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Revised Edition
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I am perplexed! For the last year my life has been falling apart all around me and I am baffled as to what to do. Take my job, for instance. Only yesterday I was the education director of Isfahan province. And now today I am a nobody. In the eyes of some, I may be even less than that. I understand that these are revolutionary times. I also understand that because of the revolution everything is chaotic and confused. What I don't understand is whether it is proper for office boys to order their former bosses around, or whether school children should be allowed to assign tasks to their teachers,
or whether everyone should be armed to the teeth? I was proud of the job security my employees enjoyed. But today job security has reached its lowest ebb; in fact, job security in the old sense doesn't exist anymore. The job you hold today may not be yours tomorrow. The riff-raff decides who should work and who should not. They decide when offices, factories, and schools should remain open and when they should not.

The impact of events of the past year on me has been so immense that only the past seems to be real to me. I mean, I can say with certainty that for the past decade I was the education director of Isfahan province. I don't think anyone would contest that. Although, come to think of it, there are probably many who not only would contest that, but would also hold it against me. This has caused me to avoid other people for two whole weeks. What a suffocating couple of weeks it has been! I think someone should have paid me a visit or, at least, should have called, or sent a message. I mean some authority figure should have informed me as to where I stand. Then again, I don't think I am singled out. There must be others like me. Like the heads of other offices—I am anxious to know what has happened to them. Although what they have to say might not be quite what I would like to hear.

Avoiding people does not mean that I am totally out of touch with the city. I take walks early in the morning. Last Friday, at sunrise, for instance, I was in the Naqshe Jahan Square. Standing before the tortuous bazaar, I looked at the beautiful blue dome and the lofty minarets of the Shah Mosque. What a magnificent sight! You have to be there, at that particular hour of the morning, and at that particular spot, to enjoy the rays of the sun dance against the intricate
designs of the golden dome of the Sheykh Lotfollah mosque. The reflection off the tiles is exhilarating.

Passing the flower beds, I walked to the shallow pond and watched my reflection tremble in sympathy with pieces of cloud in the azure sky over the high Porte of Ali Qapu. Gazing at the shimmering water, as I waited for the ripples to subside, a passing bird plunged itself into the water disturbing the serenity of the pool. This also showed me how transitory all these beauties we have created around us are ephemeral.

As if waking from a long sleep, I looked around. There was change everywhere. The meydan was no longer what it had been in the past—not, at least, the way my father had described it to me. The old man's words resounded in my ear. "None of this was here," he said with arms wide open as if embracing the whole meydan, he said, "These streets, the cars, the flower beds, the ice-cream shop, and this shallow pond are all new. In fact," he continued, "they say, in the old days this square had been a large polo field. Those stone markers in front of the Shah Mosque had served as polo posts. On occasions the square had also served as a large caravanserai. Caravans carrying Silk-Road goods from China to Rome had passed their nights here."

My father was not a traveling man but he knew a lot about shot silks, spices, and lapis-lazuli. The stories he told us as kids were mostly about adventures in the Turkmen desert, the outskirts of Bukhara, and the slave markets of Samarqand; exotic places that at the time I could see in my mind's eye and today see in my dreams. These days, for some reason, after many years, I think a lot about my father.

In any event, as I stood there, the meydan looked neither like a polo field nor an outdoor caravanserai. Lamp posts, streets, cars, trucks, buses, trees, flower beds and the ice-
cream stand masked the meydan's identity so well that the shah himself, viewing it from his high Porte, would not recognize it. This was indirectly telling me that the Isfahan that my family and I have enjoyed over the years might undergo changes that would make it unrecognizable to us all. Visualizing the outcome of this change impacted me. Tears welled up in my eyes, blurring the whole scene. I felt lonely. Not alone, mind you. Lonely. And I felt harried. I felt some force was compelling me to move along and leave everything dear to me behind.

As much as I enjoyed the cool morning breeze and the calm and quiet, I turned into the lane beside Ali Qapu, walked briskly past the old royal palaces and made it to Chaharbaq Avenue. I preferred to be indoors, before people flooded the streets and the traffic picked up. And fortunately, moments later, I slipped into our house.

Flowing water has always been inspirational for me. The river comes from somewhere unknown to me, passes me and disappears beyond me, heading for an unknown place. These days I felt my life was taking a similar course. This morning, standing on the ancient mud-brick bridge down the river, I watched the sun rise. What a magnificent sight and what a marvelous experience. Looking at the bridges in front of me, I found myself at a crossroads. While I was admiring the artistic achievement of the creators of the Khaju and Siyosepol bridges, the beam and bolt jumble of the new metal bridge did not impress me. Why was that, I wondered. As I gazed at the water, the bridges, and the sunlight, an amazing thought occurred to me. It was, perhaps as a result of my week of rummaging through my past in solitude. I realized that, unlike my eyes, my heart, and my mind that automatically discriminate, the sunlight did not discriminate. Its golden beams washed over the metal bridge with the same care and
deliberate, measured pace as over the other bridges. What amazed me even more was a concrete view of my own attitude. Suddenly I could see the very mechanism with which I separated, graded, and categorized bits of information. I could see how discrimination works: Isfahani, Shirazi, Tabrizi; Muslim, Christian, Jewish; Kurd, Turk, and Arab; acceptable, unacceptable. If only those who condemned me could experience what I experience at that instant! I found myself murmuring, "Why am I so sentimental about the past? Why is this mud-brick bridge dearer to me than the Khaju and Siyosepol?" Why does the metal bridge that is built using the same techniques and precision as the other bridges should be less impressive and, indeed, less awe inspiring?

What filled me with awe was no longer the sunlight or the bridges or the time of day. It was something larger, more profound, and more personal. It touched me deeply where my likes and dislikes are lodged. It involved my attitude toward change and agents of change—maybe more the agents of change. For the first time in my life I saw my perception, my intellect, and my education at work. Not a pretty sight. Not compared with the simplicity of the sunlight, or its sophistication or its beauty. They showed me that there were many differences between the simplicity, beauty and sophistication of the sunlight and the crude instruments that measured things, being they abstract or concrete. When I placed myself in the general context of things, I was frightened. Although standing on the bridge, I felt as though I was floating down the river. I looked around. The beautiful city of Isfahan looked frighteningly grim, as if awaiting the arrival of the destructive army of Tamerlane.

Time flew by and, like the previous week, people crowded the streets. Once again I felt I should slip into the house
and close the door behind me. However, this time I was a couple of miles away from home. As I began to walk briskly in the direction of Sheykh Baha'i Avenue, my thoughts ran ahead of me.

As I looked at my fellow citizens, the idea of change registered even stronger in my mind. Men, whether young, middle-aged or old, wore beards. Where once I used to encounter nicely groomed men smiling at me as they crossed my path on their way to work, I now see shabby beings with stern faces wearing unironed suits. They stared me in the face as if mystified by my very existence. What happened to the squeak of new shoes? I wondered. Now I realize how much I enjoyed hearing that sound as opposed to this annoying scuffing of home-made *malakis* against the pavement. Not wearing a tie, too, seemed to be fashionable. For some, in fact, it was now a status symbol.

Of every group of five people I passed by, three were revolutionary guards taking some unfortunate victim to a committee to be interrogated. The fifth was an overseeing *mullah*. His job was to hand the victim the committee's decree and see to it that all arrests were proper and that the proceedings were according to the *Shari'a* law. There were also other groups of guards and *mullahs*; they escorted victims to the gallows to be hanged. In this latter group, the victim's sentence was pinned to his clothes and, in most cases, the victim was handcuffed. I even saw a group of six or seven escorting a huge fellow in shackles.

This idea of change had become pervasive. Even things that could not change, like lamp posts or the gutter, looked different. I had the feeling that something was tearing the city of Isfahan apart exposing all that were ugly and unseemly. What could have caused this disruption? I continued to search my memory of the past for an answer. Surely the
exodus from the countryside had something to do with it; but could that be all? No. Something more ominous than the onslaught of urbanism and the demise of a cozy, rustic existence threatened Isfahan. A militant force, nourished on fear, claimed its turn at the helm. And to reach absolute power, it was ready to trample on affections, homes, and people. It was ready to change everything. In the process, it was suffocating me... and it was suffocating my family, not to mention, my whole way of life.

Women are magically transformed into crow-like beings, wrapped up in thick, black chadors. Until just a couple of weeks ago they walked down this same street with proper make-up, colorful blouses and skirts, and high-heeled shoes. How quickly all that has been effaced! It is incredible. Just like taking the eraser to the blackboard. Everything is thrown back to the glorious times of the Qajars. There are still a few non-conformists, of course, but their long, black overcoats do not add much luster to this drab scene. Nor do the navy-blue or the brown dresses. In this new environment, color, as I knew it and cherished it, is absent. An angry demon, it seems, has squeezed all the brilliant colors out of the spectrum. Shades of gray are all that is left.

Traffic is tragically slow. People, donkeys, and horses mill around in the middle of the street. The traffic lights are mostly out and the traffic cops have become revolutionary guards. It is still early in the morning but the honking horns and people's cries and yells are already deafening. In the afternoon, when the sun belabors the pavement, the noise must become unbearable. The whole square must turn into a madhouse.

Movie theaters are ordered closed. No more comedy films, no more variety shows, and no more westerns. We are not allowed to listen to music, not even at home. Once or twice, in the basement of my house, I listened to a couple of
favorite records, but each time I felt I was doing something terribly wrong and irrevocably sinful. I even felt the presence of the bearded minister of "Voice and Vision," an old friend from my college days, standing in the threshold reprimanding me. For a while I took refuge in the radio. But the topics were depressing. I recall vividly one day a mullah was discussing the required footage for shrouds in mortuaries. He was detailing how every inch must be measured, shaped, cut, and used. I felt sick to my stomach. Turning off the radio, I took refuge in the television. Can you believe it? That same clergyman was sitting cross-legged on the floor of the studio!? In his hand he held a yardstick and in front of him were piled bolts of white calico. I turned off the television, too. I have not watched that channel since. I don't know if I ever will.

Only Ali Asghar, our servant, and I ventured out of the house. My adventures, however, were brief and far between. They began and ended early in the morning. Like a whale surfacing for fresh air and diving to the depths for a long time thereafter, I left, breathed the fresh air, made sure the world around us was still there and slipped back into the house. But Ali Asghar went out frequently, mingled with people, got coupons, stood in never-ending queues, bought groceries, and watched revolutionary spectacles. Believe it or not, this seventeen-year-old was the only link between us and the city in which I had been education director for the past decade.

I wish I could get more information out of Ali Asghar. Even more than that, I wish I could know who he talks to and what he might be up to. I cannot trust the boy fully. He tells me that the building in which I used to work is still closed and that matters pertaining to education are now the concern of the mullahs. That really is not telling me much, is
it? After all this is a *mullahs'* revolution. Obviously its affairs would be in the hands of the *mullahs*. My main worry is where does the boy himself stand? Where does his loyalty lie? If he chooses, he can easily destroy me. He can destroy my whole family. Yet I know very little about his actions outside the house.

A most recent revelation about Ali Asghar has been even more distressing. It has taken sleep out of my eyes. It pertains to something my wife told me just last night; something that I earnestly hope is not true. But, then again, my wife has talked to Behjat Khanum, her sister. Behjat calls only when she senses a real danger threatening the family. In spite of all that, I still have a hard time believing the rumor. That's one thing if Behjat Khanum herself were the source. But, Behjat Khanum's son, Vahhab has told her. What do I know about Vahhab? Next to nothing. Actually nothing. Then again, I cannot dismiss what my wife told me either. Who would this *mullah* be who had supposedly said all those things to Ali Asghar? Who would want to do that to me and my family? More important, why?

No. I am not convinced. I think my wife is making a mountain out of a mole hill. I should keep my cool. Why would this *mullah*, like a beast that stalks its prey, stalk Ali Asghar? If he knew the boy, wouldn't he ask him to meet him in some run down mosque or under some old bridge? Why would he follow him like that in the crowded bazaar? Besides, how could Vahhab hear all that from behind a thick, brick wall? They could have been talking about someone else. I am sure they were. Ali Asghar is young. The *mullah* could have been tantalizing him. Suppose the house and the car in their plan were actually my house and car. Why would this *mullah* want to spend the money from all that on Ali Asghar's training in Afghanistan? Besides, what has Afghani-
stan got to do with training Iranian youths? No. I refuse to give credence to any of that. It just does not pan out. The kid is innocent. I have worked with kids like that all my life. I am familiar with their psychology. Vahhab is fabricating all that. Maybe, just maybe, he has something against Ali Asghar.

I thought I would never admit this, but it is true. I cannot lie to myself. Like those who cannot face another human being and who confine themselves to their houses or even to their rooms, I have become afraid of people. My fears are real. They might stem from observing and hearing about the astonishingly rapid and overwhelmingly drastic changes that are taking place around me, but I cannot tell. I am not a psychologist. I have no doubt, however, that people and things overwhelm me, especially since the onset of the revolution. Oh, how I wish I could absolve myself of all blame, but my conscience stubbornly holds me to it. In fact, the more I delve into our situation, the more I am convinced that a lot of what is happening to us as a family is my fault. I feel like a lonely king on the chessboard with nowhere to go. Checkmate! I should have seen the revolution coming. I should have made preparations for it. I should have taken my nose out of the books at least long enough to observe affairs around me. I should have known better. But, it took the ricochet of one stray bullet to wake me up. One single gunshot was sufficient to overwhelm me. No actually, I chose to turn a deaf ear to the advice of everyone and do the right thing. I made all the choices. Now it is becoming evident that I may also have burnt all my bridges. I have imprisoned myself and, possibly, imperiled my family. Oh God, what have I done? Have I doomed us all?

Rapid change frightens me. I am sure it was change that held me back. That very first bullet. Hearing it, I felt like
someone who had suddenly come face to face with a gigantic hissing cobra. I became numb. What did that single bullet do to me? I wonder. The last few weeks have been like a prolonged, nightmarish encounter with a cobra. A never-ending nightmare. I know the sting is yet to follow, but when? Today, tomorrow...?

Every time that Ali Asghar comes back from the bazaar, he brings us a new tale, a fresh account of events. Through him we know who has been whipped, arrested, hanged, or executed by firing squad, as well as who has gained prominence in the community. Ali Asghar is our radio, television, and newspaper reporter all rolled into one. We feel obliged to trust him. In fact, I can go one step further and say that, under the prevailing circumstances, we depend on him. The feeling, however, does not seem to be mutual. Worse yet, Ali Asghar's stories are unsettling. They recall the avenues of old Paris in which carts carried the victims of the French revolution to the guillotine. These images, mingled with the booms from the roofs of the revolutionary committees as they go about their sacred duty, unnerve even the strongest among us. My wife... my daughter... Oh God, what are my children going through?

I am not saying that Ali Asghar is a liar; far from that. But neither can I say with certainty that what he says is totally accurate or credible. Maybe I have difficulty believing him because what he tells us belongs to a much different time, or even age. He compares Isfahan to a large prison camp in which every inmate, even children, spy for the warden. That, to me, comes right out of the Nazi concentration camps of World War II or the Gulags of the Soviet Union, not Iran. Just the other day he said, "Today an old mother squealed on her son and paved her own way to paradise!" Does that mean that they hanged her son, or put him in front
of the firing squad? Still another time he said, "Reza, the ice-cream vendor’s ten-year-old son, ratted on his father. The revolutionary guards hanged the father and turned the business over to the child. Reza must now be our local ice-cream vendor." Don't these frightening stories belong to the Spanish Inquisition era? Then, seeing how afraid I am to confront the world outside, he becomes sarcastic, often even down right rude. "If I were to squeal on you," he once taunted, "I bet they would make me education director!"

The more things like that go on, the more Ali Asghar’s remarks become poignant. I wonder about the motive behind his remarks. He might mean well. In fact, they may be funny to him, but they are not to me. They are terrifyingly real, especially considering the fate of Reza’s father or the import of Vahhab’s remarks. Ironically, after all that is said and done, Ali Asghar laughs and says, "But don't be alarmed. I am only joking. I would never do that to you."

Since last night, every time I think about Ali Asghar, I visualize him talking to a mullah. For some reason, they are standing by the old Marnun Bridge. I have the feeling that the mullah is teaching him something. But I cannot see the mullah’s face. Just six months ago Ali Asghar knew next to nothing about me, my work, or any of this. Where does he get all this information? He acts and talks like an expert psychologist, a demoralizing agent; while, on the surface, he jokes as he criticizes.

I was closer to home. As I walked along the beautiful Abbas Abad Avenue and marveled at its gorgeous tall plane trees, I began to miss them already. I know I was about to lose them but I had never felt their loss as I did this moment. I was asking myself, "Why should I not be able to go to Naqsh-i Jahan Square everyday and watch the sun rise in the east? Why should I be deprived of standing before the tortu-
ous bazaar and marvel at the beautiful blue dome and the lofty minarets of the Shah Mosque? Why should those magnificent sights only blocks away from my house become so distant, so alien? Why do I feel that they were slipping away from me?

When I turned into the alley that led to the stream near our house, I realized that Ali Asghar and I had been able to leave the house and create a diversion in our lives, but that my wife and children had been cooped up in the house for all this time without a break. Isn't it time, I asked myself, to put them in the car and take them out of the city, to the ancient Gabrabad district, for instance? Even if they don't get to talk to people, they could wade in the Zayandehrud River, enjoy the breeze on their faces and feel the warmth of the sun. Thus, having made my mind up, I entered the house and said to my wife, "I will get the car ready. You get the children ready. We are going for a ride."

"Are you crazy?" She said in an incredulous voice. "The children are up, but they haven't washed or had their breakfast..."

"That's all right." I replied calmly. "They can have their breakfast in the car and they can wash in the river..."

"But why suddenly this up and go? She asked, without showing any intention of getting the children ready. "Why don't you wait till things sort themselves out?"

"Things will never sort themselves out—not today, not tomorrow—we will have to live with them as they are. I have had it up to here..."

"You've had it up to here!" She raised her voice.
"Yes, because you and the children have had it even worse. Now, let's get going!"

Knowing that my mind was made up, she found her chador, put appropriate clothes on the children, and prepared them for their day out. We arranged things so that we could spend the morning around the Zayandehrud River and its tributaries. Later we could visit the ancient Gabrabad district, eat lunch under the shade of the willow trees there by the river, and leave when it became hot and muggy.

Once I turned into Sheykh Baha’i Avenue, I did not stop. I was afraid that we would be stopped by the revolutionary guards or, worse yet, by the uncontrolled children and youth who carried lethal weapons. Past the Khaju Bridge, I headed for the tomb of the poet Valeh. I had heard that he had not only built his own tomb but that he had even sculpted his own tombstone leaving blank the date of his death. Paying a visit to the gardens surrounding the tomb of the jolly poet, I thought, would relieve some of the tension. But, unfortunately, at the gate, a badly scribbled note announced that for the foreseeable future the tomb and garden were out of bounds. Dismayed, I headed for Gabrabad. On the way there my wife remarked, "You know, Gabrabad is an interesting name, a true reminder of the passage of time. It makes me think of how people displace each other and how situations evaporate."

I could not see her face under the chador, but her voice was a mixture of desperation and nostalgia. What change was she contemplating? Nodding in affirmation and zigzagging around potholes, I added, "There is change, of course, but there are also reminders. The name Gabrabad, for instance, as you just said, reminds future generations of the past. Just look around us. Only three hundred years ago this place was a major center of activity. Do you see a Hall of
Mirrors anywhere near here; a hall that reflects the trees and the water of the Zayandehrud? Or do you see a Haft Dast or a building that resembles a saltshaker? No. They are all gone."

"Why don't you mention the many Zoroastrians who were removed from this very area to make room for those palace buildings you talk about?" My wife interrupted, returning to her original theme. Realizing my own vulnerability, I refused to respond. Responding to the analogies that she was drawing could result in nothing but spoiling everyone's day.

I parked the car under a huge tree and let the children out. They took off for the water like uncaged birds flying to tree tops. My wife and I strolled in the vicinity. There were many unanswered questions. Our formidable future, however, compelled us to continue the small talk. After we walked a few steps, like a thief looking for the police, my wife looked all around. When she was sure that no one was there, she dropped the chador to her shoulders. In the sunlight, I could see the toll that the days of confinement and worry had taken on her. I said, "Why don't you go and join the children? I am sure they will be more entertaining."

"I don't mind if I do," she said. "The lunch is in the basket in the trunk. There is a blanket on the back seat we can use as a tablecloth."

As she walked away, what she had told me the previous night about Ali Asghar and the mullah flooded my mind. I took the blanket and spread it on the uneven ground. As I gathered some wood for a fire to cook the kabobs. Although it was the middle of summer, I felt like we were on a Sizdabadar outing. I took the basket out of the trunk and set up the sofreh for lunch. So engrossed in their freedom and play, the children seemed not to care if they ate lunch at all.
Around 1:30, on our way back, I drove past the Khaju Bridge, took Chaharbagh-e Bala before Siyosepol and entered Chaharbagh proper, heading for Darwazeh Dowlat. In the area where Reza Shah's statue used to welcome the travelers to Isfahan, a crowd was forming. Men, women, and children seemed to be settling in for a long wait. I didn't stop. No, I drove straight to Sheykh Baha'i Street and home.

Because our neighborhood is close to the center of the city, it has not seen as many murders, robberies, and other unspeakable atrocities prevalent in the outskirts and the countryside. For instance, people talk about masked bandits climbing up their walls and robbing them. Others report that one or two members of their families had been caught in crossfire. As I said, those events took place mostly outside the city proper—in Lonban or in Nazhnan, Toqchi and Sar-e Qabr-e Aqa. Gradually, however, they were entering our area as well. Just a couple of days ago, for instance, there was a bloody quarrel right under our window. The first since the beginning of the revolution when a stray bullet passed through the window pane, whizzed by my ear, and lodged itself in the wall. However, compared to what is going on in Falavarjan, Shahin Shahr, Nasrabad and Najafabad, I would say, our neighborhood is still relatively quiet and safe.

