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**Infatuation with the West: The Case of *Ja'far Khan***

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**Infatuation with the West: The Case of *Ja'far Khan***

**by**

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**Report**

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## **Dedication**

To my parents,  
who have never failed to give me moral support and for teaching me that even the largest  
task can be accomplished if it is done one step at a time.

Lovingly to my dear husband, Ehsan Saadatpoor,  
who has been a great source of motivation and inspiration.

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## Abstract

### Infatuation with the West: The Case of *Ja'far Khan*

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The University of Texas at Austin, 2011

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With no doubt, staging Hassan Moghaddam's play *Ja'far Khan Returns from the West* in 1922 contributed a lot to improving the modern theater movement in Iran. Before this drama, the Iranian theater was pressing for a compelling pattern to free this old genre from the old structures of theater and provide it with the opportunity to explore novel areas. In traditional Iranian theatre, the dramatic expression was mostly in the form of dance and mime; puppetry, and Islamic religious epic drama (ta'ziyeh-khvani). *Ja'far Khan Returns from the West* opens up a new window to the traditional Iranian theatre and helps with establishing the fundamental principles of modern theatre in Iran. Moghaddam does not focus on the stories of kings as in the old comic theatre; nor narrates elegies or reenacts the martyrdom of Imam Hossein. The author, on the other hand, rather than depicting stories about old Persia, tries to address and criticize one of the major issues of his own time: the infatuation of the majority of young Iranians with the West; their alienation from their own culture; their devotion to assimilation with the West and taking it as a model; their belief in surrendering to the Western civilization totally and

unconditionally. Unfortunately although the play became one of the most celebrated pieces at the time, after its author's early death, Moghaddam's works and influence gradually diminished. Even in landmarks of theatre history in Iran, little effort is devoted to introducing the late author to the new generation of theatre enthusiasts. This project seeks to bring the significance of Hassan Moghaddam and his works, especially *Ja'far Khan Returns from the West*, into attention and discuss the importance of the play in the context of westernization.

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## Chapter 1: Introduction

### THE HISTORY OF WESTOXICATION AND THE SIGNIFICANCE OF HASSAN MOGHADDAM

Although it is unanimously held that Jalal Al-e Ahmad was among the first intellectuals who popularized the concept of westoxication (gharbzadegi)- i.e. loss of Iranian cultural identity through the adoption and imitation of Western models and Western criteria in education, arts, and culture- in Iran, with a book bearing the same title (1962), there were other intellectuals before Al-e Ahmad who had also explored this phenomenon earlier. Among these writers was Hassan Moghaddam (1895- 1925), a brilliant Iranian author, who wrote during Reza Shah's period and talked about the first clashes between traditional and modern life (which is depicted by the return of the first group of Iranian students from Europe) on the Iranian society. Returning from Europe, Moghaddam was not only struck by the superficiality of the young Iranians' awareness in respect to truth, religion, modernism, backwardness, and West, and their deep ignorance about their past, history, country, language, heritage, traditions, and customs but also by the fact that bigotry, corruption, ignorance, superstition, and lack of knowledge dominated the lives and minds of most of the older and even younger generations of Iranians at that time. Being concerned about his people, Moghaddam began to address and approach these social, behavioral, and psychological issues in his writings. In his most celebrated play, *Ja'far Khan Return from the West*, Moghaddam pointed out one of the main problems: the infatuation of the majority of young Iranians with the West; their alienation from their own culture; their devotion to assimilation with the West and taking it as a model; their belief in surrendering to the Western civilization totally and unconditionally. Yet the idea of embracing Western/ modern technology and ways of life

did not happen overnight; on the other hand, it started in the early nineteenth century. It would, therefore, be helpful to review the history of westoxication in Iran before discussing the importance of the play.

