

Tabreez

by Marlene Macke *

A Dramatic Reading
July 2019

Pronunciation Guide

| | | | |
|---------------|---------------------|--------------|--------------------|
| ‘Alí | a-lee | Nayríz | nay-reez |
| Andaruni | an-dar-oo-nee | Qá’im | caw-em |
| Anís | a-nees | Qur’án | core-on |
| Asr | as-ear | Salám alakum | sal-awm ala-coom |
| Báb(i) | bob(-ee) | Sám Khán | sawm con |
| Chihriq | cheh-reek | Sházadeh | shaw-za-day |
| darvish | dar-veesh | Shí’ah | she-eh |
| Farid | fa-reed | Siyyid | say-yed |
| Fátimih | faw-teh-meh | Sunní | soon-nee |
| Hadíth | had-eeth | Tabreez(i) | tab-reez(-ee) |
| Islám | ess-lahm | Taqíyyih | tack-ee-yeh |
| Khadíjih | kah-DEE-jah | Tihrán | teh-ron |
| Khánum | caw-noom | Vizier | vah-zir |
| Mírzá Javeed | meer-zaw jah-veed | Yazd | rhymes with jazzed |
| Muhammad | mo-ham-mad | Zanján | zan-John |
| Mullá Mostafa | mol-law moss-ta-faw | | |

* See more about this document at https://bahai-library.com/macke_dramatic_readings

Props

Persian carpets
Dining room table and 4 chairs; table doubles as desk
Chess set on small table
Antique desk clock
Samovar on side table
English china tea set
Persian glass tea glasses
Miscellaneous platters for a Persian meal
Wood lattice screen
2 letters, one one-page, the other several pages
2 reams of paper
Tin of shortbread biscuits
Silk cloth for wrapping ream of paper
2 or more bolts of fabric

Setting: City of Tabreez in Persia
 From Saturday, July 8 to Sunday, July 9, 1850

Scenes: Study in David Chandler's home
 Andaruni of Mírzá Javeed-i-Tabreezi's home (interior
 quarters where women and family members and their
 closest friends congregate)
 Roof of Mírzá Javeed's home (overlooking Barracks
 Square)

CAST
(in order of appearance)

David Chandler.....
Managing Director of Chandler Imports, a small family import firm from Manchester, England, in his mid-forties, unmarried, friendly, capable, intrepid, unconventional

Victoria Chandler.....
His niece, in her early twenties, unmarried, adventurous, curious, plain-spoken

Dr. William Cormick.....
Medical doctor, 31 years old, professional, circumspect, mild-mannered

Mírzá Javeed-i-Tabreezi.....
Merchant, in his early sixties, widowed when Sházadeh was born, affable, broad-minded, peace-loving

Sházadeh.....
Younger child of Mírzá Javeed, in her mid-twenties, widowed, lives with her father, scholarly, thirsty for knowledge and experience

Mullá Mostafa.....
Elder child of Mírzá Javeed, in his mid-forties, a low-ranking Mullá, prickly, pious

Farid.....
Son of Mullá Mostafa, in his early twenties, unmarried, lives with his grandfather, dutiful, fearless, idealistic

Maryam Khán.....
Armenian Christian, in her forties or fifties, married to Sám Khán, Colonel of one of the army regiments stationed in Tabreez, a dress-maker, modest, proud of her heritage

Also Cook, Maidservant [OPTIONAL; these are non-speaking roles; could be one person]

Director.....

BACKGROUND

In 1850, Tabreez is a major commercial centre in Persia due to hundreds of years of trade over the Silk Roads between the Far East and the West. Its 100,000 citizens include a cosmopolitan mix of residents of Turks, Armenians and Persians. Foreign Consular officials, businessmen from European and Russian trading houses and their families comprise the small foreign community.

David Chandler arrived in Tabreez a year earlier to manage the Persian office of Chandler Imports, a third generation family firm based in Manchester, England. One brother manages the home office. Another brother is a medical doctor attached to the British Army in Halifax, Nova Scotia; his unmarried daughter, Victoria, has accompanied David Chandler to Tabreez. David and Victoria have become friends with a resident medical doctor, Dr. William Cormick.

Mírzá Javeed-i-Tabreezi is a wealthy merchant whose business centres on the import and export of spices. He also owns farms and orchards outside the city. Mírzá Javeed's son, Mullá Mostafa, has his own household. Mírzá Javeed's widowed daughter, Sházadeh, and grandson, Farid who works in the family business, both live with him. Maryam Khán, an Armenian dressmaker, is Sházadeh's closest friend.

These families and friends go about their normal activities on the morning of Saturday, July 8, 1850. But Tabreez is in turmoil. A man known to the Persians as Báb-ed-Din purports to be the Qá'im (successor to the Prophet Muhammad whom Muslims believed would return in 1844). The execution of this religious leader is imminent. Will the execution impact their lives?

SCENE 1

Santur music plays in the background. The study of DAVID CHANDLER's home. He and FARID sit at a small table with a chess set. VICTORIA, sitting at a nearby desk, opens a package and pulls out two reams of paper, letters and a tin of shortbread biscuits. Music fades.

[Silence. CHANDLER and FARID staring at a chess board and making moves]

[VICTORIA scans the first short letter and then laughs softly while reading the second longer letter. Both men glance at her, then CHANDLER looks at FARID. FARID blushes and seems embarrassed.]

FARID *[Makes a move, glances again at VICTORIA]*
Check.

CHANDLER *[Looks up at FARID, smiles, knocks over the King]*
Checkmate.

FARID *[Rises]*
Thank you for the game, Effendi. I always learn new strategies from you.

CHANDLER *[Rises too]*
I enjoy our matches, Farid. Your strategy is improving. *[Teasing]* And your concentration would be even stronger if my niece were not distracting you with her giggling.

FARID *[Speechless, more embarrassment]*

CHANDLER *[Takes pity, moves to a new subject]*
But why don't you play more frequently with Mírzá Javeed?

FARID
We could play every night, he loves playing chess. But Grandfather usually lets me win. *[CHANDLER chuckles]*

[VICTORIA stands and collects the men's teacups. She moves to the sideboard, with its samovar and china tea service]

VICTORIA

Have you finished your game already? Let me refresh your tea.

CHANDLER

Thank you, my dear.

FARID

[In some confusion, regretfully]

Oh, Miss Chandler! I must return to Grandfather's house.

VICTORIA

[Smiles, invitingly]

Surely you have time for one more cup of tea, Farid? A tin of shortbread biscuits has just arrived from England, you must try one.

CHANDLER

Now Victoria, you've distracted Farid from his duties enough for one day.

FARID

[At the door, ready to depart]

Goodbye, Effendi, Miss Chandler. Thank you for your gracious welcome.

[FARID exits, VICTORIA's eyes follow him, then CHANDLER and VICTORIA smile at one another]

CHANDLER

[Resets the chess pieces]

That is one clever young man, Victoria. He has natural gifts for trading and for chess. *[Pauses]* What on earth was so funny in your Uncle Anthony's letters?

VICTORIA

Oh, nothing in Uncle's letter, just dry business matters. But Aunt Catherine's letters are full of gossip and humorous observations about tea parties and this season's betrothals and weddings in Manchester. Do you want to read Uncle's letter now?

CHANDLER

[Reaches for letter]

Let me glance at it, but I'm ready to start my reply. [*Quickly scans one-page letter*] Are you ready to begin? [*CHANDLER removes his frock coat and places it on the back of the chair*] Do we have time before Dr. Cormick arrives?

VICTORIA [*Glances at time piece on desk*]
Yes, especially if your letter is as short as his.

CHANDLER [*Makes a face at her, dictates*]
“Dear Brother Anthony,
This letter serves to review the business affairs of Chandler Imports to date. My first year in Tabreez has proven most satisfactory. I have been successful in buying high quality cumin, cardamon, turmeric, cinnamon, and best of all, saffron.” New paragraph.

VICTORIA [*Breaks in*]
– from the invoices and bills of lading, I would say over half our shipments have been supplied by Mírzá Javeed.

CHANDLER
Indeed, and apart from our business dealings, I find him most affable and –

VICTORIA [*Teases*]
– and he plays chess –

CHANDLER [*Smiles*]
– and he plays an excellent game of chess. He's the only Persian who has invited me to join him at tea houses and even the Persian public baths, but let's leave that development out of the letter.

VICTORIA [*Shakes her head, gets up to refill her tea cup*]
Persian public baths. Few in England could fathom such a custom. They would find it impossible to visualize all the men in the neighbourhood gathering together to bathe, drink tea, talk business and gossip –

CHANDLER [*Breaks off pacing*]
– except for the one day a week when all the women gather together to bathe, drink tea and speculate as to which daughters might suit their sons in

marriage. *[Puts hand up to forestall VICTORIA saying something]* And we'll definitely omit the story of you going to the public baths with the ladies.

VICTORIA *[Grins]*

The Persian ladies were shocked the first time I arrived with Sházadeh. I could feel their eyes on me, staring in horrid fascination. Thank heavens they are used to me now. They even return my greetings.

CHANDLER *[Admiringly]*

Victoria, you have inherited your intrepid nature from me. *[Pauses]* And my dear, I am grateful for this genuine friendship with Mírzá Javeed. He speaks proudly of his Persian heritage but I'm amused by how curious he is about England and our ways.

VICTORIA *[Exclaims]*

His daughter too. Sházadeh was thrilled when he installed that Western dining room table and chairs in their private family quarters.

CHANDLER

Spending time with him has proven to be a nice antidote for the tiresome socializing with the European community. I'm weary of being bombarded with invitations to their endless soirées. *[Plaintively]* Must we accept them all?

