

# **A NEW DRESS FOR MONA**

A two-act play based on the life of  
Mona Mahmúdnizhád (1966-1983)



To the Bahá'ís of Iran

## Setting

Shiraz, Iran. 1982-83

(A few years into the Islamic Revolution)

## Cast of Characters

Mona (Mahmúdnizhád)	16; bright, passionate, single-minded, not yet a saint.
Father (Yadu'lláh Mahmúdnizhád)	50; gentle, loving, with a youthful exuberance and a compelling manner.
Mother (Fárkhundih Mahmúdnizhád)	Late 40s; anxious, strong-willed, tender-hearted.
Árám	20ish. Quiet, with a poetic streak.
* Mulla	A powerful religious cleric, adamant.
* Farah	16; bold and worldly, Mona's friend.
* Mrs. Khudáyár	Middle-aged; loyal, a close neighbor.
* Taráneh (Mahmúdnizhád)	23; kind, pragmatic, Mona's sister.
* Guards 1 & 2	Members of the Revolutionary Guard.
* Woman in White	A messenger from the World of Light.
* Teacher (Female)	Narrow-minded, but not without pity.
* Rezá	20ish; a homebody, Mrs. Khudayar's son.
* Shopkeeper (Male)	An opportunist who thinks he's principled.
* (Mr.) Ehsán (Mehdizadeh)	31. Bahá'í martyr and apparition.

*\* These roles may be assigned from among an ENSEMBLE of 6-8 actors. each of whom plays multiple characters. Other speaking and non-speaking roles include Mr. Vábdát, Mr. Khushkbhú, students (female), worshipers, spirits, people on the street, vendors, young children, prisoners (female), guards, and baby Núrá.*

*Historical Note: Characters other than Mona's family and the Bahá'í martyrs are fictional, often being composites of the actual figures involved in the events portrayed.*

# A NEW DRESS FOR MONA

## ACT I, Scene 1 – Mona's home

*A soft light illumines MONA, alone.*

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

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

MONA: Ehsán Mehdízádeh. Sattár Khushkhú. Yádu'lláh Vahdat.

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

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

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

GUARD 1: Traitors! Heretics! You are to be executed now because of your crimes against Faith and Country. What do you have to say?

MR. KHUSHKHU: O God! Take me!

MR. VAHDAT: Guard! Come.

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

GUARD 1: Go.

*He goes.*

MR. VAHDAT: You think I'm a traitor? My name is Vahdat. I was a colonel in the army.

GUARD 2: You were a colonel, then you became a... what was it?

GUARD 1: (*Taunting.*) Auxiliary Board Member!

GUARD 2: And for that you die! Plus the rest of you!

MR. KHUSHKHU: O God!

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

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

MR. VAHDAT: (*Softly.*) Just don't aim for my heart. That does not belong to you.

MR. KHUSHKHU: O God!

GUARD 2: Be quiet!

EHSAN: Guard! Take mine off too. I will also welcome the bullets.

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

GUARD 1: Okay!

*ARAM turns to go.*

EHSAN: Wait. Give me your hand.

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

ARAM & MONA: Why did you do that?

*The execution resumes.*

GUARD 2: No use begging for mercy! It's time to die!

GUARD 1: (*To a bewildered ARAM.*) Get back here, stupid!

ARAM *returns.*

GUARD 1: Ready!

MR. KHUSHKHU: We thought the days of the martyrs had ended.

GUARD 1: Aim!

GUARD 2: Aim for the heart!

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

MOTHER: Mona?

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

MOTHER: My God, girl, what are you doing?

MONA: Remembering the martyrs.

MOTHER: We don't know that it's true, Mona. That woman who brought the news, she's a very emotional type. They'll run you up and down the wall if you let them. Watch the rug. Look, your father has gone to find out what really happened. So until he comes, just put it outside your mind.

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

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

*No response.*

MOTHER: What color are you going to wear?

MONA: Black.

MOTHER: *(Takes a deep breath.)* Don't you have homework?

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

MOTHER: And?

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

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

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

MOTHER: We don't know that's true.

MONA: Who would make up such an odd detail?

MOTHER: Someone who wants attention! When people want attention, they embellish stories... (*Seeing the photos.*) You cut up all our pictures? Okay that's it. (*Blows out the candles.*) You need to just stop this and go to bed.

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

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

FATHER: Alláh-u-abhá. <sup>1</sup>

MONA: Dad. (*Blows out her match.*)

MOTHER: Tell us something good.

FATHER: (*After a beat.*) They're free.

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

MONA: They're gone, Mom.

