

BAND OF GOLD

A play about Marriage, Family and Community

To an unfinished work: the Bahá'í community

To

Christian

Emily

Gordon

Leland

Leonard

Louise

Marda

Norma

Paul

And to

Gertrude,

the matron saint of Tampa

Setting

Palm Terrace, Florida (Near Tampa). 2006.

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Cast of Characters

(In order of appearance)

Melinda Jennison	40s, female, American
Hal Jennison	40s, male, white American
Chris “Semowa” Manteha	21, male, biracial / African-American
Chadwick	20s, male, African-American
Táhirih Sobhani	22, female, Persian-American *
Mr. (Sírús) Sobháńí **	50s, male, Persian *
Mrs. (Parvín) Sobháńí **	late 40s, female, Persian *
Kayván Sobháńí	12, male, Persian-American *
Núrá (Sobháńí) Golpaygáńí	28, female, Persian *
Rustam Golpaygáńí	30s, male, Persian *
(Parváneh Golpaygáńí)	infant, female – (a doll can be used)

** The distinctions “Persian” and “Persian-American” refer to the character’s basic cultural identification.*

*** The titles “Mr.” and “Mrs. Sobhani” are used in the script to help clarify for English-readers who’s who in the Sobhani household and not to suggest a special formality toward their characters.*

BAND OF GOLD

“And when He desired to manifest grace and beneficence to men, and to set the world in order, He revealed observances and created laws; among them He established the law of marriage, made it as a fortress for well-being and salvation, and enjoined it upon us in that which was sent down out of the heaven of sanctity in His Most Holy Book.”

—Bahá'u'lláh

ACT I, Scene 1

The living room of Hal and Melinda Jennison. It is late afternoon and the room is dark. With what light there is, one can make out the clutter of a not-so-recent move-in: boxes, a ladder, drop cloths, plastic-covered furniture, newspapers, items retrieved from boxes, take-out food containers. A small work area has been carved out downstage with a reclining chair, some books and neatly stacked papers. Upstage center is the front door. Upstage right is the door to the kitchen. Stage right has two doors: one to a bedroom, the other leading off to a hallway. Stage left has three doors: the master bedroom downstage, the bathroom center, and another bedroom upstage. In the living room, there is a splendid hanging lamp¹, and tied to one side of it is a home-made banner reading “Welcome Home Africa Boy.” We hear the clinking of keys at the front door. The struggle goes on longer than it should before the door finally opens. HAL and MELINDA, both in their 40s, enter. MELINDA has an allergy mask.

MELINDA: You need to fix that— (Reacting to the heat in the house.) Oh God, out of the pan...!

¹ The play may be performed without an actual lamp. This is almost preferable as the imagination of the audience may create something more magnificent than could be actually hung.

HAL: (*Inspecting door.*) It is the realtor's job to fix this, not mine...

MELINDA: We live in Florida now, you have to keep the A/C on.

HAL: You know I hate—

MELINDA: Wait.

She flips a switch, and the downstage lamp is illumined. The effect is somewhat magical.

HAL: Ah.

MELINDA: It was all I needed to know this was the right spot.

HAL: Yeah. (*He turns the main lights on.*)

MELINDA: Too bad we can't stay.

HAL: Don't start.

MELINDA: I will not live in a community where I am scorned.

HAL: "Scorned"—she didn't agree with your opinion.

MELINDA: It's not an opinion, it's the truth!

HAL: (*Looking proudly at banner.*) I don't know why you don't like this banner.

MELINDA: He's not a boy any more, and you shouldn't hang it on our chandelier.

He rolls his eyes at the word "chandelier."

MELINDA: You know I feel sorry for her, she is a repressed female.

HAL: She's a lovely and elegant woman.

She eyes him.

HAL: Who is repressing her? Her husband is a saint.

MELINDA: There's something not right with them.

HAL: Look, Parvin didn't accept your interpretation of Bahá'í law, that's all—

MELINDA: She looked at me like I was a piece of garbage on the street. That is not Bahá'í behavior, Hal!

HAL: And backbiting is?

MELINDA: Don't judge me.

HAL: I'm not, I'm reminding you.

MELINDA: If I can't talk to my husband, who can I talk to?
Everywhere I go, I run into people so steeped in denial that they project onto others all their own negativity.

HAL: Moving here wasn't my idea!

MELINDA: We moved to be here for my son.

HAL: Chris was fine here his freshman and sophomore years.

MELINDA: Having him out of the country changed my feeling about that. And he's going to need our support if he's going to be this... artist.

HAL: For the record, I moved here to save our marriage.

MELINDA: I wasn't going to divorce you.

HAL: You said you'd leave.

MELINDA: I was pre-menstrual—one more day in South Dakota, my head was going in the oven.

HAL: That's what you said about staying with your mother while I unpacked that tractor trailer—

MELINDA: (*Referring to disarray.*) And a nice job you've done.

HAL: (*Continuing.*) — full of CRAP I would have preferred to set fire to. Now again you want to leave?

MELINDA: Hey I didn't create this. The way Chris talked about this Sobhani family, it sounded like the perfect place to move, but they don't seem very welcoming of me.

HAL: You'll get over it.

HAL has settled into his recliner chair and opened his 'writing' station.' It includes all the paraphernalia of his work: pencils, pads of paper, mini-recorder, a little sign that has a picture of Einstein saying 'genius at work.'

MELINDA: You don't care if my spiritual light is extinguished.

HAL: This move has set me back six months, easily, on my book.

MELINDA: And?

HAL: I ain't movin'.

HAL has removed his jewelry, including a watch and a wedding ring.

MELINDA: Why are you taking off your wedding band?

HAL: I have a ritual when I write: I detach myself from everything.

MELINDA: Your wife included?

He doesn't answer.

MELINDA: Fine. *(She exits, begins slamming things offstage. She comes back.)*
We moved to Palm Terrace to establish an LSA and that's what I'll do, but if this is how I'm treated, I'm not going to the meetings. And if they elect me secretary, I'm going to scalp someone!

HAL: *(Still working.)* May I assume you're pre-menstrual now?

She hurls a sponge at him. CHRIS has entered, looking sleepy, from the upstage left bedroom. He is brown-skinned (biracial) and he sports a thin beard. His hair is fairly big and funky, and his body, now shedding sleep, is generally spry, active, ready to bound. He has towel and toilet bag in hand.

MELINDA: Hi honey, sleep well?

CHRIS: What up. *(He exits into the bathroom.)*

HAL: Well, their family is crazy about Chris. You have that in common.

MELINDA: *(Low.)* Did you know he was out past 3:30 this morning?
With a friend, I guess.