VICTORIA *[Laughs]*

Oh, Uncle David, you are one of the few "eligible bachelors" among the Europeans here. You simply cannot fend off the mamas who have daughters to marry off.

CHANDLER *[Grins, shrugs]*

Why do you think I begged your parents to let you join me in Tabreez, my dear? You are my secretary, hostess and shield from scheming mothers.

[Opens mouth to start dictating again]

VICTORIA *[Interrupts again]*

Wait! I see a pattern here. Mamas will be mamas. English mamas plot their

children's marriages over cups of tea and their weekly games of whist. Persian mamas plot their children's marriages during their weekly visits to the public baths.

CHANDLER

Ah, but your theory falls amiss with your own mother. How do you explain her allowing you to move to Tabreez?

VICTORIA

Simple. She expects me to marry a diplomat or wealthy merchant. Mother clearly thought there would be more scope for husband material here than in the wilds of Nova Scotia – *[Both CHANDLER and VICTORIA laugh]*

CHANDLER

– populated by soldiers and farmers and a sea captain or two. Now, Victoria, back to business.

VICTORIA *[Glances at clock again]*

Dr. Cormick should be here in half an hour.

CHANDLER

Very good. *[Dictates]*

“In looking back over our first year of business here, dear Brother, I am very satisfied with our growth. I foresee Chandler Imports enjoying a prosperous future in the years to come.” New paragraph.

“Meanwhile, Victoria has been invaluable in helping with my business correspondence and social duties –”

VICTORIA *[Interrupts]*

Uncle David, are we going to tell him anything of my Persian adventures?

CHANDLER *[Laughs]*

Uncle Anthony would be appalled. You know he's the most conservative one in the family.

[Stands to pace about, continues dictating]

“She thanks you for sending packages of writing paper and shortbread from home, and joins me in sending you our fondest regards. I remain your faithful brother, etc., etc.”

VICTORIA *[Blots her shorthand]*

I'll transcribe this and have it ready for your signature before lunch.

CHANDLER

What are your plans today, my dear? Were you thinking about going out?

VICTORIA

Yes, I plan to go to Sházadeh Tabreezi's home this afternoon. Why do you ask?

CHANDLER

Can't you stay home today? I worry about all the turmoil in the streets. The crowds can be unpredictable.

VICTORIA

I promise to be careful, Uncle David. Sházadeh is expecting me. And I have an appointment with Maryam Khán.

CHANDLER *[Resigned, but practical]*

Very well. Two of our servants can escort you to her house, and I'll speak to them about taking the long way around. Don't go through the bazaar today. Wear that long Persian cloak and veil that covers you, and make sure two of the Tabreezi servants escort you home.

VICTORIA *[Walks towards window]*

I did hear more hubbub outside this morning.

CHANDLER

That's my concern. The unrest has spilled over into the Armenian Quarter. And why? *[Slightly indignantly, self-centred]* We Europeans have nothing to do with local religious strife.

VICTORIA *[Returns to desk; collects letter paper from desk drawer, prepares pen and ink]*

Cook said it took longer than usual to get to the market and back this morning. I wonder if anything developed overnight.

CHANDLER

Cormick may have news. All I know is what we knew a few days ago – the Grand Vizier has commanded the Persian prophet be executed here in Tabreez. *[Sighs, shakes his head]* I do hope things settle down quickly. It isn't good for business.

VICTORIA

This new Grand Vizier – is he like our prime minister at home? He seems eager to eradicate all the prophet's followers as well.

CHANDLER

[Nods]

He could do it too. This Vizier is to be feared. He holds the most power in the land. Some say he controls the Sháh.

VICTORIA

Sházadeh told me he's furious that his predecessor did not slay Báb-ed-Din two years ago when he had the chance.

CHANDLER

*[Amused on hearing the name of
SHÁZADEH]*

For a Persian woman, Sházadeh seems well informed – but *[nods]* I've heard much the same.

VICTORIA

[Door bell chimes]

Oh my, Dr. Cormick has arrived early. Let me see if the samovar has enough hot water.

[CHANDLER dons his coat again; DR. CORMICK enters, goes to shake hands with CHANDLER]

CHANDLER

Cormick, welcome. We are so pleased you could join us before your patients claim you for the day.

CORMICK

Thank you, Chandler, it is always a pleasure spending time with you and Miss Chandler.

CHANDLER

Join us in a cup of tea until Cook announces breakfast.

VICTORIA *[VICTORIA proceeds to pour the tea and serve CORMICK, her uncle and herself]*

Good morning, Dr. Cormick. You can join our impromptu anniversary breakfast; Uncle David and I just realized we've been here for a year now.

CORMICK *[Slightly bows to VICTORIA]*

I am honoured. *[Turns to CHANDLER]* Tell me some of the highlights of your first year in Persia.

CHANDLER *[Reflects, pauses, sips his tea]*

One of them, my friend, has been getting to know Mírzá Javeed-i-Tabreezi. You must know him.

CORMICK

Yes, certainly. Mírzá Javeed is greatly respected by the merchants in the bazaar. And the Europeans appreciate that he speaks English. They find him trustworthy.

CHANDLER

We've become friends. Despite the differences in our age and cultures, I think of him as a kindred spirit.

CORMICK

He has an unusual family.

CHANDLER

He certainly speaks often of his daughter, Sházadeh Khanum, a widow. She was married young to a mullá, a friend of her brother. But her much older husband died some five years into the marriage.

CORMICK

I remember. He died of a heart attack at the Mosque one Friday.

VICTORIA

Sházadeh has a gift for languages. She speaks Persian, Arabic and Turkish, and learned English just from reading the King James Bible.

CORMICK

[Neutrally]

From my experience, it's highly unusual for a Persian patriarch to permit, let alone boast about, a daughter learning several languages.

CHANDLER

That's what I understand. I'm sure he told me only because I'm *not* Persian.

VICTORIA

Sházadeh told her father that one day she wants to travel to the West –

CHANDLER *[Mildly snorts, interrupts]*

– however unlikely that is. Yet, I confess my own niece may have inadvertently encouraged that desire. When he learned that Victoria had accompanied me to Persia, he asked if I would permit her to tutor his daughter in English.

VICTORIA

Sházadeh and I have become dear friends. I visit her several times a week.

CORMICK *[Ruefully]*

Many Europeans feel it's not the done thing to fraternize with the locals. However, I completely empathize with you, Miss Chandler.

VICTORIA

Ah yes, did you not mention your mother is Armenian?

CORMICK

Indeed, my Irish father met and married my mother here in Tabreez. I know all the Armenian families in the city. *[Pauses, a little shyly]* It's too soon to make an official public statement, but I'm glad to share this news with close friends. Miss Tamar Davoudi, a second cousin on my mother's side, and I are engaged to be married.

VICTORIA *[Claps her hands together]*

What delightful news, Dr. Cormick.

CHANDLER *[Jumps up to shake his hand]*

Congratulations, old chap.

VICTORIA *[Bantering]*

When this betrothal becomes public, it may divert attention from my

Persian adventures.

CHANDLER

I can scarcely fathom how the English ladies find Victoria's exploits such fodder for gossip. But the European community here is so small, they've designated her their loveable young eccentric.

VICTORIA

[Ruefully]

Stemming solely, I suspect, from the indulgence of Consul Steven's wife.

CHANDLER

Lady Stevens has made something of a pet of my niece. The Stevens have invited us to dine several times at the British Consulate.

VICTORIA

[Mildly impatient]

Uncle David, enough of this chit chat! Dr. Cormick, what can you tell us about the Persian prophet? The unrest in Tabreez seems to be accelerating.

CORMICK

[Turns to address VICTORIA directly]

Báb-ed-Din? I actually met him two years ago. Did I tell you I was called to attend him? I found him a handsome young man, not very tall and quite fair in comparison to most dark-bearded Persian men. *[Lost in thought]* His voice was beautiful. Melodious.

VICTORIA

Was this after his trial in 1848?

CORMICK

That's correct.

VICTORIA

That was a year before we arrived. What were the charges?

CORMICK

Most of the clerics were dead set against the arrival of a new prophet claiming to be the successor to their Prophet Muhammad. I personally think

the clerics dismissed the claims of all these various Qá'ims or Promised Ones because they don't want to cede any of their authority or power. In the case of Báb-ed-Din, they planned to disprove his claim by holding a show trial here in Tabreez. However, he proclaimed unequivocally – and very publicly – that he *was* their Qá'im. They say the hall went dead quiet. Then one of the senior clerics challenged him and after a bit of uproar, Báb-ed-Din apparently stood up and walked out of the room.

VICTORIA

I'm still not clear on why he stirs up such hatred.

CHANDLER

Good question. I heard Báb-ed-Din has been a prisoner of the state, isolated in a remote corner of the country. How can he stir up the enmity of the clerics so much?

VICTORIA

Yes, why *this* man? As you say, several so-called prophets have arisen in the past six years. Some kind of “millennial fever” among the Muslims?

CORMICK *[Nodding]*

Oh, several, but the numbers tell the story. This Bábí movement spread like wildfire and, apparently, thousands throughout Persia accepted his claim. Among the various sects arising since 1844, his has been by far the most successful.

VICTORIA

Ah.

CHANDLER

Let me see if I understand the sequence of events correctly. Two years ago the clergy convened a trial to denounce Báb-ed-Din's claims. Instead, he proclaimed his prophethood in their very midst. But why didn't they execute him then?