MOTHER: What? (*To FATHER.*) Then why didn't you say that? O God! I don't believe they killed them. (*Goes to leave.*) I don't know why you said that, Jamshid.

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

MONA: You're next, aren't you?

FATHER: We don't know that.

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

FATHER: Maybe things will calm down.

*She hears the gunfire.*

MONA: (*Without emotion, at first.*) So we're just supposed to lie down and let them roll right over us, mow us down one by one because we're a peaceful people they can scapegoat, we don't just not put up a fight, we welcome death, we welcome the bullets, we kiss their hands...

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<sup>1</sup> A Bahá'í greeting meaning 'God is most glorious.'

FATHER: Don't go too far now.

MONA: I'm not kissing anyone's hand.

*She kisses his. He strokes her hair.*

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

MOTHER: (*Entering.*) What?

FATHER: (*Smiles gently.*) We have a funeral to arrange.

**ACT I, Scene 2 – Mona’s School**

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

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

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

FARAH: (*Quietly.*) You’re not drawing flowers today.

MONA *shakes her head.*

FARAH: Is that you?

MONA *nods her head.*

FARAH: You have fire in your eyes.

MONA: So watch out.

FARAH: What’s going on?

MONA: (*Changing subject.*) Do you have your essay?

FARAH: Yeah. My brother wrote it.

MONA: I thought you were going to write this one yourself.

FARAH: I tried—swear to God, but the topic is so boring, so unrelated to my life. Just get me through this school year, and I’ll live a hundred percent honest life. (*She smiles.*)

TEACHER: (*Unseen.*) Farah, would you like to read your essay?

FARAH *stands to read.*

FARAH: “ ‘The fruit of Islam is liberty and freedom of conscience, but you must taste it to understand.’ Our great leader, Ayatu’llah Khomeini, has brought us back from the dangerous path of westernization the Shah was pursuing. We are returned now to the path of Muhammad, the Imams, and the law of the Qur’an. The West teaches that sweetness is found in boundless freedom, in material possessions, in satisfying the appetite, in alcohol, drugs, sex... (*She grimaces.*) Here they offer us a fruit that looks sweet, but tastes bitter, as they spread around the world this lie they call liberty when they only seek to enslave other nations in order to gain more themselves. But here is true sweetness, like a bite of ripe pomegranate: to submit to God’s decree. May the righteous live forever with seventy-two virgins... And may the infidels burn until they turn black as coal.” (*A beat.*) Sorry I got a little carried away at the end there.

TEACHER: Mona?

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

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

*In the background, we see the silhouette of a religious cleric, MULLA, ascending a pulpit.*

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

TEACHER: I think that’s enough.

MONA: (*Facing off.*) Why do you deny liberty to Bahá’ís?

*Silence.*

TEACHER: Sit down, Mona.

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

TEACHER: Stop right there.

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

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

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

TEACHER: Farah, you too! Right this minute.

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

MONA: (*With fire in her eyes.*) Throw down that veil!

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

**ACT I, Scene 3 – A Mosque**

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

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

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

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

good thing I have a robe like this, but a plain-clothes brother on the street...

GUARD 1: I think she wants to speak to you.

MULLA: (*Gestures him away.*) Flee the devil.

*The GUARD exits. The MULLA is approached by a WOMAN and her daughter (the STUDENT from the school scene). Both are shrouded in dark chadors and their voices cannot be heard.*

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

*She kisses his hand.*

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

*The daughter (STUDENT) hands him Mona's paper.*

MULLA: What is this? (*Looks and listens.*) And the name of this Bahá'í girl? Hmm. I'll certainly look into that. You know, daughter, you should work in the company of men, your appearance is highly conducive to an atmosphere of chastity.

*Another kiss for the hand.*

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

*The two are gone. GUARD 1 returns with ARAM, the reluctant guard from Scene 1.*

MULLA: These Shirazi women!

GUARD 1: Your eminence, you remember my cousin, Aram?

MULLA: He looks like he needs some sleep. What's going on with these Bahá'ís? What happened at the cemetery today?

GUARD 1: (*Caught off guard.*) Nothing, things were fine, we were in control. (*A beat.*) People get emotional sometimes.

MULLA: (*Unsatisfied, to ARAM.*) Were you there?

ARAM: Yes, sir.

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

MULLA: And?

ARAM: I was just trying to keep calm.

MULLA: So they were making trouble?

GUARD 1: We had it under control.

MULLA: Not you. (*To ARAM.*) They were angry?

ARAM: They were mourning. Some were angry.

MULLA: The Bahá'ís?

EHSAN *has opened his coat to reveal blood.*

ARAM: I couldn't tell Bahá'ís from Muslims.

