What if you were in my place, Mona?

MONA

What?

FATHER

If you were the one in danger. Would you leave your friends? The children in the class you're teaching? Your service?

MONA

I wasn't thinking about it that way.

FATHER

This is what I'm asking myself.

MR. ALIZADEH

It's not going to hurt anyone if you lay low a little while.

*[Pause. She looks at her FATHER, then at MR. ALIZADEH. A knocking from the balcony.]*

MRS. KHUDAYAR *(In loud whisper.)*

Mahmudnizhad! *(More knocking.)*

MR. ALIZADEH

Who's that?

FATHER

It's our neighbor. *(He goes to let in MRS. KHUDAYAR.)* Please come in.

MRS. KHUDAYAR

I just got a call from a friend on the fourth floor. There are several guards in their apartment looking for Baha'is. She thinks they're looking for you, but had the wrong address.

MOTHER (*To FATHER.*)

What do we do?

MONA (*Embracing him.*)

Daddy, I won't let them take you! I won't!

FATHER (*To MONA.*)

They can take me nowhere my Beloved has not already been. (*To MR. ALIZADEH.*) My friend, for your own safety, I ask that you leave right away.

MR. ALIZADEH

What about your family? What about your daughter?

FATHER

Mona must make her own decisions.

*[He goes to the door, opens it and exits.]*

MR. ALIZADEH

Well?

MONA

How can I leave them?

FATHER (*Reentering.*)

I hear them down the hall. We'll have to find you another way out.

MOTHER

There's the balcony.

FATHER

But that only leads next door.

*[All look at MRS. KHUDAYAR. A pounding on the door. Silence.]*

MRS. KHUDAYAR

All right, come on. Come with me.

*[She leads MR. ALIZADEH out by way of the balcony. He turns before exiting.]*

MR. ALIZADEH

She doesn't need to be exposed to this.

*[FATHER and daughter look at each other a moment.]*

FATHER

You can go.

*[More pounding, louder.]*

VOICES (*Off.*)

Hey! Anybody home?

MRS. KHUDAYAR

Come on, you'll just be next door.

*[They exit with MONA. FATHER and MOTHER exchange looks. More pounding. The FATHER opens the door. The MOTHER runs to fetch a chador (the full body veil). In the hall are AQA HUSAYNI and two armed guards. One of the guards turns out to be ARAM, who wears a hood partially covering his face.]*

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 menacingly. The FATHER looks at it.]*

FATHER

Please come in.

*[They enter brusquely. ARAM looks out of place, a little ashamed.]*

AQA HUSAYNI

Just you two? Aram, check those rooms.

*[ARAM exits.]*

FATHER

We are the only ones here.

GUARD

Sir, the door to the balcony is open. (*He goes out.*) It's connected to another apartment.

AQA HUSAYNI

See what you can find.

*[GUARD exits. ARAM enters, clearly relieved.]*

ARAM

All clear, sir.

AQA HUSAYNI

Nobody?

ARAM

No, sir.

AQA HUSAYNI

Search these ones for weapons.

MRS KHUDAYAR

Get out! Get out! Out of my house!

*[The GUARD reenters chased on by MRS KHUDAYAR.]*

MRS KHUDAYAR

You want to enter my apartment?! You want to accost my guests?! I want to see a warrant!  
The Baha'is may let you walk all over them, but I won't do it! One call to my brother-in-law  
and you'll be sorry you ever saw me!

*[She exits. The GUARD looks to AQA HUSAYNI.]*

AQA HUSAYNI

Let her go. Have these been searched?

ARAM

No, sir.

*[ARAM clumsily searches the MOTHER and FATHER. The other GUARD searches the apartment.]*

AQA HUSAYNI

Mahmudnizhad, you have two daughters?

FATHER

Yes, sir. One is recently married.

AQA HUSAYNI

You will give me her address.

FATHER

Yes.

MOTHER

Sshh!

FATHER

Farkhundih. We have nothing to hide.

AQA HUSAYNI

That makes our job that much easier. And your other daughter?

FATHER

Yes, sir.

AQA HUSAYNI

Where is she?

FATHER

My other daughter?

AQA HUSAYNI

Yes, I believe my son knows her. What's her name, Aram?

ARAM (*Reluctantly.*)

Mona.

FATHER

Yes, Mona... I'm not sure... exactly. Perhaps she will be back...

*[The GUARD enters from the bedroom area and approaches with a photo album, shows the AQA a picture.]*

AQA HUSAYNI

What is this?

FATHER

These are pictures of my friends.

AQA HUSAYNI

Do you know who this is?

FATHER

That is Mr. Bakhtavar.

AQA HUSAYNI

Are there others like this?

GUARD

Yes, sir.

AQA HUSAYNI

Come with us. Aram, you stay here and keep watch.

*[All leave except ARAM. MONA appears at the patio door. They stare a moment.]*

ARAM

You should go. Quickly.

MONA

This is my home.

RAM

They're in the other room. I won't tell.

MONA

My father is innocent.

ARAM

They want you too.

*[He shows her the warrant. MONA takes a deep breath.]*

ARAM

I'll go with you.

MONA

What?

ARAM

I'll get you out of here. Maybe your mother. I'll leave my father. *(A beat.)* I'll be good to you.

MONA

What about my father?

*[ARAM shakes his head.]*

MONA

What about my faith?