CORMICK

I have no idea. After he left the hall, the clerics decided the Governor's bodyguards should administer a beating. But the guards refused the order, saying it was a religious matter. So the chief of the religious court took it

upon himself to wield a nasty instrument of torture, the bastinado. In his rage, one of the blows smashed Báb-ed-Din in the face. That is why I was called in.

VICTORIA *[A statement rather than a question]*
And he impressed you with his demeanour.

CORMICK
I admired him very much. He was mild and courteous, and not at all the wild-eyed fanatic that some might assume a Mussulman prophet would be. *[Reflects a moment]* Did I mention that some Armenian carpenters working in the prison found him reading the Christian Bible? *[Starts slightly]* And here's another oddity – later that same year, the cleric who had personally beaten Báb-ed-Din died a nasty death.

VICTORIA *[Curiously]*
How did he die?

CORMICK
He died from an unexplained paralysis. Every muscle in his body suddenly froze. Nothing in our medical science could treat or relieve him. He could neither swallow nor breathe and then his heart just stopped. He expired in excruciating agony.

VICTORIA *[Hand to throat]*
Oh.

CHANDLER *[Gives Victoria a “for heaven’s sake” look]*
So, after the hearing and his beating, the Persian prophet was sent back to prison?

CORMICK
Back to Chihriq where he must have been largely forgotten. Remember the old Sháh died about that time and turmoil is the norm when a new Sháh takes the throne. And Báb-ed-Din's greatest antagonist, the previous Grand Vizier, was dead too.

CHANDLER
But the wrath of the authorities continues against this Bábi sect. We heard one account of the Sháh's troops ferociously attacking the Bábis at a place called Shaykh Tabarsí.

VICTORIA

And just this past February in Tihrán several well-known followers were executed after refusing to recant their beliefs. Sházadeh told me one of her father's oldest friends was among them. Indeed, this new Grand Vizier seems more determined than the previous one in wiping out this movement.

CORMICK

True. Attacks have accelerated all over the country. The towns of Yazd, Nayríz and Zanján have all witnessed deadly assaults on the Bábis. By all accounts, hundreds, maybe thousands, have been tortured and massacred.

VICTORIA

And this brings us to today. The Grand Vizier ordered Báb-ed-Din returned to Tabreez and executed.

CORMICK

He's been here three days now. It could happen at any moment.

VICTORIA

[Notices Cook standing in doorway]

Gentlemen, Cook is signaling that breakfast is ready. Shall we go in?

CORMICK

[Smiles, changes the subject as they go into breakfast; offers his arm to VICTORIA]

Miss Chandler, is it true you went horseback riding a few weeks ago, disguised in men's clothing?

[CHANDLER shakes his head; exit, all laughing]

Santur music rises. Lights fade to black. Music fades.

SCENE 2

Same morning. Santur music fades. Lights rise. Andaruni of Mírzá Javeed-i-Tabreezi's home, with a wooden lattice screen at the back of the stage, and a chess set sitting on a small table. MÍRZÁ JAVEED, MULLÁ MOSTAFA, FARID getting ready to sit down at a Western dining room table to eat breakfast, SHÁZADEH is serving them.

MÍRZÁ JAVEED *[SHÁZADEH hands him a glass of tea]*
Sházadeh-joon, what plans have you made for yourself today?

SHÁZADEH
Respected Father, with your permission, I hope to welcome Victoria Chandler here for an English lesson. Maryam Khanum is coming too, and we are going to have dress fittings for Victoria Khanum. She loves the first dress Maryam made her so much, she ordered a second one.

MULLÁ MOSTAFA *[Exasperated]*
Father, this has gone too far. Why do you allow your daughter to continue with these useless lessons? No Persian woman needs to learn English nor any other language. It is not correct to have that Englishwoman coming to our house. I am appalled. What if I were to enter my own home and see her face?

[SHÁZADEH continues to serve tea to MULLÁ MOSTAFA and FARID. FARID busy eating]

MÍRZÁ JAVEED *[Smiling, but firm]*
Let me remind you, my son. This is still *my* home. Now that you are a grown man with your own family, your own home, your chosen path of service in the Mosque, you are a guest in my home.

MULLÁ MOSTAFA *[Continues, not listening to MÍRZÁ JAVEED]*
And this Armenian dressmaker. She spends far too much time here. Why does my sister need so many clothes?

MÍRZÁ JAVEED
You know your sister and Maryam Khán are friends.

MULLÁ MOSTAFA

But an Armenian? She is not a fit companion for Persians. She is Christian.

MÍRZÁ JAVEED

You forget, Mostafa-jan, we have traded with Armenian merchants for many centuries.

FARID

And, Father, Grandfather has often said merchants have no nationality except that of buying and selling.

SHÁZADEH

Does not our Qur'án, the sacred Word of God, instruct us to be respectful to the People of the Book?

MULLÁ MOSTAFA [*Barely suppresses anger*]

Do not throw the Holy Qur'án in my face. No woman can begin to understand it properly.

FARID

[*Turns to*
SHÁZADEH]

Is this the verse you refer to? [*Strikes a reverent pose and recites*] Say: “We believe in God, and that which has been bestowed from on high upon us, ... and that which has been given to Moses and Jesus... We make no distinction between any of them, and to Him, we have submitted. [*Looking questioning to SHÁZADEH*]

SHÁZADEH [*Nods*]

And does not the Word of God make it lawful for Muslims to marry Jewish and Christian women?

[*MULLÁ MOSTAFA continues a slow burn,*
MÍRZÁ JAVEED continues eating]

FARID

Are we not taught there are People of the Book who are righteous and recite the revelation of God during the night and fall prostrate before Him?

SHÁZADEH *[Turns to MULLÁ MOSTAFA]*

So the Prophet tells us that Jews and Christians are believers in God and can be righteous, and he gives permission for our men to marry them.

MULLÁ MOSTAFA *[Hotly]*

If they do not submit to God through the teachings of Muhammad, then we should not waste our time with them. *[Triumphantly]* Let me remind you that God forbids us from taking them as friends and those who take them as friends are wrongdoers.

SHÁZADEH *[Controlling herself to be humble]*

Oh, Mostafa-jan, your knowledge of the Holy Qur'án far exceeds my own, but I do believe that particular verse forbids us to take as friends those who have fought us because of religion or driven us from our homes. None of the Jews or Christians in Tabreez have done any of those things. We are united in the trade of the Silk Road.

MULLÁ MOSTAFA *[Shakes his head in denial]*

No, no, no, you just do not understand.

MIRZA JAVEED *[Interrupts]*

Tolerance, my children. Yes, there are many references in the Qur'án to the brotherhood we share with the Jews and Christians – yes, Jews, Christians and Muslims all descend from the great prophet Abraham – but the lessons I wish you would all take to heart is the Prophet's teachings on tolerance. On mercy. On respect for all.

SHÁZADEH

Papa-jan, thank you for reminding us. The life of the Prophet Muhammad gives us the pattern to follow in our own lives. Respect for all peoples is surely among the most noble virtues.

FARID *[Turns to SHÁZADEH, teasing]*

And now, Auntie-joon, you are going to recall one of your favourite Hadíths from the life of the Prophet.

SHÁZADEH *[Smiles]*

Which one, Farid-jan? I have many favourites.

FARID

The Prophet was sitting by a street with his friends and a funeral procession passed by. He stood up. One of his companions commented that the funeral was for a Jew, implying, why show respect for a non-believer? The Prophet replied, "Was he not a human being?"

MULLÁ MOSTAFA *[Defiant, embarrassed, glares at each of them in turn]*

You are all making fun of me. No wonder the other clerics amuse themselves at my expense. That my sister, a widow, remains in her father's home and refuses to marry again. That my own father allows her unnatural privileges such as learning to read. That she dares to dispute with me about the Word of God. That my own son refuses to follow in my footsteps.

MÍRZÁ JAVEED *[Admonishing but in a kindly tone, jumping to the comment about FARID]*

Mostafa-jan, how can you be critical of your own son? Farid is a fine young man, esteemed by everyone in the bazaar. As a young boy, he obeyed your wishes and studied the Qur'án. He just happens to be more gifted in business affairs.

SHÁZADEH

And remember how proud great-grandfather was of Farid.

MÍRZÁ JAVEED *[Nods]*

Can it be so wrong for him to want to follow in what is, after all, the family business? You should be happy that Farid will carry it on after I am gone.

SHÁZADEH *[With distress]*

No Papa-jan, do not speak of when you will be gone. We lost Grandfather such a short time ago.

MULLÁ MOSTAFA *[Meanly]*

Yes, dear sister, you should beseech God daily that Father lives a long life. When I become head of this family, you will act like a proper Persian woman. No more lessons. No foreign friends. I will see to it that you are married to the first presentable man who comes along. In fact, I already have some candidates in mind.

SHÁZADEH *[Leaps to her feet, horrified. MÍRZÁ JAVEED and FARID also exhibit shock]*

No!

MÍRZÁ JAVEED *[Motions to SHÁZADEH]*
Sit. Sit.

MULLÁ MOSTAFA *[Barrels ahead]*
But the very first thing I will do is chop this Western dining table into
firewood so we can eat like proper Persians again – on the floor.
*[SHÁZADEH and FARID both look aghast at
MULLÁ MOSTAFA]*

MÍRZÁ JAVEED *[Sternly, raises voice, unconsciously runs his
hand protectively over the table]*
Mostafa! Enough of that. You will *not* speak disrespectfully to your sister.
Do not shame and frighten her with such threats.

MULLÁ MOSTAFA *[Truculently]*
I'm just speaking the truth.

MÍRZÁ JAVEED *[Meaningfully]*
You would do well to remember that Islam permits women the right to
inherit and own property. *[The peacemaker]* But let us turn to other matters.
[Fondly, turning to FARID] My beloved grandson. Have you already been
out to the market this morning?

