

LOVE 'S COMPANION*

— a Drama about Anis

by
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LOVE'S COMPANION

[Onto the dimly lit stage enters ANIS, a 17 year-old youth. He does not wear Persian garb, but loose-fitting cotton shorts and an opened-tunic. He kneels upon a Persian carpet, stage center; then bends his forehead to the carpet. He holds this position as the Narrator, SHAYKH HASAN-I-ZUNUZI, enters, illumined by a spot. He wears black slacks and white dress shirt buttoned to the neck, as if ready to go to a club on a Saturday night. He could be played by a black actor or a woman, 30-ish.]

HASAN-I-ZUNUZI

"But for Mullá Husayn," Bahá'u'lláh wrote, "God would not have... ascended the throne of eternal glory."

(beat)

That's quite a statement. I was fortunate enough to be companion to Mullá Husayn, and caught a spark of his burning faith. We were students together in Karbilá, Iraq. Disciples of Siyyid Kázim. Siyyid Kázim was preparing us to recognize the Promised One of the Qur'an — Whom prophecy said would soon appear. Over time, I came to suspect that Siyyid Kázim himself was the Promised One. The purity of his character, the radiance of his spirit testified to this. But one day the Siyyid rebuked me for entertaining such thoughts. I then became so confused that for days I could neither eat nor sleep. I prayed to God to either confirm or correct my impression that my own teacher was the Promised One. Then, one morning, at the hour of dawn Siyyid Kázim suddenly awakened me. "A highly distinguished Person has arrived in Karbilá," he said. "I feel it incumbent upon us both to visit Him." Next thing I knew we were both at the home of a Stranger from my native Iran. The Young Man stood in the doorway, as if expecting us. He wore a green turban and a serene smile.

[Lights rise on a green turban,
ringed with rose petals and set
upon a small table.]

We were soon led upstairs. There, in a simple room, fragrant with flowers, the Young Man bade us both be seated. I then noticed a silver cup set in the middle of the room. Our youthful Host filled the silver cup to overflowing and handed it to my teacher.

HASAN-I-ZUNUZI
(pause; cont'd)
(cont'd)

I was amazed! Without the slightest hesitation, Siyyid Kázim drank from that silver cup – the use of which was forbidden to all Shí'ah Muslims! All silversmiths and goldsmiths were Jews, and Jews – according to Shí'ah orthodoxy – are unclean. In Iran, Jews were not even allowed out on rainy days -- lest rain water run off them and touch a Muslim, defiling him. No Shí'ah Muslim would ever think of drinking from a silver cup! And here, my guide to true religion, Siyyid Kázim, was drinking from one only because some strange Youth had told him to. Who was this Young Man, I wondered, Who could so command my teacher? I wanted to consult with my fellow disciple, Mullá Husayn, but he was in Iran at the time at the request of Siyyid Kázim.

(pause)

Three days later, this same Young Man came in late to a talk given by Siyyid Kázim. I watched, as quietly, He took a seat in the back. But when Siyyid Kázim noticed Him, he immediately stopped speaking. Silence filled the room. One of my fellow disciples begged Siyyid Kázim to resume his address. "What more can I say?" the siyyid replied. He then turned towards the strange Young Man. "The Truth," he said, "is more manifest than the ray of light that has fallen upon that lap!"

[A shaft of spotlight illumines the green turban on the small table.
Hasan reverently turns toward it.]

HASAN-I-ZUNUZI
(cont'd)

I turned and immediately noticed that a shaft of sunlight had fallen upon the lap of our young Visitor. Unaware of the significance, one of my fellow disciples asked Siyyid Kázim; "Why is it that you refuse to reveal the identity of the Promised One? Can you not at least give us a hint as to His name?" I stared flabbergasted at the shaft of sunlight, and at the Face of that radiant Youth.

(pause)

After that I would often see this Young Man at the Shrine of the Imám Husayn. Tears would rain from His eyes as He prayed, oblivious of all those around Him.

[MUSIC rises; "O God, My God" from *Songs of the Ancient Beauty*. Hasan speaks in a Voice Over as MUSIC continues.]

HASAN-I-ZUNUZI
(cont'd)

"O God, my God, my Beloved, my heart's Desire," over and over again He would pray... I learned that this Young Man's infant son had recently died; and that He had revealed this prayer at the time. "O God, my God, my Beloved, my heart's Desire." I would hear Him repeating this prayer over and over again, asking God to accept the sacrifice of His only son; asking that it might serve as a prelude to the sacrifice of His own life; asking that the infant seed germinate into a mighty tree, beneath the shade of which all the peoples of the world might gather.

(beat)

Then suddenly I stopped seeing Him.

[MUSIC stops. Spot on turban fades.]

I learned that he was a merchant from Shiraz, and that He had returned there. But the memory of that silver cup, that shaft of sunlight upon His lap, His standing rapt in prayer at the threshold of the Shrine of the Imam Husayn – the memory of that Youth haunted me.