*[They look at each other a long moment. ARAM looks away. The GUARD enters, carrying a stack of books. Seeing MONA and ARAM, he is confused.]*

Oh. (*He exits.*)

GUARD

They're coming.

ARAM

I've made my choice.

MONA

*[The others reenter. The FATHER sees MONA.]*

FATHER

As I've been telling you. We have nothing to hide.

AQA HUSAYNI

Who's this?

FATHER

This is my daughter.

ARAM

Sir, I caught her trying to sneak back in.

*[MONA looks at ARAM. He turns away, pulling his hood further on. Silence. The GUARD is struggling a little beneath the weight of the books.]*

GUARD

What do you want me to do with these?

*[The AQA gestures towards the wedding gift carpet. The GUARD drops the books and tries to wrap them in the rug.]*

AQA HUSAYNI

We're ready to go. (*To FATHER.*) You and the girl. You're coming with us.

FATHER

The girl?

MOTHER

You've got to be kidding.

AQA HUSAYNI

No, we're not kidding. Can you get that or what?

GUARD

It's heavy!

MOTHER

If you want to take my husband, okay! But where are you taking this little sixteen-year old girl at this hour of the night?!

AQA HUSAYNI

“This little sixteen-year old”? You should say “this little Baha’i teacher!”

MOTHER

All right. That’s it! Take me instead!

MONA

Mom, calm down.

GUARD

Woman, we don’t want you.

MOTHER

Then kill me! Shoot me right now! (*She grabs the barrel of the GUARD’s gun.*) I’ll even aim it for you!

[*The GUARD pushes her away.*]

GUARD

Crazy woman! Get away!

FATHER

Farkhundih!

MOTHER

What are you going to do? Let them take her?!

FATHER

Farkhundih. (*Looking deeply into the men’s faces.*) These men. These men... I love these brothers like my own sons. I am sure it is the will of God that they are here now to take Mona and myself away with them. Just leave everything in God’s hands and don’t worry about Mona. These brothers look on Mona as their own sister.

[*A beat.*]

AQA HUSAYNI

(*To guard.*) Will you get that rug? (*To ARAM.*) Help him! Come on!

[*The AQA exits with the FATHER. The men struggle to raise the rug. MONA kisses and hugs her MOTHER.*]

Mama, will you be okay?

MONA

Oh, Mona...

MOTHER

I'll get this. Will you get her?

GUARD

Yes.

ARAM

*[The GUARD drags the rug out. MONA goes to leave. Her MOTHER stops her, removes her own chador, and solemnly helps MONA put it on. MONA kisses her MOTHER and goes to leave. The MOTHER rushes out of the room.]*

Mona?

ARAM

*[MONA stops. ARAM removes his hood, assuming the character and posture of the YOUNG MAN in Mona's dream.]*

Forgive me.

ARAM

*[MONA stares amazedly and walks out, speechless. End of scene.]*

**END OF ACT I**

## ACT II

### Scene 1 - Prison

*The scene begins with MONA kneeling in the middle of an empty prison cell. She sways a bit, eyes closed, apparently praying. We hear a WOMAN'S VOICE offstage as if from an adjoining room.*

WOMAN'S VOICE (*Off.*)

Mona! Where's Mona?

*[The scene changes to reveal MR. ALIZADEH's English classroom. FARAH reads a letter in front of the 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 filling out all the forms they give us. I have only seen my father once since coming here. They have done horrible things to him, but he's just become more radiant. Like a candle that's had its cover removed. I wasn't cooperating, so they brought him in on a cart. His feet were bare so I could see dried blood around his toes. The soles of his feet had been beaten with a rod. The interrogator said that it took several days for the feet to start to bleed but when they did they bled from the nails, and had I ever seen any one's feet bleed? I almost lost it there, but my father said, 'Mona, they hit me and after a while I don't feel the pain any more. Love, Mona. Only love. You must not hate them or be angry with them. Answer them bravely and honestly. We have nothing to hide.' *(A slight pause.)* “Farah, don't worry about me. I have a wonderful family here with my fellow women prisoners, both Baha'is and Muslims. *(The Muslims call me 'little prisoner.')* With love, Mona.”

*[FARAH, moved, stops reading but remains standing. Again we hear the WOMAN'S VOICE from offstage.]*

WOMAN'S VOICE (*Off.*)

Mona!

*[MONA opens her eyes.]*

MONA

I'll be right in, Zahrá.

WOMAN'S VOICE (*Off.*)

Mona, come! Teach me another!

[MONA resumes her previous position.]

MR. ALIZADEH (*Softly.*)

Is that the end?

FARAH

There's a postscript: "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."

[A pause. MR. ALIZADEH is brooding. MONA remains still.]

FARAH

That's the end.

ALIZADEH

No. Not if I can help it.

[Lights down on the classroom. MONA breaks from her meditation. Another prisoner, the HEAD PRISONER, has entered quietly from the opposite side and stands by the window.]

HEAD PRISONER

You weren't praying, were you, little prisoner?

MONA

Oh... Fakhrí.

HEAD PRISONER

I suppose if you're silent, it can't do any harm.

MONA

Thank you.

HEAD PRISONER

You know he wouldn't have banned them if they didn't work.

[MONA nods.]

WOMAN'S VOICE (*Off.*)

Mona!

MONA  
(*Getting up to leave.*)

Zahrá wants to learn another song.

HEAD PRISONER

I've got something for you.