HAL: Their girl—the one that goes to UF...

MELINDA: Tahirih.

HAL: ...she was upset Chris didn't come today.

MELINDA: Did you see their little Kevin come up to me so bright-eyed? "Are you Chris's mom?" Makes me feel I've done something in this life. Everything else is just a train wreck.
(Exiting into kitchen.)

HAL: *(Not paying too much attention.)* She's just so radiant...

MELINDA: *(Off.)* There's no food in this kitchen!

HAL: Hey, but she said "See you tonight" as we were leaving—is there another holy day activity?

MELINDA: God help us—*(Reentering.)* Oh no.

The sound of a gasoline-powered leaf-blower has been getting louder.

MELINDA: (*At the window.*) I hate those leaf-blower things. He's terrorizing my impatiens, Hal—go tell him to stop.

HAL: Just let the man do his job.

MELINDA: Sure, let the wife suffer—You have no spine. That's why you don't teach.

HAL: Oh-ho-hooo, don't go down that road.

MELINDA: I teach!

HAL: Whatever.

MELINDA: Okay, maybe I'm not the most successful teacher in the world, maybe the world cannot hear a woman with a strong voice, but you know what? I am an administrator! And you know what we are best at?

HAL: (*Picking up his things.*) I'm not going to participate in this.

MELINDA: Consulting. We don't run out of the room if we don't agree with something someone says.

HAL: (*Embroided.*) Yelling and screaming is not consultation; it's not what Bahá'u'lláh had in mind.

MELINDA: Oh, so you know what He had in mind? I suppose all your Persian friends told you, because they're so good at consulting! Everyone sits around and smiles and nods and they won't tell you in English what they're really feeling, but when you see them among themselves: jibber-jabber-jibber-jabber! (*She has come from the kitchen with a glass of lemon water and now halts at the front door.*) Look, we won't tell Chris about today. We'll let them have their relationship and keep an arm's length.

She puts on an allergy mask and walks out the door. HAL sighs, and tries to get back to his writing. The barely audible patter of little feet is heard from the ceiling. CHRIS enters, humming "Maria" from "West Side Story."

HAL: (*Gesturing.*) Wait.

They are both quiet a moment.

HAL: Did you hear that?

CHRIS: (*Sings.*) "The most beautiful sound I ever heard..."

HAL: Sounded like little feet.

CHRIS: “Maria, Maria, Maria.” Mind if I put my easel over here by the window?

HAL: Just move the boxes over there... (*indicating a pile.*)

CHRIS: Go siame, rra. (*Pronounced ‘ho see-yah-me’.*)

HAL: Come again.

CHRIS: (*Clearing an area.*) That’s Setswana for “just okay.”

HAL: Ah.

CHRIS: (*Singing.*) “All the beautiful sounds of the world in a single word.”

HAL: So I hear you were out til 3:30 this morning?

CHRIS: Guilty.

HAL: College buddy?

CHRIS: (*Singing.*) “Maria, Maria, Maria”

HAL: And his name is Maria?

CHRIS: No, but I know no song with her name. (*Sings fully.*)

‘Maria... I just met a girl named Maria,
and suddenly that name will never be the same to me...’

HAL: So she’s cute?

CHRIS: (*Stops short his clearing out the area for his easel.*) Cute? (*Thinks.*)
She is the lightning on the horizon after a long hot dusty dry season.

HAL: So will we meet Miss Lightning?

CHRIS: No doubt—Hey, this clock says 6:15.

HAL: That’s what I got.

CHRIS: Did we miss the party?

HAL: No, we went. Your mother thought you needed your sleep.

CHRIS: Ah ssshhh—oot.

MELINDA *enters, through the hallway SR.*

MELINDA: I just had a profound teaching encounter.

CHRIS: (*Peeved.*) You didn't wake me up!

He stops himself from saying more and exits into his room, closing the door.

MELINDA: What was that?

HAL: He's disappointed he didn't go to the holy day. I told you we should wake him up.

MELINDA *crosses to Chris's door and knocks.*

MELINDA: Chris, honey? (*Opens the door.*) Sorry, I would've woken you, but—jeez. (*She closes the door.*) So he just starts praying and ignores me? Does he seem different to you?

HAL: Not much.

MELINDA: (*Takes a deep breath.*) Anyway, I was talking to the yard man.

HAL: You mean the plant-hating terrorist?

MELINDA: I brought him some lemon water—'Abdu'l-Bahá used to give gifts to people who gave him trouble, so I thought I'd do the same. Turns out he was very friendly to me, and I felt inspired to invite him to a devotional gathering.

CHRIS *has reentered.*

CHRIS: I have a new rule: I "consume every wayward thought with the flame of His loving mention." When I'm upset, whatever it is, I pray and give it up...

MELINDA: We didn't do anything to upset you.

HAL: So—what's our plan for dinner?

MELINDA: I thought we'd take Chris out.

HAL: (*Looking at his wallet*) Sure, anything you want... under \$20.

MELINDA: You cheapskate! I'm only going to have a salad anyway.

CHRIS: (*On the phone, dialing.*) You know I invited the Sobhanis over.

MELINDA: What?

CHRIS: I would have told you earlier but then nobody woke me up. (*Into phone.*) Hello, Parvin? Alláh-u-abhá, this is Chris...

MELINDA: You can't just invite people over like that.

CHRIS: (*Into phone.*) They are fine, thank you.

MELINDA: If you're talking about me, I'm not fine.

CHRIS: (*Into phone.*) Is Tahirih there?

MELINDA: Hal?

CHRIS: (*Into phone.*) Just when she wakes up. You're still coming tonight, right?

MELINDA: He's invited them over.

CHRIS: (*Into phone.*) No, I insist.

MELINDA: He's insisting, Hal.

HAL: What do you want me to do?

CHRIS: (*Into phone.*) Wonderful—see you soon. (*He hangs up.*) What are you shouting for?

MELINDA: Chris, you don't go inviting people over without consulting.

CHRIS: No big deal—we move the boxes into another room.

MELINDA: It's not just that. Look, I know you're close to them but there are some real issues here.

CHRIS: What?

HAL: (*Mocking.*) "There are thum real issueth."

MELINDA: Shut up you. Now I don't know what's going on underneath it all, but it's coming out with the typical control issues ...

HAL: (*Mocking again.*) "Typical control issueth."

MELINDA: I need your support here, not your mockery.

HAL: Fine, your mother got into a little tiff with Mrs. Sobhani this afternoon.

MELINDA: It wasn't a *tiff*.

CHRIS: About what?