At about 2:30 that day, I went down into the basement. Our basement is cool and includes the luxury of running water. As on every other muggy afternoon, I began my study of our educational problems, especially those facing elementary and secondary school teachers. I often ask myself why I bother at all. After all, I am not or, at least do not seem to be involved in any way in the future plans for education. But habit, I guess, is a difficult thing to break. I will, probably, continue doing this irrespective of the decisions of the pow-
ers that be. In fact, I am sure that if I don't do this, I will go crazy within a few months.

At about 3:00 p.m., I heard a crack that sounded like a distant gunshot. Momentarily it revived the memory of the ricochet of the gunshot that has plagued my life, but it did not last long. I was working and when so engaged, I usually am not easily distracted. I continued my writing. Before long, however, I heard a commotion at the top of the stairs. It sounded something like the cocking of rifles followed by the distinct sound of army boots on hot, dry bricks. I hurried to the door where, to my great surprise, I encountered two uninvited, huge, bearded revolutionary guards each carrying a rifle. They were standing in the entrance to the hallway. Several other people were standing behind them. Ali Asghar, who apparently had been unable to hold them back, was standing in the background. With a somewhat guilty face, he refused to say anything. He even seemed uncomfortable to look me in the face.

The unannounced entrance of revolutionary guards into private residences was commonplace. Nevertheless, I could not help being curious. Visibly shaken, and without directing my question to any one in particular, I asked, "Did you gentlemen want to see me?"

A revolutionary guard who was aiming his rifle at my midsection and whose trigger finger trembled said brusquely to one of his colleagues, "The bloke thinks he is still some kind of a goddamn son-of-a-bitch. Get him going!"

Then, without waiting for the others to react, he turned to me and said, "Get moving. C'mon, get going. Move it! Let's go."

I was stunned. Not knowing what to do, I said, "Going where? Are you sure you are at the right house?"
A young woman had joined them. She must have been
talking to my wife upstairs, I thought to myself, still waiting
for a response. Smiling alongside her rifle and in a charming
Isfahani accent, she said, "There is no mistake, brother. Mis-
takes are a thing of the past. You'd better get going."

The situation was grave. Otherwise, I asked myself, why
would they send so many guards and people to fetch one per-
son? Calmly, I asked, "Well, won't you at least tell me where
you are taking me?"

The same young woman said, "To the committee, where
else?"

I realized that, contrary to my belief that I would never
be harassed, I was being arrested. Ali Asghar's tales flashed
in my mind as I recalled a telephone conversation I had with
Nahid Khanum, the wife of the ex-mayor, "It was in the
middle of the night," she had said. "They came as a noisy
bunch, broke into our bedroom, dragged the poor man out of
bed and took him to the committee in his pajamas."

As we left the basement the clock in the living room
struck 3:30. The guards had placed me in front but, fortu-
nately, no one was in the yard. At least my wife and children
were out of sight. A small hand holding the half-closed door
of the vestibule is all I saw of them.

We left the house and walked in the direction of the Lon-
ban Mosque. I did not know the exact destination, but Ali
Asghar had said that a new committee had recently begun
operation near or in that mosque. We were heading there.

There are two ways from our house to the Lonban
Mosque. One is via the Sheykh Baha’i and Shahpur Streets;
this is the longer way. The other is via a shady alley that
stretches along a well-fed stream. Considering the afternoon
heat, the guards had chosen the latter route.
Once we turned into the alley and I saw the trees and the water, my imagination got the better of me. Vague but sweet memories of early youth welmed up. I recalled the days when as a high school student—perhaps ninth or tenth grade—I used to memorize my lessons here. My friends and I swam, climbed trees, and did all sorts of childish pranks all around this very stream and nobody bothered us. But now, as a middle-aged, respectable member of society, I was being escorted by a bunch of foolish, good-for-nothing kids to some God-forsaken committee as if I were a highway robber, or a murderer. Momentarily, my whole world lost coherence and meaning. I felt dizzy and my knees began to shake. My body became warm; then it cooled and a cold sweat ran down my spine. I felt like a sentenced criminal walking to the gallows. Fearing that I might faint, I steeled myself. I began to feel better. I continued to walk. Fortunately, no one seemed to be aware of what I was going through. I hoped earnestly that we would not encounter any acquaintance. I knew the guards would not let me explain, and that people are ready to draw conclusions without the facts. Then, suddenly, I recalled something, something which could destroy us all. I slackened my pace until I was in line with the last guard. I put my hands behind me, took off my ring and put it into my pocket. It would be impossible to sit with my hand in my pocket before the committee, I thought. Then I resumed my normal pace.

I had not seen any of these committees in action except on television, where the proceedings of early trials had been broadcast. What I had seen had been invariably gloomy, discouraging and depressing. In my mind I had identified them with courts-martial, a comparison that itself filled me with horror. To ward off any thoughts that might undermine my confidence, I convinced myself that my name had come up
by accident. Surely, I thought, once people see me in person and recognize me—the education director of their province—they would reprimand the fools; they would all apologize and a friend would take me home in his car.

But if there were any mistakes, they were on my part. The committee into which I was hurled shared many similarities with the side shows in the corner of the public market place. Those who have visited the Chaharsuye Shiraziha market in Isfahan have no doubt noticed the antics of an old man who amuses audiences by describing some imaginary events depicted on a miserable little screen. Peasants from the surrounding communities listen to him and laugh and cry per his prompting. This committee featured many of the antics of that show. In fact, many of the same villagers were present here as well. The only difference, perhaps, was that this committee had four showmen to the miserable side-show's one.

Of these four, I knew one very well—or, at least, I thought I did. I was somewhat familiar with another and I had heard the names of the other two. The mere sight of one of the judges filled me with indescribable apprehension.

When I arrived at the committee, its members were finishing their interrogation of a man of forty or so. The man, from one of the villages around Isfahan, had a thick accent. He had allegedly seduced his friend's wife, and now both he and the woman were being tried. To speed things up, the woman had been sent to another committee to be interrogated.

Before long, having heard him and the witnesses, the committee members began their deliberation. No one even listened to the beseeching of the accused; everyone seemed to be entirely absorbed in the process and in the timely completion of the dossier. What disturbed me was the prosecution's two witnesses. One was the woman's husband; the
other was an invalid who, judging from his explanations, hardly distinguished the night from the day.

After a few minutes, the chief judge studied the audience carefully, and then began his summation. Speaking with a mild Azerbayjani accent, he said, "The combatant people of Isfahan and environs have given of their lives and property to the revolution more freely than the people of any other city, except maybe Tabriz. No one, but no one, should give himself the right to stain the honor of you God-fearing people."

"No one," the audience echoed in unison.

"If this clear-cut case were being tried in the United States," he continued, "this trial would take months, perhaps even years. Then the accused would be jailed for a few days or months, of course, but soon he would be let loose on society again. Here, however, we have Islamic justice. We will not allow guilty individuals a chance to develop files, engage lawyers, and sponge off this community. Soon, God willing, there will be a review of our justice system and I hope that qesas will become the cornerstone of our Shari' a law—do unto him what he has done unto you!"

"Amen," confirmed the audience in unison.

Having said these few words, the chief judge motioned the clerk, and he began to read the verdict:

"In the Name of Allah,

...Rajab, son of Mirza Ja'far, resident of the township of Kelishad in the province of Isfahan has, reportedly, committed an act of adultery. It is the sentence of this committee that he should be hanged by the neck until dead. The sentence will be carried out at 4:30 this day of ... at the meydan previously known as the Statue..."
Gradually, I began to realize why people were gathering in the area where Reza Shah's statue used to stand, and I surmised that the committee interrogating the unfortunate woman, too, must be somewhere near there. When both sentences are pronounced, I thought, they will drag the unfortunate couple to the meydan. They will hang the man and, in all probability, bury the woman waist-deep in the ground and stone her to death. What an effective way of setting examples for a cheering crowd! What an effective way of communicating with our children and youth! Is this the same Isfahan—half the world—in which Malek Shah, Nizam al-Mulk, and Shah Abbas the Great had resided, I wondered, or has the passage of time degraded it and made it low and shameless?

At about a quarter past four, several revolutionary guards and plain-clothes officers dragged Rajab, son of Mirza Ja'far, resident of Kelishad, to the ground and took him out of the committee precinct. His gradually diminishing cries and beseeching were interrupted by a number of successive shots coming from the area of the roof. The cracks sounded very similar to what I had heard just before the revolutionary guards had appeared in our basement. Involuntarily I thought of Gorgi, our dog. He would not have allowed strangers in. Where was Gorgi all that time? Why wasn't he there? Even when we left the basement, he was not in the yard. How did the guards reach the basement without having to confront Gorgi? Was Gorgi...? Did Ali Asghar...?

Having completed Rajab's dossier, the judges and their staff left the hall to take a break. Meanwhile, I tried to recall what I knew about the judges so that I could assess the gravity of my situation. The name of the judge whom I knew well was Aqa Pisuziyani. Although he had recently rummaged for the turban and the robe of a mullah, he was still a novice.
There was no doubt, of course, that at the present he was one of the main pillars of the house of justice in Isfahan and environs; if there were any doubts, they concerned his credentials and the procedures that had propelled him so rapidly to such a prominent position of responsibility.

In the past, my family and the Pisuziyani family had been very close. I recalled, for instance, that on special summer nights we used to ride our bikes to Zeynabiye, a distance of several miles from the city proper. What joyful and unforgettable nights those were! I wondered if he would remember any of that. I even wondered if he would allow himself the luxury.

Hushang Pisuziyani is from Homayun Shahr, the old Sede. He studied up to the tenth grade at the Sa'eb High School near Pol Shiri. After graduation, he returned to Homayun Shahr to manage his family's estate. At Homayun Shahr, it seems, he did not get along with his father and, with his mother's assistance, he visited India. This was one of the reasons for our not seeing much of each other for some time. Upon his return from India, he must have joined the theological school. His favorite teacher, no doubt, must have helped.

The last time I saw Aqa Pisuziyani was about a year and a half ago. I recall meeting him near our house, where Sheykh Baha'i meets Chaharbaqe Pa'in. At the time, he wore a small beard and said that he was returning from the Iran movie theater where he had just seen a remarkable drama centered on sociological problems of India. He even advocated that it was a must see film for adults as well as for the youth. Lest it create unwarranted misunderstanding, I shall not mention the name of the movie.

Now, viewing his massive turban, cloak and walking stick, it became apparent to me that his earnest desire to visit
the United States must have finally given way to the call of the robe. For some unknown reason, I felt somewhat betrayed. How could Hushang Khan be allowed to masquerade as a full-fledged mullah? Not to mention, a full-fledged judge!

The name of the other judge was Aqa Sham' al-Ma'ali. I had met him briefly once, or maybe even twice. Looking at him as he talked to his followers among the audience, I recalled a conversation that I had had with the late governor who, incidentally, was executed just a few days ago, following the execution of the ex-mayor. Our discussion centered on the vicissitudes of time. We wondered, were time and tide to surrender the reins of government to the mullahs, what the fate of people like ourselves would be? The late governor's words are indelibly etched in my memory. He said, "No one knows the mullahs better than Seyyed Ahmad Kasravi."

The governor then used the family of this very Sham' al-Ma'ali as an example. From his words—and, apparently, he knew this family as well as I knew the Pisuziyanis—I gathered that the Sham' al-Ma'alis were among the well-established mule drivers of Fereydan and Kuhrang and that they were related to the Chahar-Lang and the Haft-Lang clans of the Bakhtiyaris. The Aqa himself grew up in Daran, a small town with a primary school. He accompanied his father to Isfahan when the latter was appointed the director of one of that city's high schools. Why did he, with a diploma in mathematics from the Sa'di High School, join the men of the cloth? No one knew.

While the late governor was spewing out these details to prove that the mullahs' main objective was to gather wealth for themselves and their mosques, and that they would not strive for a better standard of living for the masses, especially for their ardent clients, the poor, I asked, "How is it
that the son of a respectable man like Hojat al-Islam Sham' al-Ma'ali, with a diploma in mathematics, should choose to become a mullah rather than, say, an engineer?" He chuckled and said, "His late father was of the opinion that money gained through banking, or by holding governmental positions, was like money received by begging in public." I was amazed. I said, "Is the money gained by the mullahs any different?" The governor, may God rest his soul, smiled and said, "Why don't you ask a mullah that question?" Of course I have not asked any mullah that question. Neither am I about to entertain it now. Nevertheless, with utmost clarity I could see that every word that the late governor had spoken was as good as gold, including his sarcastic remarks to the effect that we all are beggars at the threshold of the Commander of the Faithful, Imam Ali, and his descendants!

I knew the third Judge, an Aqa Mash'al al-Din, by name only. Reportedly he was from Tabriz. He and a few others had formed a powerful central committee in Tehran to oversee important judicial cases. When a situation so warranted, one of these experts visited the provinces. Their bold and decisive measures were exemplary enough to keep the ship of state in good condition. He was a mullah of some forty-odd years. He wore a black turban, a graying beard, and his hairline showed from beneath his turban. He appeared to be a very pleasant, even trustworthy, person.

The fourth, the committee clerk, was a youth of about twenty-five. He wore old army fatigues; a stubby beard covered most of his face. They called him Mr. Ali Zadeh. When the court was in recess, he occasionally rose and called for order so that the judges could enjoy their break.

What I refer to as the hall was in reality a large room with only one door. At the present some one hundred to one hundred twenty bodies were pushed into it. No matter how
hard you tried, you could not find room for even one more. Farthest from the door, at the place of honor, there was a platform, raised about half a meter or so from the ground. That platform, actually the place of the judges, was covered with beautiful, rare Persian carpets. The intriguing patterns of the carpets, enhanced by the extraordinary floodlights, imparted a special awesomeness to the whole situation. The rest of the floor was covered with hand-loomed cloth mats. As is the custom, the audience had carried their shoes with them and had placed them next to themselves on the mats.

When in audience, Aqa Mash'al al-Din sat cross-legged at the head of the entire hall and occasionally drank tea served with lump sugar. Aqa Sham'al-Ma'ali sat to his right and, as if plagued with nervousness, continuously worked his rosary beads. As for Aqa Pisuziyani, he sat between Aqa Mash'al al-Din and the committee clerk, Ali Zadeh. A thick book was spread in front of Ali Zadeh. From the way Aqa Pisuziyani struggled to read as much of it as he could, I surmised that it contained information pertinent to my case. But that was only a guess. A poor guess at that.

For some reason they had placed me on a folding chair at the foot of the platform. This seemed like special treatment because Rajab, son of Mirza Ja'far, had had to sit on the mat, among the audience.

As I sat on the chair, a silk curtain hanging on the wall behind the judges caught my sight. In the center of the curtain, on the white background, shone a black tulip. The blood-stained green leaves of the plant glowed like red hot blades just taken from the forge. I had seen a similar curtain in Aqa Pisuziyani’s house, but on that curtain was depicted a haloed man sitting on his knees. A special sword was placed before him.
Although the painting on the curtain was something new for me, my every view of it revived sweet memories. I recalled the very first day my father had taken me to school. A similar curtain had adorned the front wall of our classroom. Whenever the teacher bored me I took refuge in the plants and flowers of that painting. Could I lose myself in this strange silk curtain, too? I wondered.

The judges' break over, one by one they returned to their places. Only Aqa Pisuziyani was still in the yard, talking to one of the revolutionary guards who had brought me to the committee. Then, speaking, they passed by me. Aqa stepped up onto the platform and the guard plowed his way through the audience and went out through the open door.

The clerk stood up and pointed his index finger at me. First I thought he wanted me to stand up, perhaps in honor of the judges, but instead, before I could react, his voice thundered at me, saying, "People! Do you know this man?"

He had an incredibly thick Isfahani accent. The audience replied in unison, "Yes, we do."

I was flabbergasted. Never in my entire career had I encountered a scene like this. I could not have even imagined the possibility of a day when I would be placed on an uncomfortable chair, pointed at, and like a lifeless object, be inquired about. Have you seen this before? I had thought that there would be some measure of order and decorum at the committee. I had figured they would realize that I was an educated individual and that they would treat me accordingly—just as I would have treated them. But no. Apparently, a new method was being introduced. The clerk continued, "Do you know who he is?"

Someone in the audience, a man of about sixty or seventy years, stood up, pointed at me and said, "He is the son of Mirza Mohammad who resides on Sheykh Baha'i Avenue."
That at some point in his life my father had used the title of Mirza was news to me. But the old man was otherwise right. My father's name was Mohammad and we still live on Sheykh Baha'i Avenue. The clerk addressed the audience again, saying, "Do you know his occupation?"

This time one of my former employees stood up, pointed at me and said, "He used to be the Education Director."

After this introduction, in the course of which I was quite unofficially stripped of my title, the clerk invited the audience to silence. Then crossing his legs, he sat. Now it was Aqa Mash'al al-Din's turn to address the audience. He gathered his robe, cleared his throat, and rambled in Arabic:

"In the Name of God, Most Gracious, Most Merciful.
Praise be to God, the Cherisher and Sustainer of the Worlds;
Most Gracious, Most Merciful;
Master of the Day of Judgment.
Thee do we worship, and Thine aid we seek.
Show us the straight way,
The way of those on whom Thou hast bestowed Thy Grace,
Those whose portion is not wrath, and who go not Astray.
In the Name of God, Most Gracious, Most Merciful,
Say: He is God,
The One and Only;
God, the Eternal, Absolute;
He begetteth not, Nor is He begotten;
And there is none like unto Him."

After reciting these verses from the Holy Qur'an, he stroked his gray, bushy beard and said, "The individual who
is being interrogated here today has not committed a crime such as we could say, for instance, of Rajab who just left us. We cannot say that he has seduced someone's wife, or that he has paid his rent late or that he has refused to pay. He has not robbed anyone, neither has he murdered anyone so that we are obliged to interrogate him for that person's sake or simply for the sake of upholding the law. No, He has not done any of these. Of course, as you observe, he is not innocent either. Otherwise, why should he appear before you, the combatant people of this land, to be interrogated? This individual is innocent in some ways and he is guilty, very guilty perhaps, in some others."

Aqa Mash'al al-Din's ambiguous words were well chosen. He meant to convince the audience of my guilt so completely that after his speech they would heed neither my words nor my cries. They would allow the guards to drag me out like Rajab, take me up to the roof and do away with me. But even though this eventuality was clear to me, I had no alternative but to sit through his speech and wait for an opportune moment to explain. Aqa Mash'al al-Din continued, "In this world there are two types of people. Those who are religious and God-fearing, like all of you, and those who are devoid of religion and faith; and by that I mean those who do not recognize God and who refuse to be merciful to God's creatures."

This classification no doubt put me in the second category. And if he did mean me, his classification was entirely devoid of justice and impartiality. To register my disapproval, I raised my hand. I wanted to say, "Sir, you are unkind. My ancestors have been well-known in this city. They have attended sermons in the Lonban Mosque, they have prayed, and they have given alms." I wanted to refer this man, who was entirely unacquainted with the people of this
city and not a good judge of them, to the audience. He could ask the man who remembered the Mirza title of my father, who was religious and who was not; who was merciful towards God's creatures and who dragged them out of their cool basement at three and continues to keep them in suspense past five-thirty in the afternoon? But Aqa Mash'al al-Din was a veteran. As soon as my hand was raised, without the slightest break in the smooth flow of his speech, he cast a reproachful glance at me and noted, "The accused and the audience will be given an opportunity, in due time, to speak their minds. Let me add this much, however. My introductory remarks, although general in nature, are delivered here in the spirit of distinguishing between good and evil. They should not offend anyone unless, God forbid, the individual belongs to that group of people whose praises are not being sung in this noble session."

The word "accused" descended on me like a ton of bricks. Of what was I accused? As he himself had said, I had not killed anyone; I had not misappropriated anyone's property; and I had not slipped in carrying out the duties of my office. Why, then, was he using such strong words against me? Aqa Mash'al al-Din did not dwell any longer on my protest and, as soon as he was sure that I would not interrupt him, continued his sermon:

"The Almighty, Noble and High, created man and showed him the right way. Then the infernal devil took over this noble creation of God and made man a slave of his own. Of course, the devil cannot reach us all equally well, can he? Obviously, the greater number of us worships God, but there are a few [after pronouncing "a few" he directed his large and cold eyes at me] who obey the cursed devil. Anyway, may the Almighty direct the sinful and the lost to the path of righteousness!... It is reported about the noblest of the
prophets [after these words, as is customary, the audience chanted the praises of the Prophet Mohammad three times. Meanwhile, Aqa Mash'al al-Din, using the time, took out his handkerchief and blew his nose as hard as he could], Mohammad, son of Abdullah [the audience sang the praises of the Prophet one more time], that God, the Most High, places the cursed devil along the path of His creatures to test them. Only those who recognize this cruel and deceitful being will not be enmeshed in his snares and thus will not be afflicted with the misfortunes of a lowly existence on this heap of dust. They shirk the influences of this bastard and, like the families of the saints and you—courageous inhabitants of this noble land—would not even kick him. And, of course, there are those [here again, Aqa made a long pause and looked at me as I fidgeted restlessly on my chair], ... yes... there are those who are deceived by this bastard and who become the servants and the slaves of this wicked being...

"Well now, we may wish to say to hell with these infernal beings who follow the dictates of that wicked demon. So much the better. There will be more space in the exalted Heaven for us!... But are our affairs, the affairs of the offspring of Adam, this easy? This detestable being searches incessantly until he finds an individual whose fingers are all thumbs." Again, he looked at me. The audience, too, turned and looked at me as if they had seen me for the first time. "Yes," he continued. The devil finds a stupid, incompetent man whose fingers are all thumbs and who does not know God; he takes this individual by the collar and makes him his steed and rides him. It is with the help of this incompetent individual that the infernal devil finds his way into the hearts and souls and minds of our children and, in the end, as you have observed, he undermines their thought, religion, faith,
culture, and education, even their body and soul. I trust that you follow the import of all this..."

Aqa Mash'al al-Din's poorly thought-out and undigested words would, I thought, sooner or later, elicit some reaction from Aqa Pisuziyani who knew me and my family well. I thought he would interrupt Aqa Mash'al al-Din and would bring him to his senses. But, alas! Aqa Pisuziyani sat there mutely and listened to his colleague's eloquent discourse. And believe me, at times, when they were sure that I was not watching, he and Aqa Sham' al-Ma'ali supported their colleague's superb job of convincing the audience of my sins.