WOMAN'S VOICE (*Off.*)

Mona!!

MONA

It sounds like she really needs me.

HEAD PRISONER

She's a drug addict in withdrawal -- she needs distraction.

MONA

Okay, what is it?

WOMAN'S VOICE (*Off.*)

Mooooonnnnaaaaa!!!

MONA

I'm coming!!

[*The HEAD PRISONER hands her a piece of paper.*]

MONA (*Turning to go.*)

Thank you.

HEAD PRISONER

Happy Naw-Rúz.

MONA

It's not Naw-Rúz, is it?

[*The HEAD PRISONER shakes her head. MONA doesn't understand, laughs and exits, unfolding the paper. The HEAD PRISONER stares out the window. MONA reenters quickly.*]

MONA

Does this means they're letting me go?

HEAD PRISONER

Don't get your hopes too high, little prisoner. They always look for ways to catch you off-guard.

MONA

How will I know?

HEAD PRISONER

If they call you down...

MONA

Yeah?

HEAD PRISONER

That'll be a good sign

*[MONA exits. Shift to another area of the stage, an office in the prison. A MAN sits in a large chair behind a desk. His back is to the audience and his identity is hard to determine. Mona's MOTHER enters the office hurriedly.]*

MOTHER

I have the money! *(No reaction from the MAN.)* Excuse me. I was told to report here with the security bond for my daughter... *(She is handed a piece of paper.)* Oh. *(Another form.)* Okay, but is she, I mean, the time on the paper says now, because it took me a while to come up with the money...? *(No response.)* So I should fill out the forms.

*[Switch back to the prison cell. MONA and ZAHRA, a frail-looking young woman, reenter.]*

ZAHRA

Oh, Mona, this is wonderful! Where is everyone? Shirin! Roya!

MONA

Most of them are still being questioned.

ZAHRA

So what are you going to do if they release you? Here, sit! sit!

MONA

I haven't had the chance to think.

ZAHRA

What else do we think about in here? I know the first thing I'm getting when I get out of here is a good meal.

Yeah? MONA

Yeah, and it's not going to be beans. ZAHRA

No beans! MONA

No more beans. ZAHRA

Never again beans! MONA

Then there's going to be rice. ZAHRA

Of course. And tadíg? MONA

Of course. ZAHRA

Good! I love tadíg! MONA

And kebáb. I love kebáb! ZAHRA

Everyone loves kebáb. HEAD PRISONER

But the way my father makes it! MONA

Chicken or lamb? HEAD PRISONER

ZAHRA  
*(She starts to answer and then...)*  
 Mona, they're letting you go! What do you want?

It depends. MONA

ZAHRA  
On what?

MONA  
My father. I don't know if he's going to be released.

ZAHRA  
Okay, we won't talk about food anymore. Fakhri, come sit by us. (*The HEAD PRISONER doesn't move.*) What about after you eat?

MONA  
They might not even call me.

ZAHRA  
We're not going to talk about that.

MONA  
And my father...

ZAHRA  
Don't worry about the kebab.

MONA  
I'm not talking about kebab!

ZAHRA  
Good. So think about what comes next. Close your eyes. You just ate, what's next?

[*A long beat.*]

MONA  
A shower.

ZAHRA  
A shower!

MONA  
A hot shower.

ZAHRA  
Oh, yes, a hot shower!

MONA  
A long hot shower with soap and a fresh, clean towel to follow.

ZAHRA

Stop, Mona, you're going to make me cry.

MONA

Oh, Zahra, this is sick!

ZAHRA

Keep going, and then?

MONA

I don't want to be the only one. How can I sleep in my bed when you are all here in the cold?

ZAHRA

We're not going to think about that.

MONA

This is not the way Baha'is think about it. We are here for God! We are in prison for our faith! What I want is what God wants for me! That's what we all want. That's why when they line us up and give us the choice... that's why we always come back here. Because that's what we want. We want what God wants. (Pause.) It's just hard sometimes to figure out what God actually wants.

*[Switch back to the prison office.]*

MOTHER

There you go. Forms all filled out. *(The MAN at the desk looks at the forms.)* Oh, I would also like to arrange a visit with my husband. *(She is handed more forms.)* Lot of forms to keep track of, no? *(He doesn't respond, but taps the table.)* Oh, money!

*[She shuffles through her things.]*

ZAHRA *(From prison cell.)*

500,000 Tmán! That's a lot of money.

*[The MOTHER puts the money on the desk. The MAN indicates a seat away from his desk. After she sits, he picks up a phone. Switch back to Prison cell. The HEAD PRISONER looks out the window.]*

HEAD PRISONER

If that doesn't just say it all!

MONA

What?

ZAHRA

Do you ever want to get married, Mona?

MONA

Why is everyone always asking me that?

HEAD PRISONER

That *damn* tree!

ZAHRA

There's no need to curse.

HEAD PRISONER

*(Her volume increasing as she goes.)*

God-damned fruit falling off a God-damned tree on the God-damned lawn of this God-damned prison in this God-forsaken country!

ZAHRA

What are you talking about?

HEAD PRISONER

We are dying of scurvy in here and there are plums rotting on the ground out there!

*[She leaves, then reenters. ZAHRA is beginning to tremble.]*

ZAHRA

Don't you want to get married?

MONA

I'm in a prison with all women. I just want to know if my mother and father are okay.

HEAD PRISONER

Marriage is oppression. You're better off in prison.