MELINDA: It's not important.

HAL: Do Bahá'ís have to clip their nails every week?

CHRIS: Seriously?

MELINDA: I just told her that's not what Bahá'u'lláh says—we can grow our nails, we can paint them—what she believes is a myth.

HAL: You don't dispel a myth by humiliating the person.

MELINDA: I was loving and frank...

HAL: And loud.

MELINDA: ...and she gets this look like I just threw up on her. So seeing them now would be quite uncomfortable.

CHRIS: Mom, this is your Bahá'í community.

MELINDA: Yeah, and we got red flags flying left and right. (*Exits into kitchen.*)

CHRIS: I guess things in Africa were a little more life and death, you know? But hey, you just got off on the wrong foot!

The phone rings.

MELINDA: What is this insistence?

CHRIS: (*Answers the phone.*) Hello? Hey, I thought you were napping.

MELINDA: If that's them, we need to postpone.

CHRIS: (*Exiting into his room.*) Hang on.

MELINDA: Where are you...?—Hal, am I not speaking English?

HAL: Working!

CHRIS reenters, still on the phone, now holding a Bahá'í prayer book. He speaks clearly, ostensibly into the phone, but so HAL and, especially, MELINDA will hear.

CHRIS: A quote from 'Abdu'l-Baha: "The dearest wish of this servant of Thy Threshold is to behold the friends of East and West in close embrace; to see all the members of human society gathered with love in a single great assemblage, even as individual drops of water collected in one mighty sea."

MELINDA: The Bahá'í writings are not a club we use to bludgeon others into submission!

CHRIS has exited into his room, closing the door. A knock on the front door.

MELINDA: Oh, what now?

HAL: Probably your leaf blower.

MELINDA: (*Looking through window.*) It's Chad.

HAL *gets up, after the moment's hesitation it takes for his conscience to engage.*

MELINDA: (*Low.*) Look, I know he's going through a rough time, but we don't have room right now.

HAL: What do you want me to do, not answer the door?

MELINDA: Just tell him to come back... I don't know, another day.

She exits into the kitchen, and HAL goes and opens the door. A heavy-set, African-American young man (CHAD) stands there.

HAL: Hey Chad, how are you doing?

CHAD: Okay. Is Chris here?

HAL: Uh, he's on the phone. Do you...?

CHAD: Your wife gave me his email. I've been looking forward to meeting him... seeing him.

HAL: Oh, come on in for a minute—

MELINDA: (*From kitchen.*) Hi Chad!

HAL: So yesterday was tough, huh?

CHAD *nods.*

HAL: Why don't you have a seat?

CHAD *sits.*

MELINDA: (*Off.*) Hal, can I see you a moment?

CHRIS *enters, still on the phone. CHAD stands.*

CHRIS: Just a second, T. (*To CHAD.*) You're Chadwick.

CHAD: Chris?

CHRIS: My brother. (*He gives CHAD a big hug.*)

MELINDA: (*Entering.*) Chris, what did you tell them?

CHRIS: Beautiful, don't move. (*He's gone again.*)

MELINDA: So Chad...

CHAD: He's very good looking.

Pause.

MELINDA: Would you like a glass of lemon water? (*She has exited again into the kitchen.*)

CHAD: No thank you. (*To HAL.*) Can I use your rest room?

HAL: Right through there.

CHAD *exits.*

MELINDA: (*Off.*) I live in Florida and still have to buy lemons! (*Entering.*) Chad, do you like fresh squeezed lemon?

HAL: He's in the rest room.

MELINDA: (*Knocks on Chris' door.*) Is Chris still on the phone? (*She tries the door but it's locked.*) What does that mean 'he's very good-looking'?

CHAD: (*Re-entering.*) Excuse me...

MELINDA: Finding everything?

CHAD: Where's the light switch?

HAL: It's on the inside next to the mirror. Just between us, the toilet wouldn't let an egg yolk go through without getting clogged. If you need to pinch one, you can use the one in our room.

CHAD: This should be fine. (*Exits.*)

MELINDA: That was an undignified thing to say.

HAL: I have to write that down: "Egg yolk."

MELINDA: Oh, yeah, like you're going to use that in your book.

HAL: I don't censor what I write down.

MELINDA: (*Exiting into kitchen.*) Is this a book of bathroom humor?

HAL: That's an idea, you gotta read something when you're in there.

MELINDA: (*Off.*) Don't make me vomit.

HAL: It could be a new genre: each chapter is three pages long, and there's extra paper at the back... just in case. (*He laughs to himself.*)

MELINDA: (*Bringing in several glasses and a pitcher of lemon water.*) Have some lemon water, dear. Look: Chris needs to understand

we're not ready for them, and as for Chad here, I don't know how to judge his reaction to Chris—

CHAD: (*Reentering.*) All set.

MELINDA: —will be right out. (*Offering a glass to CHAD.*) So how do you like your lemon squeezed?

HAL *spits out a mouthful of water.*

MELINDA: Hal!

HAL: (*Coughing.*) Ah!

CHAD: I'm sorry?

MELINDA: Slobs like you is why we need plastic on the furniture! Here.

She hands CHAD a glass of lemon water.

CHAD: I can't. The doctor said no citrus.

CHRIS *has reentered, off the phone now, carrying a big duffel bag.*

CHRIS: What happened?

HAL: Your mother is keeping us entertained as usual.

MELINDA: So you told them?

CHRIS: (*Standing underneath the banner.*) "Africa boy!" (*Making up super hero music.*) Dun-duh-duh-duh-Dun-dun-DUUUNNN! We join Africa boy as he's digging through his magical Bush bag... Gifts for everybody!

MELINDA: Right now?

CHRIS: For Hal, the mask of the warrior! (*Pulls out an African mask.*)

HAL: Cool. (*To MELINDA, holding the mask up to his face.*) Is this sexy?

MELINDA: Knock it off.

CHRIS: Mom, this is for you. (*Hands her a dark wood statue of a female.*)

MELINDA: Oh...

CHRIS: I got it at Victoria Falls. (*He enacts the Falls.*) Whssshhhh!! Water everywhere you look, falling almost as fast as the Zimbabwe dollar.

MELINDA: Does she have a name?

CHRIS: I just called it ‘the weighty one’ after lugging it in my gear so long.

MELINDA: Thanks, Chris.

CHRIS: No mathatha, as we say: no problem.

CHAD: Is that like hakuna matata?

CHRIS: Exactly. *(He takes out a necklace made of polished beads.)* This necklace was made by a very special African brother who said the beads are special for healing.

