

Martyrdom of the Báb
A Dramatic Account of the Events Surrounding the Martyrdom
9 July 1850

Excerpted from Tabreez by Marlene Macke *

CAST
(in order of appearance)

David Chandler

Managing Director of Chandler Imports, a small family import firm from Manchester, England. Chandler is living in Tabreez.

Victoria Chandler

His niece

Dr. William Cormick

Medical doctor resident in Tabreez

Mírzá Javeed-i-Tabreezi

Merchant

Sházadeh

Younger child of Mírzá Javeed

Mullá Mostafa

Elder child of Mírzá Javeed

Farid

Son of Mullá Mostafa

Maryam Khán

Armenian Christian, wife of Sám Khán, Colonel of one of the army regiments stationed in Tabreez

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

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

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.

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SCENE 1

Morning of July 8. Santur music plays in the background. The study of DAVID CHANDLER's home.

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. *[Walks towards window]*
But I do hear more hubbub outside this morning.

CHANDLER

That's why I'm concerned. 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

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

CHANDLER

William 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. *[Door bell chimes]*
Oh my, Dr. Cormick has arrived early. Let me see if the samovar has enough hot water.

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. Now that you've been here a year, 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.

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

CORMICK

He has an interesting family.

CHANDLER

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 and I visit her several times a week. But 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

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? I've heard that several so-called prophets have arisen in the past six years. Some kind of "millennial fever" among the Muslims?

CORMICK *[Nodding]*

Oh yes, several new so-called prophets, 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 demeanor.

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 Chihríq 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?

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. 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 *[Fondly, turning to FARID]*

My beloved grandson. Have you already been out to the market this morning?

FARID

I have, Grandfather. The crowds are agitated by the rumors. *[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 I too 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.

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

SCENE 3

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 simply 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 fervor. *[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.

FARID

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]*

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

FARID

Do they not fear an uprising by the Bábí 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 Bábí 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 Bábí, 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 simply 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 a completely 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 had to be summoned to complete 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 at. 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, 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 simply 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 the 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 ire; 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 Zunúzi 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 4

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. I rushed home to make sure you are all safely inside.

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

No, 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 simply 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 wonderful tribute Báb-ed-Din has given Zunúzí –
[*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 be 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 roof top 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 is 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, properly this time.

MARYAM *[Pointing]*

Which 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 Násiri 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 Báb back into the Square. It looks like they plan to suspend them from the same spike again.

MARYAM *[Distressed]*

The Násiris 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]

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 5

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.

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.

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]*

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 death of the entire Násirí regiment.

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]*

I find myself constantly reflecting about the Báb. 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 to simply 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 completely 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 very worried about business prospects these days. For myself, I often find my emotions in despair over the massacre of those young men.

SHÁZADEH

I started having vivid dreams that seem to speak of God’s will being done and that I must continue seeking answers.

CORMICK

Through my plans to marry, 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 was such 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 certain 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. But 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 constantly, "Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven."

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