FARID *[Animated, glad to have the conversation
shift]*
I have, Grandfather. The crowds are agitated by the rumours. *[Turns to
SHÁZADEH, with concern]* Don't go out today, Auntie-joon. The streets
are too dangerous.

MÍRZÁ JAVEED
I agree with Farid, my princess. Stay home today.

MULLÁ MOSTAFA *[With an air of satisfaction]*
It'll die down as soon as that so-called Qá'im – that Báb-ed-Din – is dead.
[Turns to SHÁZADEH] And for once I agree with Farid. Do not leave the
house today.

SHÁZADEH *[Mildly, reasonably]*
Not everyone feels the way you do, respected brother. He may be a

prisoner, but Báb-ed-Din has been the guest of one of the Governor's friends for the past three days. From all accounts, he's been treated with courtesy. *[Turns to MÍRZÁ JAVEED]* Do you think the Governor will reprieve this death penalty?

MÍRZÁ JAVEED *[Shakes his head]*

I doubt it, princess-joon. I can't see how they will manage to forestall the Grand Vizier this time. No Bábi in Tabreez is safe either.

FARID

Can they not see the possibility of his claim?

MULLÁ MOSTAFA *[Temper rises again]*

Do. Not. Start. Again. He is a heretic and a pretender, nothing more. He's led hundreds of people astray with his wild ravings.

FARID

Many think he has fulfilled prophecies.

MULLÁ MOSTAFA

If only those attracted to him had gone to their own mullás and begged for clarification of his claims. *[Grandly]* Any mullá could refute his meagre claims.

SHÁZADEH

But what about Báb-ed-Din's statement here in Tabreez two years ago? Your respected friend, himself one of the most senior clerics and the step-father of Farid's oldest friend, was there.

MULLÁ MOSTAFA *[Grows more agitated]*

I tell you, he is nothing more than a deluded lunatic.

SHÁZADEH

The Crown Prince's own tutor asked Báb-ed-Din who he claimed to be. He replied, "I am, I am, I am, the Promised One –"

MULLÁ MOSTAFA

Stop!

FARID

[Continues the quote]

" – I am the One –"

MULLÁ MOSTAFA *[Interrupts]*
Blasphemy!

FARID
– whose name you have for a thousand years invoked...”

MULLÁ MOSTAFA *[Leaps to his feet, throws down his glass of tea, rushes out the door]*
You are all deranged!

[SHÁZADEH rises to mop up tea]

MÍRZÁ JAVEED *[Urgently]*
Children, you go too far. Stop provoking him, I fear it could be dangerous.

FARID
Beloved Grandfather, I am serious. Even you were moved by Báb-ed-Din’s words, you who takes no interest in spiritual matters.

MÍRZÁ JAVEED
Hush, Farid. Finish your breakfast. We must leave immediately for the bazaar.

SHÁZADEH
Papa-jan, you be careful in the marketplace today too. Farid, stay near your grandfather and protect him.

MÍRZÁ JAVEED *[Pretends to be indignant]*
I do not need “protection,” my princess, the solace of my heart.

FARID
Grandfather. Auntie-joon is telling *me* not to go running off and getting myself into trouble today. She doesn’t want *me* in the middle of the tumult.

MÍRZÁ JAVEED
Just be mindful of possible perils today.

SHÁZADEH
Listen to your grandfather, my precious nephew. We need you safe.
[MÍRZÁ JAVEED and FARID exit,

SHÁZADEH remains, clearing the table]

Santur music rises. Lights fade to black. Music fades.

SCENE 3

Afternoon of July 8. Santur music. Lights rise. Andaruni of Mirzá Javeed-i-Tabreezi's home, with breakfast things removed. Music fades.

[SHÁZADEH and MARYAM are examining some bolts of cloth on the table. VICTORIA enters]

[Looks up, walks over to VICTORIA]

Welcome, your presence is an ornament, Victoria Khanum. Please come in.

VICTORIA

To you peace, dear Sházadeh. May your home be blessed. Please accept this small gift.

SHÁZADEH *[Unwraps cloth from package]*

Writing paper! Thank you, Victoria Khanum.

VICTORIA

My uncle in England sends me reams of it because I'm keeping a journal of my life in Persia. I am delighted to share it with you. You can practice writing English.

SHÁZADEH *[Wryly]*

Now that you have discovered that Maryam will sew for you, we haven't had as much time to practise writing.

VICTORIA

I'm thrilled to have another dress just like the Persian women wear. How I love this silk material. Yesterday I described it in my journal, and I've also written to my mother describing my wonderful Tabreezi seamstress. *[Turns to MARYAM]* Good afternoon, dear Maryam.

MARYAM

Greetings, Miss Chandler. Are you ready for your fitting?

VICTORIA *[Moves behind screen to change]*

Please, Maryam, I've asked you, just call me Victoria. *[Maryam shyly smiles, nods]*

SHÁZADEH *[Calls out, teasing]*

Will you wear this new dress to the next European tea party?

VICTORIA

I think not. I've scandalized my fellow Europeans quite enough this past year. But these garments allow me the freedom to pass unnoticed in the streets and markets of Tabreez.

SHÁZADEH

Remember, Victoria Khanum, only with groups of ladies, or servants. It is not proper for a lady to walk alone through the city.

[VICTORIA nods, smiles in assent]

MARYAM

Turn to the side, please, Victoria Khanum.

VICTORIA

We do not have the equivalent to "Khanum" in English. What a graceful expression.

SHÁZADEH

We use it as a mark of respect for any woman or for a great lady or as a term of endearment for a close friend.

[VICTORIA and MIRIAM return to room]

VICTORIA

Then we are all Khanums, Sházadeh Khanum, Maryam Khanum...

MARYAM *[Laughs]*

Oh no, my lady, I could not be Maryam Khanum, I am only a dressmaker.

SHÁZADEH *[Mildly indignant]*

Nonsense, Maryam Khanum, you are the wife of one of the most respected Colonels in the army, and you are my dear friend. *[Turns to VICTORIA again]* And as you know, Victoria Khanum, we use “joon” among close friends and family as a further token of love and affection. Victoria-joon, Maryam-joon. *[All smile at one another]*

VICTORIA

I find it fascinating we three come from such different backgrounds. For instance, *[Turns to MARYAM]* I know you are Armenian.

MARYAM

Yes, both my husband and I. Armenians have lived in Tabreez for many generations as traders on the Silk Road. However, my husband’s family were all soldiers and my family are mostly priests.

SHÁZADEH

And do you realize, Victoria-joon, that the Armenians are Christian?

VICTORIA *[Intrigued]*

I recall Dr. Cormick telling me that some Armenian carpenters found Báb-ed-Din reading the Bible in jail, but I did not make the connection that the carpenters themselves were Christian. Tell me more. How did Armenians come to be Christian?

MARYAM

*[With a
modest hint
of pride]*

The Apostles Bartholomew and Thaddeus came to my homeland in the first century after the crucifixion, and by 300 AD our nation proclaimed Christianity as the state religion.

VICTORIA

Then you believe in the Bible?

MARYAM

Of course.

VICTORIA

And you follow the teachings of Jesus?

MARYAM

Yes.

VICTORIA

Do you use the Nicene Creed?

MARYAM

[Amused, at this interrogation]

Yes, of course!

VICTORIA

Then how are you different from me?

MARYAM

Between you and me? I'm sure we believe the same things. But we Armenians follow the Eastern Orthodox church.

VICTORIA

We read the same stories in the Bible, we love Jesus, we try to follow his teachings. But the different churches developed their own rites and rituals, and *[Pausing for effect]* no doubt, all those decisions were made by men. *[All laugh in mutual understanding]* And yet, there are intriguing hints that women played prominent roles during the earliest days of Christianity. Look at Mary Magdalene and Mary, Mother of Jesus. They were the ones who stood vigil at the crucifixion while all the male disciples ran away and hid. And Jesus first appeared to Mary Magdalene, not to one of the male disciples.

MARYAM

In the Gospels and the letters of the Apostle Paul, several women are mentioned by name, many of them were leaders of the home churches, even considered as apostles – Joanna, Priscilla, Lidia. My favourite is Phoebe.

SHÁZADEH

It is the same in Islam too, of course. Despite veneration towards Khadíjih, the wife of the Prophet Muhammad and his daughter Fátimih, men control our religion. We will never see a Muslim woman preaching a sermon in the Mosque on Friday –

VICTORIA

– or a Christian woman presiding at the service on Sunday. Men control my religion and my society too –

SHÁZADEH

– this in spite of our Prophet Muhammad preaching reforms which gave women greater freedoms than any previous religion. My culture, however, subjugates women. *[With a hint of bitterness]* I’ve shared with you some of the differences between how my father and my brother treat me. *[Turns aside to hide her emotion]*

VICTORIA *[Acknowledges this moment of connection]*

I believe that sums up my culture too. In Christianity, the men draw their justification from the admonitions of St. Paul, such as, *[Wiggles fingers]* “Wives, submit yourselves to your husbands.”

SHÁZADEH

Persian culture practises that too. But I will never believe that the Prophet Muhammad condoned men viciously beating their wives. When my father came to tell me my husband was dead, he found me in bed, sick, with a broken arm, covered in bruises old and new. *[Clutches her arm in remembered pain]*

VICTORIA

Why didn’t you tell your father that your husband bludgeoned you?

SHÁZADEH *[Turns away, shakes her head]*

I was ashamed. Feared I was a bad wife.

MARYAM

No...