He puts the necklace around CHAD’s neck. Tears well up in CHAD’s eyes, and he goes again into the bathroom.

CHRIS: I feel good, spreading the love.

MELINDA: Chris, you might want to rein that back some.

CHRIS: *(Pulling out a colorful African cloth.)* Look at this cloth.

MELINDA: *(Taking a corner.)* Oh, look at that, Hal.

HAL: Who’s that for?

CHRIS: *(Taking it back.)* That’s a surprise.

MELINDA: Okay, so back to business: the Sobhanis took a rain check?

CHRIS: No, they’re coming.

MELINDA: No, they’re not, because I’m not ready to have them.

CHRIS: Ready or not—Take a whiff of that!

He has pulled a zebra skin out of his bag and sticks it under MELINDA’s nose.

MELINDA: *(Recoiling.)* Oh!

CHRIS: That’s my zebra, Zamfir!

MELINDA: I’m going to be sick.

CHRIS: A gift from an African chief—Whenever I would forget where I was, Zamfir was there. *(He breathes deep.)* Yaaaaaaaggggh, Africa! *(He laughs.)* You want to smell, Hal?

He throws his arm around HAL and makes him smell it. MELINDA has exited.

HAL: Bleah!

CHAD *reenters, wearing the necklace.*

CHRIS: (*To* CHAD.) I can see the healing emanations just pouring off—Hey, why don't you stay for dinner?

MELINDA: (*Off, boiling over.*) That's it... I hope everyone likes fish sticks!

CHAD: What's the metal? Is it gold?

CHRIS: No, the place this comes from, they don't have gold to work with.

MELINDA: (*Slamming cabinets.*) Breaded fish sticks and hush puppies! That's what we have to feed everyone.

CHRIS: Manna from heaven!

MELINDA: (*Reentering.*) Boy, they're PERSIAN!!

CHRIS: So?

MELINDA: They brought a six course meal today to the celebration. They took the cheap cookies that Hal brought and displayed them on silver trays!

HAL: At least I brought something.

CHRIS: That's their culture, and they gotta understand the culture of where they're living.

MELINDA: I don't want to be an object lesson in American lack of refinement! (*Exits again.*)

CHRIS: Mom, I'll order pizza, or Chinese!

MELINDA: (*Off.*) I don't have enough spoons!

CHRIS: Chad-bro, you like Chinese?

CHAD: Uh...

MELINDA: (*She pokes her head back in, holds some plastic utensils in her hand.*) See Mrs. Sobhani, it's a spoon, but with little teeth too, like a fork. They call it a SPORK! (*She hurls some at CHRIS.*) I won't hurt you, Chad—why don't you come give a hand?

CHAD *reluctantly follows her into the kitchen.*

CHRIS: She's spunky.

HAL: You could have given some warning.

CHRIS: I have a surprise coming. (*He winks.*)

MELINDA: (*Off.*) I don't hear any cleaning!

HAL: Melinda, I told you I need to do some work to stay on schedule.

MELINDA: (*Off.*) Your schedule is no longer a priority. This place needs to be emptied.

CHRIS: Mom, back off the man.

MELINDA: (*Off.*) You may not speak another word. You are responsible for our crisis.

CHRIS: Did you say crisis? "Africa Boy" to the rescue!

MELINDA: (*Slamming cabinets.*) I am not happy!

CHRIS: (*With superhero voice.*) Melinda, come in here!

MELINDA: (*Off.*) Don't call me that!

CHRIS: (*Still with superhero voice.*) ME-LIN-DAAAAA!

MELINDA: (*Off.*) I do not deserve this...

CHRIS: That's the great thing about God—He blows away our expectations, Puggghshheww!

MELINDA: We're not talking about God, we're talking about a boy who doesn't communicate well.

CHRIS: A man! Africa Man, spreading peace and love through the land! (*Pulling her into the room to hug her in front of everyone.*) Melinda, open your arms! Wider! Come on, Hal!

HAL: That's all right, Chris.

CHRIS: (*Mocking MELINDA.*) "Hal, I need your thupport right now"—I'm teaching your wife a lesson.

HAL *laughs and comes over to join the hug.*

CHRIS: You too, Chadwick! This is it, Melinda, the oneness of the human family!

MELINDA: I don't like it when you call me that.

CHRIS: (*Mocking.*) "I don't like it when you call me that."

CHAD *has come close. The hug absorbs him too.*

CHRIS: Repeat after me: “I will no longer be sorrowful and grieved.”

ALL: “I will no longer be sorrowful and grieved.”

CHRIS: “I will be a happy and joyful being.”

ALL: “I will be a happy and joyful being.”

CHRIS: Now bring on the feast!

He pushes everyone and breaks up the bug.

MELINDA: Sometimes it’s just so painfully obvious you’re mine.

She goes to hug him and he flies away.

CHRIS: (*Out the door.*) Africa-Man!

MELINDA: And there he goes... (*At the kitchen door.*) Okay, Chad will finish washing the carrots, celery and tomatoes. (*Retrieving a kitchen knife.*) Hal, get Chris back in here and take these boxes out of here.

HAL: Got it covered. Now please do whatever you need to do to feel ready.

MELINDA: (*Gesturing with knife.*) What I need to feel ready is to see some progress here.

HAL: Why don’t you give me that?

MELINDA: Don’t mess with a woman with a seven-inch knife.

CHRIS: (*Having reentered.*) Still working on that power thing, huh?

MELINDA: I’m not working on anything, this is the man with the problem.

HAL: Give me the knife.

MELINDA: Chop, chop.

CHRIS: (*Sitting down, chewing on celery.*) See, you folks gotta see the people in the bush. The power thing was worked out centuries ago.

MELINDA: Great, so help me with the math—we have Mr. and Mrs. Sobhani...

CHRIS: Tahirih.

MELINDA: That’s seven, how about Kevin?

CHRIS: Yeah, maybe.

MELINDA: Eight.

CHRIS: Her sister's in town, but I'm guessing not.

MELINDA: Nine!

CHRIS: They won't all come.

MELINDA: Nine people means two fish sticks a piece, figure three or four hush puppies, a small handful of chopped veggies...

CHRIS: Do you have rice?

MELINDA: (*Upset.*) Got a box of Uncle Ben's—

CHRIS: Mom, no one's going to remember tonight for the food. I've got something up my sleeve.

MELINDA: (*Leaving.*) Please just finish. Hal, leave the Bahá'í books where I can get to them.

CHRIS: What are you upset about? Just let it go and be happy!

She has exited into her bedroom. HAL and CHRIS stand silently. CHAD enters holding handfuls of celery, carrots and tomatoes.