Aqa Mash'al al-Din's jaw was just warming up; he had forgotten that this was a "court of justice" rather than a community gathering for prayers and sermons. He bombarded me with every degradation he could think of—the garbage that he normally threw at Shemr the cuirassier, Mo'aviyeh, the Christian, and all the others who had inflicted atrocities on the family of the Prophet at Karbala. He might even have passed a doctoral examination in Najaf on this very subject, I thought. Meanwhile, I felt like a person who is first muzzled and then bombarded with a barrage of abuse. I heard curses and innuendoes but could not do much more than feel enraged and furious. And to my great surprise, my fellow citizens had nothing to say about all this. In fact, if on that day you stopped one on the street and asked, "Is Mount Sofeh to the south or to the north of Isfahan?" he would have ta'arofed and said, "Dear fellow. What kind of question is this? It is to the north or to the south as you wish!"

When I realized that Aqa Mash'al al-Din was just beginning his sermon and that he would not finish it before describing the atrocities at Karbala, I stopped listening. Instead, I viewed the curious silk curtain about which I spoke before. I was about to decipher the forms that made up the tulip
when I heard the reproachful words of Aqa Mash'al al-Din coming at me. Recognizing my indifference, he had become furious. Chiding me for daydreaming, he was saying, "You, sir! You whose corrupt deeds are wasting the precious time of this committee and these noble people! Isn't it time to pay attention and find out when and where in your miserable life you made your mistake? Isn't it time to find out when and where in the course of your life the infernal devil entered your world and turned your light into this hellish night?"

Words like "accused" and phrases like "this hellish night" made me tremble. Repeatedly I thought of Ali Asghar's dreadful reports and of my family, especially my children. What would happen to them? Which one of these mullahs could be the mullah whose activities had frightened Behjat Khanum? Worse yet, where was my wife when I left the house? Aqa Mash'al al-Din continued, "Am I delivering a sermon or what? Do you think I like the sound of my own voice! I am striving to return your lost soul to the straight path. My dear fellow, why are you daydreaming? If it is the accursed devil that tempts you, don't allow him... Break away!"

I could no longer tolerate this humiliation, especially when it was being dished out by a stranger to my city. I could no longer expect assistance from Aqa Pisuziyani who sat there like a deaf-mute. In order to stop this show and put an end to the barrage of abuse, I stood up to address the audience. The two bearded revolutionary guards, who had escorted me to the committee, rushed toward me to force me back into my seat. But Aqa Mash'al al-Din motioned them to leave me alone. Filled with apprehension and rage, I said, "Dear fellow citizens!"

But, I must have used the wrong words as my fellow citizens turned their faces away, as if saying, "You are no longer
a citizen of this city. Get the hell out of here and find yourself some other place.” I repeated my words but, this time, I went on, “Fellow citizens! I know most of you by sight and I know the names of many who have visited the education office in the past ten years. I don’t want to appeal to your sympathy. But I do want to appeal to your sense of justice and fair play. Didn’t my father spend his entire life in this city? Aren’t the Najafabad highway, the old Isfahan-Aligudarz dirt road [here Aqa Sham’al-Ma’ali gathered his robe and cleared his throat], the building and operation of the Pashmbaf Factory, and the installation of the steel mill partially due to his endeavors? Do you think the metal bridge, although not an object of beauty, appeared there by magic? No. It did not. I have seen my father’s correspondences on these. He spent a good deal of his latter days changing the minds of those who feared the new bridge would flood the city with Armenians. This is to say nothing of his efforts to transform a sleepy town into a burgeoning metropolis.”

At this time, somebody from way in the back, in a charming Isfahani accent, protested, “Isn’t this nice that you yourself confess. Who allowed foreigners to enter this country? Is it not you and your kind that helped the French, the British and, eventually, the Americans to invade this country and bedevil this land?”

I looked at Aqa Mash’al al-Din to see if I could respond. He did not seem to mind my carrying on a conversation with that man. Indeed, it seemed that the Aqa himself had several such questions to ask. I said, “Your question has historical ramifications. I don’t think there is any benefit in getting into the ancient past. But I can say this: foreigners have been in this country long before your time and mine. This very city has been the seat of governments that have had dealings with the French, the British, the Dutch, even with Germans and
Russians. Maybe someday, when you brush up on your German, you can read their accounts of their political and commercial activities here."

The same person, who I am sure had not understood a word of what I had just said, asked again, "When you were the Education Director, what was your opinion about land reform?"

This question stumped not only me but also Aqa Pisuziyani and Aqa Sham' al-Ma'ali who began nervously to fidget in their places. I wanted to respond by saying that I approved of land reform, especially because it divested the mullahs of their land holdings and the endowments on which they drew. But Aqa Sham' al-Ma'ali, as if reading my mind, joined the debate, "With his Excellency Aqa Mash'al al-Din's permission, he said, "I would like to say a couple of words to clarify this situation."

Aqa Mash'al al-Din, whose grip on the proceedings was becoming increasingly firm, said, "Please, Your Excellency, Aqa Sham' al-Ma'ali."

Then turning to the audience, he added, "I have traveled far and wide in this country, always on important missions such as this. But nowhere in this beautiful land of ours have I seen an individual with the intelligence, religious consciousness and philanthropy of this Aqa Sham' al-Ma'ali."

Aqa Sham' al-Ma'ali thanked his colleague and summarized his thoughts on the subject of land reform:

"In the Name of God, Most Gracious, Most Merciful. Say: I seek refuge with the Lord and cherisher of Mankind...

"I want to ask you, my dear fellow citizens, these questions: What does arz mean? It means land. What does eslah
mean? It means to repair and to put straight; *eslahat* is the plural form of *eslah*; it means to apportion the land, and whatever pertains to it, correctly. Of course, by land is not meant arid, but rather arable land, land fit for cultivation and farming. Where should reforms begin? I say they must begin at the farm level, not in some palace in the capital of Tehran and not in Washington, the capital of the United States. I further say that these reforms must be elevated gradually to reach the level at which you and I are. Now, suppose you are a farmer working on your own land. And suppose you plant one grain of wheat. I say one grain, not a billion grains, so that we can save ourselves the headache of high-level calculations. Otherwise I, too, could confuse you with numbers and graphs. Let's say we let you plant this one grain of wheat. After a given number of weeks, or months or whatever it takes, this grain will yield a head of wheat comprised of some ten, twelve or, maybe even twenty grains. Let me now ask you this question: Do all those twelve or twenty grains in this head of wheat belong to you? Were we to respond to this query thoughtlessly, we would, of course, say yes. But, why? You have been only one of the producers of this head of wheat. There are other cultivators including the rain, the wind, the moon, and the sun. They, too, have actively participated in this enterprise."

Here, Aqa Sham’ al-Ma’ali stopped to clear his throat. Then, lifting his hands to the heavens, he asked, "Could you have produced that many grains without rain, without the nourishing sunlight, without the wind? You are farmers. You answer me."

The audience unanimously roared, "No!"

Aqa Sham’ al-Ma’ali continued. "At whose command are the sun, the rain, and the clouds that have given of their energy to your project?"
The audience roared again, "Allah's!"
"As you can plainly see," the Aqa concluded, "Allah has a major share in your product. If you ignore Him, will you be able to till His land again next year and produce another head of wheat?"

The audience shouted, "No!"
"But," he said in a soft voice, "God does not force you to give up what you have earned. No, you contribute willingly. You give God's share to the endowments so that through the Prophet, his daughter, the saints and the religious order, your contributions and prayers reach the Almighty. Only in this way we can perpetuate His bounty on earth. Therefore, every thinking individual, every righteous individual, everyone who is not given to misappropriation of public property, in short, every individual who is endowed with God's love, will not forget such helpers. And he will not misappropriate the shares of God, His Prophet, as well as those of Imam Ali and his descendants."

He lingered there with uplifted hands for a few seconds longer, then turning to Aqa Mash'al al-Din, he added, "Since we were talking about land reform, even though this is a judicial committee and not a place to sort out socio-political differences, I felt obliged to say a couple of words to clarify certain modern misconceptions. Your Excellency, I have no more to say."

Aqa Mash'al al-Din cast an appreciative look at the speaker and, as if inspired by his wisdom and intelligence, said, "Yes. Now observe the fate of those who planned to misuse people's rights—observe how God's wrath has dealt with them! You may not know it, but these people had set up enormous networks with the help of which they intended to confiscate our endowed lands and hand them over to foreigners. They intended to hand over the Khuzestan plain to
the Americans to plant sugar cane. A similar deal was afoot for the Fars province. This is not to mention what they planned for our oil and natural gas resources."

As he spoke, he cast humiliating looks at me as if I had been the main dealer in his trumped-up international negotiations. But I, having decided to ignore his nonsensical discoveries, sat on the chair without making a peep.

It was about 7:00 p.m. Many of the audience had left. Aqa Mash'al al-Din was tired. He intended to end that session, postponing the real questioning until another time. Thus he concluded by saying, "My fellow countrymen. Today we have opened a file for the son of the late Mirza Mohammad who lives on Sheykh Baha'i Avenue. Whoever has any complaints whatsoever against this man; for instance, if in the past years he has fired you from your job without cause, if you have observed that members of his family have been indecently exposed, if you are aware of his having received bribes from members of your family or from friends of yours, if you know of any indulgence in alcoholic beverages—whatever complaint you might have against this man, I want you to bring those complaints to me personally, so that at our next meeting we can question him and restore your rights to you."

At this time a youth of about twenty brought in a sealed envelope, handed it to the clerk, whispered something in the clerk's ear and left the hall. Immediately, the clerk rose, went to Aqa Mash'al al-Din, bowed and handed him the envelope respectfully with both hands. Then he knelt at Aqa Mash'al al-Din's side and whispered something in his ear. Upon hearing the clerk's words, Aqa Mash'al al-Din's face turned white, as if he had seen a ghost and, while still listening to the clerk, opened the envelope. The clerk, having finished communicating the message, returned and sat in his place.
Aqa Mash'al al-Din read the note. His composure gradually returned. He then sat on both of his knees, slipped the note into his pocket under his robe and, ignoring his colleagues' inquisitive looks, and as if nothing extraordinary had happened, said, "What was I saying? Oh, yes. Of course, due to too many engagements I shall not be attending the future sessions, but my colleagues Aqa Sham' al-Ma'ali and Aqa Pisuziyani along with His Excellency Aqa Haji Chelcheraq, one of the savants of our time, will take charge of this case. I want to ask you, as I said earlier, to bring your complaints and hand them to Mr. Ali Zadeh. He will, at the appropriate time, convey your concerns to His Excellency Aqa Haji Chelcheraq. Let me assure you, however, that the rights of an industrious people like you shall never be ignored. I shall be in Tehran and I will personally attend the discussions of this case."

Aqa Mash'al al-Din was getting a second wind; he began to preach again. I still did not know why I had been brought here, or why everyone was so hostile towards me. Since this was not a court of justice, I decided to rise once more and, come what may, pour out my anger to my heart's content. This action, I thought, would either bring my fellow citizens to their senses or would add more fuel to factionalism and enmity. In either case, a trace of my thoughts would enter this phony file. I heard myself saying, "I wish to say a few words and I intend to say them no matter what the consequences."

The same revolutionary guards approached me again. And again, Aqa Mash'al al-Din motioned them to stay clear. No doubt Aqa Mash'al al-Din had muddied the water enough to catch his fish; and I, freed from logic and philosophy, allowed him to indulge himself. I said, "Much of what I am about to say may not be palatable to most of you. But vital
questions must be raised, even if it means jeopardizing one's life. The first point is that even though we may call ourselves Persians, Lurs, Kurds, or Baluchis, we all belong to this land and we form an Iranian nation, a nation that has rejected slavery and has not associated itself with the lie or with false accusations. This is my first point. My second point has to do with the standard of living. It is true that the poor and the rich live side by side in this land. But are we personally responsible for this? Do the poverty of the masses and the great wealth of a thousand families constitute a fitting accusation of me? This is my second point."

At this juncture a member of the audience, undoubtedly the same individual who had asked the first questions, asked in his own particular tough-guy tone, "Sir, all in all, how many points are you going to make?"

The audience laughed and I, with a patience heretofore unbeknownst to myself, continued, "Third point; this is a Shi’ite community, a community separate from the rest of the Islamic world, an Iranian Muslim community. I am not responsible for that dichotomy either. For centuries this schism has been part of an accepted way of life here. My fourth point is about civilization. In spite of all recent erroneous classifications, we are a civilized people. And even though in recent centuries we have been accepting a smattering of this or of that lifestyle, the core of our civilization is Iranian and Islamic. You may wish to accuse me of modernism. I accept that. In fact, as a youth, I wore my hair long and now that I have lost my hair I still wear a tie. Should this wearing of a tie affect my being an Iranian? Should it make me a disciple of the devil? What has happened to you people? Are you being mesmerized like some benumbed snake in a side show?"

Having made these points, slowly I returned to my seat. My entire body trembled, and a second cold sweat covered
my forehead. I dare say, for an instant, I even lost consciousness. Aqa Pisuziyani's familiar voice helped me steel myself. Had I, finally, stirred my only savior and persuaded him to take my side? How low can this world get! He was merely regurgitating Aqa Mash'al al-Din's balderdash. "I used to know Mirza Mohammad's family," he was saying. "I mean, before I heard certain things about them. I even visited their house. They were nice people, but they also did things which were against the Prophet's law and the laws of the saints. His wife and his daughter appeared in public without chadors; they mingled freely with infidel foreigners and they housed a dog in their house as big as a calf. They did not treat their Muslim brethren with even a semblance of noble Islamic compassion. Just recall when their car ran over Kal Ali's son and that youth [may God bless his soul] died. What did they do? They refused to pay blood money. Instead, they took their case to court, made a file, colluded with the jury and got out of the whole thing scot-free. Many examples like this can be cited. But just now the gentleman said a few things to which, before the end of this session, I would like to, if I may, respond."

As usual, Aqa Mash'al al-Din consented, and Aqa Pisuziyani continued, "He said that we are Iranians. Well, there is a grain of truth in that. But would it not be more appropriate to say: we were Iranians? He used the word bichareh. That word, as everyone knows, has been thrown out of our lexicon. No one uses that word any more. Bichareh is a fabrication of the devil and was hounded out of Iran with the devil. Then he spoke of religion. Everyone knows that the majority of the population of the world is Shi'ite; we, too, are Shi'ites and proud of it. Then what does he mean by this major dichotomy? Finally, he said that we
are civilized. Pardon my French, but who would call that... civilization?"

Aqa Pisuziyani’s reaction disappointed me. Fortunately, however, soon after his brief speech, the session came to an end. I was relieved as I did not have to respond to any more nonsensical questions. At about seven-thirty, I was allowed to return home. Furthermore, I was instructed not to leave Isfahan and to expect further instructions from the court through Mr. Ali Zadeh.

On my way back, as I walked alone by the stream of my youth, I recalled my morning sojourn and I pined for a ray of that early morning sunlight to guide me out of this darkest night of my life.

The ruminations of the previous night continued to plague me the following morning. As I opened my eyes and looked at the ceiling, the things I had said, the irrelevant and nonsensical comments of Aqa Pisuziyani, especially his ridiculous remark about "certain things" that he had heard flooded my memory. These and the prospect of appearing before the committee again were driving me to insanity. Repeatedly, I asked myself, "What things could he have heard?" More than that I was now apprehensive as to what kind of report he could have filed with the committee? Why were the guards sent to our house? Why did they destroy Gorgi at the entrance? Why did they arrest me at three and kept me in suspense in the committee until seven-thirty? Why didn’t they question and sentence me like the man before me? Why was I released?"

The only issue that kept emerging in my mind and which I could not suppress in any way was the issue of our affiliation with the Baha’i faith. Then again, this issue had been a
family matter for as long as I could remember. We had not advertised our affiliation. Only relatives and fellow Baha'is knew about it; the others, even Ali Asghar—or at least so we thought—considered us one of their own. Was this one of the "things" that Aqa Pisuziyani had heard? Or had Zhale, my daughter, been careless and said something in school, something that had reached Aqa Pisuziyani's, or someone else's, sensitive ears? Only if I knew who was responsible for this mess!

At the same time I thought, "Why should Aqa Pisuziyani, to whom I had been kind and nice, even if he knew we were Baha'is, expose us?" Well, of course, there were great benefits, the least of which were visibility and notoriety. Otherwise, how could a novice like him rub shoulders with the likes of Mash'al al-Din and Sham' al-Ma'ali? Otherwise, could he, for instance, even in his wildest dreams, interrogate the Education Director in public? Besides, wouldn't his name be included among those who rooted out corruption? And wouldn't that elevate his position or, possibly, even transfer him to Tehran? I would not be a bit surprised one day, when all of this hullabaloo subsides, to see him board the plane in Mehrabad Airport for the United States.

What gnawed at me as I mulled these thoughts over in my mind was that Aqa Pisuziyani knew well that the Baha'is were being picked up from among the population and that they were being exterminated in groups either on the roofs of the committee buildings or in slaughter houses near Gavkhuni. He knew that not only I, but my wife and children, too, would be executed without any questions asked. Could he, I wondered, forget our friendship and deliver us to the firing squad?

I recalled Ali Asghar remarking, in one of his frightening remarks about the goings-on in the city, that two individuals
had been executed on the roof of the same committee building into which I was hurled. They had been sentenced as smugglers but, as he reported with glee, they had been Baha'is. And, ironically, this very Aqa Pisuziyani had happened to be the sole presiding judge! Would we, too, in a day or two, face the same predicament? The very thought of the possibility of seeing my fourteen-year-old dragged and stood up against some horrifying sooty-brick wall turned my blood cold.

For some reason, the past couple of days, I continued to relate much of what was happening to me to Ali Asghar and his accomplice mullah. His guilty face, as they took me to the committee remained fresh in my mind. When I came back last night and asked to see him, I was told that he had already gone to bed. When I went to his room near the entrance to ask him about the events in the afternoon, he was not there. When I was returning to the main part of the building, he appeared from the dark. It seemed that he had climbed the wall or otherwise exerted himself. "I was sleeping, but I heard noises," he said. "I went to check it out. Someone was climbing the wall. I followed him, but could not reach him. Then I returned."

I did not pursue the interrogation. The wall was too high for Ali Asghar to climb in pursuit of anyone. He could jump off it into the house, if someone, on the other side gave him a boost.

In the morning, if Ali Asghar was still around, I thought, I should question him some more. Having decided on that, I got out of the bed, pushed my feet into my slippers and went into the bathroom, my disturbing ruminations following me. While brushing my teeth, the telephone rang. My heart sank and then began to beat very fast. I wanted to go to the hallway and answer the phone, but I realized that my hands were
wet. I called Zhale who, with her special agility, appeared at the phone. A moment later she said, "Dad, ...Aqa wants to talk to you."

I was stunned. The word "aqa" struck me as if it were a bolt of lightning. I stood there gazing at Zhale who, herself, was terrified, just for looking at me. I asked her, "aqa"?

Unable to fathom my desperation, she said, "Yes." Then she placed the receiver on the wet towel in my hand and left. I was talking to myself saying, "Oh, good God. What have I done to deserve all this? Why does "aqa" himself want to talk to me?" I took hold of the receiver with my other hand to stabilize my shaking arm. Then, placing the receiver near my mouth, with a weak, barely audible voice, I said, "Hello...hello..."

The individual on the other side repeated these same words. It seemed that he, too, was afraid of me. "Aqa," it seemed, had changed his voice. Instead of his normal voice, which sounds like the voice of a medieval sage, he was talking in the voice of a young man. Was someone pulling my leg, or was there some mischief involved?

Enmeshed in such confused thoughts, I threw in a few words including imam and ummat to concoct a phrase befitting the occasion. My interlocutor, who was apparently shocked, also muttered a few things—things, however, that my many years of service at the Education Bureau had made my due. I heard him say, "I should be the one to say hello, sir. I hope you will forgive me for calling at this hour."

During the time this conversation was proceeding, I was dazed and giddy. The half-lit hallway, the walls which had assumed a nauseating, yellowish color and the black telephone with its white numbers: they all seemed to be mocking me. For a moment, I shared the feelings of the several hundred Isfahanis who had been executed. Had "Aqa" talked to
them personally and had he promised them, too, that after their execution he would see to it that their families would be well looked after? What should I do? What could I do? I was petrified. Had "Aqa's" voice changed or was the telephone playing tricks on my ear?

I was struggling with these vague notions when the interlocutor's voice came through again. There was no doubt. The voice on the other end was not "Aqa's." It was the voice of a youth of twenty-two or twenty-five who, for some unknown reason, was pleading with me, a drowning man, for assistance and guidance. I said, "Excuse me. I mistook you for someone else. I didn't hear you well."

He said, "Sir, as you wish. I am Ali Zadeh, the clerk of the committee."

"Oh, yes. I see. Well, how can I help you?"

"Didn't anyone tell you?"

There was not a trace of the fake Isfahani accent in his voice. I said, "No, I haven't seen anyone yet. What has happened?"

"Last night, after the committee was closed, Aqa Mash'al al-Din was murdered."

I didn't know quite how to take this news. Was I to rejoice upon the death of an enemy, or was I to feel sad and ashamed because of a man's loss of life? I asked, "Murdered? Who martyred him?"

"No one knows yet, sir. It seems that a few men from outside the city had attacked and stabbed him with a knife."

"I am sorry to hear that, but how can I be of assistance to you?"

"Well, sir, since the very first day of our arrival, Aqa Pisuziyani has, for some unknown reason, considered Aqa Mash'al al-Din and myself to be stumbling blocks in his way. Now that Aqa Mash'al al-Din has left the scene, and I have
lost my main support, Aqa Pisuziyani is coming at me very strongly. This morning, several revolutionary guards had come to arrest me. I escaped through the back door of the hotel and, at the moment, I am still at large. I am a stranger in this city. Since it seems that you know Aqa Pisuziyani very well, I thought if I took my case to you, you would help..."