MULLA: You can always tell. (*Points to his own eyes.*) Would you like me to teach you how?

ARAM: I like to learn.

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

GUARD 1: He's a poet-type, sir.

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

ARAM: My memory's not so good.

MULLA: So compose one. I'll give you a subject: the Bahá'ís. Who was it you were following?

EHSAN *has come close to ARAM.*

ARAM: Ehsan.

MULLA: Last name, I mean.

ARAM: Mehdizadeh.

MULLA: Good memory. So describe him—no poem necessary, just a word.

EHSAN *takes ARAM's hand to kiss.*

GUARD 1: Say something, Aram. He was a spy, a traitor.

MULLA: (*To GUARD 1.*) Shut up. (*To ARAM.*) Hafez?

ARAM: (*After a pause.*) Mystifying.

GUARD 1: (*Hits ARAM on the head.*) Idiot!

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

*The GUARD goes to kiss the MULLA's hand, but he's waved away.*

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

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

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

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

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

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

**ACT I, Scene 4 – Mona's Home**

MONA and her MOTHER enter—the MOTHER with a dark chador, which she removes and folds up upon entering.

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

MONA: You should have let them do it.

MOTHER: Are you so ungrateful? You're one of the few Bahá'í children still in school.

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

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

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

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

MONA: God let them into Mr. Vahdat's home. Being a Bahá'í is no protection—that goes for Dad too.

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

MONA: In one hundred forty years, when have the people of this country ever stood up for us? (*A beat.*) We have to sound the alarm, remind them that this is Iran, the land of Cyrus the Great, the founder of human rights! That's what I was standing up for today.

MOTHER: Did it work?

MONA: Did what work?

MOTHER: Your wake up call.

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

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

MONA: What does God want us to do, Mom? If He just shows me the path, I'll go. I just don't understand why there has to be so much pain. (*Waits for an answer.*)

MOTHER: Why are you looking at me?

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

MOTHER: Taraneh!

TARANEH: Hey, I got here as soon as I could.

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

MONA: Ah, ah, ah, ah, ah....

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

TARANEH: Hi darling.

MONA: (*Absorbed.*) I can't believe this is you, Taraneh. There's a little creation forming inside of you.

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

MONA: (*In her own world, but not leaving TARANEH's belly.*) But imagine what the baby is going through, no idea where life is leading. Bahá'u'lláh says we're like the baby in the womb and the spiritual world is all around us. You know, like we're inside, hidden by this veil... (*Indicates her belly.*) All warm, we'd stay inside there forever.

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

MOTHER: She?

TARANEH: Did I say that? I keep telling myself not to. (*Tears well up.*)  
I don't even want a girl. I think Sírús's family wants a boy—  
they won't say it, but they keep calling it a "he."

MOTHER: We need a boy in the family.

MONA *has her ear up to* TARANEH's belly.

TARANEH: What do you think, sweetie?

MONA: I'm listening. (*Addresses the baby.*) Who are you? Helloooo...  
Hellooooo....

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

MONA: Who are you?

*The ceiling seems to open and light starts coming down—a glimmering of the  
possible.*

WOMAN IN WHITE: (*With gentle authority.*) Prepare yourself. Just like  
the expectant mother, just like the babe—prepare yourself.

MONA: For what?

*The WOMAN shrugs as if to say "what else?"*

MOTHER: Mona?

*Shift back to the physical plane.*

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

MONA: (*Coming back to herself.*) Huh?

TARANEH: What's wrong? You see a ghost?

MONA: (*Standing.*) No, I'm fine.

MONA *exits.*

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

shouldn't get out of Iran altogether at least until this whole thing blows over.

TARANEH: Have you talked to Dad?

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

TARANEH: Where is he now?

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

TARANEH: Mom.

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

MRS. KHUDAYAR, *a neighbor, enters.*

MRS. KHUDAYAR: Well, are you coming?

TARANEH: Hello, Mrs. Khudayar.

MOTHER: Coming where?

TARANEH: The birthday party, Mom. I'll get Mona. (*Exits.*)

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

MRS. KHUDAYAR: He's just about to cut the cake.

*The voice of her son, REZA, is heard from the hall.*

REZA: (*Off.*) Is she coming?

TARANEH: (*Having reentered.*) Maybe a little later.

REZA: (*Poking his head in.*) Why not now?

TARANEH: Happy birthday, Reza.

MOTHER: Mona has some thinking to do.

MRS. KHUDAYAR: Thinking, huh?

REZA: (*Exiting.*) Fine.

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

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TARANEH: Well, shall we get some cake?