SHÁZADEH *[Turns back to face them]*

My father was so staggered at my injuries, he shouted, “That savage swine! If he were not already dead, I’d kill him with my own hands.” He brought me home. I am safe here.

[Silence. VICTORIA embraces SHÁZADEH]

MARYAM

[Reflectively]

How do we separate our sacred teachings and the behaviour of men and women? I truly believe the holy men who convened the councils in the early days had sincere intentions. They hoped to root out heresy and disunity and agree on rituals that would be pleasing to God. *[Turns to VICTORIA]* I can see the skepticism on your face, Victoria Khanum, but remember I come from a long line of Armenian priests... *[VICTORIA nods]* We all have imperfect understandings of what God wants for us.

SHÁZADEH

“Imperfect understandings.” That’s a positive way of looking at it.

VICTORIA *[With genuine interest]*

Maryam Khanum, what would you say are the central doctrines of your faith?

MARYAM

The Doctrine of our Saviour may be divided into three elements – Faith, Sacraments, and Duty.

VICTORIA

Oh my goodness, I am Armenian Christian although I was baptized and raised in the Church of England. *[All laugh]*

SHÁZADEH

And your spiritual beliefs would also find harmony in Islam because we know and love Jesus too. *[VICTORIA looks surprised]* Yes, we believe he was a Prophet of God, as were Abraham and Moses.

VICTORIA

But who is Muhammad? We Christians do not accept him as a Prophet.

MARYAM *[Smiles, earnestly]*

I want to learn more about Muhammad too. Sházadeh-joon told me last year that Moses, Jesus and Muhammad had all descended from the family of Abraham; it made me think that somehow all the religions must be one, or if not one, at the very least, they have connections that we should know about.

VICTORIA

– if we share Abraham as our ancestor, then we are cousins –

SHÁZADEH *[Eagerly, to both women]*

I have been making a study of the prophecies of the Bible and the Qur'án, my Holy Book. Perhaps you would like to join me?

VICTORIA

Oh yes! I would love to learn more about the teachings and beliefs of our religions. But *today* interests me even more. I want to understand what is happening in Tabreez today. The stories about Báb-ed-Din attract me.

[MARYAM nods in agreement. They arise from their break and resume dress fitting]

MARYAM

I would be glad to join your studies too.

VICTORIA

Sházadeh-joon, you've told me something of Báb-ed-Din and his followers such as the killings in Tihrán, but what does it all mean?

SHÁZADEH

Let's begin right now. In a true religion, the prophet gives a covenant to his followers. One of the tenets of each covenant promises that the prophet will return in the future.

MARYAM

The Jewish Covenant and the teachings of Jesus both promise the Return.

SHÁZADEH

And so did the Covenant of the Prophet Muhammad. We have several prophecies and Hadíths about the signs that signal his return.

VICTORIA

Hadíths?

SHÁZADEH

“Hadíths” are the collected sayings and deeds of our Prophet Muhammad. There are thousands of them.

VICTORIA

*[A
statem
ent,*

*rather
than a
questi
on]*

And Báb-ed-Din claims now to be the return of the Prophet Muhammad.

SHÁZADEH

The prophecies refer to the Day of Resurrection, the appearance of the Promised One. In Shí'ah Islam, which I follow, we are awaiting the Qá'im, or He Who Arises.

MARYAM

Give us an example of a sign that will happen when Muhammad returns.

*[MARYAM and VICTORIA gather closer
around SHÁZADEH]*

SHÁZADEH

One of them ...

Lights fade to black. Santur music rises.

SCENE 4

Evening of July 8. Santur music. Lights rise. Andaruni of Mirzá Javeed's home, with table set for dinner. Music fades.

[MULLÁ MOSTAFA and MÍRZÁ JAVEED enter the room in deep conversation. Just as they enter, SHÁZADEH slips unseen behind the screen upstage]

MULLÁ MOSTAFA *[Intensely]*
Papa-jan, you must declare yourself publicly to be against Báb-ed-Din and his wild ravings.

MÍRZÁ JAVEED *[Patiently]*
Son, I never discuss religious matters in public. No one expects it of me.

MULLÁ MOSTAFA
You know it requires more than personal belief, Father. You must be *seen* as a believer.

MÍRZÁ JAVEED *[Still patient]*
I'm seen at the Mosque on Fridays, I pay Zakah as my obligation to the poor, I fast during Ramadan. I affirm there is only one God and Muhammad is his prophet.

MULLÁ MOSTAFA *[Accusingly]*
But do you pray five times a day?

MÍRZÁ JAVEED *[Patiently, but growing less so]*
I do not have to explain myself to you. My prayers are private, they are not your business. Nor do I flaunt my piety for every lout on the street to notice *[Slight pause, meaningful glance]* – as some do –

MULLÁ MOSTAFA *[Barely listening]*
– and why have you not been on pilgrimage yet?

MÍRZÁ JAVEED

Pilgrimage is required only once in a believer's life. I am still a young man. I intended to go a few years ago, but with the onset of Grandfather's illness, I was needed here. Now I am waiting for Farid to take over the business and then I will go.

MULLÁ MOSTAFA *[Still agitated]*

Not enough! You must denounce him in public. Even those *suspected* of sympathy toward the Bábi sect will be exposed and rounded up. The latest command from the Grand Vizier permits this. I applaud it.

MÍRZÁ JAVEED

My son, you worry too much.

MULLÁ MOSTAFA

What if one of your business competitors with a grudge informs the authorities against you?

MÍRZÁ JAVEED *[Stubbornly]*

No one would believe such claims against me.

MULLÁ MOSTAFA

Or one of the Vizier's henchmen suspects you of insufficient piety?

MÍRZÁ JAVEED *[Waves a hand dismissively]*

I do not fear for myself.

MULLÁ MOSTAFA *[Clearly worried]*

Then what about Farid? People will remember he associated with Zunúzí, a known follower of Báb-ed-Din.

MÍRZÁ JAVEED *[Heatedly]*

No one would attack my grandson! And he's not religious. Everyone knows he is a merchant, not someone caught up in this religious fervour. *[Upon quick reflection]* But it would be a wise precaution if you talked to him.

MULLÁ MOSTAFA *[Indignantly, then almost pleadingly]*

Me? You expect Farid to listen to *me*? Please, Papa, you talk to him and warn him of the danger to himself. *And* to his family. He will listen to you.

[SHÁZADEH enters from behind the screen]

SHÁZADEH

Mostafa. Welcome. Are you staying for dinner?

MULLÁ MOSTAFA *[Grumbles]*

I do not need a welcome to my own home. *[MÍRZÁ JAVEED and SHÁZADEH stifle smiles]* I just came to speak to Father on an urgent matter.

MÍRZÁ JAVEED *[To SHÁZADEH]*

We have finished our talk, princess-joon. *[Turns to MULLÁ MOSTAFA]* Please do join us for the evening meal. *[Pauses, looks sideways at MULLÁ MOSTAFA]* Sunset arrives, my son. Join me on the roof for the prayer of Asr while my daughter prepares our meal.

[MULLÁ MOSTAFA nods in satisfaction, MULLÁ MOSTAFA and MÍRZÁ JAVEED exit. SHÁZADEH retrieves an extra chair to set at the table, rearranges items on the table. FARID enters]

FARID

Auntie-joon, I have distressing news.

SHÁZADEH *[Distracted, politely]*

What is it, Farid?

FARID

Zunúzí has been arrested and thrown in jail with Báb-ed-Din.

SHÁZADEH *[Alarmed, her attention caught]*

Oh dear, he will be put to death. *[Pauses, reflecting]*

FARID

Zunúzí wished nothing more than to be with his beloved Lord, the Báb. Now he is, and perhaps he will be through all the worlds of God. *[Glances around]* Is Grandfather home?

SHÁZADEH

Your grandfather and father have gone to say their prayers. Why not join

them?

FARID

Grandfather? *[They both smile]*

SHÁZADEH

Hush, it was to placate your father. Mostafa worries that our family might be targeted by the Vizier's spies. He fears these spies will denounce every soul not seen to be sufficiently devout.

FARID

[Teasingly]

Beloved Auntie, were you listening behind the screen again?

SHÁZADEH

[Smiles]

Do not tell Mostafa. You know your father. Now go up to the roof and make him happy.

[FARID starts to exit but MÍRZÁ JAVEED, MULLÁ MOSTAFA enter. The men proceed to sit at the table]

MÍRZÁ JAVEED

Thank you, Sházadeh-joon. Please join us.

MULLÁ MOSTAFA *[Will not give up]*

Father. It is not proper.

MÍRZÁ JAVEED

Son, I will have *all* my family at my table. Sházadeh-joon, sit.

[Meaningfully] One Hadith instructs us that the most perfect in faith is he who is kindest to his wife. My dearly-beloved wife is dead, but I still have my princess and I choose to be kind to her.

MULLÁ MOSTAFA *[Snorts, but knows he has been shown up, glares at SHÁZADEH]*

FARID

[Tries to divert attention from SHÁZADEH]

Father-jan, just now when you came down from the roof, you seemed especially elated.

MULLÁ MOSTAFA *[Gloats]*

Tomorrow that despicable pretender dies. Báb-ed-Din is scheduled to receive the official order for the execution first thing in the morning. He's

to be put to death by firing squad right here in Barracks Square.

MÍRZÁ JAVEED *[Surprised, alarmed]*

Right across from our home? Why are they doing it in such a public place?

MULLÁ MOSTAFA *[With satisfaction]*

Precisely because it *is* the most public place. The largest possible crowd will see him slain.

FARID

Do they not fear an uprising by the Bábi followers?