I interrupted him, saying, "Dear boy, you didn't happen to have cotton in your ears yesterday, did you? Aqa Pisuziyani's views about me and my family are crystal clear..."

"No, sir. You are mistaken. Aqa Pisuziyani is a politician. In pre-committee hearing sessions, Aqa Pisuziyani defended you zealously; he considered you one of the most competent directors in the whole city."

Now I was really confused. Was Aqa Pisuziyani my friend or my enemy? If he were my friend, why was he confirming Aqa Mash'al al-Din's assertions; and, if he were my enemy, why had he supported and defended me in pre-hearing sessions? I said, "In any event, what are you guilty of; what do they want you for?"

"By God, as far as I know, sir, I am innocent. Since my arrival here with Aqa Mash'al al-Din, it is being rumored that I am a Baha'i. I swear to the holiest of the holies that this allegation is a fabrication. I am not a Baha'i and I do not know anyone who is a Baha'i. Between you and me, to hell with one and all Baha'is."

I said, "Is it proper to curse people about whose faith you are not even informed?"

He said, "I know I should be ashamed of myself, but I hoped you would excuse my being impolite and rude. I merely intended to prove that all they say is fabrication. I would have directed all those swear words to myself, if I were a Baha'i. But since I am not, they won't be efficacious!"
From his explanations I could gather that Aqa Pisuziyani was actively persecuting and executing the Baha'i's of Isfahan. I also gathered that Aqa either did not know about, or had not discussed my being a Baha'i in the pre-committee hearings. If it were not Aqa Pisuziyani who had sought my arrest, who had? To broach this problem in a fraternal voice, I said to Ali Zadeh, my only source of such information, "God helps those who help themselves. If you expect me to help you, you must put some information at my disposal."

He said, "As you wish, sir. How can I be of service?"

"Just tell me, under what charge was I brought to the committee yesterday?"

"Excuse me for evasion, sir, but I am sorry. You are asking about the secret goingson of the committee, I have taken an oath not to divulge any such information. I can be executed without a trial. Please, ask other questions, but..."

"Well, if you intend to insist on taking the fifth and carry these precious secrets to your grave, who am I to say anything?"

As if shocked by the word "grave," without any introduction to the subject, he said, "As I was saying—please keep this a most guarded secret—Aqa Mash'al al-Din believed that the Education Director of Tehran and the education directors of the provinces had undermined the whole education system of the country and thereby of whole Islamic culture. For this reason, whenever we arrived in a province, he would have its education director brought before him. Then he would, as he did yesterday, lecture him using the same sermon; and then he would let him go. Here, however, initially he was confronted with Aqa Pisuziyani's vehement opposition. But since Aqa Mash'al al-Din had more clout, he succeeded in bringing you before the committee."

"What happens to these people's files?"
"They are filed under 'out of circulation.'"

This brief conversation provided satisfactory responses for many of my vexing questions of the night before. I also realized that I had misjudged Aqa Pisuziyani, accusing him of much for which I did not have proof. He was not oblivious to our past friendship and he was aware of my conscientious way of dealing with people—he still supported me. But would he continue to support me, if others found out that I was a Baha'i? I asked myself. Then to Ali Zadeh, "In your opinion, therefore, what will happen to my file?"

"Well, sir, for some reason, Aqa Haji Chelcheraq has refused the custody of your file and, as far as I can guess, Aqa Sham'al-Ma'ali, too, does not dare..."

At this juncture, a voice different from Ali Zadeh's interrupted asking yet another individual, "Did you get it all on?"

"Yes," said the fourth voice with an air of finality.

Following this brief exchange the line went dead. I looked at the receiver and turned around. My wife and Zhale were standing behind me waiting to hear about the call. I turned to Zhale and said, "Dear, I almost had a heart attack. I thought 'Aqa' wanted to talk with me."

"I didn't say 'Aqa.' I said 'an aqa.'"

"I wish I had heard 'an aqa,'" I said, putting the receiver in its cradle.

My wife who could no longer stand the suspense, said, "Please stop the classroom discussion! Who was it and what did he want?"

"It was Ali Zadeh, the committee clerk. Apparently last night someone killed Aqa Mash'al al-Din on the way to his hotel. And now the clerk is being sought."

"Where was he telephoning from?"

"He didn't say. Someone cut the line and, I think, our conversation was being recorded."
"Good gracious!"
Zhale, her face pallid, asked, "Dad, what is happening to us?"

"Nothing," I said. "What can happen? God is merciful."

Several days elapsed following the mysterious murder of Aqa Mash'al al-Din and my telephone conversation with Ali Zadeh. Then one day, about one o'clock in the afternoon, Ali Asghar arrived from his quarters, panting. He said that when returning from the noon prayers he had talked to Aqa Pisuziyani. The Aqa had sent word to me that he was planning to visit me that night between the hours of ten and eleven.

The news of this unexpected visit jolted us out of monotony and boredom; it gave us something to do. We had to receive Aqa Pisuziyani in as ceremonially correct a way as possible. But first, I felt I should ask Ali Asghar about his dealings with Aqa Pisuziyani. I should find out if they had colluded and intended to expose their plot tonight. In that case, I needed to find a way to foil it or, at least, stall it. I learned, however, that Ali Asghar knows Aqa Pisuziyani as a distant friend of the family. He had talked to him several times as the Aqa had asked about the family. Once he even had helped the kid get coupons from the mosque to buy food.

When the house-cleaning was done, we sent Ali Asghar to the market to buy what fruit and sweets he could find. We made sure that he would not leave the queue, as he sometimes did, before buying some watermelon, melon, apples or any other fruit. We also cautioned him to hold tight to his coupons lest someone try to wrest them out of his hand. Then, at about nine, in order to prevent Zhale and Kayvan
from inadvertently adding something to the conversation, we sent them to their rooms.

At about ten o'clock, after Ali Asghar retired to his quarters by the gate and my wife and I were alone, she said, "I couldn't say anything while all these other things were going on. Why do you think he is coming here this late at night?"

"I don't know. Perhaps he has chosen this time so that no one sees him come here. Or, perhaps, he didn't want anyone else to accompany him. Something important must be afoot."

"Don't you think if it were an important matter he would call?"

Then, quickly, interrupting herself, she added, "The telephone, too, of course, is no longer a telephone—it has become another instrument for gathering information."

I have always been proud of my wife. She is intelligent and insightful and she does not forget significant events easily. She said, "When you were appointed Education Director, do you remember the first person who called to congratulate you?"

I had forgotten this event completely. But my wife's reminding me of it gave a totally different meaning to Aqa Pisuziyani's untimely call. Involuntarily I sprang to my feet and said, "Of course, it was Pisuziyani. You have an elephant's memory!"

She said, "I know this Pisuziyani very well—he is a cunning, opportunist spider. Before reaching this 'position,' he used to speak like the villagers and the bazaaris to make fun of the mullahs. His main refrain was, 'If ever I say good-bye to this land, it will be good-bye for ever...'"

I was Pisuziyani's friend and yet, it seemed, I did not know him quite as well as she did. Thus, even though not the jealous type—I allowed my wife to run her life as she saw appropriate—I could not help asking, "May I ask how ma-
dame has come by so much information vitale about the monsieur?"

My wife now had me over a barrel, so to speak, and could, as usual, tease me for quite a while. But time was of the essence. Sweetly, she said, "After the children were in bed, Mozaffar's sister and I used to eavesdrop from behind the closet door."

This reference was sufficient since Mozaffar, who is now a medical doctor in Germany, with private practice and all, used to be a very close friend of Hushang Khan. Indeed, one reason for the fallout between Hushang and me, before his sojourn to India and joining the "men of the cloth," was his friendship with Mozaffar.

My wife's soothing words diminished my mental anguish. When she said good night and retired to the bedroom, I was fully ready to meet Aqa Pisuziyani. Before long, Ali Asghar appeared at the threshold and announced that Aqa had arrived. I hurried out of the room to meet and welcome him.

When in the room, the Aqa cast a long look around and said, "I trust that all is well with you, Mr. Director."

"You are very kind," I said calmly. "Life has its ups and downs, but it all passes."

While ritually pronouncing pleasantries, I invited him to sit on the sofa. With a special show of dignity, he took off his turban and placed it beside him on the sofa. Under the turban, his hair was well-groomed and stylish. Then he took off his cloak, folded it a number of times and placed it under his turban. Then he sat, placing his arm on my shoulder.

"I apologize for disturbing you at this hour of the evening."

"No apologies needed. It is your own house. Come and go as you please."
As is customary, a short while after Aqa's arrival, Ali Asghar brought a tray full of all kinds of fruit. He put the tray on the table in front of us, left the room and returned with yet another tray. On this tray there were two cups in silver holders and a china teapot decorated with intriguing patterns and flowers. A pleasant, fragrant vapor, ascending from the spout of the pot, dispersed itself in the room.

I poured a cup of tea and placed it in front of the Aqa, then poured another one for myself. He thanked me and, without any introduction, began to talk about the subject of his visit:

"Mr. Director," he said, looking me in the eyes. "I have come here to discuss two very important issues and, since it is late, I shall not beat around the bush. I hope that you will not consider this frankness an act of impunity or boldness. Time is short and we have to make do."

"As you wish," I said. "Please go ahead."

"Well, the first issue has to do with your file. After the untimely death of Aqa Mash'al al-Din, I have taken it out of circulation. I shall talk about your file a little bit later. The second issue is about the selection of a mayor for the city. The acting mayor, as you know, apparently is not able to handle the position. I know just the man for the job, but without your assistance, it would be difficult to 'install' him in that position."

"I have always been ready to improve the city's image."

"You indeed have," he said and continued. "Well, this is how it will work. After you recover from your cold or flu or whatever it is that has held you in, meet informally with your teachers and staff, praise this individual—I'll give you his name later—and convince them that he is the man for the job. I, too, will talk to the city fathers, the clergy and the ba-
zaaris. Together, perhaps we can bring a semblance of decency to this beautiful city. What do you say?"

Then, without allowing me to answer, he returned to the first subject regarding my file. He said, "But regarding your file. Today I received a tape recording containing, I believe, a conversation between you and the ex-committee clerk, Ali Zadeh."

This was the first time in this meeting that I felt uncomfortable. I scanned the various exchanges in the telephone conversation mentally as one would scan a film. He continued, "This Ali Zadeh is a Baha'i. He was sent here as part of Aqa Mash'al al-Din's entourage to create trouble. Fortunately, he was arrested somewhere in the Toqchi district and is now in prison. My advice to you is to stay away from him. I shall add the tape to your file and keep that, too, out of circulation."

Without showing any sign of my latent concern for Ali Zadeh's safety, I asked, "Are you positive that he is a Baha'i? Has he confessed?"

"No, my dear fellow. Are you joking? They do not confess. Such information must be dragged out of them with a pair of pliers. In his case, however, we shall learn a lot tomorrow. Aqa Haji Chelcheraq can find a needle in a haystack..." Then he sat back, folded his arms and, in a serious tone, said, "No one knows about the tape I spoke about. I wanted to let you know of its existence in case something comes up."

I said that I understood. Then, before the Aqa got ready to leave, again urged by my humanitarian instincts, I asked, "Then what do you think will happen to the poor fellow?"

"Which poor fellow? Ali Zadeh? He is done for. According to the tape he has discussed secret committee matters in public. His punishment is death."
"But you said that this tape will remain on my file and will not be circulating! How can it be used against Ali Zadeh at the same time?"

A mysterious smile appeared in the corner of his lips. Placing his sweaty palm on my shoulder, he stood up saying, "The law asks for two witnesses. The same two who made the recording will testify that Ali Zadeh has divulged the secrets of the committee. Then they will say that their tape recording did not come off as expected. Who can quarrel with electromagnetic tapes? May the Almighty Allah bless his soul!"

He bent, drank the rest of the tea in his cup, picked out a nice, red apple and pocketed it. Then he picked up his turban with both hands and, looking into the window pane, placed it on his head. I helped him put his cloak around him. When he was ready to leave, I accompanied him as far as the entrance to our garden. When I returned, my wife was sitting on the sofa waiting. As soon as she heard me enter, she said, "Didn't I say he is a cunning spider?"

Obviously she had been listening to every word. Together we entered the bedroom. That night I slept like a log.

More than a year elapsed. By the order of the Supreme Revolutionary Commander in Tehran, the revolutionary committees throughout the country were banned and closed. Aqa Pisuziyani was appointed attorney general of Isfahan. At his behest, a review of the goingson in the now defunct committees got underway. The files of many of my acquaintances were reopened; there was no mention of my file.
Job wise and otherwise, things became tight for us. First, I was formally fired from my job as the Education Director and remained jobless from then on. Following that Ali Asghar left us. I haven't heard from him since. Soon after my ancestral home was confiscated; this forced us to live in a tenement with a number of other families. We moved to the Chaharsuye Shiraziha district. The transition, although tough, was tolerable.

The families in the tenement were mostly from Fars; one couple was from Abadeh, where my ancestors came from. All the families had lost one or more of their members to a committee. But due to some miracle—and I am not complaining, even though we had lost our jobs and our home—we had not lost any family member.

Having gotten over my fear, I gradually began to mingle with people. Every now and then I came across Aqa Pisuziyani in the market place or on the street. We never said much beyond exchanging greetings. He still called me Mr. Director, but I was not sure whether he was poking fun at me or whether he felt bad that my family and I should have been treated so roughly. Several times I decided to confront him and tell him that I no longer directed anything, but each time I concluded that discretion was the better part of valor. Why create hostility in a situation that is already suffused with bigotry and prejudice?

Life passed at its own slow pace until one day, when I came home, my wife said, "Taqi, the son of one of the neighbors, was here looking for you."

"What Taqi?" I said. "Whose son is Taqi?"

"I don't know. He said they live at the end of the alley—the house with the big door and the sign that reads 'Aid is from Allah and Victory is at hand.'"
"But that's the late Haji's house. Didn't he say what business?"
"Said his dad wants to chat with you."
"His dad? You mean the seyyed who appears around here about the middle of each week? What business could he have with me? I have nothing to chat with him about."
"Well, I don't know. Maybe he wants you to marry his daughter!"
"Look, let's be serious. What do you think? Do you think he, too, is a cunning spider?"
"How do I know? I haven't had a chance yet to eavesdrop from behind his closet door. As far as I know his name is Asheykzhadeh, or something like that. He preaches around the Kohne Meydan. And, if you believe the women in the bathhouse, they were saying that he had been appointed to high places from the Capital but he had rejected the offer."
"I wish I knew what he wants," I muttered.
"What makes it so difficult? Go to his house and find out!"
"That's easy for you to say. Do you know his wife?"
"Which one? He probably has three or four."
"Didn't the boy, at least, say what time? Can I just walk into someone's house?"
"He said whenever you are free. It is not important what time during the day. But it must be either on a Tuesday or a Wednesday."
"Just like the airline pilots—a couple of days here, a couple of days there. Let's see, today is Tuesday and I am sure that he is taking a nap right now. What if I go and pay him a visit in a couple of hours, say around four?"
"Fine. Go and see what the good seyyed has to say. He may have found a job for you!"
At about four that afternoon, I wore a semi-official suit, with no tie and a pair of old, home-made *malakīs*. Shuffling, I headed for the late Haji's house. I knocked at the door. From behind the door, a sweet female voice with a delightful Isfahani accent said, "Who is it?"
"Son of Mirza Mohammad. I want to talk to the Haji."
"Please, wait a minute!"

A good deal of time passed and nothing happened. Then, suddenly, the big door opened and the rather large body of the late Haji's son appeared in the entrance. The first thing that caught my sight was his over-sized black, baggy pants and the white cord that had been hurriedly tied over his fat belly to hold them up. He was wearing a white calico shirt with a v-neck. The bushy hair of his wide chest protruded through the opening. His turbanless head resembled a soccer ball with an artificial beard attached to it. In short, the Haji's son was unlike anything that I had imagined I would meet at that door. Nevertheless, without losing my composure, I offered my greetings to which he said, "Hello, hello. Son of Mirza Mohammad. Welcome. Come in... come in... Mind the step."

Without uttering a word, I entered the house. I saw a large-sized pool with greenish water and dirty footpaths, a brick floor with many bricks broken or missing, and tall plane trees whose roots had been exposed by the previous rainy season.

He led me to the short, closed door of a small room resembling an independent kitchen. In fact the soot that had accumulated on the door frame, the wall and the square opening that served as a window confirmed that we were standing in front of the closed door of a kitchen. The Haji's son halted here and, before pushing the door open, as if obliged to give me an explanation, said, "I hope you will ex-
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cuse me for not taking you to the parlor. I have a small room at the back of the kitchen here. We are going there."

Having said this, he pushed the door open. A soot-ridden, dark kitchen appeared before us. We entered. He led the way in the dark and I followed his shadow, "This way...this way...watch out for the water reservoir."

He cautioned too late. My arm was already in the cool water of the reservoir which was as tall as my chest. I followed his shadow until I could no longer see him. He kept going on and talking, "...When you reach where I am now, turn right..."

He was still speaking when, at the end of this dark tunnel, he pushed on the door of a room and opened it. The whole kitchen was flooded with the light of the lantern in that room. He left the door open, took off his slippers at the door and entered. I, too, took off my malakis, placed them next to his slippers and entered.

"Come in... welcome... come in."

"Thank you."

This was a small, yet beautifully and neatly arranged square room. Its walls were white and its floor was covered with elegant carpets. A lantern hung from its light blue ceiling. In the far corner of the room there was a pot of fire, placed on a shiny brass tray. I was secretly enjoying the artistry and the elegance of this hidden retreat when my eyes, having become used to the light, saw something that struck fear in my heart. It was an opium device placed next to the pot of fire. My fears mounted as I smelled the fragrance of the drug permeating the room.

My first reaction was that something foul was afoot. I thought this room could be a trap for catching me red-handed. If they arrested me here, I thought, they could convict me on charges of use, trafficking, or possession and, like
many other Baha'is, sentence and eventually legally execute me. I went pale and a shiver, similar to the one I had felt when about to face the committee, ran throughout my body. The Haji's son, who had realized the cause of my anxiety, quickly came to my aid, "Excuse me," he said, casually. "I was puffing away when you knocked."

I shall never forget his fat face, large red eyes, thick beard, bald head and the cord that held his baggy pants up. While pondering "puffing away" used by a seyed, I sat cross-legged across from him. He sat in the corner by the pot of fire. We were ready to chat. "To begin with, son of Mirza Mohammad," he said, "this room has a history of its own. If gracious Allah wills, I will tell you some of it in the course of our chat. As far as the opium is concerned, don't worry... no one, but no one, knows about the existence of this room."

The fragrant, blue smoke of the opium had filled the room. Even if one did not smoke, one still felt the pleasant giddiness that accompanies the use of the drug. My main objective, however, was to stay sober and discover the motive behind this unlikely hospitality. He continued, "...Also rest assured that not a word of what transpires here and now is heard outside of this room."

Then he poked the fire, chose a nicely burning coal, picked it up with the tongs and gently hit it against the side of the pot of fire to shed the covering ash. "Of course, if a word of it is heard outside, we both will be in great trouble. Won't we?" He chuckled.

"Yes, sir. I realize that."

After this brief introduction, he said, "A few months ago, quite by chance, I came across your file and, although from a distance, I became acquainted with you..."

The mention of my file made me self-conscious. Because of this file, I had so far "sold" my ancestral home and had
become a tenant. I had lost my job without any explanation and, now, I was sure, I was about to lose something else. He then talked about his involvement in the community and all the help that he had extended to people like me.

No matter how I looked at them, his words smacked of extortion; I could detect its foul odor from miles away. I felt that I was confined in a smoke-filled room with an ungodly creature; one who would not allow me to leave before receiving several thousand tumans or, worse yet, before I agreed to do something for which I would abhor myself for the rest of my life. Exhaling an extra generous amount of smoke through his wide nostrils, he continued, "Your file classified you as a group 'B' Baha'i."

"Group 'B' Baha'i? I don't understand."

"Well, I don't understand either. All I know is that in the committees the Baha'is were divided into two groups. Those grouped under 'A' have all been exterminated and their files are marked 'completed.' Those in group 'B', as far as I know, have lost only their jobs, property, and the like. But they still live. For some reason, however, the true identity of the members of this latter group has not been disclosed to all committee members. You are a Baha'i from group 'B'."

"As you say, then," I said. "I am a Baha'i from group 'B'."

"When reading your file, I came across several sentences of yours. I liked what you said, but even more than that I liked your courage. The day when you said 'from the Lur to the Kurd and from the Pars to the Baluch we all are Iranians,' was a day when no one dared call himself Iranian."

I said in a sad tone, "Well, it was like the Arab invasion of the country and the question of jeziyeh and mawali and so forth all over again. Wasn't it?"

He fell silent for a few moments then said, "In any event, I know that you are from the Fars province; we are from
Fars, too. Wouldn't it be awful to allow simple, religious disagreements to mar our friendship and cooperation?"

His sagacious speech was entirely incongruous with his outward appearance and, just like a Sheykh's smoking opium, baffled me. The word "cooperate" struck me as a key word expressing the intentions of the son of the Haji. I convinced myself that somewhere in the character of this man of God there were reservoirs of kindness and of experience in fathoming life's difficulties. Weren't those words incentive enough for me to "chat" with him? He continued:

"For a long time now I have had the desire to tell my life's story to someone with educational and literary background, someone who could take notes and turn them into a book. Who knows, my experiences could prove useful, produce a light before our children. Of course, I don't intend to mount the pulpit and say that my life reflects all that is good and proper. No, God forbid. That is not for me to say. My life would indicate what routes to avoid; it would also show the results of following different philosophies—some have proven beneficial, some harmful. The very recognition of these issues would be a fitting textbook for our children who now follow one cunning fox after another. It would teach them to think before they leap; in fact, before they destroy themselves and the future generations whose very existence depends on them."

I had heard about people's desire to delegate someone to write their life's story. But their stories had invariably been a front for unveiling personal and, I should add, damaging knowledge about their victims, victims of extortion—pretexts for retailing instances of the I-can-get-you-out-of-this-miserable-situation sort. Could his be any different? I found myself agreeing with him, "Yes, yes. As you say."
"Mirza Mohammad's son. Please feel at home here. Just as if it were your own house. Pour the tea and drink."