*[Pause.]*

MONA

They haven't called yet, have they.

*[A phone rings in the prison office. Mona's MOTHER anxiously awaits some news.]*

MAN BEHIND DESK *(Answering.)*

Mm-hmm... Mm-hmm... Mm-hmm. *(He hangs up.)*

*[Switch back to prison cell. All the women sit slumped up against the wall. ZAHRA rocks and shivers between MONA and the HEAD PRISONER, who try to comfort her.]*

HEAD PRISONER

If I had a choice? First. Get it over with.

MONA

Definitely not last. Watching the others go before you. That's too much.

ZAHRA

What are you two...? You're not dying! You're not!

*[Switch to prison office.]*

MOTHER

What is it?

MAN (*Standing.*)

Farkhundih Mahmudnizhad – this is your name?

MOTHER

Yes.

*[The MAN walks behind her. We now see it is the RELIGIOUS MAGISTRATE.]*

MAGISTRATE

Well, I have some good news and I have some bad news. The bad news is: It seems there's a warrant out for your arrest.

MOTHER

My arrest?

MAGISTRATE

Yes, for involvement in prohibited religious activities.

MOTHER

But what about...

MAGISTRATE

The good news? The good news is your bail has been set at 500,000 Tuman. You're free to leave.

*[He pulls out the money from the envelope, fans it and smiles. MONA slowly tears her release in half. The voice of her FATHER is heard.]*

FATHER

YAAAAAHHHHHH!

*[The FATHER is revealed. He sits upright with his feet extended forward.]*

FATHER

I don't... under... stand... I, I, I don't... why you... yoooouuu.

*[MONA begins to tear the paper again. A loud crack.]*

FATHER

YAAAAAAAHHHHH!!! I've told, told you.... the... the...truuuuuuth.

*[MONA continues tearing. Another loud crack.]*

FATHER

YAAAAAAAHHHHH!!! O Baha'u'llah! Thank you! *(He starts to laugh.)* I see!! Yes.

*[Another crack.]*

FATHER

OOOOOOHHHHH! Ya Baha'u-l'abha!! Give these men all that they desire! Give them all good things!

*[A louder crack.]*

FATHER

AAAAAAAHHHHH!! *(Lower.)* Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.

*[MONA drops the torn pieces like snow. Lights fade on the FATHER. Mona's MOTHER slowly stands. She turns to go, but then turns back. ]*

MOTHER

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

*[Fade on MOTHER. An announcement comes over the Intercom. It is the voice of AQA HUSAYNI. Immediately, the women are expectant.]*

AQA HUSAYNI

Attention prisoners. Baha'i prisoners are no longer to associate with Muslim prisoners. Muslim prisoners are no longer to associate with Baha'i prisoners. Effective immediately. Head prisoners in each cell are required to enforce this order... That is all.

*[A moment where the women, leaning on one another, absorb this. The HEAD PRISONER rises first, and has to pull the trembling ZAHRA away from MONA. ZAHRA then runs off in tears.]*

MONA

Fakhri, wait. I want to see.

*[A beat.]*

HEAD PRISONER

But you said you didn't.

MONA

I think I'm ready now.

*[The HEAD PRISONER digs in her pocket and pulls out a small mirror case. MONA opens it and looks at herself and her sallow complexion.]*

AQA HUSAYNI

Attention Mona Mahmudnizhad. Report to the floor checkpoint.

*[MONA hands the mirror back to the HEAD PRISONER and exits. End of scene.]*

**Scene 2 - An Interrogation Room**

MR. ALIZADEH *sits at a table.* MONA *enters.*

ALIZADEH  
Miss Mahmudnizhad.

MONA  
Mister Alizadeh?

ALIZADEH  
It's good to see you again.

MONA  
What are you doing here? This isn't how we normally meet with visitors.

ALIZADEH  
I've come to bring you home.

MONA (*Amazed.*)  
What? I didn't bring my things. I didn't say goodbye. Why are you smiling like that? Is this a joke?

ALIZADEH  
It's good to see you so happy.

MONA  
What happened? It was supposed to be a while ago.

ALIZADEH  
You've been here far too long.

MONA  
But why is it you? Is my mother all right?

ALIZADEH  
I'm sure she's fine.

MONA  
It's hard for me to believe... O God!!

ALIZADEH  
What is it?

MONA  
I tore up the release form.

ALIZADEH  
Release form?

MONA  
You need it to get through the gate.

ALIZADEH  
I'm sure we can work that out.

MONA  
Do you have a copy?

ALIZADEH  
I don't...

MONA  
I just got it today.

ALIZADEH  
Oh?

MONA  
You didn't know about that?

ALIZADEH  
Miss Mahmudnizhad, you don't know how happy I am to see you still so full of life. I was afraid I detected a hint of resignation in your letter to Miss Ja'fari.

MONA  
The letter? Farah got the letter?

ALIZADEH  
She read it before the whole class.

MONA  
Oh. So that's why you're here?

ALIZADEH  
Hearing your words set me on fire.

MONA  
But what about the release?

ALIZADEH  
I just spoke to the authorities here. There was no mention of your release.

MONA

You said you'd come to bring me home. What did you mean?

ALIZADEH

I am here to discuss with you your options.

MONA

So I'm not free.

ALIZADEH

Well, not yet... but it is within your power to negotiate your freedom.

MONA

I don't know if you know this but the only way they'll release us is if we claim to not be Baha'is.