CHAD: Uh, these are washed, what should I do now?

HAL: I gotta open a window in here. (*He opens a window and breathes in the air.*)

CHRIS: What do we do, boss?

HAL: Uh... Maybe you can move that table over there.

He points to an area downstage. CHAD puts the vegetables on the table and as he and CHRIS are moving it, some of them fall on the floor.

HAL: (*Annoyed.*) You're dropping...

CHAD: Oh.

HAL: I'll get that. (*To CHAD.*) Why don't you take this box to the garage.

MELINDA: (*Off, sneezing.*) Achooo! (*And again-*) Achooo!!

HAL: Did someone just drive in?

MELINDA: (*Off, sneezing.*) Is there a window open?

HAL: It's shut!

He slams the window shut. CHRIS opens the door for CHAD who goes out with a box. MELINDA enters.

MELINDA: Okay, I have some boundaries that I need to lay down.

CHRIS: They're here.

HAL: Oh jeez.

CHRIS: They only live a few minutes away.

MELINDA: (*Exasperated.*) I am not done.

HAL: Chris, table.

MELINDA: Respect me!

She exits to her room. HAL and CHRIS move the dining table so it's centered beneath the lamp. The sound of people approaching the front door. Though the door is still open a crack, the doorbell rings. Hal opens the door to find six people. They are TAHIRIH, a young woman in her early 20's, her mother (PARVIN SOBHANI), her father (SIRUS SOBHANI), her younger brother (KAYVAN). Trailing behind these four are Tabirih's older sister (NURA), her brother-in-law (RUSTAM), and their infant daughter, Parvaneh.

HAL: Holy Mackerel! Hello everybody.

THE SOBHANIS: Hello, Alláh-u-abhá, etc.

CHRIS: Hey you! (*He gives TAHIRIH a big hug, while the others look on.*)

TAHIRIH: Easy boy—

CHRIS: (*Laughs.*) Welcome to you all!

HAL: Come on in, everybody.

TAHIRIH: Thank you.

CHRIS: Sirus and Parvin, hál-e-shomá?

MELINDA: (*Entering.*) Hello, every—Oh dear God...

CHRIS: You know my mother everyone.

TAHIRIH: Some of us do, hello Melinda.

MELINDA: Hi. Hello, Parvin.

MRS. SOBHANI *nods her head graciously, but with a certain aloofness.*

HAL: Please come in.

MR. SOBHANI: Thank you.

There is head nodding and hellos, but no one actually comes far into the room because of the clutter.

CHRIS: (*To Tahirib's young brother, KAYVAN.*) Kayvan, give me some skin.

KAYVAN: (*Beaming.*) Hey Chris.

TAHIRIH: Chris, you remember Nura?

CHRIS: Of course, we met last year— (*To baby.*) And who is this?

TAHIRIH: That's Parvaneh, my four-month-old niece.

CHRIS: She's beautiful! Is this your foot?

NURA: This is my husband, Rustam.

TAHIRIH *walks away.*

CHRIS: So you're the mystery man—

RUSTAM *nods, but his reaction and overall presence are uncertain.*

MELINDA: I apologize for the state of our house—

TAHIRIH: Hey, this place is just like our house.

MELINDA: I'm sorry to hear that.

TAHIRIH: I mean, the shape and everything, don't you think, Dad?

MR. SOBHANI: Yes, similar...

TAHIRIH: Did you know that when you bought it?

HAL: No.

MELINDA: Of course we wouldn't have the same house as you on purpose.

KAYVAN: That's ironic.

MELINDA: That is ironic, Kevin. But on the other hand it just shows, you know, sort of the underlying unity...

HAL: One planet, one floor plan please. Come see our backyard and my bed of dying impatiens.

Some laugh. HAL is leading them off through the stage right hall.

MELINDA: Aren't you clever, Hal? Always making me sound like some long-winded, wind-bag.

She is last to exit. CHRIS has pulled TAHIRIH to the side so they are alone.

TAHIRIH: What are you doing?

CHRIS: I just have to tell you something.

He has come up close, she holds him off.

TAHIRIH: They'll be back in a minute.

CHRIS: Last night—the sea, the air, the moon, the sand beneath our feet—it was pure magic.

TAHIRIH: Yeah?

CHRIS: Yeah.

TAHIRIH: I have to tell you something: you can't just pick me up like that in front of my family.

CHRIS: I have something for you!

He has retrieved the African cloth. TAHIRIH takes it and puts it on like a Persian head scarf.

TAHIRIH: Right back to Iran.

CHRIS: No, no, no—let me show you. (*Taking the cloth and wrapping it around her like an African dress.*) Hold this under your arm, okay and I'll wrap this around, hmm...

TAHIRIH: Careful. You need a permit for that, you know.

CHRIS: You smile—I'm the one suffering here.

TAHIRIH: You call this suffering?

CHRIS: I do. (*Stops wrapping, points to one of her rings.*) You've got that on the wrong finger.

TAHIRIH: It's silver—silver rings can go on my thumb.

CHRIS: Hey, I just came from the African bush.

TAHIRIH: Isn't that where diamonds come from?

CHRIS: You're sly.

TAHIRIH: Anyway, you said it's not the real thing.

CHRIS: I said it's a stand-in until I can afford something more befitting.

TAHIRIH: Boy, if you want something, you have to go after it full on!

CHRIS: Didn't I tell you I loved you and I wanted you to be my wife in this world and in all the worlds of God?

TAHIRIH: I seem to remember that.

CHRIS: What did you feel then?

TAHIRIH: I dunno.

CHRIS: Was your heart pumping fast?

TAHIRIH: Maybe.

CHRIS: And did you have this little bit of sweat on your forehead here, like you do now?

Voices heard off.

TAHIRIH: Okay, cool off, Romeo.

CHRIS: You said 'full on,' no?

TAHIRIH goes to break away from CHRIS.

CHRIS: Let me finish wrapping here. So are we going through with this?

TAHIRIH: Not til I signal. I dropped a hint to my parents—My mother wasn't going to come.

CHRIS turns to see MELINDA leading the others in. TAHIRIH quickly takes off the cloth, moves away from CHRIS and starts folding the cloth.

CHRIS: *(To MELINDA, singing "Something's Coming" from "West Side Story")* "There's something due any day, you will know right away..."

MELINDA: *(To TAHIRIH.)* You missed the tour.

TAHIRIH: Next time.

CHRIS: *(Turning to TAHIRIH.)* You took it off!

KAYVAN: Smells good!

MR. SOBHANI: I agree!