[MUSIC starts again, calling Hasan
back to another memory.]

In later years, when the call of a Young Man from Shíráz, proclaiming Himself to be the Promised One, reached my ears, I knew immediately who it was. I left for Shiraz and there became a follower of the Báb.

[MUSIC fades. Hasan retreats to podium.
He takes a sip of water, as if a speaker
preparing to address his audience.]

My name is Hasan-i-Zunuzi.
(slight bow)

When the Báb was transferred from Shiraz to Ádhirbayján, during all the stages of His journey, I was privileged to serve as His amanuensis. While He was imprisoned in Máh-Kú and Chihriq, I lived in a mosque outside the gates of the city of Tabríz. From there I was able to deliver messages between the Báb and His followers who were forbidden to visit Him. Then the day came for the Báb to be brought into Tabríz for an inquisition. He was to be interrogated by the chief mullás of the city in the presence of the Crown Prince, Násirí'd Din – the seventeen year-old boy who, in less than three months, would be Shah. All residents of Tabríz were forbidden to approach the Báb when He entered the city. Town criers were dispatched to warn the people what would happen

HASAN-I-ZUNUZI
(CONT'D) (cont'd)

should they attempt to approach the Prisoner.

[Hasan struts across the stage, calling out like a Town Crier.]

"Whosoever makes any attempt to approach the Siyyid-i-Báb, or seeks to meet Him, shall have all his possessions and property seized, and be condemned to life imprisonment."

[Hasan pulls up short and becomes himself again. He addresses the audience.]

It was quite a threat. And one that worried my cousin, who was a resident of Tabríz. For his seventeen-year old son, Mirza Muhammad, had become a Bábi.

[Lights rise on ANIS. Agitated and distracted, he packs a bundle as if for a journey. He loads prayer beads, prayer book, and a change of clothes.]

HASAN-I-ZUNUZI
(cont'd)

The boy burned with new belief and devotion. My cousin knew that I too was a Baha'i, and so he approached me. He needed help with his son, and he didn't know where else to turn.

[Hasan removes an *aba* from a clothes tree and puts it on, taking on the persona of the boy's FATHER.]

HASAN-I-ZUNUZI
(cont'd)

The Prophet was coming to Tabríz; the boy longed to meet his Lord; and the father was terrified of the legal consequences.

[Anis knots his bundle and slings it over his shoulder. He is wearing a headband and holding a walking stick. He steps out of his stage-center position, as if leaving the house. HASAN, playing the father, turns to address him from across the stage. NOTE: Neither actor ever invades the space of the other. While Hasan will direct his words at Anis, Anis plays the scene self-contained, as if encountering an invisible FATHER.]

HASAN-I-ZUNUZI
(cont'd)
(as the father)

Where are you going?

[Anis pulls up short, as if caught in
the act.]

HASAN-I-ZUNUZI
(cont'd)

Have you lost your mind? That's all I need: to lose yo to
prison and my house to the mullas, over this— this craziness.
What Do you see in this new religion? What's wrong with
Islam? Do you want the house I have worked so hard for to be
taken away from us Is that what you want? To rot in prison
for the rest of your life?

[Anis stands pleading, arms outstretched]

[Hasan turns to the audience. A dejected
Anis returns to his center stage place.
He sets his bundle down and sits, looking
disconsolate. He pulls off his headband.]

HASAN-I-ZUNUZI
(cont'd)

I locked him in the house — to protect him from himself...
For the 40 days the Báb was in Tabríz, my son was a prisoner
in his own house. I was ashamed of myself, but what else
could I do? Finally, the Báb was returned to the prison of
Chihriq, and I thought it would be safe now to allow my son
to leave the house.

[At the mention of "Chihriq," Anis
rises with his bundle and walking stick.
Again he leaves the house. Hasan — as the
father — turns to address him.]

HASAN-I-ZUNUZI
(cont'd)

Now where are you going?.... To Chihriq? To prison? Get back
in the house.

[Anis slinks back to his place.
The father appeals to the audience.
During the following speech, Anis kneels
and bends low to the ground, looking
disconsolate.]

HASAN-I-ZUNUZI
(cont'd)

Now he wants to visit Him in prison! Do you know what has been decreed should anyone dare approach this Báb: he'll be thrown in prison himself – for life. Our home will be seized. We'll all be disgraced. What kind of a son brings such shame upon a father? He gives no thought to a profession or career – he gives no thought for his own life. I'm at the end of my rope, Hasan. How long can I keep him locked up? He is my son. Please, Hasan, see if you can't talk some sense into him. Reason with him. I love him. I want what's best for him. But if he doesn't calm himself, I'm afraid he will lose his mind. Hasan, please, for his own safety, show him the middle way.