ALIZADEH

Yes.

MONA

So I really don't have any other options.

ALIZADEH

Miss Mahmudnizhad, I am ashamed. I am ashamed to find you here.

MONA

You don't have to be.

ALIZADEH

You should be free! You should be in school, learning!

MONA

I'm in prison because of my beliefs. There is no shame in that.

ALIZADEH

No, this is unacceptable!

MONA

I appreciate that. I do. But we have to leave this in God's hands.

ALIZADEH

Is that how you really feel?

MONA

Really. There's nothing you can do.

ALIZADEH

Nothing? Aqa Husayni just told me several women here in prison were about to be given a death sentence. I asked, is my student one of them? He said yes. And then he asked me -- *me* -- to help him.

MONA

To do what? Convince me to recant?

ALIZADEH

Clarify your options.

MONA

Mr. Alizadeh, I'm grateful that you've come, but if you're only here to get me to give up my religion...

ALIZADEH

Are you afraid I might succeed?

MONA

I'm afraid of nothing.

ALIZADEH

Nothing? What if they torture you? What if they torture someone you love?

MONA

I...

ALIZADEH

Are you afraid of truth, Mahmudnizhad?

MONA

No. I'm not.

ALIZADEH

Then you can listen to this old bachelor foreign-language teacher whose only wish is to see his students grow and flourish?

MONA

Of course.

ALIZADEH

You know, you're just like him.

MONA

What?

ALIZADEH

You have your father's faith.

MONA

I follow the same religion as my father. My faith is my own.

ALIZADEH

Look, I am not here to convert you. I do not like the clergy. But I can find nothing of any worth in you dying for a belief.

MONA

I understand why you might feel that way, but you are not a Baha'i.

ALIZADEH

Still.

MONA

You are a Muslim?

ALIZADEH

I was born one.

MONA

Did Imam Husayn 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. Too many people have already died for causes. There's no room for you on our calendar.

MONA

I'm not doing this to be remembered by your calendar.

ALIZADEH

Yes, I know. I know something about your religion. It says some good things about education...

MONA

Men and women.

ALIZADEH

But the goal of education is to make this a better world, and yet you seem all too ready to give it up for some other world. It sounds like fundamentalism.

MONA

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

Mr. Alizadeh, you care about truth?

ALIZADEH

Truth? What is truth? Even within Islam, there are different opinions about what truth is.

MONA

You stood up to the clergy for me.

ALIZADEH

Yes.

MONA

Why?

ALIZADEH

Because I wanted to see you thrive and flourish, and *live*.

MONA

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

I live in an apartment.

MONA

No free thinker is safe in this society, didn't you say that?

ALIZADEH

That doesn't mean we throw ourselves into the fire.

MONA

You think you're the only one who should sacrifice.

ALIZADEH

I love what I do. I have sacrificed nothing.

MONA

So if I told you I love my Faith more than anything else?

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 absolute truthfulness.

ALIZADEH

And yet 'Abdu'l-Bahá said you could lie to a dying man if it would comfort his mind. How do you explain that contradiction?

MONA

'Abdu'l-Bahá said that?

ALIZADEH

I know something about your...

MONA

Where did he say that?

ALIZADEH

Some Answered Questions, chapter 57, verse 12.

MONA

I need to check that. But even then, 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 Baha'i 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...

ALIZADEH

There are no absolutes.

MONA

Baha'is don't dissemble their faith.

ALIZADEH

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

MONA

Baha'is 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 had a dream that you told me about. With the dresses.

*[Mona looks down.]*

ALIZADEH

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

MONA

Yes.

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 dare you say that?!

ALIZADEH

Are we not allowed to ask questions?

MONA

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

ALIZADEH

But, you see, I don't think it was God sending you that dream. I think it was your own unconscious. Maybe it sensed that 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. Are you ready to die for a confused God?

MONA

Why are you doing this? I don't know why you're doing this.

ALIZADEH

You are my student.

MONA (*A discovery.*)

You were a Baha'i.

[*A beat.*]

ALIZADEH

I was.

MONA

What happened?

ALIZADEH

I woke up.

[*A beat.*]

MONA

Do you believe in God?

ALIZADEH

I cannot believe in a God at war with Himself.

MONA

I'll be honest with you. I didn't expect to face this situation. But I have not been abandoned. I'm starting to see things differently... Life and death, they don't mean the same things any more. Look, everything around us is telling us how fleeting this life is. But God is present with us in this very moment. Do you feel Him? He doesn't speak through human language. He speaks in the heart. And sometimes it takes time to understand what He's saying.

ALIZADEH (*Harshly.*)

What you're really talking about is another father figure that you can cling to when your real father is dead.

MONA

I am not clinging to my father.

ALIZADEH

Then listen to what I'm saying and stand on your own!

MONA (*Standing, trembling.*)

I stand on my own. I have left the house of my father. My clothes are packed. My rugs rolled up. And I'm on a journey. To the abode of my lover.

ALIZADEH

Your...

MONA

I am a bride. And this is my wedding day. This is my wedding dress. The dress I have chosen. The dress I have put on. And no one will take it off me... until my wedding night. And then only him.

ALIZADEH

What if someone kills him first? Your lover. (*Gesturing.*) What if someone holds him in front of you and -- with a word -- slits his throat? (*A beat.*) Dead. He's dead. Your lover is dead, and you are alone in this world.