MULLÁ MOSTAFA *[Again, with satisfaction]*

Any attempt is doomed to failure. Sám Khán's regiment is charged with the order for execution. How could a handful of dissenters prevail against trained soldiers, armed with muskets?

SHÁZADEH *[Taken aback]*

Sám Khán? Why, that's Maryam's husband.

MÍRZÁ JAVEED *[Sternly]*

Sházadeh-joon, I absolutely forbid you to leave the house tomorrow. Farid and I will go shortly after dawn to the bazaar to secure our business premises.

SHÁZADEH *[With a hint of foreboding, looks at MÍRZÁ JAVEED]*

I pray the mob here in Tabreez will not treat the Tabreezi Bábis like they did your dear friend in Tihrán.

FARID *[Nods]*

People still talk about the Seven Martyrs of Tihrán.

SHÁZADEH

No matter how hideous the tortures meted out to the Bábis, their numbers apparently keep multiplying.

MULLÁ MOSTAFA *[Righteous tone continues]*

Bah! "Seven Martyrs of Tihrán." It merely shows how insidious this false prophet has been, that his fantasy could seduce even leading citizens and respected mystics.

MÍRZÁ JAVEED *[A rising note of anger]*

Mostafa, I have held my peace about the religious strife caused by this movement, but I will not close my eyes to the death of one of my oldest friends, a highly esteemed merchant.

FARID

Another of the seven was a respected divine, another, a famous darvish.

MÍRZÁ JAVEED

The atrocities visited upon them were more barbaric than those meted out to a common criminal.

MULLÁ MOSTAFA *[Note of warning]*

Father. Do not say anything more.

FARID

Their families and friends offered huge ransoms, but these seven men – these Seven Martyrs – refused to deny their allegiance to Báb-ed-Din.

MÍRZÁ JAVEED *[Gazes into the distance, more reflectively]*

I don't know if this Báb-ed-Din is the Promised One. But I suddenly realize if one of my dearest friends believed he is, then the claim is worth investigating.

MULLÁ MOSTAFA *[Dumbfounded, shouts]*

Father –

SHÁZADEH *[Surprised, interrupting each other]*

– Papa –

MULLÁ MOSTAFA *[Roars]*

– never say this in public –

SHÁZADEH

– this is the first time you ever said such a thing –

FARID

Grandfather – *[Looks like he would say more, but lapses into thoughtful silence]*

[All regard one another in silence]

MULLÁ MOSTAFA *[Thoughtfully, brings down the heat of the moment]*

The ransoms offered are one thing, but those fools could have saved their lives by the practice of Taqíyyih –

MÍRZÁ JAVEED

Indeed, a follower of the Prophet Muhammad is permitted to deny his faith in the face of mortal danger. It's an entirely acceptable practice.

SHÁZADEH *[Earnestly]*

Is it possible that is exactly the point? Those men were followers of a *new* Prophet who brings a new religion for this day. To prove faithful to their Lord, might they not count it a privilege and joy to die for him rather than lie to save their own lives?

MULLÁ MOSTAFA

Bah. *[Gives SHÁZADEH a speculative look]* Nothing will convince me we are in the Day of Judgement. *[Emphatically]* That man is not the Qá'im.

SHÁZADEH *[With a jolt of recognition]*

The Seven Martyrs are the Seven Goats.

MULLÁ MOSTAFA *[Incredulous]*

The Seven Goats. Are you insane? *[Turns to MÍRZÁ JAVEED]* Father, do you now recognize the folly of permitting a woman to study our traditions?

MÍRZÁ JAVEED *[Starts to speak]*

Son –

FARID *[Excitedly interrupts]*

– yes, *yes*. The Hadíths teach us the Seven Goats will walk in front of their true Shepherd, the Qá'im –

SHÁZADEH *[Wonderingly]*

– the deaths of the Seven Goats will precede the martyrdom of the Qá'im.

MÍRZÁ JAVEED *[Reflects]*

The first man executed actually said that with his last breath. He prayed that the Almighty wipe away the stain of our guilt and enable us to awaken from

the sleep of heedlessness –

FARID *[Breaks in]*

– those words so moved the executioner that he left, muttering his sword needed re-sharpening. But he did not come back. A different executioner completed the killings.

SHÁZADEH *[Shakes her head in wonder]*

People marveled at their stirring words to the crowds, their eagerness to embrace death, the ecstasy of their last moments.

MULLÁ MOSTAFA *[Scoffs]*

Yet the headless bodies rotted in the street for three days and three nights. Were spat upon. Had garbage thrown on them. The good citizens of Tíhrán hurled curses at them. Infidels and traitors to the Prophet Muhammad – blessed be his name – deserve that end.

MÍRZÁ JAVEED *[Looks around at each of his family members]*

It shames me, it shames us all, that the earthly remains of any human being should be treated with such disrespect. *[Visibly shakes himself]* But enough of this talk when we are about to have a meal as a family.

SHÁZADEH *[Soothingly]*

Papa-jan, let me serve you your favourite pilaf.

MÍRZÁ JAVEED

Farid, my beloved grandson, why are you looking so pensive?

[SHÁZADEH shakes her head warningly to FARID. FARID ignores her]

FARID

Grandfather, my friend Zunúzí was arrested and thrown into the jail cell with Báb-ed-Din.

MULLÁ MOSTAFA *[Shakes his head]*

That gullible young fool. It serves him right. He will be executed tomorrow.

SHÁZADEH

But Zunúzí's family is among the most well-known in the city. Will the Governor not step in?

MÍRZÁ JAVEED

The Governor might well fall under suspicion himself if he is not careful. His refusal to accept the command of the Vizier stirred up a lot of speculation in the bazaar.

SHÁZADEH *[Sadly]*

What a shame. Zunúzí has only been married a short time and already has a baby. Imagine the grief of his family.

MULLÁ MOSTAFA *[Righteously]*

I say it serves him right for choosing to follow the Pretender. Zunúzí's death will cleanse his family of his dishonour. What a trial that boy has been to his father.

FARID *[Heatedly]*

His *step*-father. And Zunúzí is not a boy. He's a man with a wife and child. Two years ago, his *step*-father locked him up just before Báb-ed-Din's trial here. What gave him the right to incarcerate his wife's adult son?

MULLÁ MOSTAFA

His *step*-father thought Zunúzí was deranged for following that false prophet. His *step*-father was doing it because he did not know what else to do. His *step*-father wanted to *protect* his wife's son. *[Ends on a note of triumph]* And Zunúzí did regain his senses, and he was freed.

FARID *[With hesitation]*

I have not told you this before, Grandfather, Father... I was allowed to visit Zunúzí a few times.

MULLÁ MOSTAFA *[Look of consternation on his face, shouts]*

How dare you disobey my direct order to stay away from Zunúzí?

[About to say more]

MÍRZÁ JAVEED *[Holds up a hand to stop MULLÁ MOSTAFA's anger; neutrally to FARID]*

Go on, Farid.

FARID *[Shrugs]*

Zunúzí's *step*-father thought I might be a good influence on him. Persuade him to recant his belief in Báb-ed-Din. But Zunúzí countered my every argument with proofs and prophecies. He was ready to die for his Lord, the

Báb. At first, I thought he was mad too.

SHÁZADEH *[Gently]*
And did you change your mind, Farid-jan?

FARID
One day when I visited, Zunúzí was a different man. He was calm, peaceful, happy. His face shone. He told me Báb-ed-Din appeared to him in a dream.

MULLÁ MOSTAFA *[Cups his hands over his ears]*
– Sacrilege. I cannot listen to this –

FARID
The Báb revealed he would die here in Tabreez, and that he had chosen Zunúzí to bear the cup of martyrdom with him.

MÍRZÁ JAVEED *[Perplexed]*
But I heard none of this in the bazaar, only that Zunúzí had apparently regained his senses and his step-father released him from captivity.

FARID
No. No one knew. Zunúzí kept this vision secret. But then he told me, and I saw him with my own eyes. Zunúzí's former despair turned to certitude, and yes, his step-father was amazed at the change in his behaviour, and he did release him.

[MÍRZÁ JAVEED and SHÁZADEH look at each other in amazement]

MULLÁ MOSTAFA *[Smugly]*
It means nothing. Such dreams are the work of devils. They mislead ignorant people. And now young Zunúzí will be executed with the False Prophet.

[MÍRZÁ JAVEED and FARID shake their heads in seeming denial of MULLÁ MOSTAFA'S comment]

SHÁZADEH *[Musingly]*

I wonder ...

Lights fade to black. Santur music rises.

SCENE 5

Late morning of Sunday, July 9, 1850. Santur music. Lights rise. Roof of Mirzá Javeed's home, overlooking Barracks Square. Music fades.

[SHÁZADEH, VICTORIA and MARYAM are drinking tea. FARID enters. VICTORIA and MARYAM fasten their veils across the lower half of their faces]

SHÁZADEH *[Surprised, alarmed]*

Farid-jan. Why are you bursting in like this? I thought you were going to stay with your grandfather today.

FARID

We got separated in the crowds. Then I saw Maryam Khanum slip by, heading in this direction. I did not think anything of it, but then I spotted Victoria Khanum, also heading towards our home. I rushed back here expecting to see the three of you donning men's clothing so you could go out into the Barracks Square this morning.

SHÁZADEH *[Startled]*

How did you hear of that? It happened weeks ago.

FARID

A groom recognized you when you went out to the stables.

VICTORIA

But we did not say a word. I thought we were very convincing as men.

[MARYAM, SHÁZADEH, VICTORIA all stifle chuckles]

FARID *[Fiercely]*

It is not a laughing matter, Auntie-joon. You are just very lucky the stableman's first loyalty is to grandfather and to me, and he did not carry the tale to Mostafa.