HAL: (*To CHRIS.*) I found out what that noise was—There's a squirrel chewed his way into the rafters.

RUSTAM: Like I say, I lend you my gun.

MELINDA: No guns thank you!

HAL: He chews on the wrong wire and all our lovely things go up in flames.

TAHIRIH: You don't want that.

HAL: Not til after I get some decent insurance. Chris, help me with chairs—

MELINDA: (*To TAHIRIH.*) It's a lovely pattern, that cloth. Chris gave me this. (*She shows the statue.*)

TAHIRIH: That's beautiful.

MELINDA: Do you like it?

HAL: Folks, please seat yourself around the dining table.

They gather around the dining table, around which are brought an assortment of chairs. Over the following dialogue, they settle into assorted chairs. MELINDA pushes in a nice desk chair.

MELINDA: Parvin, would you like to trade with me?

MRS. SOBHANI: Thank you, I am fine.

MELINDA: It's just my back is a little funny from moving. Again I apologize, we didn't expect guests.

RUSTAM: Maybe we should not have come.

CHRIS: Nonsense, we're together!

MELINDA: I hope you like fish sticks and hush puppies—in tiny portions.

CHRIS: Our fishes and loaves!

CHAD enters from the front door. He has been absent since the Sobhanis arrived.

CHRIS: Hey, Chadwick, where'd you go to?

CHAD: Just uh—telling my grandma. (*Goes into the kitchen.*)

HAL: Chad's our neighbor. He'll be joining us for dinner.

NURA: Oh, great. Is Chad a Bahá'í?

CHRIS: Not officially, but he's very interested in spiritual things.
Right, Chadwick?

RUSTAM: That's great, Chad's not a Bahá'í.

NURA gives RUSTAM a look, which he refuses to acknowledge. CHAD has returned to his chore of cutting the vegetables with a knife.

MR. SOBHANI: You know, the house is similar, but this is much newer.

HAL: We'll have to judge for ourselves. When are we invited, Parvin?

MRS. SOBHANI: Oh.

HAL: I'm looking forward to tasting your bademjun again.

CHRIS: I can just imagine one man in the bush walking into another's mud hut and saying, 'You know this is of a very similar design and construction to our hut...'

TAHIRIH: We are in the same sub-division.

MELINDA: We weren't sure we could afford to buy in Palm Terrace, but Hal is a pretty good haggler.

HAL: I don't haggle.

CHRIS: Definitely a haggler.

HAL: It's just a poker face.

MELINDA: Yes, this Bahá'í is proud of his poker face.

CHRIS: The Guardian was asked if it was okay for Bahá'ís to play poker—guess what he said.

MELINDA: Tell him, maybe he'll develop some shame.

HAL: I almost never play—and I've never read anything against it.

MRS. SOBHANI: (*To TAHIRIH.*) Ún chí-e? اون چیه؟

[Translation: What is that?]

TAHIRIH: Poker? Qomár bází. پوکر؟ قمار بازی.

[Trans: A gambling game.]

MELINDA: Tell him, Chris, before he has time to hide in his fox hole.

MRS. SOBHANI: Gambling not good.

Laughter.

CHRIS: Parvin-jan, Shoghi Effendi was asked if poker, the card game with no money so no gambling, is poker okay for Bahá'ís? He said, (*Gesturing with his hands.*) "The Bahá'ís have time to play poker?"

Everyone laughs except Rustam.

RUSTAM: You know why he said that.

Everyone quiets down.

RUSTAM: He wants to steal all our fun away.

Pause.

MELINDA: I think my hush puppies are burning.

HAL: Let me help you. (*To CHAD.*) Oh... you might want to cut those a little bigger.

They both exit.

CHRIS: What do you mean by your comment, Rustam?

NURA: He means nothing, that's his way of making joke.

TAHIRIH: Real funny.

MRS. SOBHANI: Mídúni chí dorost karde? میدونی چی درست کرده؟

[*Trans: Do you know what she's making?*]

TAHIRIH: Chris, what is it we're having?

CHRIS: Fish sticks and hush puppies.

MR. SOBHANI: Puppies? What if we try bite them and they bite back?

Everyone laughs.

KAYVAN: Yeah, or if they bark at us. (*He laughs.*)

NURA: No, Kayvan, they're hush puppies, so they are well-behaved.

Everyone laughs again.

MRS. SOBHANI: Chí tu-she?

چی توشه؟

[*Trans: What's in it?*]

NURA: Tú chí? Hush puppies?

تو چی؟

[*Trans: In what?*]

TAHIRIH: We want to know what's in a hush puppy.

MRS. SOBHANI: (*Embarrassed.*) Ah! Tahirih-jan.

CHRIS: Corn meal? No dog I'm pretty sure.

MRS. SOBHANI: Of course, of course.

CHRIS: In Botswana, they eat corn meal, but they call it mealie-meal.
It's like a fist-sized lump of over-cooked grits covered in chicken fat.

RUSTAM: That is better than starving.

CHAD: They have a lot of AIDS there, right?

CHRIS: (*Pensively.*) Yeah.

MELINDA and HAL enter with the food on pans.

MELINDA: This is just embarrassing, but it's all we have...

MR. SOBHANI: Everything is great. (*He claps his hands together.*) I'm ready to try a puppy.

Everyone laughs.

KAYVAN: Me too—Arf! Arf! (*He dangles out his tongue and whines.*)

MELINDA: Chad, you want to bring over the vegetables that you have.

CHAD: Sure. (*He does.*)

HAL: And there's ketchup here.

TAHIRIH: (*To CHAD.*) Did you make salsa?

HAL: That's just very finely chopped.

CHRIS: Chadwick, I truly appreciate your service for our dinner. You gave more attention to those vegetables than I did to my first two years of college.

TAHIRIH: Maybe you should get a real major.

CHRIS: Like what, pre-dental?

TAHIRIH: It's a real major!

RUSTAM: So you are an artist—when can we see your painting?

CHRIS: It's been a while since I finished anything.

KAYVAN: (*Putting ketchup on his plate.*) Hey Chris, look the puppy is bleeding. (*He starts to whine like a dog.*)

TAHIRIH: *Bachche*, sáket. بچه، ساکت.

[*Trans: Boy, be quiet.*]

Nura puts her napkin to her mouth as if she feels sick.

MELINDA: Nura, go ahead and take some before Hal finishes them off.

CHRIS: What do you do, Rustam?

RUSTAM: Computers, graphic design.

MR. SOBHANI: Rustam now works with me, my jewelry store.

RUSTAM: Just temporary.

A beat. CHRIS looks over to TAHIRIH, but she shakes her head.