I felt quite uncomfortable knowing that Muslims, especially the religious fanatics, would rather their utensils not be touched by others. But, once again, the Haji's son came through, "I am not an advocate of the strict rules of cleanliness, you know. Please, pour the tea and drink! What was I saying? Yes, son of Mirza, let me make this as clear as possible. I do not intend to impose on you and, simply because you are a Baha'i, make you sit cross-legged across from me and listen to me pour out my heart."

"No, sir, no. Not at all. I am sure that whatever you say will be a lesson not only to our children but to us all. Only if I could impose on you to send Taqi Khan to our door and let my family know that I will be here for a while. They worry, you know."

"Certainly, no problem."

Then, without moving from his place, he reached for a funnel-like device, apparently part of a home-made communication system, and shouted into it, "Taqi... Taqi... Go to the son of Mirza Mohammad's house! Giv'em our greetings and say that he will sup here with us... Run on, that's a good boy!"

Then, he turned to me and said, "As you know, life has its ups and downs. Consider that file, there, on the niche. See it?"

"Yes, I do."

"That's not your file—yours is thicker than that. This one belongs to a certain person. After I tell you how that file has gotten here, I would like to review it with you, either tonight or tomorrow night. I have read it, of course, and I have made certain decisions on it, too. But there are several things in there that go way over my head."
Unable to control my curiosity, I asked, "Can I ask whose file it is?"

"As I said, it is not your own file. Now, if I tell you whose file it is, what would remain to do for the rest of the evening but talk, talk."

I felt remorseful for having asked. Crestfallen, I apologized, "You are so very right."

"Do you smoke opium?"

"No."

"Drink araq?"

"No."

"Well, there's a good Muslim! Shall I have a hookah prepared and brought in?"

"As you wish."

He smiled. Then, once again, he reached for the funnel-like device and shouted, "Ma'sumeh!... Ma'sumeh!... Would you please prepare a qalyun and bring it here right away."

He then drank the rest of his tea, poured a cup of tea for himself and another for me, all the time searching for something that he would not discuss. Meanwhile, the qalyun was prepared and brought to the door. He got up, took the device from Ma'sumeh who remained hidden behind the door, and brought it in. He placed the qalyun in front of me. Then he walked to the niche where the file awaited inspection, took a folded piece of paper from on top of it, and returned to his place.

If you have listened to opium smokers, you know how much they love details. To some the details outshine the very substance of the conversation. The Haji's son, I soon found out, was no exception. He discussed every event in full, gauged the impact on the face of his company, and then continued. As for me, I was captivated by the mysterious file and the folded piece of paper. Similarly mystifying was the
motive that had prompted the Haji's son to confront me with this scene.

As he resumed his place at the pot of fire, the Haji's son opened a pouch which was placed strategically underneath the little silk carpet on which he sat, produced a fresh piece of opium from it and handed the opium to me, saying, "You are not a connoisseur, I would assume. But you can smell. It has come all the way from Fereydan."

I took the chunk, looked it over and smelled it. It had a rather pleasant fragrance. Then I poked my nail into it to see how hard it was. It was quite hard. I handed it back to the Haji's son. He took it, broke off a small piece and placed it on his heated opium pipe. At first touch, the opium froze to the porcelain with a special hissing sound. The Haji's son watched the sizzling for some time; then he picked up the tongs. Poking the coals once again, he found the right piece of coal, picked it up with a proprietary touch, shook off the excess ash, tightened the hold of the tongs, and placed the tongs at the side of the pot of fire. I continued to watch him as I pulled on the qalyun.

Before resuming his story, he squinted, looked me right in the eyes, and said, "Son of Mirza Mohammad, what I am about to say may come as a shock to you; but there is a lesson in it for you and your children. I have learned this lesson the hard way, but I am offering it to you almost for free."

Having said this, he pursed his lips, placed them at the top end of the pipe and began to blow air into it. His breath, accumulating in the pipe, escaped in spurts from a small hole just below the piece of opium. It made the piece of coal glow bright red. After blowing a few times, he began to suck the air in through the same hole. Often the hole would plug. Then he would free it with the sharp end of a safety pin. The fresh air carried the drug-laden smoke into his lungs. He did
this several times in a row until his eyes began to water. This was the sign that his lungs were full and that he was ready to exhale the smoke and talk. Although feeling somewhat light-headed, I kept pulling on the *qalyun*.
"About noon, over a year ago," said my host, "I was in this same house. Someone knocked on the door. Ma'sumeh returned from answering the door and said, 'It's Asef Kazem's son. He has a registered letter.'

'I had just awakened and had not had time to wash. I put my indoor shoes on, fastened the cord holding my pantaloons, threw my cloak over my shoulders and went to the door. Asef Kazem's son had not seen me without my turban before. He cast a long look at my face, half-sleepy eyes, and said, 'Good day to you, sir.'

'Good day to you, too,' I said. 'Where is this registered letter from?'

'From Tehran.'
Then, hastily, he added, 'Sir, it is not a letter. It's a tele-
gram.'

"While he was jotting down something in his log, I was
wondering who in Tehran could be sending me a telegram. I
didn't know anyone in Tehran.

When he had completed registering the telegram in his
notebook, he handed the telegram to me respectfully with
both hands. I thanked him. Then, looking the envelope over,
just to have made conversation, I said, 'How is the mail ser-
vice these days?'

'Not bad,' he said. 'Lots of complaints though. People
complain of receiving their mail late or not receiving it at all.
It's the mail service, you know.'

"While saying this he was also getting his bike ready to
mount. Even though a good many years separated us, be-
cause I know his father, I ta'aroffed, saying, 'Where's the
fire? Come on in and have a cup of...'

'No, Haji,' he said. 'Thanks just the same. There is a lot of
mail and I must deliver all before lunch. Some other time,
God willing. I hope I brought you good news.'

"Having said this he mounted his bike and rode away. I
kept on looking at him wobbling while my hands opened the
telegram."

The Haji's son then carefully unfolded the sheet of paper
that he had taken from on top of the file and placed it in front
of me. It read:

In the Name of Allah

Dear Haji Fanusiyân,

With this telegram you are appointed the Attorney
General of the province of Isfahan so that you may at-
tend to the judicial affairs of that province. It is in-
cumbent upon you to review the activities of the now defunct revolutionary committees and to transfer all relevant cases to the office of the Attorney General in Tehran. According to the circular number A122 and the order of the "Aqa," the military as well as other relevant law-enforcement units will be at your service.

In addition, even though a year has elapsed, our office has not received adequate information concerning the martyrdom of Aqa Mash'al al-Din in Isfahan. It is expected that your office promptly bring the instigators of this calamity to justice.

Sincerely yours,
Ayatollah Naftchi Qomi

I recalled my wife's words about the gossip in the bathhouse. After all, there was a grain of truth in what the women had said. But why did he decline such a lucrative position? He continued:

"Only six months earlier, before the revolutionary committees were closed, if someone had proposed that I take charge of half of what is in this telegram, I would have pronounced him insane and would have guided him to an asylum. But, in the wake of the bombings, the slaughters that ensued, and a dearth of capable men, this order was no longer that extraordinary. Of course, I am not saying that I was a capable person; only Allah knows that. I was aware of my lack of knowledge, lack of experience in unraveling the intricacies and interpreting the complexities of the judicial system; but, what could I do? I had lived in this city for most of my life. I had not harmed a soul. I had participated in quarrels as an impartial judge of sorts and I had consistently and quite judiciously distinguished between what is mine and
what belongs to the public. This has proved a useful method because I had not had anything to gain from it personally. But could I continue this as the attorney general? The attorney general had to interfere in other people's affairs; he had to deny them, or their families, profit. Would such individuals sit still?

"I mulled these thoughts around in my mind, as I walked to the pool, bent and splashed my face with a couple of handfuls of cool water to wake me up. The children's mother, already cooking lunch in the kitchen, shouted, 'Who was it?'

'No one. Ased Kazem's son had brought a telegram.'

'A telegram? Where from?'

'From the capital.'

'What has happened? More riots and arrests?'

'No, no. None of that. They have found a job for me. They are asking me to become the Attorney General of Isfahan.'

'And what does that mean? What are you supposed to be doing?'

'Well, I don't know yet. He may have delivered this to the wrong house, although it has my name on it—says Haji Fanusiyan.'

'You are not a Haji! Why don't you ask Malihe to read it for you?'

'I read it. The writing is legible. It's even printed. They want me to investigate and judge the affairs related to the committees...'

'What?... What did you say about the committees? Are you crazy? Why should you put your life on the line? You are not a judge!'

'I don't have to be a judge. There are books. There are other judges. All I need to do is just look and see what the
others do and follow suit. Besides, this is probably an order from the "Aqa". What do you want me to do?"

"Throughout this conversation she was in the kitchen. But, upon hearing the word "Aqa," she stormed out into the yard. Her chador was tied around her waist and her gray hair covered most of her face. She came directly to the pool, ritually washed her hands, squatted by the side of the pool and said, 'My dear man. Are you aware of how many mullahs, mojtaheds and ayatollahs have so far lost their lives? Tell me, how many of those are close relatives of the "Aqa"?"

'Woman!' I shouted. 'Shame on you! Don't even hint at such things in public.'

'Write back,' she said emphatically, 'and say that Haji Fanusiyan has passed away, or that you are sick. How can you deal with a bunch of Muslims, Zoroastrians, Jews, and Bahá'ís and come out on top? Throughout your fifty-odd-years, have you ever been in politics enough to want to begin now? As things stand, thanks to the late Ashéykh Hadi, you receive a living for a few words that you string together as sermons. Don't let your easy life misguide you. Otherwise, we, too, will have to leave this house tomorrow, this city the day after, and this country the day after that. Isn't this the truth? Was it any different for that cursed Shah who tried to overreach his limits?'

'All right, stop it now!' I said firmly, walking towards the kitchen.

'Isn't what I am saying the truth? If it is not, forget the whole thing; but if it is the truth, then find a solution for it.'

'All right! All right! I will think about a way.'

"'Then, as an afterthought, I asked, 'Is lunch ready?'

'No. It needs to cook a while longer.'
"About half an hour later the children's mother had spread the table cloth on the floor of the vestibule. She had cooked the best *qormeh sabzi* ever."

The Haji's son stood up, stretched himself and, without uttering a word, left the room apparently to go to the bathroom. I was tempted to get up, thumb through the file, and see at least whose file it was that he wanted to "review" with me. Perhaps, I thought, I could at least prepare myself. But, as usual, I could not. I was afraid he might walk in and embarrass me. Besides, he could be standing behind the door or be watching me through some crevice.

A few minutes passed. Then the door opened and the Haji's son returned. I rose as a sign of respect. He motioned for me to sit down. Then he walked to the niche, picked up the file and carried it to the place where he sat. The words "strictly personal and confidential," were written in blue ink on the folder. There was no name on the file. The Haji's son poured me a cup of tea and said, "Dinner is still quite far away. I had to say my prayers."

I remained silent for a while then, as is the custom, I said, "May it be accepted. Bless you!"

He said, "Thank you."

I felt somewhat uneasy about his remark regarding prayer, but did not allow that to occupy my mind. Seeing that I was ready to listen, he picked up his story.

"Usually, during the low season for preaching," he said, "I take an afternoon nap. Then at about five or six I go to the nearest mosque to say my evening prayers as well as to talk to my colleagues. After prayers I go directly home for din-
ner. This is my daily routine during this season and it is unchangeable unless someone dies or there are wedding ceremonies in one of the districts.

That day, too, I was stretching my legs and was about to go to sleep when there was a knock at the door. Soon after Ma'sumeh came to me and said, 'There are two gentlemen in suits at the front door. They wish to talk with you.'

'She said this and remained behind the door for an answer. I knew that they were from the office of the attorney general. I said, 'Tell them to wait a minute. I shall be with them momentarily.'

'Quickly I tightened the cord of my pantaloons, threw the cloak that I had brought from Karbala on my shoulders, found my most expensive turban, shook it and placed it on my head. Then reciting prayers, I passed the pool and went to the door. Of the two men, one was at the end of the alley. He had his arms akimbo and was whistling. The other was sitting on the platform of the house waiting for me. Upon seeing me, he jumped off the platform, dusted his nicely ironed, gray suit and, in a grandiose way, said, 'Hello.'

I answered his greetings and said, 'Did you wish to see me?'

'Yes, sir. The car is ready. Are you going to the office or...'

'I realized that copies of this telegram must have been sent to others as well and that I was, so to speak, in business. But I was not ready for business by even the greatest stretches of the imagination. I said, 'Who is that fellow?'

'His name is Hassan Khan, sir. He is your driver.'

'And I am sure you don't belong to these parts.'

'No, sir, you are right. I don't. My name is Mansuri. I have been sent here from Tehran to assist you.'

'Very good... very good.'
"Since I did not have the vaguest notion about how the office of the attorney general operates, I decided to lose these gentlemen by temporarily bringing that office within my orbit, i.e., to operate from a mosque while learning the ins and outs of the job. I could also continue my chats with my colleagues and receive vital information about the committees. Therefore, I said to him, 'Take me to the Lonban mosque. Then go to the office of each of the committees and collect their files. Take all the files to the office [I didn't even know where the office of the attorney general would be in Isfahan]. At the office, sort out the files and bring the relevant cases [I borrowed "relevant cases" from the telegram] to me in the Lonban Mosque.'

"Mr. Mansuri was at a loss. It was as if I had said something very wrong but on which he could not comment. He gasped, 'Relevant cases?'

'Yes,' I said firmly, 'cases relevant to the committees.'

'Yes, sir. As you wish. Shall we go? The alley is too narrow for the car to negotiate... What time should I call at the mosque?'

'Don't bother. When my work is finished, I will get home on my own. But don't forget, bring the relevant cases to the mosque in the morning. The mosque is, of course, the very one we are going to now.'

'Yes, sir, as you wish.'

'The large, shiny limousine, flying a revolutionary flag on its hood, stopped in front of the mosque. As required, the chauffeur opened the door for me and Mr. Mansuri hurried to my side to guide me into the mosque. I took my time for a while, then got out. The shopkeepers who, over the years, had seen me shuffle in and out of the mosque were amazed. They had abandoned their work and were watching me, Mr.
Bashiri, and his car. As soon as I left the car, Hassan Khan sped off in the direction of the roundabout.

Inside the mosque, it was quiet and serene. A couple of the faithful who had missed the communal prayers were praying. I passed them to reach a relatively quiet corner where the murmur of the running stream lulls me to sleep. This is a secluded, cozy place where, on days when there is too much noise at home or when I decide not to return after the communal prayers, I go to take a nap.

I placed my shoes on the mat and was ready to lie down when I heard someone calling me. I looked around. A lady in a black chador caught my attention. By the way, I forgot to tell you that this is also the place where people come to have prayer wheels written, evil eyes taken off themselves and their family, and the Qur'an consulted for undertaking marriage proposals, the writing of wills and the like. She said, 'Seyyed, for God's sake, can you help me?'

'Yes, sister. What has happened?'

'My child is sick. I have taken him everywhere. No one seems to be of any help. Can you administer a prayer?'

'Yes. One moment,' I said, thrusting my hand into my pocket. 'What is wrong with him?'

'Well, he has stomach cramps, intense pain on his side, is feverish and feels generally weak.'

'I carefully reviewed my supply of prayer wheels, picked one and handed it to her. She took it and kissed my hand. Her touch made me somewhat uneasy. She said, 'Seyyed, I don't have any money to pay for this. But, if you wish, you can perform a sighe. Make me your maid.'

'She then opened her chador to show me what she looked like. She was beautiful. I said, 'That's all right, sister. Look me up next time you come to the mosque. Right now it is my nap time. Give this to the child and hope for the best.'
"She thanked me again and left. I never saw her again.

"The next day, before sunrise, I woke up Taqi to go to the bathhouse together. The public bath is not far from here. On the way I was explaining to him that I might get a new job in which case we would have to make certain changes in our lifestyle. It was hard for a ten... uh, twelve year old—I have a terrible time remembering ages—to understand how one can change his lifestyle. To explain, I said, 'Do you recall a few years ago, whenever we went to the bath? You used to swim and play in the steaming bath reservoir?'

'Yes, but the baths don't have hot reservoirs anymore!'

'You are right,' I said. 'And this comes with change. Modern baths have showers instead of hot pools. This is what we call a minor change in lifestyle. Do you remember after we left the steam room how we used to walk down the dark corridors to the cloakroom on wooden sandals? Then we used to rinse our feet in a pool of cool, fresh water and go to the platform where our clothes were? Do you remember how we used to sit there, drink tea and talk?'

'I didn't drink tea!' Taqi protested.

'Well, I mean us, the grown-ups. Children only had enough time to put their clothes on and get ready.'

'This conversation played heavily on my feelings of nostalgia. In the old days, were it in the bazaar or in the baths, people mingled without any inhibitions, just like children. When you passed the boiler room, you knew that Kal Najaf worked in that hellish underground to produce hot water so that you could cleanse yourself. You recognized Kal Najaf's contribution and you respected him for that. The bath attendants and the owner would join you in the cloak room for a cup of tea and talk. But now, we no longer know who runs
the bathhouse; we don't even know who the hell runs the whole world! They send me a Mr. Mansuri from Tehran to help me. What does Mr. Mansuri know about Isfahan and the Isfahanis? Or take myself as the Attorney General. Other than the driver and Mr. Mansuri, who else knows about my having become the attorney general? Does the bath owner know? No. Does the bath attendant know? No. Does the man in the boiler room know? No. These are the inhabitants of Isfahan and none of them knows what I am about. Isn't this frightening? How is one to learn of the joys and sorrows of other people?

"As we approached the baths Taqi, who must have been thinking about his friend Reza, who lives on the street previously known as Shah Avenue, said, 'Dad, when we come out of the baths, can I go to Reza's?'

'Let's see how things go in there and what time we come out.'

"In the baths, an attendant whom I did not know, came, rubbed us down and left. I washed Taqi's hair with soap, rinsed it and handed him the pumice stone to scrub his heels.

"When we left the baths, Taqi had forgotten Reza altogether. In order to keep him from thinking about Reza, I said, 'Taqi, if you pick up your feet, I'll buy you some bamiye and zulbiya from the confectioner's.'

"This remark speeded Taqi up. He also began to talk, 'Why didn't Mr. Mansuri drive his car to the door?'

'Because the alley is too narrow.'

'Are you going to have it expanded?'

'No. We might move to Sheykh Baha'i, to a house where cars can come to the door.'

'Or, perhaps, near Reza's?'

'Perhaps.'
"Taqi continued his questions until we reached the confectioner's. His questions, questions of a ten..er.. twelve year old, fascinated me. How observant children are! For example, he was asking: Why is it that after the revolution people are more afraid of each other? Why does Ustad Ali have to smoke his opium pipe in the closet of his room? Why have they given Mohammad Khan the butcher's second floor to Sekineh and her daughter? Why did they change the picture on our flag? Why are there so many men with only one arm or one leg? Why?... Why? ... Why?...

"All these were, and still are, relevant, some of them even profound, questions. But, as the Attorney General, I did not have any answers, not even one that would convince a ten or twelve year old.

"Fortunately the confectioner's was at the end of the block. It attracted Taqi as would a piece of sugar a fly. After we bought the zulbiya, on the way, every now and then, Taqi held the bag out for me to help myself. I was glad that the confectioner had opened his shop this early in the morning. He is a pleasant fellow. What intrigued me about him was this: He knew that I had been asked to be the Attorney General of Isfahan.

"At home, as usual, the children's mother asked, 'So what did you all talk about?'

"I had given up on explaining to her that one does not get to talk to anyone in the modern bathhouses and that the only people I see were Taqi, a bath attendant I did not know and Ostad Mahmud, the confectioner. Instead, I said, 'Nothing in particular,' and added, 'I must eat my breakfast before the twosome appears at the door again.'

"And, speaking of the devil, I was only half finished with breakfast when somebody knocked at the front door. As usu-
al, Ma’sumeh came to the door and said, 'It's the same man in
the suit. He says its 8:00 o'clock.'

"For the first time in my life I felt the pressure of work-
ing in an office. The job of Attorney General, I thought, must
be the most difficult job in the whole wide world."

What was the point of talking about his life, his son, and
his wife, I wondered. Why was he telling me all this? Who
could write a book about garbage like that? Besides, I was
sure that the cunning fellow had something up his sleeve. I
wished my wife were behind the closet door listening! What
intrigued me most was the family's move to Sheykh Baha’i.
Could this have been the Mullah who had been talking to Ali
Asghar?

When the Haji’s son began to put away his opium device
and cover the coals with ash, I knew that we were nearing
the time for dinner, perhaps another thirty minutes or so.
Having put everything away, he returned to his place, and
resumed his story.

"I am not a heedless fellow who, God forbid, you might
imagine has spent his entire life disregarding those rules of
religion concerning what is allowed and what is not. And I
have not cheated people or, as the saying goes, robbed Peter
to pay Paul. I am not a stupid fool either, one who could be
readily saddled by every incapable, blind, bald or cripple. I
am, however, bound by a couple of personal philosophies,
philosophies that I have drawn on from my early youth or,
perhaps, even from early childhood. They constitute the
foundation of my being. Whether I have inherited these phi-
losophies, or they are products of the society I live in, is not
clear to me. What is clear is that during the past fifty odd
years, I have benefited tremendously from these philosophies. Indeed, I dare say I have understood the meaning of life and living by following the dictates of these philosophies.

"Pardon the expression. They say work is not for people. It is for donkeys. Isn't there a grain of truth in that? Human beings are intelligent, capable of reasoning; they distinguish good from evil. Yet, it so happens that they are physically weak. By necessity, therefore, they must find a restive donkey, put a bridle in its mouth, place a saddle on its back and exploit its God-given strength. Of course, you are aware that I am using the word 'donkey' advisedly and in a general sense. Besides the quadrupeds, some bipeds, too, could easily be identified as such. These include those who, from dawn to dusk, fight nature by moving piles of dirt, loads of rocks, or bunches of timber about, as well as those who day in and day out haggle in stuffy offices.