SHÁZADEH *[Surprised]*

Father knows of this too?

VICTORIA

Uncle David could have told him, Sházadeh-joon. *[Placating to FARID, but teasing; her veil slips off]* But you are correct, my dear Farid. The next time we want to ride into the countryside, we will employ you to bring the horses around to the door of *my* house.

FARID *[Opens his mouth to speak]*

SHÁZADEH *[Interrupts]*
And why would we leave the house today anyway? I'm obeying Father's request that I stay home.

MARYAM
And the roof of your home overlooks the Barracks Square. Much as I fear what will unfold today, I must see my husband's regiment.

VICTORIA
So Sházadeh Khanum invited us to watch from your roof.

SHÁZADEH
Now that you know we are safely at home, Farid-jan, don't you think you should go back to your grandfather?

FARID *[Considering for a moment, glances at VICTORIA]*
No, I think I will stay here.

SHÁZADEH *[Catches his look; teasingly to FARID]*
Hah! You want to stay with us because Victoria Khanum is here today.

[FARID and VICTORIA both smile at each other, then look studiously away; SHÁZADEH turns to MARYAM]

Have you noticed, Maryam-joon, how often when Victoria Khanum is visiting me, my nephew suddenly turns up? *[Smiles all round]*

[MARYAM beckons to VICTORIA to adjust her new Persian garment and they move]

away]
[To FARID, seriously]

SHÁZADEH
You know, Farid-jan, Mostafa will never consent to you marrying an English woman.

[Thoughtfully]

FARID
Father will not, I agree. But I will make my appeal to Grandfather. He is still the head of our family. He highly respects her Uncle David, and he values your opinion about Victoria Khanum.

[Playfully]

SHÁZADEH
And all this is assuming she will have you for her husband? *[More seriously]* However, Grandfather wants you to marry and be happy. I am sure he will give his approval.

[Adjustment finished, MARYAM and VICTORIA return to the sides of SHÁZADEH and FARID]

[Seriously]

FARID
I am going to stay here because I want to be a witness to my friend's death this morning.

[Double-takes and gasps from VICTORIA and MARYAM]

VICTORIA
You mean Báb-ed-Din?

SHÁZADEH
No, he refers to Zunúzí, his childhood friend. He is one of the Bábis who was arrested when the Báb was being transferred to the Barracks prison.

VICTORIA
My Uncle David heard that the Governor actually refused the command to execute Báb-ed-Din. He thinks it's another case of the clerics wanting the civil authorities to lend their weight to a religious issue.

FARID
Often true. However, when the Governor rejected the Vizier's order, he may have put himself in jeopardy.

VICTORIA *[Curious]*

But did the Governor reject the order because it was a religious matter?
Political and religious interests in Persia seem indistinguishable to me.

FARID

I think the Governor's decision was more personal than political. He declared that he refused to be known as a traitor like those who arose after the death of Muhammad.

[VICTORIA and MARYAM look at each other perplexed]

VICTORIA

Pardon? What do you mean?

SHÁZADEH

After the death of our Prophet Muhammad, traitors persecuted and even killed some of his family members. It's an ultimate sin to commit murder against God's Prophet or his holy family.

VICTORIA

So yesterday the Báb-ed-Din was transferred to the prison just across the square?

FARID

Zunúzí and I were there. How could we stay away? Everybody wanted to see Báb-ed-Din. The crowds were so dense, and progress towards the Barracks was slow. *[With a catch in his throat]* As he passed us, Zunúzí lunged forward. I reached to pull him back, but he twisted away from my grasp and threw himself at Báb-ed-Din's feet.

VICTORIA *[Astonished]*

Why would he do such a thing?

SHÁZADEH

Zunúzí follows the Báb. Father has not minded that Farid and Zunúzí maintained their friendship. But my brother? He vociferously disapproved of Farid associating with Zunúzí. [*FARID grimaces at mention of his father*] He ordered Farid not to see him at all.

FARID

Zunúzí was on his knees, clutching Báb-ed-Din's clothing. I heard him begging the Báb not to send him away. Time and movement stopped. I felt as if I were suspended in a dream myself.

VICTORIA

Did Báb-ed-Din say anything to him?

FARID [*Sighs*]

He said, "Arise and rest assured that you will be with Me." He gazed at Zunúzí with such tenderness, I felt a jolt of jealousy.

[*Silence*]

MARYAM

Báb-ed-Din clearly expects he's destined to die. The soldiers must have been frantic, being hemmed in by the mob.

FARID

It's true. The soldiers pulled Zunúzí to his feet and they continued pushing through the frenzied crowd to the jail. Then two more men leapt into the path of the Báb, proclaiming *their* devotion. So the soldiers hauled all of them off.

VICTORIA [*In wonder*]

And all this happened yesterday afternoon.

FARID [*Nods*]

I did learn something else late last night. Zunúzí sent out word through a friendly guard. We are to call him Anís.

VICTORIA

Anís?

SHÁZADEH

Anís means “Companion.” What a priceless tribute Báb-ed-Din has given Zunúzi – *[FARID frowns at her]* – Anís.

VICTORIA *[Muses]*
His dream has come true. Anís will share the crown of martyrdom with his Beloved.

MARYAM *[Somewhat hesitantly, shyly, her veil has slipped off too]*

I have news.

[SHÁZADEH, VICTORIA, FARID turn towards her]

SHÁZADEH
Maryam-joon, what is it?

MARYAM *[More confidently]*
My husband suffers anxiety that his regiment is to carry out the execution.

FARID
But Maryam Khanum, why would he feel that way? He is a soldier, just following orders.

MARYAM
He fears the wrath of God if his own regiment is the instrument that slays a holy man. I begged him to speak to Báb-ed-Din.
[Exclamations of surprise, shock]

SHÁZADEH
What happened?

MARYAM *[Nods]*
My husband told him he was a Christian and entertained no ill will towards him. He even prepared what he was going to say to him. He said, “If your Cause is the Cause of Truth, enable me to free myself from the obligation to shed your blood.” Báb-ed-Din told him to follow his orders, and if his intention were sincere, God would surely relieve him from his perplexity.

FARID *[Kindly]*
You see? All will turn out for the best.

MARYAM *[Shrugs]*

God willing. But when he slipped home to tell me, I could see that he was still upset.

[Sound of rising crowd noise in the background]

FARID

Look. Look. They have returned from receiving the death warrants. *[Turns to VICTORIA]* See how the soldiers are lining up?

VICTORIA

What are they doing?

FARID

Those 750 soldiers in the regiment are all armed with muskets. To carry out an execution, 250 of them will stretch themselves flat on the ground, 250 will kneel and the rest will stand behind them.

MARYAM

[Looking around]

How quickly the Barracks Square has filled with spectators. Every rooftop overflows with more people. Surely ten thousand will witness this execution.

SHÁZADEH

[Shading her eyes to look into the distance]

Look. Báb-ed-Din and Anís are being tied with ropes – it looks like they are to be suspended from a spike in the Barracks wall.

[Offstage roaring rises. A command is shouted, "Fire." 250 muskets roar. A slight white fog/smoke arises. Another command, "Fire." The second range of 250 muskets roar. More white fog/smoke rises. A third command "Fire." The third range of muskets roar. More white fog/smoke envelops the rooftop and then very quickly dissipates]

[MARYAM turns away, in tears; VICTORIA stands with her ears covered and eyes averted; only FARID and SHÁZADEH look out towards the Barracks Square]

VICTORIA

[Looks back with trepidation towards the Square]

What happened?

FARID

[Amazed]

The Báb is nowhere in sight. That's Anís standing there. I don't see a mark on him. He's smiling.

MARYAM

Oh my, look at the soldiers scrambling to their feet.

SHÁZADEH

Sám Khán looks dumbfounded! He's shouting the regiment into formation.

MARYAM *[With amazement]*

They are marching out of the Square!

VICTORIA

What is happening? Where is Báb-ed-Din?

FARID

Have we witnessed a miracle? Can that many muskets misfire?
Inconceivable. *[Shakes his head]*

MARYAM

This mob frightens me. I've never heard such howls of terror.

[MULLÁ MOSTAFA rushes in and goes to the wall overlooking the Square; VICTORIA and MARYAM hastily pull over their veils, and step into the background]

SHÁZADEH

Mostafa, what happened? Where is Báb-ed-Din? Has he ascended to Heaven?

MULLÁ MOSTAFA *[Sneers]*

No, my dear sister, nothing so miraculous. They found him in his cell and will shortly drag him out and finish off the execution, they won't miss this time.

MARYAM

[Pointing]

What regiment is that marching in? That is not my husband's regiment.

MULLÁ MOSTAFA *[Dismissively, refusing to directly acknowledge Maryam]*

That coward, Sâm Khán. He refused to carry out his orders and commanded his regiment to leave the Square. *[MARYAM smiles radiantly]* The Násirí bodyguards were on standby to protect the officials and keep the peace among the mobs. *They will not fail to do their duty.*

FARID *[Shouts, pointing]*

They are dragging the Bá**b** back into the Square. It looks like they plan to suspend them from the spike again.

MARYAM *[Distressed]*

The Násirís are arranging themselves into a new firing squad. I cannot watch. *[Turns away]*

VICTORIA *[With trepidation, prays]*

“Yea though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for thou art with me...” Oh God, save these innocent souls. Have mercy upon them.