[*A beat.*]

MONA

I just saw someone die.

ALIZADEH

Yes.

MONA

Mr. Alizadeh, it was you.

[*End of scene.*]

**Scene 3 - The Site of the House of the Báb**

FARAH *sits. Her shoes are off. ARAM enters, dressed in his religious attire. He sees FARAH, hesitates, then approaches her.*

FARAH

Mr. Alizadeh said they're not going to let her out.

ARAM

I heard. *(He comes forward to sit down.)*

FARAH

Take off your shoes.

ARAM

Why?

FARAH

Because Mona did.

*[He takes off his shoes and sits.]*

FARAH

Where have you been? I haven't seen you much.

ARAM

I've been around. I see you... not seeing me.

FARAH

I'm not used to you wearing that.

ARAM

It doesn't really fit me.

*[FARAH begins to cry.]*

ARAM

Farah, I'm sorry.

FARAH

*(Trying to stop, failing, wiping her nose.)*

Do you have a handkerchief or something?

ARAM *(Checking his pockets.)*

Oh... I guess I don't.

FARAH

*(Crying more, and trying to wipe her nose with her hands.)*

Ugghh! My nose won't stop running. Mona! You jerk! I came to your favorite place to remember you and now look at me!

ARAM

She can't hear you.

FARAH

*(Turning on him, sharply.)*

What?

ARAM

She's not dead...

FARAH

Why did you say that?

ARAM

It's true.

FARAH

Why don't you just say what you mean? Yet! She's not dead yet!

ARAM

That's not what I meant. You have... *(Indicating her nose.)*

FARAH

So why are you looking at me? Leave me a little dignity.

ARAM

I feel responsible.

FARAH

Go away!

ARAM

Here. *(He takes off his turban and offers it to her.)* Use this.

FARAH

I can't take that. It's religious.

ARAM

It can be washed.

FARAH

I'd rather stand here dripping head to toe with tears and snot for the rest of the night than go to hell because I defiled that thing!

ARAM (*Moving towards her.*)

We won't let you go to hell.

FARAH

Aram!

ARAM

Be still!

*[He grabs her and wipes her face and hands with equal measure of force and gentleness. She is still while he does it. When he finishes she glares at him. He can't help but crack a smile.]*

FARAH

You touched me.

ARAM

You're not unclean.

FARAH

Completely covered with mucous.

ARAM

Mucous is okay. Where would we be without mucous?

FARAH

Maybe I'm a Baha'i.

ARAM

Maybe.

FARAH

You touched me.

ARAM

I did.

FARAH

It's gonna cost you.

*[FARAH looks away. They both restrain smiles. End of scene.]*

### Scene 4 - Prison

*Prisoners Visitation Room. A desk and a chair with a glass barrier separating the prisoners' side from the visitors'. There are phone receivers on either side. Mona's MOTHER sits and waits anxiously. MONA enters, bundled up with clothing. She sits down and waves to her, picking up the phone receiver. The MOTHER picks up as well. Throughout the conversation we can only hear MONA's voice*

MONA

Hi Mama... It's really good to see you too... It's just a cold. How are *you* doing?... Worried about what?... Please don't say that. (MONA *wipes her nose with her sleeve.*) I haven't really thought about it. I don't know how it looks to you out there, but from where I'm sitting... Don't be upset. (*She sighs.*) You're right. It's possible. I'm just tired... Mom, I need to ask you something. Don't get upset... If they do execute me... That's not what I have to say. Don't cry, Mama. It's really not sad. If God wants to take me... But it's a great honor... But you have to accept that it may happen... But if it does, what will you do?... Mom, I need to know that you'll be safe... Safe is that you'll have food to eat, a place to sleep... Please don't say that. You do still have a reason... Please don't put that on me. I have enough.

[MONA *looks away from her MOTHER. The door opens. The FATHER enters, walking slowly and with difficulty.*]

GUARD

Three minutes, Mahmudnizhad.

MONA

Daddy! (*She goes to him.*)

FATHER

Hello, my darling daughter. (*They embrace.*) Is that your mother's voice I heard all the way down the hall?

MONA

Mom's here. Are you okay?

FATHER

It's nothing. Hello Farkhundih, it will take me a minute to get over there, my dear.

MONA

Let me help.

FATHER

Thank you. (*Picking up the phone.*) Hello, my dear one... No, no, it's nothing. I'm a little stiff... Free? You think you're free? You on the outside are in the harsher prison! I'm lucky, I have my own room.

[*He squeezes MONA's hand and smiles. She looks down.*]

FATHER

One minute, my dear. (*He puts the phone to his chest.*) Mona, there's something in your heart.

[*MOTHER talks animatedly pointing at MONA.*]

MONA

It's nothing. Mom wants to talk to you.

FATHER

Do you want to share it?

MONA

What do you want me to say?

[*The MOTHER bangs on the window. The FATHER puts his hand up to the glass where hers is and holds it there, but keeps his eyes on MONA.*]

MONA

Mr. Alizadeh came to see me.

FATHER

He did.

MONA

Yes, and he said all these things. My head is buzzing...

FATHER

It's okay.

MONA

I just have all these questions now.

FATHER

Questions?