[Anis stretches the full length of the floor and pounds the rug in choreographed rhythm, expressing his irritation. He rises to his feet and breaks into a step dance, suggestive of breaking out of the house. He uses his walking stick as a battering ram.]

[Brief tableau of the dance sequence. It builds to a climax and breaks off. Thwarted and frustrated, Anis sinks to his knees.]

[Hasan has returned the *aba* to the prop basket. He is himself once again.]

HASAN-I-ZUNUZI
(cont'd)

So I did as the father asked. I spoke to Mirza Muhammad. I told him that I understood. That as a fellow believer I understood the pain of separation. That I too longed for the Báb's presence. But that we must be patient.

[Anis looks up at the mention of the word "patient" and defiantly shakes his head. He stands with yet more resolve. He begins a step dance suggestive of flight, which now is even more frenzied.]

[Hasan paces the perimeter of Anis' space, gesturing and miming a conversation. But Anis seems oblivious to reason. He is building his step dance into a frenzied rhythm.]

[Suddenly, Anis hats his dance in mid step. Hasan pulls up in surprise.]

[Brief tableau.]

HASAN-I-ZUNUZI

Then, one day, he was suddenly calm.

[Anis quietly sits back on his heels. A soft, amber SPOT glows warmly over him. With hands folded on his lap, Anis stares into the distance, smiling. Hasan crosses the stage and approaches Anis' space as if appearing at his door. As Hasan notices that Anis had been about to pray, the youth moves to put his prayer beads away]

HASAN-I-ZUNUZI
(cont'd)

Mirza Muhammad, may we pray together?

[Anis nods and warmly invites Hasan to sit beside him. Hasan kneels and sits back on his heels -- at Anis' side. They both bow their heads in prayer. Pause.]

[Hasan rise and steps out of the scene. Assuming his narrator role, he addresses the audience.]

I was so relieved to see him like this. I'd been so worried about him. And his father -- poor man -- he thought he might be going out of his mind.

ANIS
(softly)

I am.

[Hasan looks toward Anis, and then directs his attention back to the audience.]

HASAN-I-ZUNUZI

He did indeed seem out of his mind. Completely in his heart. I pressed him as to the cause of this sudden happiness. He told me he had seen the Báb.

[Anis comes forward.]

HASAN-I-ZUNUZI
(cont'd)

Of course, I knew he hadn't seen the Báb. His father hadn't let him out of the house. In fact, he'd never seen the Báb. He'd become a Báb without ever meeting Him.

ANIS

All my life I've been looking for something to believe in; something bigger than myself. When I saw the Writings of the Báb I knew then that this was the Truth. I wanted nothing else but to dedicate myself to the Báb's Cause. But my father locked me in the house. The Blessed Báb came and went from Tabríz, and still I had not see him.

[Anis sinks to his knees.]

I was in despair. So miserable, so agitated, that one night, unable to sleep, I wept until dawn. In desperation, I turned my face toward Chihriq, and begged the Báb for relief. Suddenly, I heard His voice.

[Anis lifts his head, and sits back on his heels. A spot illumines the green turban. The Bab's theme MUSIC begins - then the Words of the Báb in Voice Over.]

WORDS OF THE Báb

"Rejoice; the hour is approaching when, in this very city, I shall be suspended before the eyes of the multitude and shall fall a victim to the fire of the enemy. I shall choose no one except you to share with Me the cup of martyrdom. Rest assured that this promise which I give you shall be fulfilled."

HASAN-I-ZUNUZI

I asked him how he knew it was the Báb. That he wasn't dreaming. He described to me the face of the Báb Whom he'd never met; the face of the Young Man Whom I had first met in Karbilá.

[Anis begins unpacking his bundle. He puts away his belongings and hangs up his clothes. For the first time in the play, Anis appears "at home."]

HASAN-I-ZUNUZI
(cont'd)

At first, I feared this vision might encourage my cousin all the more to seek the Báb's presence. But Mirza Muhammad was now not only calm, but content. He agreed to keep his vision a secret, and to keep the Báb's promise of martyrdom locked within his own heart. All desire to leave Tabríz and visit the Báb now fled him. He was content to await the fulfillment of his vision. He vowed to be obedient to his father, and to show him respect in all matters.

(beat

For my part, I know that martyrdom had been the lot of many of my fellow Báb is, but hoped that such a young boy as my cousin might rather live a long life of service... In any event, that happy father released his son from bondage, and for the next two years, Mirza Muhammad was true to his promise: he proved to be a devoted son.

[Anis dons a white wedding robe.]

Though still a teenager, he married... also becoming a devoted husband.

(beat

And then, a young father.

[Anis picks up a baby blanket, miming holding an infant. He sits with the "child" on his lap.]

HASAN-I-ZUNUZI
(cont'd)

Two years passed in this idyllic manner. And then came the summer of 1850.

[A Gunshot SOUNDS. Anis rises in shock. Lights down on Anis; up on green turban.]

