

THAT UNCERTAIN FEELING

a short Bahá'í play by

James Tichenor

jtichenorwriter@gmail.com

Cast of Characters

Jasmine (18) a college freshman, anxious
and a little shy

Alicia (25) a young businesswoman and
Jasmine's Ruhi study circle tutor

"That Uncertain Feeling"

SETTING: An apartment with two chairs and a coffee table. There are two doorways at left and right, real or imagined.

MUSIC UP

AT RISE: JASMINE, neatly dressed and cheerfully bubbly, **enters** from the kitchen carrying a book and humming "I Am Weak." She sits at the coffee table counting for the umpteenth time paper bookmarks in a prayerbook, *Gleanings*, and a Ruhi Book One.

JASMINE

(to herself)

One. Two. Three. All right. Four. Five.

She sits back. Fusses at the cuff of her sweater or blouse. She remembers something.

JASMINE

(to herself)

Oh. Duh! The flowers! Alicia's bringing flowers.

She jumps up and runs back out to the kitchen, returning in a moment with a vase half-filled with water which she sets on the coffee table. She straightens the books then stands back to judge the effect. Makes an adjustment.

JASMINE

(to herself)

Okay.

She sighs a breath of relief.

SOUND EFFECT: **Her CELLPHONE RINGS.**

Jasmine is startled and answers, glancing at the cellphone to see who it is.

JASMINE

Oh, hi, Michelle! I'm just waiting for Alicia to stop by. When are you --

She listens with growing dismay.

JASMINE

You're not coming! Oh, no. But what --

She listens.

JASMINE

Oh, NO! I'm so sorry. It's not some kind of flu, right? Did you --

She listens.

JASMINE

Good. I hope that works, Michelle. I'm so sorry you can't come. I guess I'll have to call Simone and cancel.

She glances at her phone to check the time.

JASMINE

What did you say?

(beat)

Well, she'll be leaving soon. I need to call her now.

She listens.

JASMINE

Oh. No. No. No. I can't do it alone. But we'll just have to do it when you feel better.

She listens.

JASMINE

Well, I don't want to disappoint Simone, either. That's why I need to call her. Alicia is bringing some flowers. Maybe I can ask her if she knows someone else from our study circle -- but, no. There just isn't enough time. I'll have to call Simone and cancel.

She listens with growing dismay.

JASMINE

But it isn't like a children's class, Michelle. And we never do those alone either, anyway. You know? I'm not Alicia.

(MORE)

JASMINE (CONT'D)

I'm not you either! I'm me and I can't. I just can't do it alone. And anyway this is something you and I agreed to do. After we went to the other devotional meetings, right? This is ours -- not mine.

She listens.

JASMINE

No, I'm not blaming you. You know that. Oh. I don't know why I find this so difficult! It's just that I'm anxious about it. It's like this at school for me, too. I don't -- I haven't ever done anything alone.

She listens.

JASMINE

Good. I'm glad you understand. Thank you, Michelle.

(calmer)

I can't help it if I'm anxious about things like this, you know.

She listens.

JASMINE

So, I'll call Simone. Right. Bye. I hope you feel better.

Jasmine goes to hang up but thinks of a parting thought.

JASMINE

Do you need me to pick up a prescription?

(listens)

Okay. I'll stop by tomorrow. Love you.

She hangs up then searches on the phone for number.

JASMINE

Simone. Simone. Where -- Ah. Here you are.

She touches keys to call Simone, then listens.

SOUND EFFECT: Knock at door.

JASMINE

Oh! Tsk!

Jasmine cancels her call and goes to the door.

ALICIA, wearing a jacket and cross shoulder bag, enters holding a bouquet of cut flowers. They embrace awkwardly.

ALICIA

Alláh-u-Abhá!

JASMINE

(breathlessly)

Oh! Yes. Alláh-u-Abhá. Oh, Alicia. I'm so glad you're here.

(notices the flowers)

Oh, nice! Come in! Come in.

(but returns to her major concern)

You're an answer to a prayer!