MONA

I have these times of clarity, of peace – But then there are moments where I forget and I have to call out to God to get me back, to remind me. And it comes. But it's that place in between, Dad. That's the most dangerous place. What if they get me when I'm there? Sometimes they keep us standing so long, I start to sleep standing up. I'm afraid they'll come for me when I'm not ready. I'm afraid for Mom. I'm afraid for you. Dad, I'm afraid. I feel like I'm being ripped up by the roots. I don't want to mess this up. This is everything.

[A beat.]

FATHER (*Raising the phone.*)

Farkhundih, you will help me? -- Mona, your teacher *was* a Baha'i and an active one. He was an exceptional scholar -- Yes, Farkhundih -- and speaker as well. All of the girls were in love with him. Actually, before we were married, I think your mother... -- Excuse me, Farkhundih, you don't need to shout, I hear you just fine, my dear. -- Mona are you blushing?

MONA

(*Trying to cover up a blush.*)

What? So, what happened?

FATHER

At a certain point, he began to cause problems in the community.

MONA

Like what?

FATHER

He began to question the institutions, the teachings themselves.

MONA

And?

FATHER

He left the Faith voluntarily.

MONA

Oh.

FATHER

He was a good friend to me. For a long time.

MONA

Why did he do it? Why would anyone do that?

FATHER

Hold on -- Your mother is listing the reasons. *(He laughs.)* -- I'm sorry, my dear, I'm not going to repeat these things you're saying -- Mona, you've seen him with your own eyes. You know his qualities. Perhaps you can unravel the mystery yourself.

*[MONA nods, looking down.]*

FATHER

The way I understand it, the wisdom of the martyrs is that they never know, they can never be sure -- but somehow they persevere. And some, in that final moment, unravel the meaning of love.

*[Silence. MONA looks at her MOTHER. She kisses her hand and puts it to the glass where her MOTHER puts her hand. She takes her FATHER's hand, leans forward, kissing him on the cheek. They sit holding each other's hand as best they can. A moment of silence.]*

GUARD

Time's up, Mahmudnizhad.

*[The sound of a prison door slamming shut. The lights go off except for a single harsh light center stage. MONA comes forward to stand in the light. As she comes into it, she is overtaken by exhaustion.]*

MONA

How much longer are you going to keep me here? My legs are numb. *(Her head falls. She starts.)* No! Gotta stay... *(She struggles to open her eyes.)* What did you want? *(Her head falls.)* Awake. *(She walks around in a small circle, stomping, trying to stay conscious.)* I'm awake!

*[She falls asleep, standing. Pounding is heard. Slow pulses of red light come up on Mona's MOTHER, who sits as before. She pounds on the glass barrier.]*

MOTHER

Mona, wake up!

MONA (*Rousing.*)

I am!

[*Mona's FATHER rises from where he was seated and walks past MONA.*]

FATHER

Love, Mona. Only love.

MONA

Dad.

FATHER

These hours of separation will pass in no time. Before you realize it we will all be together again.

MONA

They're trying to break me. They want to destroy me.

[*More pounding from MOTHER.*]

MONA

Mama, let go.

FATHER

Would you like me to turn the light off for you?

MONA

How did you look into their eyes and smile? You called them your brothers.

FATHER

May my life be sacrificed for you, my love.

MONA

How can you love the one who wants to destroy you?

[*The FATHER and MOTHER are gone. Three HOODED FIGURES emerge. One of the FIGURES speaks. It's the voice of the YOUNG MAN from Mona's earlier vision.*]

YOUNG MAN

Look for me.

[*MONA turns. The FIRST FIGURE pulls out a blue dress. MONA goes to the first figure and looks beneath the hood, shakes her head "no", then moves to the SECOND FIGURE, who has pulled out a black dress. MONA looks under the*

*second figure's hood and again shakes her head. These two FIGURES exit. The THIRD FIGURE stands still, holding a box with a red ribbon. MONA removes his hood to reveal the YOUNG MAN.]*

MONA

It's you. The dress is different.

YOUNG MAN

I am there when you look for me.

MONA

I've seen you.

YOUNG MAN

In the face of others--

MONA

Who are you?

*[From the side, we hear AQA HUSAYNI.]*

AQA HUSAYNI

Mahmudnizhad!

YOUNG MAN

I am.... *(He points at her.)*

AQA HUSAYNI

Mona Mahmudnizhad! Stand up!

*[The scene shifts. As MONA comes to, her bodily exhaustion returns. The YOUNG MAN moves to a corner of the stage and begins to change costume. Gradually, MONA becomes aware that she is in an interrogation room, but the YOUNG MAN remains in view. MONA checks her eyes, trying to differentiate the two worlds. AQA HUSAYNI gets up, ready for business. He is unaware of the presence of the YOUNG MAN.]*

AQA HUSAYNI

Are you ready to give up this charade?

MONA

Charade?

AQA HUSAYNI

This life of lies and deceit. This world of dreams and shadow-play.

MONA

Your honor, I...

AQA HUSAYNI

What? "I - what"? You can say it.

*[The YOUNG MAN turns around and looks at MONA. He has been putting on a religious cleric's costume.]*

MONA

I don't know what to say.

AQA HUSAYNI & YOUNG MAN

Shall I make it plain for you?

MONA *(To the YOUNG MAN.)*

Please.

*[The YOUNG MAN bows his head to MONA, slips on his hood and exits.]*

AQA HUSAYNI

Your parents have deceived and misled you. They have forced you to imitate them in following the Baha'i religion.

MONA

*(Not what she was expecting to hear.)*

What?