[The SOUND of telegraph tapping; and then a Russian Voice Over.]

ANITCHKOV (V.O.)

"The Báb, Who is known to your Excellency, has been brought to Tabríz, and is, at present, detained in the arsenal...

HASAN-I-ZUNUZI

The Russian Consul in Tabríz:

ANITCHKOV (V.O.)

"...The orders of the Persian Prime Minister as to what is to be done with Him are awaited."

HASAN-I-ZUNUZI

The Báb was to be executed.

[Hasan-i-Zunuzi removes a rope from his prop basket. Anis has removed his white wedding gown and begun pacing his carpet. His face is haggard, his feet are bare, and his hair is dishevelled. He begins to storm about his space.]

HASAN-I-ZUNUZI

The Báb was stripped of His green turban and paraded through the streets of Tabríz. A tremendous commotion erupted. Crowds thronged the streets, lined the rooftops, straining to get a glimpse. Never before had the city experienced such turmoil.

[SOUNDS of a crowd. Anis' pacing becomes more frenzied. He tosses his belongings and upsets the rug, mirroring the "commotion" Hasan describes.]

HASAN-I-ZUNUZI

As the Báb approached the courtyard of the barracks, Mirza Muhammad forced his way through the crowd. Ignoring the armed guards and the danger, he leapt forward and threw himself at the feet of the Báb.

[The SOUND of the crowd gets louder. Anis bursts forward and out of his house. He throws himself upon his knees, upstage center. He raises both hands in supplication. Crowd SOUNDS abruptly stop.]

ANIS

Send me not from Thee, O Master!
(beat

Wherever Thou goest, suffer me to follow Thee.

HASAN-I-ZUNUZI

Mirza Muhammad clutched at the hem of the Báb's garment. And before the guards could intervene, the Báb spoke.

[THEME MUSIC for the Báb plays under a recording of His Words.]

WORDS OF BÁB

"Muhammad Ali, rise! Rest assured that you will be with Me. Tomorrow you shall witness what God has decreed."

[Theme MUSIC fades. Anis rises slowly to his feet.]

HASAN-I-ZUNUZI

Muhammad Ali was immediately seized and thrown into a separate cell. But when he wept and begged to be placed in the same cell with the Báb, his wish was granted.

[Hasan drops the rope over Anis' extended hands. Anis wraps the rope around his wrists, simulating handcuffs. He then backpedals slowly upstage. She sinks to his knees. A spot illumines the green turban beside him.

HASAN-I-ZUNUZI
(cont'd)

That night the Báb's face glowed with joy. His mission was now near its completion. Indifferent to the storm raging around Him, He cheerfully conversed with Mirza Muhammad-Ali and with the other three Bábís who shared the cell with Him. And then He made His unusual request. A request that would cause my cousin to be remembered for all time..

[Theme MUSIC for the Báb begins and then the recorded Words of the Báb.]

WORDS OF BÁB

"Tomorrow will be the day of My martyrdom. Would that one of you – My devoted followers – might now arise and, with his own hands, end My life.

(beat)

I prefer to be slain by the hand of a friend rather than by that of an enemy."

[Anis rises to his feet. MUSIC fades.]

HASAN-I-ZUNUZI

The other Bábís shrank back at the thought of killing the Manifestation of God. But Mirza Muhammad-Ali sprang to his feet.

[Anis takes a bold step forward, drops to one knee, extends both arms, and pulls the rope taut between his hands.]

ANIS

I am ready to obey instantly, with exact obedience whatever, whatever my Lord might ask of me.

[Anis's extended arms – and the taut rope – tremble with tension. A pause. Finally Hasan speaks.]

HASAN-I-ZUNUZI

For years, what had kept my young cousin calm during His separation from the Báb; what alone had soothed his troubled heart was remembrance of the Báb's promise to him: that he would one day share the cup of martyrdom with the Prophet of God. To many that might seem strange – to consider death as a reward. But as a fellow believer, I understood the station of martyrdom. I understood Mirza Muhammad's longing for that station and the hope he placed in it...

(beat; looks at Anis)

It was shocking enough to see him willing to murder the Manifestation of God – even if it had been the Báb's own request; but what equally surprised me was his willingness to abandon his most cherished wish. For if my cousin killed the Báb tonight, how could he be martyred with Him tomorrow?

(beat)

The other Bábís intervened and forced Mirza Muhammad to abandon his thought of killing the Báb.

[Anis loosens his grip on the rope and stands. He backs upstage, as if being led there. A spot illumines the green turban. Anis collapses at the foot of it.]

HASAN-I-ZUNUZI
(cont'd)

But what to the other Bábís was blasphemy, was to the Báb, obedience.

[The Báb's theme MUSIC begins and the Voice Over of His recorded Words.]