With the advent of technological inventions in the West in the nineteenth century—telegraph, telephone, bicycle, motorcycle, car, dynamite, electricity, refrigerator, machine gun, camera, motion picture, steam engine as well as scientific developments such as Charles Darwin’s theory of evolution and Louis Pasteur’s inventive process of pasteurization and alike— the actual ever-increasing gap between the West and Iran persuaded a number of Iran’s thinkers and intellectuals to embrace the modern technology and ways of life in the West. From the very beginning of the century, thinkers such as Mirza Malkam Khan (1833–1908), an Iranian proponent of Freemasonry and a believer in Social Darwinism, encouraged to model Iran on the values of the enlightenment taken mainly from the West. Malkam Khan who worked as Iran’s ambassador in Great Britain and, in 1890, published a newspaper titled *Qanun* (Law), in which he recommended a simple solution: the acquisition of Western Civilization without any Iranian alterations.<sup>1</sup>

Yet the intellectual and scientific chasm between Persia and the West continued to widen as the twentieth century began. The invention of the radio, electric typewriter, airplane, hand grenade, military tank, television, magnetic tape recorder, gas turbine, and high-voltage generator along with the suffragette movement, Einstein’s theory of relativity, the development of insulin for the treatment of diabetes, Louis Blériot’s flight across the English Channel, Marie Curie’s treatise on radiography, Ernest Rutherford’s

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<sup>1</sup> See Hamid Algar, *Mirza Malkum Khan: A Study in the History of Iranian Modernism*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1973. 5,7.

atomic model, and Alexander Fleming's discovery of penicillin chastised many Iranians and smacked them out of their state of self-delusion and sangfroid.<sup>2</sup>

Consequently, large numbers of students were sent to the West and, who upon returning to Iran, managed to alter the political, scientific, and intellectual landscape of the country. As a proof of their increasing sense of national consciousness, students who were sent to the West to study humanities and social sciences showed a particular interest in investigating Iran's relations with the outside world. Many Iranian scholars (among which were Allameh Mohammad Qazvini, Hoseyn Kazemzadeh Iranshahr, Seyyed Hasan Taqizadeh, and Mojtaba Minovi) worked closely with Western scholars such as Edward Brown (1862–1926), E. E. Herzfeld (d. 1947), and Vladimir F. Minorski (1877–1966). As a result, the presence of numerous American, Belgian, French, and Swedish intellectuals in Iran who were employed to assist in running various governmental bureaucracies raised the output of these institutions significantly. In addition, in the 1930s and 1940s, Iran's intellectual overtones improved further with the translations of René Descartes's *Discours de la méthode*, Montesquieu's *L'esprit des lois*, Jean-Jacques Rousseau's *Contrat social*, Victor Hugo's *Les misérables*, Herbert Spencer's *Education*, and parts of Darwin's *The Origin of Species*, among others.<sup>3</sup>

Although many intellectuals and reformers were indeed impressed with Western scientific innovations, democratic systems of government, military discipline, superior academic institutions, and high quality of social services, there were also a lot Iranians who were distasteful about the West. A number of events happening in Europe shocked and disillusioned the educated and intellectual Iranians of the interwar period. This was

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<sup>2</sup> See Mehrzad Boroujerdi, "'The West' in the Eyes of the Iranian Intellectuals of the Interwar Years (1919-1939)" *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* - Volume 26, Number 3, 2006, pp. 393

<sup>3</sup> see *Ibid.*, 396

the generation that experienced numerous historical turmoil and brutality and witnessed the world pass through enormous periods of turbulence such as World War I (1914–18), the Bolshevik revolution and the consecutive civil war (1917–21), Joseph Stalin’s campaign (beginning in 1928), the collapse of the U.S. Stock Market (1929), the rise of fascist movements in Italy and Germany (1920s and 1930s), Italy’s war with Ethiopia (1935), the Spanish Civil War (1936– 39), World War II (1939–45), the Holocaust, and, finally, atomic bombardment of Japan in 1945. Because of the England and Russia’s threats to Iran before, during, and after World War I and II, the use of chemical gas during military operations (first used in 1915), the dismemberment of the Ottoman Empire and the Hungarian Empire, the League of Nations’ failure to provide collective security, the huge cost of the above-mentioned conflicts- both in terms of human and material costs-, and the revenge-seeking resentments, Iran’s interwar generation fully experienced the impact of Western superiority. Observing this, many of Iranian intellectuals concluded that the radical violence of the West against the world knew no boundaries.<sup>4</sup> World War I made Iranians and people of other Eastern societies more familiar with the various European nations. The indistinguishable category of *Farangi* (Westerner) was replaced by specific references to America, Britain, France, Germany, and the like. The war also brought about the political awakening for many Iranians. The 1906 constitutional revolution made the intellectuals move toward embracing nationalism, which was the major political social ideology at the time. When the constitutional revolution proved to be a failure, a period of unrest and turbulence began which lasted thirteen years (from the 1908 bombardment of the parliament to coup d’état by Reza Khan in 1921). Numerous events took place during this period: the destruction