ALICIA

(not yet getting the extent of Jasmine's emotion)

Aww! I told you I'd check you out. Just for a minute, though. My brother's expecting me.

Alicia spies the vase.

ALICIA

Is that for these? Is Michelle here yet?

She takes off her bag and sits to put the flowers in the vase.

JASMINE

Yes. They're beautiful. Thank you so much, Alicia. But --

Alicia arranges flowers, still not picking up on Jasmine's anxiousness.

ALICIA

You know. My brother David?

(glances at Jasmine)

Yeah, you know him. You met him at the holy day. The tall guy --

Jasmine sighs and sits down heavily.

ALICIA

(stops with flowers)

Uh oh. What's wrong?

JASMINE

Oh! It's awful. Michelle is sick.

ALICIA
 (fixes flowers again)
**Oh, no! And now you are getting ready to host your first
 devotional meeting.**
 (regarding flowers)
There!

JASMINE
Yes. And Simone will be leaving at any moment to get here.

Alicia gets up, ready to depart.

ALICIA
Right. And now what? What was Michelle going to bring?

Alicia picks up her bag.

JASMINE
What do you mean? Herself, that's all. I'm cooked!

ALICIA
 (leans down to check
 out the books)
**Okay. Slow down! You have some readings chosen? I see
 bookmarks.**

JASMINE
Yes. Oh, yes. It's not that. We prepared our devotional.

Alicia takes her phone out of
 the bag, checks the time.

ALICIA
Well, what is it, Jasmine?

Alicia puts the phone away,

JASMINE
 (embarrassed and
 not forthcoming)
I just can't.

ALICIA
 (becoming impatient)
Can't? I don't understand. Can't what?

JASMINE
I can't do it alone.

ALICIA
 (softly, getting it
 at last)
Oh. Ooof! You mean --

JASMINE
(verging on tears)
And I feel like I made Michelle feel guilty. But that's not
what I wanted to do at all, of course.

ALICIA
I'm sure she doesn't --

JASMINE
(barely holding it
together)
And she's my best friend.

Alicia sits.

ALICIA
(gently now)
Oh, now. Jasmine. It's okay. Calm down.

Alicia takes Jasmine's hand.
Holds it, comforting her.

JASMINE
And I need to call Simone.

ALICIA
Why? She'll be here soon.

JASMINE
That's just it. She can't come now. I'm not -- I can't --

ALICIA
Why -- What do you mean when you say you can't do it?

JASMINE
Not alone. I can't do it alone.

ALICIA
What makes you think that? Of course you can.

JASMINE
(getting heated)
No! No, I can't. Not alone, I can't.

ALICIA
So you were counting on doing this together with Michelle?

JASMINE
Yes. Of course. We told you we were doing it together.

ALICIA
Well. Okay. I didn't understand what you meant. But what makes
you think you can't.

JASMINE

I don't "think," I know. I never have been able. In school it's the same. In a study group I can do whatever I have to, you know? if I'm with my friends. But if I have to answer in class, I can't. Panic!

ALICIA

Have you ever tried...

JASMINE

(ignoring Alicia)

Even in high school it was like this. It will never change. This is one of the reasons I became a Bahá'í, actually. Because, you know, we do things in groups. Together in teams. In unity.

ALICIA

Maybe we should pray about this?

JASMINE

Oh, I have prayed, Alicia. And prayed and prayed and prayed. Look! Doesn't it say right here that we can start with two or three people as hosts?

(Jasmine leafs
through Ruhi Book
One)

That's what we read. And I was counting on it. On being able to do this with Michelle. Isn't that right?

ALICIA

Well, yes. It does say that. That's okay. You don't have to show me.

Jasmine puts the book aside.

JASMINE

And when you told us we were expected to hold a devotional meeting, well, okay. I agreed as long as I could do it with Michelle. But now...

ALICIA

(unsure what to do)

Let's go over your preparation. You have selected readings --

JASMINE

(near exasperation)

Oh, Alicia. I know what to do. It's not that. It's my nervousness about it. Oh, I can't explain it.