"Opposed to these groups is an elite group whose activities approximate those of the pious cat. They study the various ways in which they can freely draw on the wages and property of the first group. I tend to relate more to the second group than to the first. In fact, in the past few years I have given this very dichotomy a lot of thought and have related it to certain segments of society. I am now at the stage of finding out how beneficial this philosophy is for me. Others, of course, have used it in the past and have received very good results from their endeavors."

I could not believe my ears. I kept hearing resonances of the sermons of Aqa Mash'al al-Din. This man, too, was insulting me and everything I held dear, although he was using a totally different set of tactics. He was calling me and my kind stupid and himself, a leech on the body of society, a member of the elite. He was openly insinuating that he in-
tended to use me, as I am sure he was using other victims or, as he put it, stupid office workers as a cog in his factory wheels. But rather than protest, which is my natural reaction in such situations, I chose silence. He continued, "Now you may ask why I am being so frank about my views about people and about myself; why should I not follow custom and keep everything to myself? The reason is that unfortunately people cannot distinguish the donkey from the man. And those who make a distinction do not do so with conviction. Yet this distinction plays a pivotal role in society and affects every individual. Those who do not take it seriously, sooner or later, fall victim to the webs of cunning spiders where they struggle for dear life."

He projected the image of a frank and no nonsense man so well that you felt obliged to pour out your heart to him in the same way. But what were his motives? I let him talk without interruption, "In order for you to recognize the spider of spiders, it is necessary that I recount my personal experiences as a point of information. In fact a frank narration of my thoughts has several useful aspects for your study. Firstly, you will become intimately aware of the character of the man who might have become the Attorney General of Isfahan. Secondly, when I talk about the files of those accused in the committees, or those who accused them, you will know my personal feelings in the matter. But most important, you will see how an individual who has done his homework well can gather a few stupid individuals around him and spend his few days on earth as a prosperous fellow in one of the districts of Isfahan rather than as a Jew in the Jewish quarters of Shiraz. And, above all, in a way that does not draw any criticism."

No doubt he was the most confident, if not outright abrasive, individual I have ever encountered in my entire
life. He felt as secure as Mt. Sina and, apparently, had a heart doubly as hard. I knew that he intended to ask me to do something extraordinary for him. I also knew that he would leave me no option. What remained was to find out what. I listened:

"And now," he said with almost childish glee, "an account of the life and deeds of this poor, humble creature. As I said earlier, my father was from the Fars province. I lived with my family in the city of Shiraz until I was ten or twelve—the same age as Taqi. We lived in a locality called Sare Kale Moshir or, as the Shirazis bluntly put it, 'in the Jewish district.' There my grandfather had a small jewelry shop behind the Now Mosque and his transactions were mostly with the Jewish people. Of course, there were others who came to him from Darvazeh Kazerun, Gowde Araban and Darvazeh Qur'an. But the majority of his customers and associates were Jewish. I know this because the dialect of Persian they spoke was distinct. In my family, however, only my grandfather, perhaps from many years of association with Jews, spoke with a Jewish accent. The rest of the family mimicked the Shirazis.

"Now you may ask why, instead of living around the Jom'eh mosque, Shah-e Cheraq or the shrine of Seyyed Mir Mohammad, my family should live in Sare Kale Moshir. I don't think I have an answer for that. Indeed I broached the question several times when talking about Shiraz to my father, but he never gave me a straight answer. Often he snapped: 'What a nosy kid! It's none of your business. Pay attention to your work!'"

Listening to the Haji's son, involuntarily I recalled my own father's words about the Naqsh-e Jahan square. How difficult it would be today to unearth and reveal the old polo ground! He continued, "Several years after the death of my
grandfather my father sold the jewelry shop behind the Now Mosque to a man called Sham'un the Jew and made ready to travel to Isfahan.

"These were the days that people no longer traveled in caravans. Therefore, we took our luggage, tossed it into the back of a truck, and soon after, joined it up there. Once in the box, my father mysteriously pulled a bundle towards himself, opened it and produced an old, clergyman's cloak and a matching black turban. Once he placed the turban on his head, I noticed his stubby beard and realized why he had not been shaving the last few days. Then he threw the cloak over his shoulders and answered our inquisitive looks this way, 'There is a lot of dust on the way to Isfahan.'

"As he talked he opened another bundle and from that produced two sets of similar clothing. He handed one to my brother and threw the other one to me.

'... Our eyes and skin may be damaged,' he advised.

"We wore the clothes. My mother, too, put on a chador. In a few minutes our family lost its usual look and assumed an aura of spirituality.

"My brother, although somewhat dissatisfied with this fatherly imposition, took the situation in stride; but my mother, who had been freed from the chador during Reza Shah's time, was bitter. But she wore it nonetheless. It was her husband's wish; she had no choice. Then my father produced a rosary from his pocket and began to work the beads.

"Later, the truck driver, a man of about thirty, came by to see us and to make sure that the children would stay in the box and not climb the sides when the truck was in motion. This, he said, would make trouble for him. Then, seeing my father and considering his spiritual presence, he regretted that the 'Aqa' must sit uncomfortably on top of the load all the way to Isfahan. He said, 'Asheykh, this is not proper that
you, a descendent of the Prophet, should sit on top of the load in the back. Please, come down and join me in the cab. It's a long way to Isfahan. It may take two or three days...'

'My father winked at us and, with a special, dignified air, began to climb down the metal ladder at the side of the truck box. The truck began to roll and we did not see my father until we reached Abadeh. While we were drinking tea there, he said, 'This driver is a noble soul. He had two passengers in the cab who were traveling to Abadeh. They are gone now. He said the three of you can join me in the cab. But I want to put a condition on your joining us. You continue to wear the outfits you are wearing and speak as little as possible and, only when needed, properly.'

'But there is no dust in the cab!' my mother protested.

'I know that,' he snapped back. 'But I have introduced us as descendants of the Prophet. We cannot all of a sudden become ordinary people!'

"In short, the driver and my father, who now spoke of nothing but purity and piety, became fast friends and when we arrived in Isfahan he found this house behind the Chaharsuye Shiraziha market for us. The following day, he took my father around and introduced him to the grocer, the dealer, the confectioner, and the fruit and vegetable seller as Asheykh. From then on my father became known as Asheykh and my name, too, gradually changed to Asheykh's son. I have lived with that name for many, many years. Nobody has called me Hormoz since those days.

"Now about our work situation. My father did his best to keep the cloak and the turban on my elder brother Habib, but he did not succeed. Habib would not listen to him and, whenever father threatened that Habib was destroying his own future, the latter answered that father should worry about his own future and that he, Habib, could manage on his
own. When this did not work, father opened a jewelry shop in Darvazeh Dowlat for Habib and he himself started jewelry smithing on the sly here, in the house.

"In order not to be discovered or disturbed, he remodeled the unused space at the back of this independent kitchen and built the fireplace such that it could easily be used as a forge from the other side. That niche with the file in it is where the furnace used to be. The kitchen stove is no longer behind it. It was moved to the front where there is more light. Then father asked us to respond to those who might come to see him, especially when he was working in the 'kitchen,' with either 'He is sleeping.' or 'He is not home,' or 'He is at the mosque.' In this way, he could kill two birds with one stone. He could be Asheykh when he was out of the house, and he could continue the family tradition and sell his handiwork in my brother's jewelry shop.

"The jewelry shop did well. Habib Khan got married and left the house. After my mother's death, my father, becoming old and lonely, took some money and headed for the holy city of Mecca. These rapid changes brought me to my senses and prompted me to find a vocation, to seek a name on my own rather than wait for my father's return and the inevitable promotion to the position of the Haji's son.

"One day, I mustered my courage and entered the Charharbagh Theological School. There, sitting under the trees by the stream that runs through the school, I spoke about my future with one of the students. From our discussion I concluded that I had two avenues open to me. One was to follow the example of the regular students at the school and aim for a diploma. By my quick calculation, this required a good deal of capital as well as a long period of studentship. The other was to select a well-known mullah and, with his assistance, bring myself some notoriety. After much thought, I
decided to follow both routes simultaneously lest one not bear fruit. To fulfill the 'scholarly' requirements, I asked the student for a couple of titles and began studying them. This work was, of course, against my philosophy and thus did not continue for long. I lacked the background for it anyway. The alternative involved humility and servility; this I began to master. I frequented the school and the mosques until I found a preacher by the name of Asheykh Hadi who also lectured at the school.

"In the course of a friendly chat in the school, I told him of my secret wish to help out men of God. He comforted me and said that he would allow me to attend to his donkey. He also promised that, when he rode from one rowzeh (sermon) to another, he would allow me to guide his donkey in the alleyways. I had no more use for the school.

"As you see, my career as a preacher began with holding the reins of the donkey of Asheykh Hadi who preached in and around the Kohne Meydan. The good thing about this arrangement was that the haunts of the Sheykh were far from my home base. Those days no one from the Chaharsuye Shiraziha went to the Kohne Meydan. For this reason no one in the Kohne Meydan knew much about me. Gradually people came to know me as the son of Asheykh. By Asheykh, however, they were not referring to my father but to Asheykh Hadi. I knew what was going on, of course, but I pretended ignorance. I told Asheykh Hadi, however, that my father was also referred to as Asheykh. He acknowledged that it was a predicament but did not protest. We hoped that the situation would work itself out.

"For a long time my sole job was to guide Asheykh Hadi's donkey to various places and to listen to his sermons. During my free time, I changed clothes, met with my friends
near the Khaju Bridge in Gabrabad, drank ‘araq, and chased prostitutes till late into the night.

"Then, one day, Asheykh fell ill and became bedridden. His wife combed the neighborhood to find someone to substitute for Asheykh. Finally, she approached me as I was sitting expectantly under the pomegranate tree by the pool and said, 'Asheykh wants to talk to you.'

"Without uttering a word, I got up and went directly to Asheykh's bedside. He did not look well at all. When he saw me, he smiled meaningfully and said, 'Son of Asheykh. You have been accompanying me for many years now and you have heard my sermons. Today, I need someone to preach for me from the first step of the pulpit and to tell the owner and the audience that, God willing, I will be there the next day? Do you think you can do that for me?'

'Yes, I am sure I can,' I said with confidence. 'In fact, I have been reciting your sermon on the "Drawbacks of Ambition" to myself for a long time now.'

"Asheykh was extremely pleased. Like a gardener who, one day, notices the fruit of his labor in a budding flower, he took me by the hand and said, 'I knew from the day we first met in the school that you were an intelligent fellow. Go to the door, convey my greetings to the owner and tell him about my being ill. But don't talk to any of the other preachers. They may be a nuisance. Then, when my turn comes, go to the pulpit, sit on the first step and deliver the sermon on the 'Drawbacks of Ambition!' Don't forget to begin with 'In the Name...' Then, for the climax, rather than going to the events at Karbala, which are extremely complicated, go to Mo'aviyeh's palace...speak about his ambition.'

"To cut a long story short, that day I delivered Asheykh's sermon on the 'Drawbacks of Ambition' from the third step of the pulpit and, for the climax, I detailed the atrocities that
befell the Prophet's family at Karbala. And, I should add, I
drew tears like I had never seen anyone draw before!
"Asheykh Hadi did not survive his illness. In fact, his
passing away left my position up in the air. Since everyone
in the community knew me as Asheykh's son, with the assis-
tance of Asheykh's wife, I persuaded the late Sheykh's clients
to invite me to preach for them at a considerably reduced
price. Most of them accepted. Gradually, I took over Ash-
eykh's rounds. After I had full control of Asheykh's sessions
and donkey, I brought the rest of his household under my
control as well.

"A couple of years passed before I became acquainted
with one of Asheykh's daughters from a different marriage.
Here I had an opportunity to test my other personal philoso-
phy, the one that says: don't allow the garden to overwhelm
you; pick a rose and move on. My acquaintance with Ash-
eykh's daughter, however, ended in marriage—my first mar-
rriage. But since everyone was of the understanding that I was
Asheykh's son, it was not possible to marry the girl without a
hitch. With the help of the girl's mother and Asheykh's other
helpful wife, I married her on my family's side of town, in
the present house, which after my father's death had been left
to me and Habib. No one from the Kohne Meydan commu-
nity knew about this marriage.

"The transfer of Asheykh's daughter to this house made
matters difficult. I still had to go to the Kohne Meydan early
in the morning and return in the evening and, of course, this
constituted work. And you know my attitude towards work!

"After a couple of years, I solved this problem, too, with
another marriage. A second marriage, I thought, would cure
the everyday monotony for me and it would satisfy those in
the Kohne Meydan who were complaining that their wives
and daughters were being preached to by a bachelor. Thus,
with the assistance of Asheykh's helpful wife, who did this as a revenge against her rival, I married a fourteen-year-old and settled her next to Asheykh's house. No one on that side of town knew about this recent marriage.

"As time passed, I began to tire of preaching daily in the Kohneh Meydan. Instead, I began to visit old acquaintances in the bazaar, and the mosques on this side of town, looking for a way to rid myself of traveling to the Kohneh Meydan. After much thought and visiting many people, I came to the conclusion that I should seek the assistance of my father's old friends. They might, I thought, be able to find me a niche in the Lonban district. With this in mind, I went to the same driver who had unknowingly started my father on the job and, in a tongue-in-check manner, asked for help. He came through. Before long I was preaching around Lonban and soon after that in the Lonban community itself.

"I should add that, like everything else, getting this job was not without a hitch. I had had to work hard for it, as had my father's old associate. As a token of my gratitude to this old friend, I married his grand-daughter and settled her on the other side of the river, near Jolfa. "This last marriage happened on the eve of the revolution, and it has tripled the difficulty of my scheduling things. Saturdays and Sundays I go to the Kohneh Meydan. I stay the nights with my second wife. Mondays I rest somewhere in some mosque. Tuesday I come back to this neck of the woods. I spend today and tomorrow with the children's mother here where the mailman correctly found me. I take off on Thursday and I spend it together with Friday in the company of my new bride near Jolfa."

The Haji's son looked worn out. A white substance had formed on his blackened lips and in the corners of his mouth. With an air of finality he leaned against the wall and said,
"All this is going on without difficulty because I do not have a conventional vocation—none of my wives, even if they knew, could complain, because I cannot preach on all three sides of the town at the same time! But with a regular job as Attorney General, I had to make certain adjustments; they would not allow me to divide the office, would they?"

By now I had become better acquainted with this frank and rather amiable Sheykh. In fact, much of the boredom I felt while listening to the first part of his story had gradually dissipated. He knew where he belonged and he knew how he had attained his position. Was it the opium talking, or was he really telling me something? The theme, or the philosophy, as he would put it, that I could gather from his hints and insinuations was this: If you can't beat them, join them. Was he asking me to give up being a Baha'i and become a Muslim or was he telling me to leave Isfahan, go somewhere else and practice taqiya? I looked forward to the end of this conversation when, possibly at the door as I was leaving, he would hit the nail on the head. Oh, how I detest ta'arof!

Dinner was ready. I could visualize it as it was being dished up in the kitchen, a few steps away from us. Ma'sumeh knocked on the door and said, "Haji. I have the sofreh, the water jug, and towels for you."

The Haji's son walked to the door and took the table cloth and the other things through the-half-opened door. I felt that I should offer to help but, since Ma'sumeh was on the other side, I decided that I should let him carry them by himself in two trips. As he spread the table cloth, he said, "I hope you like fried chicken and rice."

"Oh yes, I do."

"... and lamb kabob?"
Viewing the *sofreh* from a distance, I smiled and said, "Oh, definitely," and added, "You really shouldn't have inconvenienced yourselves to this degree."

He did not say anything. Then, as I sat at the *sofreh*, he brought a bowl and the water jug and helped me rinse my hand. He then handed me the towel and rinsed and dried his own hand. As we sat at the *sofreh* cross-legged, he recited a verse from the *Qur'an* in praise of the Almighty's bounty on earth and invited me to serve myself, saying "Son of Mirza Mohammad. Please do not *ta'arof*. Eat whatever you like in whatever manner is most comfortable for you. There are spoons, forks, and knives; personally I like to eat with my fingers. So, please go ahead!"

It was a very hard decision to make. I was not sure at all whether I should follow the example of my host and use my fingers or, awkward as it would seem, use the utensils they had provided. I decided to eat as I always did. I filled my plate with rice, chicken, kabob, and yogurt and began eating.

Once I had served myself, the Haji's son took the rest of the chicken in his hands and tore it into two pieces. He laid the half from which I had taken a portion on top of the rice and put the other piece on his own plate. He then put some soup in a bowl, added pieces of bread to it and stirred the combination until the bread became soggy. He then dipped his fingers into the bowl, took some and slurped it up, every morsel of the greasy bread. This done, he served himself some rice and began what amounted to his second course.

I was fascinated by the way he ate. There was no rhyme or reason to it; yet I am sure he did not consider himself un-orderly. He would take a piece of flat bread and stuff it with rice and a piece of chicken or kabob. As he pulled the chicken apart and ate it he would deposit the bones in the empty soup bowl. Often he would dip the piece of stuffed bread in-
to the yogurt and then put the whole thing into his mouth. The funny thing was that even with a full mouth, he continued to talk, "Like the opium," he managed to say, "everything on this sofreh comes from my own barns and fields."

Hearing this assured me that we had come very close to the discussion of the long awaited topic. He continued, "Recently I bought what amounts to an entire village located between here and Arak. The place is called Ashgerd. It is surrounded by wheat fields as far as the eye can see, has good running water, and its people are honest and God-fearing. The lamb we are eating comes from Ashgerd. There is a larger village near there called Damaneh. That, too, is a beautiful place with fields and streams. It, too, is on the block. But the price is high. I may be able to swing that deal though. If I sell my new property in Sheykh Bahá’í, some older property in the Kohne Meydan, and add some cash."

I was not familiar with the places he was talking about; but buying villages I thought had been a thing of the past. I asked, "Who sells these villages?"

"Oh, the people," he said. "They still live in them, of course. But, by selling their common property, they get rid of their cash flow problems for a while."

The subject was not of great interest to me. Nevertheless, I said, "Suppose you bought it. What would you do with it after you buy it?"

The Haji's son fell silent. His face turned red, considered his answer for a while, swallowed the big morsel he was chewing, and said, "Well, the question is not what I would do with a village. The question is this: What would a capable person like yourself do with it?"

Suddenly I felt overwhelmed by the whole conversation. I lost my appetite almost totally and began to play with my knife and fork. I knew now that the Haji's son had more than
a friendly chat up his greasy sleeve. He continued, "About a week ago, I made a trip to Ashgerd and Damaneh. So beautiful. I didn't want to return. Just wanted to marry an Ashgerdi lass and stay there forever. But here I am. It was not my kismet. Damaneh has great potential for development. It is on the Isfahan-Aligudarz, as well as the Isfahan-Khomein-Arak, highways. The highway from Isfahan splits there, you see. Think of the potential for development. A hotel, a regular bus line, even a dam. There is also an imamzadeh there that can be repaired and highlighted. Besides, Damaneh is the gateway to the Kuhrang area and trade with the Lurs."

I already could smell great trouble afoot. Just think of what happened to Aqa Mash'al al-Din who tried to outsmart his colleagues! Who wants to get on the wrong side of Aqa Shams al-Ma'ali?

As I ruminated in silence, the Haji's son ate. He ate the rest of the chicken, most of the rice and all but one skewer of the lamb kabob. When he saw me sitting idly, he literally forced me to take it. Having regained my appetite meanwhile, I began to eat.

I no longer liked what he was saying, but I loved the food his wife had cooked. It was traditional Iranian cuisine and it was delicious.

After dinner, I left my host for a few minutes. When I returned, the sofreh was gone and the low table in the middle of the room was refurbished with trays of sweets and fruits. I thought he would continue his discussion of developing Damaneh into a metropolis, but he did not. Instead, he poured us each a cup of tea and said, "Now, I want to tell you what happened after I received that telegram. And that part of my story pertains to this file. In fact, a list of names and this file are the only things I gained from receiving that telegram."
As he spoke he got up and went to the door. Apparently Ma'sumeh had brought something, although I hadn't heard her knock. When he returned with a pot full of burning coals, I knew that he was going to smoke opium again. He put the pot of fire down on the tray, fetched his opium device and returned to his original place for smoking. My legs were hurting from having sat on them for such a long time. I hoped that he would not impose the qalyun on me again. He pushed the file towards me but motioned that I should not open it yet. He said, "I bet I have given you a headache."

"No, not at all," I said. "The account of your life is so very interesting."

Assuming a pensive posture, the Haji's son said, "Well, as I told you, judgment is the most difficult task a human being can be assigned. And now, those at the helm, knowingly or otherwise, had placed this burden on my shoulder. What did I do? I tried to do the best I could do for them and for myself. Let me begin at the beginning."

Having said this, he fell silent, chose his favorite coal, picked it up, shook it, and placed it at the side of the pot of fire on the ashes. Then he put some opium on the device as he had done before, blew on it through the device and sucked the smoke. Exhaling never-ending tubes of blue smoke through his nostrils and mouth, he talked, "My first day as Attorney General was a Saturday, a day on which I had preaching appointments at the Kohne Meydan. In order not to create any undue difficulty, I sent Taqi there to keep the audience busy by giving a sermon from the first step of the pulpit. I also told Taqi to tell them that I had been detained at home. Then I waited for Mr. Mansuri and the driver. They came on time and took me to the Lonban Mosque. There I was confronted with the task. An army truck was parked in front of the mosque and they were unloading the files
brought from the Attorney General's office. I asked Mr. Mansuri, 'To which part of the mosque are they taking these files?' Looking inside the mosque, he said apologetically, 'Oh, they are running a bit late. They are stacking them in your chambers.' Then hurriedly added, 'I mean we have cordoned off a section under the dome as your headquarters until you decide to move into the office.'

'Fine, fine.'

'I said this and slowly retired to the sunny side of the mosque to join an old acquaintance, Ased Ahmad. The morning sunshine felt good on my aching bones. Ased Ahmad looked quite pensive for this early on a Saturday morning. I asked, 'Ased. I hope everything is in good order. Where are the faithful?'

Raising his head from his folded knees, he responded, 'They are at the hospital.'