WORDS OF THE BÁB

"This same youth, who has risen to comply with My wish... will, together with Me, suffer martyrdom. Him will I choose to share with Me its crown."

[THEME MUSIC continues for a few seconds and then fades.]

HASAN-I-ZUNUZI

Suddenly it became clear why my cousin had been promised this unique privilege: the Báb had foreseen his example of unhesitating obedience. The station of instant and exact obedience had won for him this honor... That night, the Báb bestowed a new name upon my cousin. He named him "Anis" -- "companion." For his unflinching obedience, Mirza Muhammad was now to be Anis -- the Báb's companion -- for all eternity, through all the worlds of God.

[The song "O God, my God" from the *Songs of the Ancient Beauty* CD begins softly.]

[Anis slowly rises and comes downstage, holding a scroll in his hand. Spot fades on turban. Anis addresses the audience.]

ANIS

I write these few lines in response to your loving letter, dear father...

[He indicates the letter in his hand.
MUSIC fades to low in background]

ANIS (cont'd)

You ask me, father, to flee from death, to deny my beliefs in order that I might embrace life and return to the bosom of my family. You have always been excellent example to me of what a good father should be. But what example would I be to my own young son, if I were to teach him by my example to place family before God?... He is the Compassionate, dear father. Thanks be to God! I find no fault with my circumstances. What God wills, comes to pass. If death is the destiny God hath appointed for me, then God is the guardian of my family. I only ask that you be my trustee. Love my son as you have loved me, dear father. Forgive me if I have failed to be in all ways an obedient son. For all this I beg your pardon. I ask forgiveness from all the family for my faults. Commend me to God, my father. God is my portion, and how good is He as guardian."

[Anis remains standing downstage center
as "O God, my God" fades.]

HASAN-I-ZUNUZI

Anis' distraught father now made one final attempt to save his son's life. He used all his power and influence in the Tabríz community to strike a bargain with the Muslim clergy. The mullás granted the father his wish: if Anis would deny his faith, his life would be spared.

(paces)

He was then brought before Mullá Muhammad. I had known this man in Iraq. He too had sat with Mullá Husayn and myself at the feet of Siyyid Kázim. We had all been fellow seekers of the Promised One. But Mullá Muhammad had given up his search for truth and settled for power and wealth. During the inquiry in Tabríz, he interrupted the Báb, correcting His grammar. He then cursed the Manifestation of God and ordered Him to be bastinadoed. Now it was he who signed the Báb's death warrant.

[Hasan takes out a black eye patch and
prayer beads. Anis kneels downstage
center, facing forward.]

HASAN-I-ZUNUZI
(cont'd)

Mullá Muhammad had but one eye. Physical blindness is often symbolic of spiritual vision. Not in Mullá Muhammad's case. Long ago in Karbilá, he had failed to recognize the shaft of sunlight fallen upon the Báb's lap. And he had failed to see the light ever since.

[Hasan puts on the eye patch and the lighting becomes RED and ominous. He becomes Mullá Muhammad. He paces behind the kneeling Anis while swinging his prayer beads.]

HASAN-I-ZUNUZI

Now: what have we here – a Bábi?

ANIS
(eyes straight ahead; defiant)

The Báb is the essence of my life. In Him I have found my true paradise.

HASAN-I-ZUNUZI
(as the mullá)

Such words betray your madness. Your father was right. You have been enchanted by this magician. Now is your chance to return to go the true Faith.

ANIS
(defiant)

I am not mad. A charge of madness should be brought against you who –

HASAN-I-ZUNUZI
(as the mullá)

Hold your peace!

ANIS

...you who have sentenced to death the promised Qá'im.

HASAN-I-ZUNUZI

Now: curse this imposter, and we will revoke your death sentence. Be quick! Deny Him!

ANIS

Never. He is my Lord. He is my life.

[Mullá Muhammad has had enough of this nonsense. He walks upstage where he lifts a baby blanket by one finger. He comes downstage and dangles it in front of the kneeling Anis, and then drops it at his feet.]

HASAN-I-ZUNUZI

What about this life?

[Anis stares in recognition. He bends and tenderly lifts it with both hands.]

[Hasan removes the eyes patch and thus takes off the persona of Mullá Muhammad. RED lighting fades to bright as Hasan addresses the audience.]

HASAN-I-ZUNUZI
(cont'd)

Anis' young son was then brought before him. Mullá Muhammad had coached the child. The boy held out his tiny hands and begged, "Daddy, Daddy, please. Don't leave me."

[Anis holds the baby blanket to his chest and covers his eyes with one hand, as if weeping. Pause.]

HASAN-I-ZUNUZI
(cont'd)

If doubt ever entered Anis' mind, it was at that moment. He was tormented; convulsed with guilt. Did his duty as parent take precedence over his duty as believer?

[Anis closes his eyes and bends to embrace the blanket, as if it were his son. Brief tableau.]