TAHIRIH: Hey Dad, show Chris your wedding ring.

MR. SOBHANI *complies, but without taking off the ring.*

CHRIS: Very nice.

MR. SOBHANI: Some rings are precious because their gems—this is precious because its history. It was my great, great grandfather's.

CHRIS: Is that turquoise?

MR. SOBHANI: Yes. Turquoise they say was thrown to side of road by Abá Badí—you know Badí?

CHRIS: Sure.

MR. SOBHANI: His father tossed big bag of turquoise to go with empty hands to Shaykh Tabarsi with Mulla Husayn.

CHRIS: Wow.

HAL: So someone less detached came by, found the bag of turquoise and your great, great grandfather ended up with a piece.

MR. SOBHANI: That is the story. My grandfather gave it my father, my father gave it me.

CHAD: And it's gold?

MR. SOBHANI: You want to see? (*He shows the ring to CHAD.*)

TAHIRIH: Now that's a ring, huh Chris?

CHRIS: Yeah.

TAHIRIH: (*Teasing.*) You don't just find something like that in a store in an airport as you're walking by.

MR. SOBHANI: It is not so important. Maybe I sell it—fill my tank with gas.

TAHIRIH: Get out!

CHAD: I would buy it if I had the money.

TAHIRIH: He's teasing—he has to give it to Kayvan.

CHAD: (*To NURA.*) What about your ring?

NURA: My ring does not fit me any more.

RUSTAM: You know what does that mean, Chad? Maybe she's not the same woman I married.

NURA: Azíyat nakon.

اذیت نکن.

[*Trans: Don't be fresh.*]

RUSTAM: I swear, my wife was like this. (*Indicates 'skinny'.*)

MRS. SOBHANI: (*To NURA.*) Cherá

چرا نمیری

nemírí bekhábún-í-sh?

بخوابونیش؟

[*Trans: Why don't you go put her (Parvaneh) down?*]

NURA gets up with the baby, but MR. SOBHANI takes her hand.

MR. SOBHANI: We can resize the ring.

CHAD: How?

MR. SOBHANI: (*Indicating.*) You cut here, put torch, high heat here to melt, let cool... the ring is fit.

TAHIRIH: (*Having taken the baby.*) Melinda, is there somewhere we can put the baby to sleep?

MELINDA: Oh.

CHRIS: Use my room. Just to the left.

TAHIRIH takes the baby out, followed by NURA.

HAL: You came from L.A.?

CHAD: I think I see what you're saying. It's kind of like online, in the chat rooms, you know that label that people take online, it's not their real name. So, like mine is loverboyblue2.

TAHIRIH *laughs*. CHAD *looks over at her*.

CHAD: No, it is.

TAHIRIH: I'm sorry. I wasn't...

MR. SOBHANI: Bishtar bokhor.

بیشتر بخور.

Báyad tashvígshesh koní.

باید تشویقش کنی.

[*Trans: Eat some more. You should encourage him.*]

CHAD: What did he say?

TAHIRIH: He said he likes the hush puppies.

CHRIS: Chadwick, what were you saying?

CHAD: Oh, I think I forgot where I was going.

TAHIRIH: Chat rooms.

CHAD: Right, I was just saying when you get online, all you really have to go on is like the words that people say. You just get like their name, even though it's not their real name—and then there's the words, just letters and words. You're in your room and it's dark, and quiet, and these words is all the connection you have to that person. They could be thousands of miles away, and it's just like this little life sign—words and letters coming up on your screen.

TAHIRIH: Sounds kind of lonely. I mean great at the same time—that's how you connected with Chris, right?

MR. SOBHANI: It's wonderful we have power to connect all the world.

VARIOUS: Yes. Here, here..., etc.

A beat. TAHIRIH *signals to CHRIS, but he's in the middle of chewing.*
MELINDA *instead seizes the moment.*

MELINDA: I just want to take this moment to—clarify something. Parvin, we got into something this afternoon I don't think we really wanted to or...

CHRIS *coughs with surprise and exchanges a look with TAHIRIH.*

MELINDA: ...it was just so unnecessary, and I said something to you and, well, you...

MRS. SOBHANI: (*To TAHIRIH.*) Ma'zerat معذرت خاهی میکنه؟
khâhí míkone? Okay, it's okay. [...]
[*Trans: Is she apologizing?*]

MELINDA: (*Moving over to a stack of boxes.*) Right, well what's good is that we have consultation and the Writings to turn to. And we've got the Kitab-i-Aqdas here, so Hal, which box is it?

HAL: This probably isn't the best time.

MELINDA: (*Looking in boxes.*) No, I really want to move past this... I think we both do.

MRS. SOBHANI: Chí shod? چی شد؟
[*Trans: What's going on?*]

NURA *has reentered, evidently having laid the baby to sleep.*

CHRIS: (*Coming up to her.*) Mom, what are you doing?

MELINDA: I don't know why we haven't unpacked these yet—they're our most valuable possessions.

MRS. SOBHANI: Dâre durúghesh-o داره دروغشو ثابت میکنه؟
sâbet míkone? Chún man چون من کتابمو آوردم.
ketâbam-o âvordam.
[*Trans: Is she looking for proof for her lie? Because I brought my own book.*]

MRS. SOBHANI *pulls out her own book out of her handbag. NURA sees this and pushes it back in the handbag.*

NURA: Nakhayr. Mâman, نخبیر. مامان، بذار
bezâr kenâr—Tahirih. کنار - طاهره.
[*Trans: No. Mom, put it away.*]

MELINDA: (*Turning.*) What are you saying, Parvin?

TAHIRIH: (*Catching on.*) She's not—we were just talking. (*To mother.*)
Emshab darbâre-ye ín níst. امشب درباره این نیست.

[*Trans: This is not what tonight is about.*]

MRS. SOBHANI: (*Relenting.*) Man من نمیخواهم، ولی
nemíkhám, valí agar ú ketábesh-o اگر او کتابشو بیاره،
bíyáre, manam míyáram منم میارم.
[*Trans: I don't want to, but if she brings a book, I'll bring my book too.*]

NURA: Velesh kon. ولش کن.
[*Trans: Leave it alone.*]

MELINDA: Okay, I don't know where we put it. It's just a mess—
thanks, Hal.

CHRIS: So...

TAHIRIH *shakes her head at CHRIS saying the moment is not right.*

CHRIS: ...Mom, how long did you hold the lawn guy hostage?

MELINDA: Oh, am I not allowed to teach the Faith now because I'm
not running around Africa with a rotting zebra skin?

CHRIS: Okay, okay...