'At the hospital?' I echoed his hollow words. 'What's at the hospital?'

Stroking his short beard, he said, 'Apparently Aqa Haji Chelcheraq has suffered a massive heart attack.'

I was shocked. I said, 'Aqa Haji Chelcheraq! What has caused it?'

'Ased Ahmad pointed to the files and said, 'Too much of that. He literally lived in those committees trying to make sure that people were judged correctly. He was not like those novices who judge by imitation, you know.'

'What a loss!' I said after I overcame my astonishment. 'What are his chances? What do the doctors say?'

Viewing the heavens, he said, 'Not good. Not good.' Then looking serious and skeptical, he added, 'What have the doctors to do with it? What do they have to say? God giveth and God taketh away!'
"I consoled the old seyyed who was deeply affected by the impending loss of a close associate.

"When the job of moving the files was completed, I joined Mr. Mansuri in my "chamber" where piles and piles of files were literally stored, each stack as high as my waist. Mr. Mansuri explained, 'Sir, these are not all the files. We could access the files of only two of the committees. Others were called, but we could not reach anyone.'

'What committees are these from?'

'The one near here, and another one on Chaharbagh Avenue!'  

'Well, I shall work on these while you work on getting the rest of the files. Eventually all these files will have to be moved back to the office.'

'Yes sir, I realize that.'

'Now tell me, how are these arranged?'

'Sir,' he said. 'We have organized these very carefully into four categories. These piles are marked "dismissed." You may want to review them to see if they are in order. These three piles contain small files each about a page or two. These we have marked "completed".'

Here the Haji's son took a long breath, stared at the ceiling for a few seconds and then added, "I estimate the number of those files to be somewhere between 300 and 350. I asked Mr. Mansuri, 'What does "completed" mean?''

'Sir, it means executed.'

'So why are we working with them?'

'I don't know sir. To see if justice had been... ?'

'How about these?' I interrupted.

'Sir, these we have marked as "out of circulation".'

'And what does that mean?'
'Sir, it means that for some reason or other the committees have felt that the individual should be released but kept under surveillance.'"

Here the Haji's son looked up at me and said, "Your file was in this group."

I wanted very much to ask him about the "A" and "B" grouping he had mentioned before, but I felt he might think that I was too pushy. So I continued to listen as he talked. I was sure that an occasion would arise in which either he would mention it or I would ask. He continued, "Then, I asked Mansuri about the smallest pile. He said, 'Sir, these are marked "strictly personal and confidential".'

'What does that mean?' I asked.

'It means that these files have been put together by experts in various fields, experts who have investigated the judges who have passed judgment on those cases!'

'And who appointed these experts?' I asked.

'Apparently a Haji Chelcheraq, sir.'

I weighed his answer for a moment, then said, 'Other than this Haji Chelcheraq, who else knows about the contents of these files?'

He thought for a short while and said, 'To the best of my knowledge, no one else, sir.'

To make absolutely sure that that was the case I said, 'Are you positive?'

Without the slightest hesitation he said, 'Absolutely, sir.'

I said, 'Fine, fine.'

Then he asked, 'Is there anything else, sir?'

'No,' I said. 'Just the routine.'

'Yes, sir. I have placed two guards inside and one at the entrance. And I have brought an old man, named Rahman, from the office to bring you tea.'

'Fine, fine.'
"As soon as Mr. Mansuri left I began looking the files over. As a rule, I disregarded all the files marked 'dismissed.' The pile marked 'completed' also did not attract my attention. I figured rightly or wrongly those lives have been lost. Besides, inasmuch as they had been identified as associates of the devil, they did not deserve sympathy. I then proceeded to the pile marked 'out of circulation.' These files, I found, belonged to people like yourself who had great potential as directors and developers but who, due to their race, or sex or creed, had been discriminated against."

He paused here and, looking me straight in the eyes, asked, "What do you think I did?"

Regarding this to be a rhetorical question, I did not say anything. In fact I was so overwhelmed that I could not say anything. I continued to show great interest in his story. He went on, "I took a fresh piece of paper and put down what struck me as extraordinary about some of these fellows. I also included a resume of their past life and of their activities for my own future reference—notes that would jog my memory when I wanted to help these people reshape their lives, you know."

Clouds were gradually being lifted and I could discern a dim outline of Mr. Fanusiyan's grand scheme. He continued, "You are here, of course, as a result of that list."

He paused, and I said, "Of course."

He then continued, "Having exhausted those files, I moved to the smallest pile—that of the committee judges. There were six files, each marked 'strictly personal and confidential.' The thickest was the one before you. It belongs to no one but our very own great Attorney General, His Excellency Aqa Seyyed Pisuziyani."

All along I had had a vague feeling that the file could belong to one of the judges, but I had not been able to iden-
tify it with Pisuziyani. To react properly to the disclosure, I pretended to be startled, "The Attorney General's?"

"The same," he said, smiling.

He seemed to be amused for a while; then in a serious tone, he said, "Now, if you join me here on this side of the pot of fire, we can look at this together."

I moved over and placed the file, still unopened, before him. He wetted his thumb and in a clumsy way opened the file. A copy of Hushang Pisuziyani's birth certificate was on top. The Haji's son asked me, "Do you know Aqa Pisuziyani?"

I shook my head saying, "No, sir. Only a distant acquaintance."

"How is it then that I have the feeling that he knows you quite well!"

"Possibly because we went to the same school."

"That could be," he said with an air of incredulity and added, "in any event, he is an enemy of yours, of that I am sure. But as long as I am alive, and as long as this file is in my possession, your file will stay out of circulation. You can be sure of that."

I could feel his invisible claws as they were settling snugly around my neck. I said, "Thank you. You are so very kind."

"Mirza Mohammad's son," he said quite matter-of-factly, "don't thank me; thank yourself for having cultivated your potential. Otherwise you, too, like so many others, would have a completed file."

"Well," I said, "I thank God for that."

"Here," he invited me to look at the file again. "Look at the Aqa's birth certificate, especially at his grandfather's surname, Behdin. Doesn't this mean a Zoroastrian?"
"Yes, the word does," I said with incredulity. "But it's only a surname!"

"Correct. But look at the documentation on the faith of the whole family."

I looked. It said, "Unknown."

I was still unsure what the Haji's son was getting at. Because Pisuziyani's own religion was clearly marked "Shi'ite." He added, "These Pisuziyans, you may not know them well. They are rich. They owned quite-a-good deal of the lands around Homayun Shahr. But they did not own any property in the city. Since the revolution, however, the following are reported for the Aqa: three houses [one of them a house of ill repute], one school, two transportation services, three trucks [used frequently in drug trafficking and smuggling goods from Bandar Abbas and Lar], several buses and five taxis. Where do you think these came from?"

I could not help but think about the "completed" and "out of circulation" files. But in order not to reveal my feelings, I argued, "Preaching picked up a lot after the revolution."

"Perhaps," he said as if disappointed at my poor grasp of the subtle points of the conversation.

Then he thumbed through some of the documents in the file and stopped at one marked "A.Z., Confidential Report No. 2." Looking at this he said, "Haji Chelcheraq, may God bless his soul, was a thorough investigator. They used judges like him in medieval times when they persecuted the Zendiqs."

Continuing to pretend ignorance, I asked, "What is a Zendiq?"

"Those fools who preferred their infidel culture over the Islamic culture."

I remained silent. He continued reviewing the file. Then he stopped and said, "Here is something that baffles me.
Here this A.Z. fellow, whoever he is, reports to have watched Pisuziyani while the Aqa was in the bathhouse. He reports that under his usual clothes, the Aqa wears a long, white shirt and that he ritually ties an unusually long cord around his waist. Do you know anything about things like that?

"Well," I stuttered. "I don't know... But all I can say is that such a report about the Attorney General is absolutely preposterous."

"Why? Do you know something about him that I don't know?"

"Yes, I do. But..."

"But what?"

Suddenly I felt pressed for time. I needed time to sort out my thoughts and respond with caution. But like the priests of the Spanish Inquisition, he repeatedly bombarded me with questions.

"Nothing, really." I stalled, then added, "I think I am letting my imagination run away with me. Perhaps something that has to do with his family. The Christian clergy, as you know, wear something similar; but that's more like a belt."

"You could be right, you know! He seemed to agree. It's just like my old man who used to wear a skull cap in the house."

There was silence for a while; then he added, "Anyway, this Pisuziyani must know much more than the high school education his file reveals. He speaks of things that I know virtually nothing about. Look at this other report, again prepared by the same A.Z."

It suddenly dawned on me that the A.Z. must stand for Ali Zadeh, the court clerk whom Pisuziyani insisted on persecuting and eliminating. I asked, "What does it say?"
"Well, it says a lot. It is a transcript of one of Pisuziyani's sermons. Read it for yourself."

He pushed the file away from himself, put his finger which had a discolored nail, on a line and said, "Read from here and tell me what you think."

I took off my glasses, cleaned the lenses and put them back on. Following his directions, I read, "...we are told that, after the Islamic invasion, the Persian language survived but the Persian culture died. This is erroneous. The Iranian culture not only survived, but it was refurbished with new and more vibrant social and spiritual dimensions. The old Iranian concepts persisted and today they constitute some of the major pillars of Shi'ism. For example, can you imagine your faith divested of the coming of the Mahdi? Can you live a day without the assistance of the Fourteen Immaculate Ones? Could you feel secure after death, if you were not sure of the intercession of the Commander of the Faithful, Imam Ali?"

I didn't read any more. Tongue-in-cheek as the sermon was, it bespoke a Pisuziyani very different from the one whom he had allowed me to see. I recalled my wife's comments on the Aqa's character. In order not to get into a discussion with the Haji's son, I said, "I don't see a date on this."

"I understand it to be one of the earlier reports by this A.Z. fellow, himself a colorful person. Although no name is given for him, his accomplishments at an early age included a degree from abroad and experience in compilation of special intelligence and counter-intelligence. He must have been on Pisuziyani's case for a long time before the revolution; the sermon strikes me as one by a novice trying to impress naive audiences."

I thought to myself that the sermon could belong to the year after he returned from India, the year he must have been overly enthusiastic about his roots. How skillfully then, I
thought, he had handled his response to my statements at the committee. Could he have been playing on words?

The Haji's son was not about to allow me to read every word, interesting as the subject was. Gently, he closed the file. Then keeping his hand on the closed file, he bent towards me and said, "You see, every page of this file is priceless. Sitting there, in the Lonban mosque, I realized that my hard work of many years was being rewarded. I had found the fellow I had been desperately looking for."

I was really amazed at this seyyed's ability to juggle things. I said, "What did you do then?"

"What did I do?" He echoed my words. "Well, there I was, supposedly working as Attorney General. The children's mother was absolutely against my accepting the position. My life situation was incompatible with the demands of the office; and I knew the job's prospect for me to be dim at best. I was not even sure that the telegram was not intended for my late father!"

Then, as if testing my ability to juggle again, looking me in the eyes, he asked, "What do you think I did?"

Again I did not have any brilliant answer. He continued, "I put the piece of paper with the names into this file, shoved the file inside my pantaloons, and tied the cord as tightly as I could. Then, like a bull in a china shop, I went around and scrambled all the other files so that it seemed as if a tornado had hit my chamber. When all was in utter disarray, I called Rahman. Moments later he entered and said, 'Yes, sir. Can I help with something?'

'Yes, Rahman,' I said. 'Get Mr. Mansuri.'

Several minutes passed before Mr. Mansuri entered. The expression on his face was unforgettable. A Tehrani, born into office discipline and order, was facing disorder and cha-
os. He said, 'Sir, yesterday I meant to say that the files should not be moved without filing cabinets.'

'That's all right, Mr. Mansuri.' I assured him. 'No harm is done! Rahman will take care of them. I was looking for the file of Aqa Pisuziyani. Are you sure that you brought all the files for the two committees?'

'Yes, sir. I am positive. I can go and look for it in the office...'

'No, that's all right now,' I said reassuringly. 'Find it later. Right now it is getting past my nap time.'

'We can drive you home, sir,' he said enthusiastically, and added, 'I mean as far as the car can negotiate.'

'No, no. That's all right, too. I can manage. However, it seems that, as you said, the mosque is not an appropriate place to work on such involved cases. Have these files moved back to the office with the rest. And tomorrow, don't call for me that early!'"

As he spoke, the son of Haji unfolded and handed me another piece of paper. That piece, too, did not belong to the file proper. It read:

In the Name of Allah.
To the threshold of His Excellency
Ayatollah Naftchi Qomi

This humble slave is honored to have been delegated the awesome task of being the Attorney General of Isfahan and of reviewing the actions of the revolutionary committees. Following your directions, I have reviewed the files, which are in order, and have moved most of them from the committees to the central office. This I did with the help of Mr. Turaj Mansuri whom you have appointed as my assistant. As to the lesser question, i.e., the assumption of the office of Attorney General, I would have to respectfully decline on account of my age which now approaches seventy,
but more so on account of a herniated disc which plagues
my life every waking hour. The office, as you know better
than anyone else, needs an able-bodied, knowledgeable
man of the caliber of the late Aqa Haji Chelcheraq, but of
about forty or fifty years of age. If recommendations are
not interpreted as impertinence, I know a younger man by
the name of Aqa Seyyed Pisuziyani who has spent much
time in similar, albeit lesser, capacities and who, I am posi-
tive, can return Isfahan to normalcy. I recommend him
without any reservations for the position of Attorney Gen-
eral.

Respectfully submitted
Yours very truly
Haji Fanusiyan

When I finished reading, the Haji's son took the letter,
refolded it and placed it under his mat next to the other letter
and the opium pouch. He then smiled meaningfully and said,
"Of course, I need not tell you that Aqa Pisuziyani knows
that his job was offered to me first. He also knows that I
have a file on him. He does not, however, know about this
letter. It is between you, me, and the son of Ased Kazem
who helped with it. I am sure you will keep all this to your-
self."

"Oh, definitely," I said humbly. "You can be sure of
that."

I looked at my watch. It was past midnight. I said, "Haji,
some time I must come and listen to your sermons. You are
an extremely enlightening person."

"Please, son of Mirza Mohammad, I tried only to make
time pass. I hope I can be of some help in these days of ad-
versity. I think I have said everything I intended to say. A
word to the wise, you know. Think about it. Talk it over with
your family. Sometime later, let us smoke a qalyun at the side of the pool and discuss it. How is that?"

"That suits me fine," I said. "Thank you for your hospitality. Please thank your wife for the delicious dinner. Tonight, probably, I will dream of Ashgerd and Damaneh even though I haven't been there."

"You may get there yet. Who knows? You may live there and help those people. I'd love to live there myself."

"Thanks again."

"I will walk you to the door."

"No, please. I don't want to inconvenience you!

"No inconvenience at all, son of Mirza Mohammad."

Moments later, I was in the alley and in the fresh air. The house with the plaque "Aid is from Allah and Victory is at Hand" meant an absolutely different thing to me now than when I entered it some eight or so hours ago. For some reason, I felt insignificant, humbled and degraded, as if something rare and precious had been taken away from me.

When I entered our one-room apartment and saw my wife drinking coffee, I knew that it would be a long night. Seeing me, she got up, came to the door and rather angrily whispered,

"The children couldn't make it beyond eleven. They were worried. So was I."

"But I sent Taqi to let you know that I was going to be late!" I whispered back.

"Yes. I know you did," she said. "But he said you were having supper there. It is past one o'clock in the morning!"
Trying to pacify as well as to prevent her from crying, I said, "The Seyyed had a lot on his mind and I felt obliged to hear him out."

"To hear him out!" She repeated my words. "You sound like you owe him something."

"No. I don't owe him anything." I raised my voice a little. "In fact he owes us something; he owes us the rent he collects on our house. Until now I thought it was Pisuziyani who forced us out. But was I ever wrong! This man has all the right files. And he is running almost everyone I know including Pisuziyani."

Without uttering a word, she raised her index finger to her nose to prevent me from proceeding. Then, in a barely audible voice, she whispered, "Seddiqeh washes their clothes. She eavesdrops. I saw her do it."

Her words of caution frustrated me. I had so much to say; I even was ready to give up my sleep. But, apparently, I couldn't. I couldn't speak to my wife in private. Mutely she pointed towards a stack of paper and a pencil on the floor. Disgusted, I unwillingly picked up the paper and the pencil and wrote, "We didn't have this problem before!"

She wrote back, "I saw her do it early this morning. When I told you about the Seyyed's message, I intended to tell you about that, too. But it slipped my mind."

When she resumed writing, I moved to her side to read her message as it was being written. The perfume she was wearing, the general secrecy of the situation and fatigue began to work on me. It seemed like it was only yesterday, before we got married, when she used to write love notes to me at their house. She still had her college-girl behavior, especially when it came to writing notes. I continued reading, "But we still can talk—in the back room."
The back room is about half the size of our living room and almost everything, from the children's bicycles to my wife's old shoes and my ties, is stored in it. I looked at her. She stopped writing and smiled. I agreed. She folded the sheet of paper and took it with her into the back room.

When I woke up in the morning, it was a pleasant, sunny day. The breakfast tablecloth was spread in front of the door. My wife came to me and said, "Did you have a nice sleep?"
"Yes. But I need a few days of it before I can recover from last night."
"Made you that tired, did it?"
"Well. It was instructive," I said smiling.
"I told the children some of the things we talked about. They are all excited."
"All excited about what?" I asked curiously.
"About going to Ashgerd, of course." She retorted.
"Wait a minute," I said impatiently. "Nobody talked about going to Ashgerd."

Then, remembering Seddiqeh, I lowered my voice and added, "Can we talk now?"
"Yes," she said. "Seddiqeh went to work."

I walked from my bed to where the pot of fire was and said, "Well. Now, let me make this clear. The man made a tongue-in-cheek suggestion and I agreed to give it some thought. That is the long and short of it."
"So what can prevent us from going?" she interrupted rudely. "Wouldn't this be the best opportunity to, at least, leave this dump and live in the fresh air?"
"Darling," I said in a calm voice. "You are allowing your emotions to get the best of you. Look at this thing logically."
"Logically...logically," she echoed my words. "Logically you should be picking up your briefcase and going to work. Logically, I should be teaching my class. But you haven't had your breakfast yet, and I am sitting here daydreaming. What is done here that is logical?"

Having said this, she stormed out of the room and did not return until I was about half done with my breakfast. Then she entered the room silently, sat by the samovar, poured a cup of tea and handed it to me, saying, "Why not go to Aqa Pisuziyani and discuss the matter with him? He seems to play a big role in this whole thing. He has helped you before."

"I would if it could be of any help," I said in desperation. "But this battle is not between Fanusiyan and Pisuziyani."

"So, that is the Seyyed's name," she mused. "How interesting. I knew there would be a spark somewhere around him. Fanusiyan the Lighthouse! "It is a battle between Fanusiyan and Aqa Sham' al-Ma'ali," I interrupted.

"And how did Aqa Sham' al-Ma'ali get involved in this? You never mentioned him before."

"No. I never did. Because I didn't know, but..."

"So, what is Ashgerd to him?" She interrupted.

"Ashgerd is nothing to him." I said. "But if Fanusiyan buys Damaneh, as he plans to, then he would be infringing upon Sham' al-Ma'ali's interests in the Kuhrang area as well as upsetting the Aqa's trade relations with the Lurs."

"But you are not involved in trade," she snapped at me again. "You will most likely be one of many."

"One of many is right. Fanusiyan is not the only person who knows I am a Bahai. Sham' al-Ma'ali knows it, too. Suppose you live in a tiny village like Ashgerd; how long do you think you will last being called "Vahabi" at every turn?
"Khamush," she pleaded. "Please don't talk like that—especially to the children. You are frightening me."

"I didn't mean to. I am sorry. This is our kismet to die a slow death. It will happen whether we live in this dump or in that one. We are left no choices. And I am running out of options. Everyone is using me as a ladder. It would be naive to think that one day I could retrieve my position at the education department; it would be just as naive to think that we could return to our home in Sheykh Baha'i."

She placed her hands on my shoulders. Then, keeping me at arm's length, she looked into my tired eyes and saying, "Now, there is my long lost husband, Khamush the realist," she hugged me affectionately.

"I have always been a realist," I protested.

"Not since the revolution," she said wearing a bitter smile. "You have been moping around and trying to bring the world to justice. Can such a person be called a realist?"

"So what do you think we should do?" I said in a resigned but sarcastic tone, and added, "particularly since you seem to be the one taking the bull by the horns!"

"I think," she said firmly, "we would have a better chance of survival at the hand of the villagers. For one thing they don't keep files on people and, for another, when and if the situation becomes grave, we can always head for the mountains. The children are grown up."

"So," I said sarcastically. "This is what we have come to. Wouldn't you wish Cyrus and Darius the Great were present to see their offspring head for the mountains? Damn this world... damn it all!"

Breaking into tears, which made me feel like a jerk, she said sobbing, "And don't you think you have damned the world long enough! First we lost our car. You said, 'Damn... Damn,' and then said, 'That's all right. Let them have it.'
When we lost our home, again you said, 'Damn... Damn,' and then, 'That's all right. They can have that, too.' During the last couple of years we have lost our servant, our jobs, our pride, and our self-esteem. And now that an opportunity has come our way, you prefer letting it, too, slip by simply because there might be a battle between two akhunds!"

With tears choking me I said, "Believe me I did not mean to be callous. I am as distressed as you are. What do you suggest we do?"

"I suggest," she said emphatically, "that you get out of those miserable clothes, shave that scraggly beard, throw away those revolting malakis and become yourself. Go to the Seyyed, accept his darn offer and let us get out of here. By the time we reach there, get settled and the battle begins, if there is a battle, we will be ready for it."

I don't know what got into me. Sarcastically, I said, "So, you want me to parade down the main drag in Ashgerd town, wearing polished shoes and a tie!"

Disregarding my sarcasm, affectionately she said, "How did the mullahs begin their "education" of the public? Wasn't it the power of villagers from such places like Ashgerd and Damaneh—villagers with no knowledge about the internal and external affairs of this nation—that gave the reigns of government to them? Do you think that if we do not go to Ashgerd and put the foundation for a new life, Zhale and Kayvan will be able to live in this dump?"