[VICTORIA starts weeping, leans towards FARID'S shoulder; FARID goes to put his arm around her shoulders, takes a look at MULLÁ MOSTAFA'S back and drops his arm]

[Offstage a command is given “Fire.” The sound of 250 muskets roars. A slight white fog/smoke arises. Another command, “Fire.” The second range of 250 muskets roar. More white fog/smoke rises. A third command “Fire.” The third range of muskets roar. This time a huge wind erupts and the sun darkens. A violent storm ensues with a bolt of lightning and a crash of thunder]

SHÁZADEH *[Shouts above the wind]*

Victoria. Maryam. Come out of the wind. Come inside with me.

[Exit SHÁZADEH, VICTORIA and MARYAM, shielding their eyes from the dust; MULLÁ MOSTAFA and FARID both stay on the roof]

for a few moments, each for his own reasons]

FARID *[In awe. Shouts over the wind]*
The bodies are shattered. Are the prophecies coming true?

MULLÁ MOSTAFA *[Gives FARID a strange look, then a look of triumph covers his face. Shouts]*
It's the Bábis' hopes that are shattered. We shall see, we shall see how soon this heresy disintegrates.

[MULLÁ MOSTAFA and FARID regard each other with stony and appraising looks]

Lights fade to black. One last crack of thunder. Santur music rises as noise of the storm abates.

SCENE 6

No set time. Santur music plays in background. Soft spotlight rises on MULLÁ MOSTAFA first, and subsequently on each of the speakers in turn. They move around the stage and speak in soliloquy. When they stop speaking, the spotlight on them fades and rises on the next speaker. Music fades.

MULLÁ MOSTAFA

The mutilated bodies of the self-proclaimed Qá'im and that young fool who insisted on sharing his so-called martyrdom were cut down and dumped outside the city walls. I went to see the bodies myself. A detachment of ten soldiers took turns guarding the remains so that no one could spirit them away. I did wonder that no bullet had marred their faces. *[Pause]*

Of course, the clerics were elated after the execution. We made a point of proclaiming the next Friday in the Mosques that wild dogs had, in fact, eaten the bodies.

FARID

Of course, the clerics crowed about the Hadíth that no remains of God's prophet could be eaten by wild animals, thus proving that Báb-ed-Din was no prophet. What I never told my family was that the bodies of the Báb and Anís *were* rescued. The details are sketchy about how it happened. A man disguised as a madman managed to retrieve the remains from under the very noses of the guards. Were they drunk or merely asleep? Who knows? It doesn't matter. To save face, and perhaps their own hides, they claimed that the bodies had been eaten. *[Looks around furtively]* This rescue remains a closely guarded secret, and one I will never share.

SHÁZADEH

I found all that happened perplexing. I could not shake a profound sense of grief, and all for a man of whom I knew so little. Of course, Mostafa gloated, but neither my father nor Farid would talk about it, so meal times tended towards silence. *[Pause]*

Farid was especially introspective. I thought he was brooding about the death of his friend, Anís, but I soon learned he had other weighty thoughts on his mind.

MULLÁ MOSTAFA

I would never admit this in public, but it's been a hollow victory. The clerics were so convinced it was the correct thing to do to execute the False Prophet. But where is the rejoicing, the return to normality? Turmoil still wracks the city. It may be just the sudden famine, but the population seems especially fearful. I'm amazed at how many of them mumble about Báb-ed-Din just possibly being the Qá'im after all. *[Pause]*

And I am completely estranged from my own family now. My son avoids me. I think he's hiding something. My own father seems preoccupied and distant. What will go wrong next?

MARYAM

Right after the execution, I was terrified my husband would be punished for not obeying orders. *[With relief]* Then his regiment was transferred out of the city to the Russian border. They expect to be stationed there for up to two years. *[Pause]*

I stayed in Tabreez and moved in with my cousin, Tamar Davoudi. I am to sew her trousseau and wedding gown. Helping her get ready for her wedding to Dr. William Cormick takes my mind off the absence of my husband.

VICTORIA

Maryam was sad to be separated from her husband for two years, but she is relieved that he is safely away from Tabreez. *[Pause]*

Later the Násirí regiment was eradicated in the most odd circumstances. First, a third of them perished in an earthquake when a wall fell and crushed them. Then, the rest of the regiment mutinied, and they were rounded up and shot. To make sure they were all dead, the executioners went among the bodies, stabbing them with their bayonets. The bazaar furtively debated whether or not the Násirís were punished by God for killing a holy man. Frankly, all this made me wonder too.

CORMICK

The city remained in as much turmoil after the execution of Persian Prophet as it had been in the days leading to his death. The superstitious Persians were especially frightened by the unprecedented destruction of the entire Násirí regiment. *[Pause]*

Overall, though, I am little affected by all this upheaval. In fact, business is good for doctors these days. Plagues and diseases flourish, and my services are much in demand. *[Smiles]*

Of course, I am also absorbed in my upcoming nuptials to Miss Davoudi.

MIRZÁ JAVEED

The days following – dare I say it? – the ‘martyrdom’ of Báb-ed-Din left me wondering if indeed he had been the Qá’im. Are we all being punished for our blindness or indifference to God’s newest Prophet? One of our prophecies speaks of the “Trumpet Blast” which will smite the earth with extermination. Well, God’s vengeance certainly seems to be visited on us. The fruit in my orchards died on the vines. My animals perished. Crops failed. We face famine. Disease and illness plague us not just here in Tabreez but throughout Persia. The merchants are shocked at the speed with which trade and commerce have evaporated. Our very livelihoods are threatened. *[Pause]*

Reflections about the Báb continually crowd my mind. Only conversations with my good friend, David Chandler, can divert me.

CHANDLER

My niece seems to have witnessed an important event. Consul Stevens was out of the city on the day of the execution, and in his absence, a perfunctory report was sent to the British Ambassador in Tihrán. However, after Victoria told Lady Stevens she had witnessed the execution, Consul Stevens pressed Victoria for every minute detail and then he sent off a fuller dispatch. *[Pause]*

The diplomats may be able merely to observe and report on what's happening in this country, but I'm suffering from the chaos. Civil disorder is always bad for business. Local agriculture has failed through drought, and the caravans from the East have disappeared. New shipments of spices have dried up. I would be tearing my hair out if Mírzá Javeed-i-Tabreezi had not given me exclusive access to the remaining inventory in his warehouse.

VICTORIA

Uncle David is anxious about business prospects these days. For myself, I find my emotions swinging from despair about the massacre of those young men to elation. *[Pause, smiles]*

My personal life has taken a sudden delightful turn.

SHÁZADEH

I started having vivid dreams that seem to speak of God's will being done and that I must continue seeking answers. Meanwhile, Farid has asked his grandfather for permission to marry Victoria.

CHANDLER

Victoria's announcement that she and Farid want to marry has diverted my preoccupation with these terrible business conditions. In principle, I'm not against their wishes – he is a fine young man and already a shrewd businessman – and I can convince her parents this is a good match. I know Mírzá Javeed sees the business advantages of our two families merging through this marriage, but I confess his elation surprised me. He wants Farid and Victoria to move to England immediately after the wedding, and to take Sházadeh with them.

VICTORIA

I am in love with Farid. Miraculously, Mírzá Javeed has given his consent to our marriage. Uncle David warmly agrees. Of course, Sházadeh supports us too, and as we expected, Mostafa is apoplectic. He disowned Farid and refuses to speak to his own father. We are awaiting word from my parents, but I am confident of Uncle David's persuasive powers. After all, he teases me, my mother did want me to marry a wealthy merchant, and Farid qualifies.

SHÁZADEH

Victoria asked me endless questions about whether our religious differences might doom their prospects. I taught her about the Word of God in the Holy Qur'án, such as the injunction that husbands are to treat their wives well and be kind to them. Farid has the temperament and the example of his Grandfather to be a good husband. I am ecstatic. And their marriage is the only thing that can make Father smile these days.

CORMICK

Only the prospect of two marriages could distract our families from the continuing troubles in Tabreez. I have become better acquainted with my fiancée's cousin, Madam Maryam Khán.

At first, I thought it was a fine idea that Madam Khán had become good friends with Miss Chandler and Sházadeh Khanum Tabreezi. But now I find myself uneasy about that association. Those three ladies – inestimable in all other respects – seem to have too great an interest in Báb-ed-Din. His hold on the superstitious segments of the population continues, albeit underground. I don't want my fiancée caught up in any religious heresy.

SHÁZADEH

Sympathizers of the Báb are still in great danger. But I *pleaded* with Farid to obtain some of his writings for me. He very reluctantly bowed to my entreaties. I devoured what Farid smuggled into the house. And intensified my study of the Hadíths and prophecies of Islam. Victoria-joon and Maryam-joon joined me. Not even Father knows how seriously we study.
[Smiles tentatively]

And I can scarcely imagine Mostafa's reaction, if he knew.

FARID

My Auntie Sházadeh and the other ladies seemed to grow stronger and more fearless in their journey to seek spiritual truth. Soon I was slipping home most afternoons to join them. All four of us are now convinced that the Báb was the Qá'im. *[Pause, smiles]*

I am so full of joy about our marriage and move to England. But then my thoughts turn to the Qá'im. Nothing seems to have changed, still his followers are hunted down, persecuted, murdered. However, my faith that God's will has been done strengthens every day. *[Pause]*

Victoria taught me one of her Christian prayers, and I find myself repeating one of its lines, "Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven."

[By this point SHÁZADEH, VICTORIA, MARYAM and FARID have moved together in a cluster downstage, with FARID and VICTORIA now holding hands, with the most light. MIRZÁ JAVEED has moved towards them. CHANDLER and CORMICK are standing slightly apart from one another mid-stage, with less light. MULLÁ MOSTAFA is standing furthest away from them, upstage with the least light]

Lights fade to black. Music rises. Lights come up.