He thought of the Prophet Abraham, who had been asked to sacrifice his son. I thought of the Báb and the sacrifice of His own son. But here a son was being asked to sacrifice a father. But what child can understand such matters.

[Anis overcomes his inner struggle. He looks up with new resolution.]

Anis knew: God would never ask such sacrifice without providing for his family. Anis entrusted his wife and child to the care of his father – and to the protection of God.

[Anis rises. He turns toward Hasan and tenderly hands him the blanket. Anis then backs up toward the turban area, one arm still reaching out as if to touch his son.]

[Hasan now circles around the back of the carpet to meet Anis with the execution rope.]

HASAN-I-ZUNUZI

The next morning, in the courtyard of the barracks, a nail was driven into the column that separated the two prison cells. Two ropes were hung from the nail. From one rope the Báb was suspended; from the other, His companion – Anis.

[Anis circles behind the green turban. Hasan stands on the other side of the turban, while holding out the rope for Anis. Anis accepts the rope. He kisses it and slips it over his head and under his armpits, simulating his execution posture.]

HASAN-I-ZUNUZI
(cont'd)

Anis begged the commander of the firing squad to position him in such a way that his own body might shield that of the Báb from the bullets.

(beat)

He was eventually suspended in such a way that his head rested on the breast of his Lord.

[Anis tilts his head toward the turban.]

Ten thousand people crowded onto the roofs of the barracks and other adjoining buildings – to watch the execution. A firing squad of 750 riflemen took aim.

[The explosive SOUND of the discharge of 750 rifles. Lights down. Blackout.]

[After a beat the SOUND of telegraph TAPPING comes out of the quiet darkness.]

HASAN-I-ZUNUZI
(cont'd)

Professor E.G. Browne of Cambridge University:

E.G. BROWNE
(V.O.; British
accent)

"The Báb was not to suffer alone... The other disciple was a young merchant of Tabríz... Although his wife and little

E.G. BROWNE
(cont'd)

children were brought before him, entreating him with their tears to save his life, he stood firm in his faith, and only requested that at the moment of death he might still be allowed to fix his gaze on his Master... As he hung thus, he was heard to address the Báb in these words: 'Master, art Thou satisfied with me?' Then the file of soldiers... received the command to fire, and for a moment the smoke of the volley concealed the martyrs from view. When it rolled away, a cry of mingled exultation and terror arose from the spectators, for... the Báb had disappeared from sight! It seemed, indeed, that his life had been preserved by a miracle..."

[The telegraph TAPPING fades.
The darkness is pierced by a spot -
lighting the green turban. Lights then
rise on an unflappable Anis, who holds
the severed rope in his hands.]

HASAN-I-ZUNUZI

Anis stood before them alone, alive and unhurt. Though the ropes binding him had been torn to shreds by the bullets, Anis' tunic was without blemish; not even stained by the thick rifle smoke.

(pause)

The Báb was found in His cell, completing a conversation with His amanuensis, which He had warned His executioner not to interrupt.

[The Báb's theme MUSIC begins.]

HASAN-I-ZUNUZI

"I have finished my conversation," the Báb pronounced.
"Now you may proceed to fulfill your intention."

[The Báb's theme MUSIC stops.
Anis again loops the rope over
his head and under his armpits.]

HASAN-I-ZUNUZI

From the same wall, in the same manner, the Báb and Anis were again suspended, while the regiment lined up to open fire upon them. At that moment, the Báb's voice rang out.

[Spots rise on Anis and on the green

turban. The Báb's theme MUSIC begins again.]

WORDS OF THE BÁB

"Had you believed in Me, O wayward generation, every one of you would have followed the example of this youth... and willingly would have sacrificed himself in My path. The day will come when you will have recognized Me; that day I shall have ceased to be with you."

[The SPOT on Anis fades.
Then the SPOT on turban fades.
The Báb's theme MUSIC fades.
Lights rise on Hasan.
Meanwhile, Anis dons a white robe.]

HASAN-I-ZUNUZI

This time the 750 bullets shattered the bodies of both the Báb and Anis, blending them into one mass of flesh and bone.

[Pause.]

[Spot finds Anis upstage, dressed in his white wedding robe, sitting on a stool beside the green turban and pedestal.]

HASAN-I-ZUNUZI

That night, the mangled bodies of the Báb and Anis were thrown outside the gates of the city. Four companies of sentinels were ordered to guard the bodies so the Bábís could not rescue them. Next morning, however, the Russian Consul in Tabríz ordered an artist to make a sketch of the remains as they lay beside the city moat.

(pause)

It was such a faithful portrait of the Báb. Not a single bullet had struck His forehead, His cheeks, or His lips. A smile still seemed to linger upon that radiant face. But His body had been severely mutilated. Yet I could recognize the arms and head of Anis, who still seemed to be holding his Beloved in his embrace.