Alicia rises, wanting to encourage Jasmine, but needing to move on to her next meeting. Considers being forceful.

ALICIA

You've got to find your inner Sarah Connor, here, Jasmine.

JASMINE

(distracted, confused)

My what? My Sarah who?

ALICIA

Sarah Connor? In *The Terminator*?

Jasmine looks blank.

JASMINE

Is that a movie or something?

Alicia is flailing, too.

ALICIA

Yes. But don't worry about it. I'm sorry.

Alicia sits, still edgy.

ALICIA

I was making a little joke. But I know this isn't funny for you.

Jasmine wipes her eyes trying to be brave.

ALICIA

You have to find your personal source of courage -- like Táhirih.

JASMINE

Táhirih?

ALICIA

Okay. I think Book Four might be up next for you.

Alicia checks to see if she is getting through.

Jasmine is still in distress.

ALICIA

You should be like the early Bábís. That's what I mean.

JASMINE

Oh, Alicia! I'm not like them. Not at all. I'm sorry.

(now in despair)

I'm sorry I'm so weak.

ALICIA

You're not weak, Jasmine. Not at all. I think you are brave, to even consider something that is so hard for you.

Jasmine shakes her head. Not quite buying Alicia's support.

ALICIA

I think the first thing to do is to remember that it's not about you, Jasmine. This is a service. And 'Abdu'l-Bahá tells us that God answers every urgent prayer.

JASMINE

(tentatively hopeful)

Oh. Yes?

ALICIA

And you are not doing this just to say you did it. You know? I know you know that. This is a service you and Michelle decided to undertake, and one that Simone will be happy about. So, you don't want to disappoint Simone now, do you?

JASMINE

Now that just makes me feel guilty, Alicia.

(taking up her phone)

And... and I need to call her!

ALICIA

Oh, I'm sorry! I just meant... Why does that make you feel guilty?

JASMINE

It makes me feel like a failure.

ALICIA

Oh, dear. That's not...

JASMINE

It makes me feel I'm supposed to be something I'm not.

Alicia realizes she has gone too far. She reflects.

JASMINE

(quieter, resigned)

I'm just not!

Alicia takes the phone out of Jasmine's hand.

ALICIA

You know, my father used to tell me that 'Abdu'l-Bahá says: God doesn't test us beyond our capabilities.

Alicia sets Jasmine's phone down, deliberately trying to connect with her.

ALICIA

So I had to learn how to accept that about myself. That was a hard lesson. But slowly over time we learn and develop strength and try. Try things we thought we couldn't do.

JASMINE

How did you know when you were ready?

ALICIA

You just have to try. Pray and try. Keep trying.

(she sits up feeling
like they made
progress)

So can you?

JASMINE

What do you mean? Can I what?

ALICIA

Are you ready to try?

JASMINE

Oh. You were talking about me? I thought you were talking about yourself.

ALICIA

Oh!

Alicia laughs.

ALICIA

Oh, I see. Well... maybe I was.

Jasmine joins in the laugh,
faintly at first.

ALICIA

Or, if I wasn't, maybe I should have been. You know another thing my father would say to me is that God answers all prayers, just not necessarily the way you expect.

They laugh together.

JASMINE

So, then, what DO I do? About Simone? She'll be here any minute.

ALICIA

That's the wrong question.

Alicia stands and takes off her jacket, putting it on the back of her chair.

Jasmine watches her curiously.

JASMINE

I'm sorry?

Alicia taps a quick text on her phone as she talks.

ALICIA

The question is what do WE do?

Jasmine smiles, still doubtful.

JASMINE

We? I thought you had to go see your brother?

ALICIA

I do. But we'll do this together first. David will be waiting --

Alicia puts her phone away.

ALICIA

(chuckling)

--and so will his taxes. He can't do them -- without me. I just told him I'll see him in a bit.

Jasmine laughs, relieved.

Alicia sits.

ALICIA

All right. What do we have planned?

MUSIC UP

JASMINE

Here. I made a list. Simone is gonna SO love this!

They look at the list.

CURTAIN