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<sup>4</sup> See Eric Hobsbawm, *The Age of Extremes: A History of the World, 1914–1991*. New York: Random House, 1994. 183.

of the revolutionary forces; commencement of the reign of at the age of eleven (1909); Mohammad Ali Shah's attempt to come back to power (1911); imperialist powers' interest in Iranian oil (1908); World War I; Iran's occupation by Russian, British, and German forces (1914); various diseases and the death of hundreds of thousands of people from illnesses and hunger; the access of Iranian minority tribes to European guns; the assassinations of many political authorities; the rebellion Mirza Kuchak Khan (1880–1921) in the northern Iran; the closure of parliament for six years; Qajar kings' massive debts; the need of a real military force; the unproductive economy; and the inability of the state to collect revenues.<sup>5</sup>

In such an atmosphere, nationalism was pleasing to the Iranian intellectuals since it would set Iran free from foreign dominance. Important Iranian intellectual papers of this period such as *Kaveh*, *Tufan*, *Iranshahr*, and *Ayandeh* were extremely nationalistic in their contents and attitudes.<sup>6</sup> During this period, poets, too, focused on the idea of nationalism with an enthusiasm previously unseen. For example, Seyed Ahmad Adibe Pishvari (1844–1930), an avid nationalist poet, wrote many poems praising Wilhelm II believing that a German victory in World War I would free Iran from Anglo-Russian domination.<sup>7</sup> The poet-journalist Seyed Ashraf al Din Hosseini Gilani (1870–1934)—who published the newspaper *Nasime-Shomal* (*Northern Breeze*)—was also an important figure who applied humorous poetry to champion nationalist causes.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> See Mehrzad Boroujerdi, "'The West' in the Eyes of the Iranian Intellectuals of the Interwar Years (1919-1939)". 396

<sup>6</sup> See Jamshid Behnam, "Zaminehay-e Fekri-yr Andishmandan-e Iran dar Berlan" ("The Ideological Origins of Iranian Intellectuals in Berlin"). *Iran Nameh* 16, 1998. 553–78.

<sup>7</sup> See Seyed Ahmad Adibe Pishvari, *Divan Adib-e Pishawuri*. 2nd ed., ed. Tehran: Chap-e Part, AH 1362/1983. 65

<sup>8</sup> Seyed Ashraf al Din Gilani, *Kolliyat-e Seyyed Ashraf al-Din Gilani "Nasim-e Shomal (The Collected Works of Ashraf al-Din Gilani)*. Tehran: Negah, AH 1375/1996.

The novelists of this era also discussed nationalist feelings in their works. In 1921, Mohammad Ali Jamalzadeh (1896–1997) published *Yeki bud Yeki Nabud (Once upon a Time)* which quickly turned him into the pioneer of modern short story in Iran. The stories of this collection are great in terms of the narrative style and use of metaphors, stereotypes, ballads, and anecdotes. For instance, one of the stories in this book called “The Friendship of Auntie Bear,” is an ironic reference to the “Russian Bear.”<sup>9</sup> Jamalzadeh shows the Russians as a dreadful enemy; this was very much in line with the nationalistic attitudes and philosophy of that era.

The year after, Hassan Moghaddam published a wonderful play that cleverly depicted the clash between traditional Iranian values and imported European values. *Ja’far Khan Returns from the West* (1922) is perhaps Moghaddam’s most celebrated piece of work in which Moghaddam mocks a displaced Westernized Iranian named Ja’far Khan. Having returned to his homeland after seeing what technological and material services Europe has to offer, Ja’far Khan has become rather contemptuous and scornful of his own traditional culture, with its seemingly ridiculous and absurd rituals, practices and primitive values. On the other hand, he considers Europe as the epitome of prestige, progress, opportunity, and privilege. Ja’far Khan is a member of an up and-coming generation who is extremely judgmental and terribly arrogant. He has poor opinions of his compatriots, is against praising the native values, admires the West for its scientific and technological advances, and disapproves of the ignorance or firm hostility of their predecessors toward the West. He acts as a superficial *idiot savant* skilled in slavish imitation of Westerners even though he does not have adequate knowledge about the

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<sup>9</sup> See Mohammad-Ali Jamalzadeh, *Yeki bud Yeki Nabud (Once upon a Time)*. Tehran: Kanoun Marefat, AH 1355/1976. 62–77.