[Anis involuntarily moves his arms, as if in response to the suggestion.
Lights fade on Anis.]

HASAN-I-ZUNUZI
(cont'd)

As I gazed horror-struck upon that haunting portrait, and saw how those noble traits had been disfigured, my heart sank within me. I turned my face away in anguish and retreated to my house. I locked myself in my room. For three days and

HasAN-I-ZUNUZI
(cont'd)

three nights, I could neither eat nor sleep. The Promised One I had spent my life seeking was now dead.

(pause)

Meanwhile, a friend of the Báb is used a ploy to distract the sentinels guarding the remains of the Báb. He feigned insanity. While he was carrying on like a madman, the Bábis removed the mangled bodies from the moat, and hid them in a silk factory owned by one of them.

[Anis rises and circles behind the green turban. He waits behind it.]

HASAN-I-ZUNUZI
(cont'd)

...Then, under Bahá'u'lláh's direction, the sacred remains were secretly transported to Tihrán.

[Anis reverently lifts the turban. He crisscrosses the back of the stage, simulating the journey Hasan now describes.]

HASAN-I-ZUNUZI
(cont'd)

For fifty years, the remains of the Báb and Anis were hidden in Muslim shrines and in the homes of Baha'is; hidden from the enemies of the Faith. Finally, after six decades of secrecy, after passing through Iraq, Syria, and finally through Lebanon; the sacred dust arrived safely in Palestine in 1899.

[Anis comes to a stop upstage right, and kneels with the pillow and turban.]

For the next ten years, the trust was concealed in 'Akka, in the room of the Greatest Holy Leaf. And then, in 1909, choosing Naw-Rúz for the occasion, 'Abdu'l-Bahá had a marble sarcophagus brought to the vault which would one day be the Shrine of the Báb...

[Hasan has moved the pedestal downstage center.]

And there, by the light of a single lamp...

[Hasan now places an oil lamp in front of the pedestal and moves to stage left. Anis rises with the green turban and comes forward. He sets the green turban — and the pillow upon which it rests — on the pedestal.]

HASAN-I-ZUNUZI
(cont'd)

... with His own hands, 'Abdu'l-Bahá set the wooden casket, containing the sacred remains of the Báb into the marble sarcophagus.

[Anis bends low to the table and turban. Lights fade to silhouette on him. Lights rise on Hasan. He stands off to the side as if watching the scene he now describes.]

HASAN-I-ZUNUZI
(cont'd)

The sixty-year long odyssey was at an end. The earthly remains of the Martyr-Prophet of Shiraz were at last moored safely on God's holy mountain. 'Abdu'l-Bahá cast aside His turban, removed His shoes, threw off His cloak, and bent low over the opened sarcophagus. His silver hair waving about His head, His face transfigured and luminous, He rested His forehead on the border of the wooden casket, and sobbed aloud, weeping with such a weeping that all those present wept with Him.

(pause; comes forward)

On that very same Naw-Rúz, 18 Bahá'ís were martyred in Iran. The burial of so sacred a trust as the remains of the Báb — said 'Abdu'l-Bahá — called for such a sacrifice. By another strange coincidence on that same day, a cablegram from America arrived in the Holy Land. Plans for the construction of the Mother Temple of the West had begun. The mysterious forces of the Faith were well in motion.

[The song, "O God, my God" rises softly as Hasan approaches the pedestal and turban. He bows low before them, then stands upstage of the table, raising his hands, as he intones the Tablet of Visitation.]

HASAN-I-ZUNUZI

"The praise which hath dawned from Thy most august Self, and the glory which hath shown forth from Thy most effulgent..."

[Anis slowly rises and wanders in small pirouettes, arms outstretched, palms up, as if marvelling in wonderment at his fate. Hasan's voice fades into his.]

ANIS

Every day, all day long, pilgrims enter here to recite the Tablet of Visitation over the Báb's sacred remains – *here* where *I* also rest.

[Anis shakes his head in disbelief. Hasan continues his prayer quietly as Anis, still standing downstage center in wonderment, interjects.]

ANIS (cont'd)

The Beloved Guardian has called this spot the center of the planet. 'Abdu'l-Bahá has said that so precious is the Báb's dust, that the very earth surrounding the Shrine housing this dust is blessed. Why then am *I* here? What did I do to deserve such an honor?

[Whereas earlier in the play, Hasan had seemed to circle a stationary Anis, now Anis circles his carpet and the prayerful stationary Hasan. Meanwhile, Anis gazes up in awe, as if glimpsing the Concourse on High.]

HASAN-I-ZUNUZI
(still praying)

"...I bear witness that he who hath known Thee hath known God, and he who hath attained unto Thy presence hath attained unto the presence OF GOD..."

[Anis now arrives downstage left. He indicates where the turban rests.]

ANIS

Here *I* am for all eternity – at "the Spot," the Master says, "the Spot round which the Concourse on High circle in adoration." Why am *I* the one chosen to be here?