AQA HUSAYNI

I said your parents have deceived and mis...

MONA

Your honor, I heard what you said.

AQA HUSAYNI

Then why did you ask?

MONA

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

AQA HUSAYNI

Young girl, what do you know about religion?

MONA

What more proof of my faith do you want? Here I am in front of you!

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, Baha'u'llah, 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 Baha'i!

AQA HUSAYNI

Silence!

[*The RELIGIOUS MAGISTRATE has entered.*]

MAGISTRATE

Aqa Husayni.

AQA HUSAYNI

Magistrate! Forgive me, I was not aware of your presence.

MAGISTRATE

I will take over from here.

AQA HUSAYNI

Yes, your honor.

[*The AQA exits. The RELIGIOUS MAGISTRATE holds Mona's file.*]

MAGISTRATE

So... Miss Mahmudnizhad.

MONA

Yes, sir.

MAGISTRATE

Is there anything I can do to make you more comfortable?

[*She doesn't respond.*]

MAGISTRATE

Chair to sit on? (*He fetches her a chair.*) Piece of fruit? (*He pulls an orange from his pocket and sets it before her.*)

MONA

Thank you, sir. *(She keeps her gaze lowered.)*

MAGISTRATE

I came across an interesting thing. Under "desired profession", you have "service to humanity." And that one of your role models in this respect is your father.

MONA

Yes, sir.

MAGISTRATE

Your father has been of great service to us here. Reminding the Baha'is that they have nothing to hide. Do you have something to hide?

MONA

No, sir.

MAGISTRATE

No doubts or fears, questions why you're really here?

MONA

I have nothing to hide.

MAGISTRATE

Then tell me why you're here.

MONA

I served as a teacher for a Baha'i children's class.

*[A beat.]*

MAGISTRATE

Would you like to see him? Your father? *(To a GUARD.)* Go ahead, bring him in. *(To MONA.)* Yes, go to him, my dear.

*[The doors open and the FATHER is wheeled in on a gurney, seated upright. MONA goes to embrace him, then jumps back.]*

MONA

Wha?!

MAGISTRATE *(Laughing.)*

Daddy seem a little cold?

MONA

Oh, Daddy! *(A beat. Softly.)* Good for you. Good for you. *(She kisses him and begins to*

cry.)

MAGISTRATE

Is this what you want for you, girl?

*[She doesn't respond. The FATHER's body is wheeled out.]*

MAGISTRATE

That is 'service'?! Give me light! (*Lights come on.*) Since God's revolution came to this country, we've taken away your ability to congregate. We dissolved your institutions. We closed the border to keep you from spreading. What is happening to your potential for service? We denied you rights of citizenship. We had you expelled from schools, fired from your jobs. Your homes were burnt, your leaders executed, your holy places destroyed. Do you see what is happening to your service? You come here, cut off from the world, you have nothing, you are completely at our disposal. Well then, you think, you can help the others in the cell with you. Now you can't go near them. You wanted to pray. I took the words right out of your mouth. (*A beat.*) Now you feel that breath surging in and out of your nostrils? That hot, moist breath surging in and out? Mona, I can take that away too. How are you going to serve then, Mona, when Mona is no more?

MONA

Then somehow, I will serve... in death.

MAGISTRATE

Serve whom, Mona? Do you think anyone will ever remember what happens to you here? (*A beat.*) Do you think this is cruel? I love this country. And I love all the people in it. I love them the way God loves them. With justice. And justice, in our sight, is only mercy. Do you feel my love for you, Mona? I am your real father, Mona. I am telling you the truth, Mona. So will you forgive me? Mona?

MONA

There's nothing to forgive. (*A beat.*) You lead me to my Beloved.

MAGISTRATE

We must obey the Qur'an. Accept Islam or face execution.

MONA

I kiss the order of execution.

*[Lighting change. MONA begins to shake. The MAGISTRATE comes forward and takes her hands. As he speaks, we hear also the voice of Mona's FATHER.]*

MAGISTRATE & FATHER

I am entertaining last requests. What do you want?

MONA

Perseverance.

*[The FATHER enters, looking as he did at the beginning of the play.]*

MAGISTRATE & FATHER

What do you want from me?

MONA

Perseverance for all the Baha'is.

MAGISTRATE & FATHER

Mona, what do you want for yourself from me?

MONA

Perseverance.

FATHER

It is granted.

*[MONA kisses the hand of the MAGISTRATE. She then looks into his face. She lifts her hands and removes his turban, his beard and his glasses to reveal the YOUNG MAN from her earlier visions. His outer garment falls to the ground. He smiles as she stares at him. After a moment, he moves behind her.]*

YOUNG MAN (*Gently.*)

Are you ready?

*[MONA nods. A noose is revealed. MONA takes a step towards it.]*

MONA

Wait. (*A beat.*) Last. I want to be last.

YOUNG MAN

Are you afraid?

MONA

No. I want to pray for the others.

## YOUNG MAN

It is granted.

*[MONA lowers her head in silent prayer as the FATHER begins to read off the names of the Ten Women Martyrs of Shiraz. A carpet is spread before the noose, and as the names are read, people come out carrying, with great care, dresses representing each woman.]*

FATHER (*Throughout.*)

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

*[When MONA is called, she and the YOUNG MAN together remove her chador, revealing the red dress beneath. She shivers and moves forward to the noose. She kisses the noose and lays down the veil.]*

**END OF PLAY**