MRS. KHUDAYAR: Well, well, Taraneh, look at you. Wait, wait.

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

MRS. KHUDAYAR: Definitely a girl!

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

**ACT I, Scene 5 – Mona's Dream**

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

WOMAN IN WHITE: I have something for you. A gift. But you must choose.

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

MONA: Ooh.

SPIRIT 1: Red. The final testimony, indisputable truth; blood spilled presents its own proof. Red is a fire, a lover, a warning. The sun descending has no finer adorning.

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

MONA: No!

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

MONA: Lovely.

SPIRIT 1: Black. Wrapping itself about, the jealous lover douses all other color. Pupil of the eye, closed lid of night; black is nothing without light.

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

MONA: No, I don't want that one either.

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

MONA: I like blue. *(She takes it, but hesitates to put it up to herself.)* But what is it?

SPIRIT 3: Blue is the beginning, sea and sky, renewal. A soul alone, a stone, a pool. Ripples and reflections that sparkle over faces, good deeds that light up darkened places.

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

WOMAN IN WHITE: Do you want to remove the veil?

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

WOMAN IN WHITE: Enough!

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

FATHER: Honey? *(He goes to her.)* Wake up, sweetheart.

MONA: *(Waking, crying out.)* Ah! Ah! Dad, Dad...

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

MONA: Dad, I saw Him. I saw Him.

FATHER: It's okay...

MONA: I saw His face.

*ARAM has remained in the same place, as if he's still in Mona's sight.*

**ACT I, Scene 6 – A Clothing Shop off a busy street**

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

MONA: Salaam.

SHOPKEEPER: (*Wary, turning down the music.*) Salaam.

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

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

SHOPKEEPER: Salaam.

FARAH: Hi. (*To MONA.*) Are you still mad about the class?

*No response.*

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

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

MONA: No thank you.

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

*MONA looks at her.*

FARAH: Got you to look.

*MONA looks away.*

FARAH: Come on, don't be mad at me.

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

FARAH: I told you I was sorry.

MONA: So I forgive you.

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

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

FARAH: Okay. (*A beat.*) How about a red one?

MONA *looks at her, a little spooked.*

FARAH: Red for anger.

SHOPKEEPER: Very good prices on these scarves, the best in the city!

FARAH: No thanks!

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

FARAH: Offered by who?

MONA: By God. I think.

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

MONA: The dresses symbolized paths I could choose in my life.

FARAH: Okay.

MONA: The red one meant martyrdom and the black one suffering.

FARAH: Someone would choose those paths?

MONA: I chose the last one, which was service.

FARAH: So...

MONA: I chose a life of service.

FARAH: What about a life of fun?

SHOPKEEPER: (*Approaching.*) How can I help you girls?

MONA: Do you have any dresses this color?

SHOPKEEPER: Sure. Over there.

MONA *moves to the indicated area. The SHOPKEEPER sees ARAM standing just outside the shop door looking in, and he goes to switch cassette tapes for something more Islamic.*

SHOPKEEPER: How did that tape get in there? That music's unclean!  
(*Switches tapes to something more Islamic.*) Much better.

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

FARAH: So maybe you're going to get married.

MONA: What?

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

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

MONA: Mmm, that one.

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

FARAH: So was there a guy in this dream?

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

FARAH: What, him?

MONA: (*Folding up.*) Maybe we should buy this and go.

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

MONA: How much?

SHOPKEEPER: For you: 100.

FARAH: Rial?

SHOPKEEPER: (*Sarcastic.*) Rial. 100 Tuman.

MONA: Sorry I don't have that much.

SHOPKEEPER: Why don't you ask your boyfriend? (*Indicates ARAM.*)

MONA: He's not my boyfriend.

FARAH: Who made you a mulla to judge?

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

MONA: (*Calmly.*) Well, I'm not a chaste Muslim, I'm a chaste Bahá'í.  
And I can offer you 20 tuman.

FARAH: (*Flummoxed.*) You don't need to tell him that.

SHOPKEEPER: Bábí?

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

SHOPKEEPER: Bábí báhí, I don't care. (*He takes the dress back.*) 200 tuman! Final price.

MONA: Sir, be fair. All religions teach that much. (*She pulls out money.*)  
Now how much is the dress worth? I have twenty-five tuman.

*A beat. He looks at her money.*

SHOPKEEPER: Out.

MONA: What?

SHOPKEEPER: The dress is not for sale, Bábí girl!

MONA: It's Bahá'í. Bahá'í, Bahá'í, Bahá'í, Bahá'í!

FARAH *walks away.*

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

SHOPKEEPER: Get out!