MELINDA: Aren't you hot? Take this thing off.

She tugs at his long shirt sleeves, and he pulls his arm away.

RUSTAM: 'Ajab khánevádeh-í. عجب خانواده‌ای.
[*Trans: Nice family.*]

MRS. SOBHANI: Ye dúne máhí-e dígeh یه دونه ماهی دیگه
bokhor, saye khodet-o bokon. بخور، سعی خودتو بکن.
[*Trans: Eat another fish stick, make an effort.*]

CHAD: What did they say?

TAHIRIH: They said the fish is good.

CHAD: What language is that?

HAL: Farsi.

CHAD: What's that?

TAHIRIH: Persian.

CHAD: Oh, right. Like Baha-la-la.

Six people correct his pronunciation.

ENSEMBLE: Bahá'u'lláh.

CHAD: Wow, you all said that at the same time.

TAHIRIH *laughs*.

CHAD: I still don't think I can say it.

CHRIS: It'll come with time.

RUSTAM *gets up and walks out the front door without saying a word*.

MELINDA: (*Re-entering*.) Where is he going?

TAHIRIH *signals to CHRIS, but CHAD speaks first*.

CHAD: So how do you all know each other?

MELINDA: We're all Bahá'ís.

CHAD: Uh-huh.

HAL: The Sobhanis moved here from Iran—if I've got this right—a few years ago after waiting almost two years in Turkey for visas.

MR. SOBHANI: That's right.

TAHIRIH: Except I came earlier than the rest on a student visa. So everybody... Chris has an announcement.

CHRIS: (*Standing*.) Yes, well, two part story. First, I want you to think for a second: Throughout all the dispensations of the past, names have been very important.

MELINDA: Oh brother.

CHRIS: Please—when Jacob wrestled the Angel, God named him Israel. When Saul was struck blind by the vision of Christ, he became Paul. In our Faith, Ali Muhammad became the Bab. Muhammad Ali became Quddus.

CHAD: Actually, Cassius Clay became Muhammad Ali.

Everyone looks at CHAD.

CHAD: Really, I did a book report on that.

CHRIS: (*diverted, but not defeated*.) Cassius Clay became Muhammad Ali. Fátimih Zarrín-Táj became Qurratu'l-ayn became TA-HI-RIH!

TAHIRIH: That's right.

MELINDA: What are you getting at, Chris?

CHRIS: What I'm getting at Chris is that "Chris" is no more. My name is "Semowa."

HAL: Semowa?

CHRIS: Semowa.

MELINDA: That's not a name, it's a country.

CHRIS: (*Spelling it out.*) Not S-A-M-O-A. It's S-E-M-O-W-A.

KAYVAN: That's cool, what does it mean?

CHRIS: Glad you should ask. Semowa is the Setswana word for "Spiritual."

MELINDA: What's wrong with 'Chris'? I should have some say in this.

KAYVAN: My cousin's name is "Rohan" -- that means spiritual too.

TAHIRIH: I think the name sounds Indian, like Native American.

CHRIS: It has a certain multi-racial appeal, I'll admit.

KAYVAN: Seminole Casino!

HAL: So when are we supposed to start calling you this?

CHRIS: It's kind of like the phone company with area codes. It starts off optional, both work, and then...

CHAD: (*Imitating a phone company recording.*) Boo-do-DWEEEE! We're sorry. The number you have dialed is no longer in service, please check the number and try again.

CHRIS *laughs and claps.* *Everyone else is just startled.*

CHRIS: Beautiful, Chad-bro. I couldn't have done better myself.

He gives CHAD a high five. A pause.

TAHIRIH: Well, I like it, and I'm proud of Semowa. We need Bahá'ís who will stand up and be different despite what people say.

MELINDA: Are you going to change your name too?

TAHIRIH: I believe I am.

NURA: What?

KAYVAN: Augh, I want to change my name too!

He gets a glance from MRS. SOBHANI.

KAYVAN: Okay.

MELINDA: Tahirih, you have a beautiful name already, don't pay attention to this doofus.

TAHIRIH: I'm not talking about my first name.

MELINDA: What? Why would you change your last name?

She moves over to hold CHRIS's hand. Realizations appear, pop-corn like.

MELINDA starts choking and coughing. NURA's tears start and she goes to hug TAHIRIH. TAHIRIH's parents look calm having had some warning. Only KAYVAN is still out of it.

TAHIRIH: Surprise.

KAYVAN: What are you going to change it to?

TAHIRIH: Manteha.

KAYVAN: That's Chris's name—O my...! *(He jumps and hides behind his chair, sticks his head up...)* So wait, that makes Chris, my...

CHRIS: Brother.

KAYVAN: Whoa, that's... that's so cool, Chris—I mean, Semowa.

HAL: I got to give it to you: that was some ace up your sleeve.

MELINDA: I can't feel my legs.

TAHIRIH: We know it's a surprise, but we've been thinking about it for months.

CHRIS: It's a beautiful thing, the coming together of East and West. The Persian martyrs and the American pioneers, and now with an understanding found in the bosom of Mother Africa herself—like two great seas coming together in... one big salty soup! Our children will be a new race of men.

He raises his glass; others join, some hesitantly.

MELINDA: Ah, excuse me, I don't mean to pop anyone's balloons but there is the little issue of consent—as in you need the

approval of all biological parents—before you go making any grand announcements!

TAHIRIH: Melinda, that's why we decided to announce it with you all here.

MELINDA: You mean you planned it this way? Chris?

CHRIS: Semowa.

TAHIRIH: And we have a special request: Not only would we like my parents' and Melinda's consent, we'd like yours as well, Hal, because you've been like a father to Chris.

HAL: You don't need to do that—that stupid door.

RUSTAM *has been trying to open the front door, but the door knob is sticking. CHRIS runs to open it.*

CHRIS: (*Opening door.*) Hal, it's not up for discussion. It's as if Bahá'u'lláh sealed the matter Himself.

RUSTAM: (*Entering, very happy.*) Boy, I love fresh air!

NURA: Rustam!

RUSTAM: What's happening?

NURA: Tahirih o Chris míkhán

طاهره و کریس میخوان

arosí konan.

عروسی کنن.

[*Trans: Tahirih and Chris want to get married.*]

RUSTAM's *happy expression disappears behind an opaque semi-smile.*

CHRIS *goes to shake hands with him, but RUSTAM turns away and walks right back out, slamming the door. A beat where CHRIS looks at TAHIRIH, who looks at NURA, who looks to her parents.*

MR. SOBHANI: Maybe he doesn't know to show his happiness.

Lights fade. End of Scene.

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