West either. As a result, one is cannot develop any sympathy for the musings of Ja'far Khan.<sup>10</sup>

Interestingly, Moghaddam differentiates himself from Ja'far Khan and members of his generation who have blindly followed and embraced Western values unquestionably. The author criticizes them for distancing and alienating themselves from the Iranian values just by presuming its absolute backwardness. Yet, he does not support the latter's conventions either: on the other hand, he uses humor as a device to undermine the bigotry, corruption, ignorance, superstition, and lack of knowledge which dominated the lives and minds of most of the older and even younger generations of Iranians at that time. Attentively observing his society, Moghaddam keenly highlights the most important issue for the Iranian intellectuals during that era. He was among the first writers who contributed a lot to depict the destructive consequences of the clashes between traditional and modern life, especially for young Iranian intellectuals who return from Europe and totally lost connections with their homeland country. During a period where, on the one hand, nationalism was at its zenith, and on the other hand, the younger generations were infatuated with Western values, Moghaddam cleverly seeks a middle ground: to cautiously adopt the worthy Western values and conventions and to apply them to the Iranian values without being prejudiced towards either direction. And logical middle ground is what has kept his drama alive and enjoyable to read even to this day.

## CONCLUSION

It is important to remember that while the West was being censured on the one hand for its materialism, lack of spirituality, and lack of principles and on the other “for

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<sup>10</sup> See Mehrzad Boroujerdi, “The Ambivalent Modernity of Iranian Intellectuals,” in *Intellectual Trends in Twentieth-Century Iran: A Critical Survey*. Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2003. 11.

its (neo)colonial arrogance, belittlements, denigrations, domination, plunder, and slights, there never developed any systematic anti-Westernism in Iran during the interwar years.”<sup>11</sup> Nor were there any critical demand for internationalism or pan-movements. Iranian intellectuals might not have been genuine cultural converts, but, as Gavin Hambly has remarked, “the gradual introduction of European ideas into Iran during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries [had] enlarged the outlook of this class while the momentous economic and social changes initiated during the reign of Reza Shah (1925–41) demanded the growth of an adaptable middle class possessing techniques and experience of a kind familiar to nineteenth century Europe.”<sup>12</sup> Therefore a sense of ambivalence toward Europe influenced the Iranian society in general and the intellectuals in particular. And once more Hambly writes, “In thinking about the United Kingdom, for instance, the Iranian intellectual is torn between two visions: of England as the home of Parliamentary government and personal freedom, and the birthplace of two of his idols, Shakespeare and Dickens; and England the Great Power in Asia who so long presided with Russia over Iranian destinies”.<sup>13</sup> Similarly, since the majority of elites received French education, Iranian intellectuals viewed France as the “idealized home of European civilization”<sup>14</sup>. On the other hand, Reza Shah and many of Iran’s arising intellectuals who had embraced a nationalistic point of view were devoted to the self-centered and self-supporting Germany.<sup>15</sup> Yet Iran’s upcoming nationalistic identity could not have achieved just by relying on Western thought-forces. Reza Shah was aware of the fact that

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<sup>11</sup> See Gavin Hambly, “Attitudes and Aspirations of the Contemporary Iranian Intellectual,” *Journal of the Royal Central Asian Society* 51, 1964. 128.