MONA: Fine. See you, Farah.

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

FARAH: Wait up, Mona! (*To ARAM.*) What are you staring at?

*She leaves. ARAM pulls a photograph from a small notebook, looks at it, then towards where MONA exited. EHSAN is now there, but ARAM avoids looking at him.*

SHOPKEEPER: You go now, you'll lose your girlfriends.

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

**ACT I, Scene 7 – Mona's Home**

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

FATHER: Aren't you going to say something?

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

*He is silent.*

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

FATHER: Yes.

MOTHER: She needs a father.

FATHER: Farkhundih.

MOTHER: I am not blowing this out of proportion—

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

MONA: Alláh-u-abhá. *(She heads towards her room.)*

MOTHER: Mona, come back here, please.

MONA: *(Returning.)* What's going on?

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

MONA: Okay.

MOTHER: I'm not happy about you being gone when there's so much to do. *(She exits to the bedroom.)*

MONA: What happened?

FATHER: It's okay. *(Exits to kitchen.)* You want a little tea?

MONA: (*Sits on the carpet and holds her head.*) I don't know. (*A beat.*) I saw God today... on the street.

FATHER: (*Reentering.*) You did.

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

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

MOTHER: (*Entering, moving to the door.*) Here's the list, Mona, so don't forget. (*At the door.*) There's a package here. Maybe it's a bomb.

*She kicks it inside the door and leaves. The FATHER winces some and holds his stomach.*

FATHER: Mmm.

MONA: Your tummy? Here, let me do that (*She takes the broom.*)

FATHER: I'm okay, I'll just get the tea. (*Exits.*)

MONA: (*Starting, then stopping the sweeping.*) Here's what I figure. I'm not supposed to have that dress. It's just a symbol. I mean, obviously, He told me it stands for service. So I don't need the actual dress for that. It's better that I don't have it.

FATHER: (*Off.*) Uh-huh.

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

FATHER: Sorry, honey, the kettle was making noise.

*He has entered with a tray with tea. He has been crying and turns to wipe away tears.*

MONA: Are you sure everything's all right?

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

MRS. KHUDAYAR: (*Off.*) Hello!

MONA: (*At the door.*) It's our neighbor.

FATHER: (*Uncertain what to do with the tea tray.*) I better not.

*He exits back into the kitchen.*

MONA: Dad, come back.

FATHER: (*Off*.) Mona, we can't push people.

MONA: (*Shakes her head and opens the door.*) Hello, Mrs. Khudayar.

MRS. KHUDAYAR: Am I interrupting?

MONA: No, Dad was just making some tea.

MRS. KHUDAYAR: (*So the FATHER can hear—*) No thank you.

FATHER: (*Off*.) Hello, Mrs. Khudayar.

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

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

MRS. KHUDAYAR: Oh?

MONA: It was really about choices in life...

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

MONA: What?

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

MONA: What does he look like?

MRS. KHUDAYAR: See for yourself. 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.*

MRS. KHUDAYAR: (*Excited.*) Oh, oh, oh—do you know him?

MONA: (*Almost to herself.*) That's the same young man as was in my dream.

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

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

MRS. KHUDAYAR: Just what?

MONA: A symbol.

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

MONA: Dad, isn't that tea ready yet?

MRS. KHUDAYAR: Girl, how old are you?

MONA: Sixteen.

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

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

FATHER: Here we are...

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

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

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

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

FATHER: Mona, if she needs to go...

MRS. KHUDAYAR: I have tea at home.

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

FATHER: Mona dear.

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

MONA: But that's silly.

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

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

FATHER: (*Unconvinced.*) What's the letter?

MONA: It's been opened.

FATHER: Who's it from?

MONA: (*Opens the letter and reads.*) It's from the Bahá'í children's committee.

FATHER: Yeah?

MONA: They want me to teach a Bahá'í children's class.

FATHER: Let me see.

MONA: (*Moved.*) It's happening, Dad. I asked Him to show me the path and He's doing it.

FATHER: (*Taking the letter.*) I'm just surprised the committee didn't hand-deliver it.

MONA: (*Goes for the package by the door.*) Could be from an admirer. Could be a bomb. (*Picks it up.*) Why was Mom so upset? Before I die.

FATHER: I've been appointed to the Auxiliary Board.

MONA: (*After a beat.*) That's such an honor.

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

MONA: (*Covering her emotion.*) Just leave me your books—Taraneh wants them too, but I'll use them more.

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

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

MONA: Dad.

*He turns.*

MONA: Farah must have gone back... (*Holds it up to herself.*)

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

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

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

*This is the end of this sample script.*  
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