[Anis continues wandering in wonderment,
looking up at the ceiling.]

HASAN-I-ZUNUZI
(cont'd)

"...Waft, then, unto me, O my God and my Beloved, from the
right hand of Thy mercy and Thy loving-kindness, the holy
breaths of Thy favors, that they may draw me away from myself
and from the world..."

ANIS
(as if in response to the
prayer)

Love drew me away from myself, yes. But all I did was love.
Is love worthy of so high a station? Others have loved.
Others *will* love.

[He points into the orchestra pit.]

See: the nine terraces ascending to this sacred Spot...
(turns)

And there: the nine terraces rising above this—
(stops; realizes)

Is that what it is? Is that why I'm here?
(beat)

Because I obeyed?... But love's companion is obedience. All I
did was obey... All I did was obey my love...
(sinks to his knees;
MUSIC fades)

All I did was obey love's command...

[Anis gazes upward in humble
thanksgiving, arms outstretched
at his sides. A spot bathes him
in a shaft of brilliant light.]

[The spot very slowly fades to black
as Hasan prays.]

[Blackout. Except for the oil lamp
in front of the Báb's green turban.]

[The lights rise for the actors to take
their acknowledgement of the applause.]

[Blackout.
The MUSIC "*O God, My God*" rises.]

[Anis comes down from the stage, holding
the oil lamp aloft. In solemn procession,
he files toward the back of the theatre.]

THE END

N.B. The following is an optional conclusion to the piece.

EPILOGUE

[Hasan-i-Zunuzi, as the Narrator,
comes forward to address the audience,
quoting the Báb's final instructions
to the Letters of the Living.]

"O My beloved friends! You are the bearers of the name of God
in this Day. You have been chosen as the repositories of His
mystery. It behoves each of you to manifest the attributes of
God, and to exemplify by your deeds and words the signs of
His righteousness, His power and glory. The very members of
your body must bear witness to the loftiness of your
purpose... and the exalted character of your devotion...
'Ye are even as the fire which in the darkness of the night
has been kindled upon the mountain-top...

[Candles in audience, at strategic
locations, begin to light one by one.
This continues during the following.]

"Let your light shine before the eyes of men. Such must be
the purity of your character and the degree of your
renunciation, that the people of the earth may through you
recognize and be drawn closer to the heavenly Father who is
the Source of purity and grace... You who are His spiritual
children must by your deeds exemplify His virtues, and
witness to His glory. You are the salt of the earth, but if
the salt have lost its savour, wherewith shall it be
salted?... For verily I say, the heavenly Father is ever with
you and keeps watch over you. If you be faithful to Him, He
will assuredly deliver into your hands all the treasures of
the earth, and will exalt you above all the rulers and kings

HASAN-I-ZUNUZI
(CONT'D)

of the world.' O My Letters! Verily I say, immensely exalted is this Day above all the days of the Apostles of old. Nay, immeasurable is the difference! You are the witnesses of the Dawn of the promised Day of God. You are the partakers of the mystic chalice of His Revelation. Gird up the loins of endeavor... Purge your hearts of worldly desires, and let angelic virtues be your adorning. Strive that by your deeds you may bear witness to the truth of these words of God... The days when idle worship was deemed sufficient are ended. The time is come when naught but the purest motive, supported by deeds of stainless purity, can ascend to the throne of the Most High and be acceptable unto Him... You have been called to this station; you will attain to it, only if you arise to trample beneath your feet every earthly desire... You are the first Letters that have been generated from the Primal Point, the first Springs that have welled out from the Source of this Revelation. Beseech the Lord your God to grant that no earthly entanglements, no worldly affections, no ephemeral pursuits, may tarnish the purity, or embitter the sweetness, of that grace which flows through you. I am preparing you for the advent of a mighty Day. Exert your utmost endeavor that, in the world to come, I, who am now instructing you, may, before the mercy-seat of God, rejoice in your deeds and glory in your achievements...

[Points of light, scattered among the audience, now illumine the theatre. The first audience member to have lit her flashlight, now rises and proceeds out of the hall. A procession of flashlight bearers follows ceremonially.]

"Scatter throughout the length and breadth of this land, and, with steadfast feet and sanctified hearts, prepare the way for His coming. Heed not your weaknesses and frailty; fix your gaze upon the invincible power of the Lord, your God, the Almighty...

[The Narrator indicates the procession.]

"Arise in His name, put your trust wholly in Him and be assured of ultimate victory."

[A recording of the Persian CHANT of the Fort Tabarsí martyrs: "Holy, holy, the Lord our God, the Lord of the Angels and the spirit!" (see Nabil's *The Dawnbreakers*, 352) fills the theatre.]

[The CHANT continues until all the candle bearers have reached the back of the theatre. Then the chant fades, and the audience is left in meditative silence.]

THE END