Having said this, she got up, left the room and, this time, closed the door behind her.

Left alone, I began to analyze the situation. After much thought, I concluded that she was right. On more than one occasion I had misjudged Aqa Pisuziyani, a man to whom I probably owed my own life as well as the precious lives of my wife and children. Blinded by the lethal prejudices per-
meating Isfahan, I also had allowed sectarian differences to cloud my judgment and, in the process, to make me irritable, abrasive and overly suspicious. No doubt I had been taking the world too seriously and had approached life too logically. While doing this, I had unwittingly isolated myself, and thereby my family, from the world. I used to chat with the ex-mayor, with the ex-governor and with others, I thought to myself. They are not around any more, of course, but why can't I talk to other people?

Gradually, it dawned on me that I had been stunned by the fast pace of the revolution and that fear, suspicion, mistrust, and a general feeling of loss had taken their toll on me. As hard as I tried, I could not find even one instance of an important decision that I had made in the past two years. I had simply allowed things to take their course, hoping that they would resolve themselves. Two years ago, I would have decided on the spot what course our lives should take, but after that horrible summer afternoon, when I was dragged to the committee, no, in fact after that first gunshot, I had let things slide by. And in doing so I had let myself as well as my family down. I had turned my life into a monotonous and tiresome affair.

I spent the rest of the morning on the balcony under the sun. I thought about my wife's words and about what Fanusiyeh had said the previous night. No doubt they meant to change the direction of my life. Finally I made my decision and, at lunch that day, when everyone was present, I announced, "This afternoon, I intend to visit Haji Fanusiyeh, smoke the qalyun, and chat about Ashgerd and Damaneh."

My wife, astonished, said, "And what do you intend to do after that?"
I said, "Then I intend to visit Aqa Seyyed Pisuziyani and see if, with his help, I can discuss the matter with Aqa Sham' al-Ma'ali.

My wife, still surprised and incredulous, said, "Now who is rummaging for the cloak and the turban? Have you ordered a cloak and a turban?"

"Not yet." I snapped back. "But I have contacted London for permission!"

The children listened to this artificial conversation with awe. Finally, Zhale quipped. "Come what may! Don't forget to place an ad in the newspaper. It will help solve your problems!"
Three

It was foggy. One of those truly foggy scenes where it is impossible to see anything, even your own outstretched hand. The mountains, rivers, trees, and the fields—all that man strives to gain, control, and possess—had melted into an indiscriminate gray cloud. Ali Zadeh sat at the foot of what resembled a rather large tree. Around him, as far as the eye could see, masses of clouds stretched in all directions. People that, in reality, were no more than bundles of feelings and intelligences, milled around in groups, most of them waiting their turn to face the judge, plead their case, cross the bridge, and retire to their permanent resting places. Ali Zadeh's case was not to come up for quite some time yet. He had been
given a grace period during which to sort out his thoughts and to rehabilitate himself.

Since his arrival, he had met many who had suffered death in the committees, but he had not met Aqa Mash'al al-Din, Rajab, or Tala, the unfortunate woman who had been stoned for allegations of adultery. In fact, he had not thought about them. Frequently, he had thought of Aqa Haji Chelcheraq, the master to whom he owed almost everything he held dear. He had worked with the Haji when they lived, and was still attracted to his wisdom and faith. Knowing that before long the Haji, whom he had met briefly on arrival, would be crossing the bridge soon, Ali Zadeh waited for him here.

As he waited, Ali Zadeh heard names being called. People, wearing different clothes and speaking a variety of languages, stood in never-ending lines. Each individual carried something in his hand. These they presented at the gate as they were ushered in.

Finally the old master appeared from the fog. Looking somewhat bent and older, yet cheerful and nimble, he carried a portfolio under his arm. His anxious face bespoke his desire to cross the bridge, go home and rest. Upon seeing Ali Zadeh, the Haji approached the ex-committee clerk, shook his hand, and sat next to him. After salutations, he asked about Ali Zadeh’s status, Ali Zadeh said, "What can I say, Haji, My case is moving along quite slowly. But it is moving forward."

Haji Chelcheraq smiled meaningfully and said, "Son, that is the correct way. Judgment means deliberation. It means weighing things, whatever those things are."

As if not hearing the Haji, Ali Zadeh mournfully complained, "When I lived, I did not know what I lived for. I worked day and night; yet I realize now that I have not ac-
quired any merit. I guess I was not a good judge of my own actions!"

"You knew," Chelcheraq asked, "that you were responsible for creating your own future out of the goodness and love afforded you, didn't you?"

"Yes, I knew. But ever so vaguely" Ali Zadeh said in a respectful tone. "Only I was not given a chance to discern a role for myself. I was pushed through life without being given a chance to live. I did what others wished or needed to have done. I did not initiate anything, nor even criticized..."

"There lies the tragedy," Chelcheraq said firmly. "Rather than using your life for your own good and for the good of your fellow man, you allowed it to be used or, should I say, misused!"

"I understand that now, sir," Ali Zadeh said, regretfully. "But is it not unfortunate to realize that this late?"

"Son, you are torturing yourself for no real reason. I was impressed with your work. Even though we were not in the same place, I was regularly informed of the decisions you made. Maybe it was my mistake to bring you to Isfahan. But your decision on the mother who was being deprived of her child by a man who was not the child's real father was just. Your decision on the land confiscated by the headman was on target. The headman was using his authority to force the poor man to give up his rights by threatening to enlist his son. All in all, I think you have accrued a great deal of good points. These deeds have brought you here. They will, I am sure, pull you up. Meanwhile, keep yourself occupied, the same way that I did..."

"You are extremely kind," Ali Zadeh thanked the Haji.

"No, Aqa Reza," I am stating the truth. You realized so quickly after you arrived in Isfahan that if you or I were in trouble and the education director could help, he would do
his best. You realized that he is an extremely kind person at heart. No one else bothered."

"I knew very little about his family," Ali Zadeh admitted. "But I understood that they had worked hard for the prosperity of Isfahan and for bringing a semblance of order, recognition and a good life to the city. His sincerity made me agree with everything that he said about his ancestors. And I felt genuinely sorry for them. Life becomes a burden when you are vulnerable."

Having said this, Ali Zadeh fell silent.

Haji Chelcheraq consoling his friend, said, "Son. Are you not forgetting an important contributor to the resolution of the fate of the Khamushis?"

"I don't know," Ali Zadeh said involuntarily, and in a muffled voice added, "Am I?"

"You most certainly are, son," the Haji confirmed. "You are forgetting Allah. Things take their course, it is true; but Allah, in His own wisdom and in His own ways, arranges and rearranges the affairs of man. He pays little, if any, attention to sectarian disputes, or indeed to differences in creeds. He separates the good from the evil—the good and evil that permeate all life. Our job was to create our own life out of the goodness, the love, and the blessing that He had afforded us. The Khamushis are under Allah's protection as are you and I. He has protected them since the revolution, hasn't He? Why should you feel that He will abandon them? There is, I am sure, some wisdom in their move to Ashgerd. The people of Ashgerd should be proud to have that family among them. They need to supplement the nonsensical sermons of Sheykh Shamsi, their resident mullah, with a substantial program. Khamush, I am sure, will see to it that they receive proper education..."
Ali Zadeh interrupted the Haji and asked, "Your Excellency how is it that you know so much about the education director and his family?"

"I knew his father, Khamushi senior, quite well," said the Haji quietly. "He and I worked on a number of projects for the city. I couldn't have judged his father's case, had it been brought before me, because we had been friends. I couldn't have judged the son's because he had done nothing wrong, nothing that could be established without a shadow of a doubt. The committee organizers wished to impose a verdict upon me."

Pointing to a white tulip he carried in his hand, he then added, "I had my own file to worry about. I didn't intend to weaken a case on which I had spent a lifetime."

Saying this, he raised the tulip to eye level and added, "I am coming from a small garden I keep near here. It was something to keep me busy during these lonely days. I picked this sample to show the judge. He is a connoisseur, you know."

Then, looking distant and sad, he sighed, "On my walks I often passed Aqa Mash'al al-Din's house. Wild, black tulips have sprouted all around his property, clear to the mountain slope..."

Ali Zadeh remained quite unaffected by this information. It was as if he had known that Aqa Mash'al al-Din lacked Haji Chelcheraq's insight and dexterity, especially in matters like nourishing and growing plants.

A few more minutes passed in silence. The two colleagues, like a departing father and his son, were mute as Haji waited for his name to come up. Finally a deep voice called, "Chelcheraq!"

Haji smiled and rose to his feet. He embraced Ali Zadeh, and then kissed him on both sides of his clean-shaven face.
Tears gathered in their eyes. They shook hands and parted; the indiscriminate fog swallowed them up as each went his way.

The End

Revised
January, 1985
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Glossary

Abadeh
a town halfway between Isfahan and Shiraz.

Abbas Abad
a district on the northern shore of the Zayandehrud River in Isfahan.

Akhund
a preacher; once a term of respect, now slightly depreciatory.

Ali Qapu
a splendid administrative and residential palace; part of the Shah Meydan complex.

Aqa
originally meaning elder brother in Turkish, in modern Persian the term denotes a gentleman. Aqa is also used as a title meaning mister or sir. After the 1979 Revolution the Ayatollah Khomeini is referred to as the "Aqa".
**Araq**
a strong brand of home-made vodka much liked by Iranians.

**Ased**
vulgar pronunciation for *aqa seyyed* (see *aqa* and *seyyed*)

**Asheykh**
vulgar pronunciation for *aqa sheykh* (see *aqa* and *sheykh*)

**Atashgah**
the site, near Isfahan, of the ruins of an ancient Zoroastrian fire temple built on a relatively high hill.

**Bahai**
a member of the Baha'i faith; a follower of Baha'ullah, who advocated universal brotherhood of man and legal equality between men and women.

**Bamiyeh**
saffron-flavored fried pastry.

**Behdin**
a believer in the best religion, i.e., the religion of Zoroaster; a Zoroastrian.

**Bichareh**
poor. After the 1979 Iranian Revolution this term was replaced with the Arabic term *mustaz'af*.

**Caravanserai**
stoping place where merchants used to spend the night under the protection of the town's watchman.
a veil worn by Iranian women to cover their whole body and
dress. The chador ceased to be fashionable during the Pah-
lavi era (1925-1979), but it made a strong comeback after the
Islamic Revolution. Today black chadors constitute the dress
code of the pious and God-fearing women of the Islamic Re-
public.

see the Lurs

a boulevard divided to upper (bala) and lower (pa'in) cha-
harbaqs by the Zayandehrud River. The boulevard con-
stituted the western boundary of the palace complex built by
the Safavid monarchs (see Siyosepol).

an open market in Isfahan originally established and op-
erated by the Shirazi emigrants to the city.

a chandelier; a proper noun based on the terms chehel (forty)
and cheraq (lamp) used as a name.

a Nazarene. Here the term refers to the Christian who decapi-
tated the third Shi'ite imam, Imam Hossein, after his defeat
in the Battle of Karbala.

the Friday prayer, offered in common in the mosque.
Dogs and Islam

dogs are shunned by the Muslims. Anyone who touches a dog is required to ritually wash his or her hands seven times.

Fanusiyan

a name based on the term *fanus* or lighthouse.

Fars

Arabized version of Pars; a province in the south of Iran. In ancient times, this province included the seat of the Persian government; the entire realm was identified with this province which the ancient Greeks referred to as Parsa. The terms Persia and Persian in modern Western languages are derived from Parsa. The language of Iran, Farsi, is also related to the same semantic complex.

Fereydun

an administrative unit west of Isfahan; it includes the town of Daran and the villages of Ashgerd and Damaneh.

Friday

Sabbath; the day of worship and rest among the Muslims when they gather in the mosque. Saturday is the first day of the week.

Gabo

a member of the ancient Zoroastrian Iranians who refused to submit to Islam; a Zoroastrian.
**Gabrabad**
a district in the suburbs of Isfahan, previously inhabited by Zoroastrians.

**Gavkhuni**
the salt marshes about fifty miles southeast of Isfahan wherein the Zayandehrud ends.

**Gorgi**
a proper noun based on the term *Gorg* or wolf.

**Haft-Lang**
see the Lurs

**Haji**
a Muslim who has made the pilgrimage to Mecca. The pilgrimage is made in the twelfth month of the Muslim calendar; it is performed on the seventh, eighth, ninth and tenth days of that month. Feast of the sacrifice is held on the tenth. The children born on the day of the feast of the sacrifice are automatically given the title *Haji*. This latter, however, is a nominal title lacking the religious distinction of the title acquired through piety and performance and completion of the pilgrimage. The title *Haji* cannot be inherited or transferred to another person.

**Imam**
a religious leader; in Shi'ite Islam one of the twelve saints of the family of Ali, the Prophet Mohammad’s son-in-law.

**Imamzadeh** (lit., offspring of an *Imam*)
a minor shrine wherein a descendant of an *Imam* is buried.
Isfahan
popularized as nesfe jahan or half the world, the city of Isfahan has served as the capital of Iran during the Seljuq and Safavid dynasties. As a result, today, Isfahan offers the traveler, as well as the scholar, a most remarkable array of ancient and medieval fire temples, bridges, tombs, mosques and residential palaces.

Jezīyeh
tribute; tax, especially such as was paid by Zoroastrians, Jews, and Christians who refused to convert to Islam.

Jolfa (properly New Jolfa)
an Armenian town on the southern shore of the Zayandehrud River—Isfahan is on the northern shore.

Kal
Vulgar, short form for Karbala'i (see Karbala'i).

Karbala'i
title of one who has made a pilgrimage to Karbala in present-day Iraq.

Khaju Bridge
a magnificent bridge on the eastern flank of the Safavid palace complex. This bridge connected the city proper with the Zoroastrian quarters (Gabrabad) on the southern shore of the river (cf., Jolfa and Siyosepol).

Khamushi
a proper name based on the term khamush or extinguished.
Khan
a (Turkish) title affixed after a person's first name, e.g., Hushang Khan.

Khuzestan
a western province of Iran that includes the fertile Khuzestan plain as well as most of the Iranian oil fields.

Kohne
ancient; old; name of an ancient district in Isfahan.

Kuhrang
site of the Kuhrang tunnel; this mountainous region of the Zagros range is inhabited by sedentary as well as nomadic Bakhtiyari tribes (see the Lurs).

Lurs
the education director uses the term "Lur" in a general sense. He, thus, lumps the sixty or so Lur tribes of southwestern Iran together with the somewhat more numerous Bakhtiyari tribes who live southeast of the Lurs. The Haft-Lang and the smaller sedentary Chahar-Lang groups to which he refers belong to the Bakhtiyari confederation.

Madreseh
theological school in which the Qur'an and the sunna are taught and discussed. Outwardly the madreseh may resemble a mosque, but it lacks most of the distinctive features of the latter. Instead it has small rooms in which students of Islamic theology live and study.
Mahdi
the twelfth Imam of the Shi'ites expected to return in order to purify Islam.

Mahfel
a place of meeting. In Baha'i circles, this term refers to weekly gatherings in which the faithful pray and socialize.

Malaki
cotton shoes with cloth or rubber soles.

Mash'al al-Din
a proper name based on the terms mash'al (flame) and din (religion)

Mawali
(plural form of mawla) refers to non-Arab converts to Islam. In the early days of Islam these converts were regarded as second-class citizens of the Islamic Empire—second class to the Muslims of Arab descent, that is.

Meydan
a public square, an open field (see the Shah Meydan)

Mo'aviyyeh
the founder of the Ummayed line of Caliphs. Yazid's commanders fought Imam Hossein in Karbala, defeated him and took his family to Mo'aviyyeh's palace in Damascus, as captives.

Mo'aviye's Palace
refers to that portion of a rowzeh in which the atrocities that befell the beleaguered descendants of the Prophet, at the court of Mo'aviyeh, are recounted.
**Mojtahed**
a doctor of Islamic law.

**Mullah**
a learned teacher or expounder of the religious law and doctrines of Islam.

**Naftchi**
a proper name based on the term *naft* or oil, and the Turkish suffix *chi* or performer of an action, in this case, one who sells or otherwise handles the oil.

**Naqshe Jahan** (square)
same as the Shah square or the Shah *Meydan*.

**Opium Pipe**
the opium pipe consists of a ceramic top and a hollow wooden pipe. The opium is placed on the ceramic top near a small hole. The heat from the fire brought to the opium with a pair of tongs produces smoke. The smoke is drawn into the mouth through the hole and inhaled.

**Pisuziyani**
a proper name based on the term *pihsuz* or tallow-burner.

**Qalyun**
a water-pipe or hookah is an instrument for smoking tobacco. It consists of a base filled with water and a hollow, wooden body on top of which the tobacco is placed in a ceramic top. The fire on the tobacco produces smoke. The smoke, before it is inhaled through a pipe that connects the body to the mouth, passes through the cool water.
Qesas
retaliation—the cornerstone of the Islamic criminal law.

Qom
a religious center between Tehran and Isfahan.

Qormeh Sabzi
a stew containing green vegetables and meat.

Qur'an
the sacred book of the Muslims, believed by them to be divinely inspired. The Qur'an is written in the Arabic language.

Ramazan
same as Ramadhan, the ninth month of the Muslim calendar during which the fast is observed. It is also the month during which the holy Qur'an was brought to the Prophet of Islam by the angel Gabriel.

Reza Shah
the founder of the Pahlavi dynasty; reigned from 1925 until 1941 when he was forced to abdicate.

Rowzeh
a garden. The description of the martyrdom of Imam Hosseinf and the other martyrs of Karbala. These descriptions and eulogies are taken from a compendium entitled the Rowzatosh-shohada or the garden of the martyrs. The term rowzeh is an abbreviated form of this title.

Sa'adat Abad
the southern flank of the Safavid royal complex—now a relatively deserted district of Isfahan.
**Safavid**
a dynasty of Persian kings that reigned in Iran from about A.D. 1500 till the usurpation of Nader Shah in 1736.

**Sahari**
food eaten before dawn during the fasting month of Ramazan.

**Sassanian**
a dynasty of ancient Iranian monarchs who ruled in Iran from A.D. 226 till the overthrow of the dynasty by the invading Muslim armies in 658.

**Seljuq**
a dynasty of Persian kings that reigned in Iran from A.D. 1037 to 1187.

**Seyyed**
a descendant of the Prophet Mohammad, recognized by the black color of his turban.

**Seyyed Mir Mohammad**
a religious shrine in Shiraz adjacent to the Shah-e Cheraq

**Shah-e Cheraq**
a religious shrine in Shiraz.

**Shah Meydan**
A large rectangular plaza that includes the Shah mosque, the Sheykh Lotfollah mosque, the Ali Qapu, and the entrance to Isfahan's covered bazaar. The Shah Meydan constitutes the northern flank of the sixteenth-century Safavid palace complex straddling the Zayandehrud River.
Shah Mosque
also referred to as the Royal mosque, the Shah mosque is one of the most impressive structures constructed by Safavid archi-
tects. It has four minarets, a lofty turquoise dome, and a most imposing facade.

Shahrestan Bridge (same as Marnun)
an ancient bridge (some three kilometers west of the Siyose-pol bridge) believed to have been built by the Sassanians and later repaired by the Seljuqs. Similar bridges are built by Sassanian monarchs elsewhere in the country.

Shamsi
a proper name based on the term shams or the sun.

Sham' al-Ma'ali
a proper name based on the terms sham' (candle) and 'ali (supreme).

Shemur
the general who slew Imam Hossein in Karbala.

Sheykh
a title of respect used before the name of learned men of fifty and upwards.

Sheykh Lotfollah Mosque
a private chapel in which the Safavid royal house worshiped. It is located opposite the Ali Qapu in the Shah square.
Shi'ite
a member of one of the two great sects of Islam who considers Ali, the Prophet's son-in-law, as the first Imam and successor of the Prophet. The members of the other sect, the Sunnis, do not believe in Imams and thus do not build shrines. Iran became a Shi'ite nation after the Safavids came to power in the 16th century.

Sighe
a marriage of convenience; a temporary marriage usually blessed by a mullah on the spot.

Siyosepol
a magnificent bridge on the western flank of the Safavid royal complex. With this bridge, the Chaharbaq boulevard joins the Armenian town of New Jolfa to Isfahan proper.

Sizdahbedar
the thirteenth day of the Iranian New Year festival (the festival begins on the last Wednesday of the year and continues until sizdahbedar) on which day the Persians go out of doors partly for pleasure and partly to frustrate the inauspiciousness of the day.

Sofreh
a tablecloth. The sofreh is usually spread on the floor at mealtime. People sit around the sofreh and eat (mostly with their hands).

Son of
a Persian rendition of the Arabic term "ibn".
**Ta’arof**
the word *ta’arof* is widely used. It consists of several forms of compliments, practiced habitually by all Persians. The main forms are ceremonial greeting, feigned courtesy, asking someone to help himself or herself with food, etc. These gestures are, however, often half-hearted and generally out of mere formality.

**Tabriz**
city in northwestern Iran. Capital of the primarily Turkish-speaking province of Azerbaijan.

**Tala**
a proper name based on the term *tala* or gold.

**Tamerlane**
(properly Teymur the lame) is recalled by Isfahansis as the savage invader who built a 'tower of skulls' in the city square, using the heads of seventy thousand Isfahansis.

**Taqiye**
dissimulation. A doctrine according to which a Shi’ite is allowed to smooth down or deny the peculiarities of his religious belief, in order to save himself or herself from religious persecution. Some Shi’ites pass themselves off as Sunnis, for instance. Although absolutely against their creed, some Baha’is pass themselves off as Shi’ites.

**Tuman**
a monetary unit worth ten *rials*. 
**Vahabi**
Not to be confused with Wahhabis of Saudi Arabia. *Vahabi* is used here as a vulgar pronunciation for Baha'i.

**Zayandehrud**
name of a river in Isfahan (see Gavkhuni).

**Zendiq**
an atheist; a fire worshiper; any member of the communities that refused to accept Islam.

**Zulbiya**
pretzel-shaped sweet fritters prepared with baking powder, flour, rose water and vegetable oil.
Map of the city of Isfahan