<sup>12</sup> see *Ibid.*, 138

<sup>13</sup> see *Ibid.*, 138

<sup>14</sup> see *Ibid.*, 139

<sup>15</sup> See James C. Scott, *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1998. 103



indoctrinating patriotism and trust in his political system could be fulfilled through the use of heroic folklore. The attempt to cultivate unity in the national consciousness and to create a sense of national pride called for “the building of a largely imaginary glorious past under the old Persian kings, Shah and his intellectual entourage paid who were remote enough to enable the need for historical accuracy to be relaxed.”<sup>16</sup> Consequently Reza Shah and his intellectual train paid great attention to the stories about old Persia and masters of epic poetry, such as Ferdowsi (940–1020). In contrast, some intellectuals and elites, such as Hassan Moghaddam, took the opposite direction: although they were familiar with Western ideas, concepts and ideologies and aware of Iran’s backwardness comparing to West, they did not follow the predominant attitude of blindly praising the West and its values. Hence, although they were triggered by the idea of modernism but they refused to turn their backs to the rich national Iranian values and conventions, while remained critical of widespread the corruption, superstition, bigotry, and ignorance. Though their attempts to free the society from such impediments might not turn out to be a real success at the time- since as the famous historian H. A. R. Gibb mentions, “it seems to be a general rule of history that, when two civilizations come into contact and a transmission of ideas is effected, the recipients are attracted to those elements in the other civilization which are most congenial to their own habits of thought and, on the whole, neglect or reject the other elements which they find more difficult to assimilate.”- Yet, they were influential in initiating the emancipation Iranians from the old structures of thoughts and providing them with the opportunity to step into new eras, leaving all the prejudice and superstitions behind so as to better the social conditions in general and help

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<sup>16</sup> See Ann K. S. Lambton, “The Impact of the West on Persia,” *International Affairs* 33, 1957. 23

the Persians take pride over the country they have now rather than sticking to the honors of old Persia.

## Chapter 2: *Ja'far Khan* Returns from the West

### A Play in One Act

#### Characters

Ja'far Khan Abjad (22 years old)

Ja'far Khan's Maternal Uncle

Mashadi Akbar, *Ja'far Khan's tutor*

Ja'far Khan's mother

Miss Zinat, *Ja'far Khan's cousin*

Carotte, *Ja'far Khan's dog*

*Tehran, Ja'far Khan's home (1922).*

*Scene opens into the private quarters of a Tehran petite aristocrat. It shows a white room with carpets and rugs on the floor. To the right a door opens towards a walk-in closet; to the left is a door to the hallway. Upstage, on the right, there is a chair and a table. On the table, there is a dish of roasted chickpeas and raisins, a dish of candy, and a set of knives and forks. On the left, there is a small table with a pair of pajamas, a samovar, a calendar, and a newspaper on it. A big cushion is placed in the middle of the room.*

## SCENE ONE

(Mother, Zinat)

*Mother's clothes: a tutu and pantaloons, a blouse and an old-fashioned vest, a thick scarf, a house chador, barefoot. - Zinat's clothes: a starched scarf, a fashionable skirt and blouse, silk stockings; no shoes and no chador. - Mother and Zinat are sitting at the front of the stage on cushions when the curtain is raised. Mother is smoking a hookah. A brazier and tongs with indigo and cosmetics implements (such as an indigo pot, kohl container, a bar of soap, boxes of cleansing clay and rouge, etc.) are placed on a low table in front of Zinat. Holding a mirror in her left hand, Zinat is applying indigo on her eyebrows. She has already drawn her mustache.*

**Mother:** (*Smoking a hookah*) Draw carefully to connect your eyebrows. My dear Ja'far is coming back today and you should make yourself pretty for him. He should see that our girls have nothing less than the European girls.

**Zinat:** (*Applying indigo to her eyebrows*) Auntie, how long has it been since Ja'far Khan went to Europe?

**Mother:** It's got to be eight or nine years. He was knee high to a grasshopper when he left. Now he must be a grown man, may God protect him; but what's the good of it! He's probably lost his faith in religion totally. (*Sighs*) Damn his father who took the kid away to Europe with him.

**Zinat:** Auntie, is it true that they eat the flesh of bears, monkeys, and things like that there?

**Mother:** Sure thing. These infidels eat whatever they find; they also have weird drinks. I have heard from Eftekhar Daftar, whose husband has recently returned from

Europe, that there's a liquor called *chartreuse* which is extracted from the skin of their priests when they die.

**Zinat:** Oh! God save us from such a fate! I've heard they make *cognac* from old shoes and dirty socks. To Hell with them.

**Mother:** Well, after all they are not Muslims to extract liquors from grapes or raisins in a proper way.

**Zinat:** (*Showing her face*) It looks good now, doesn't it Auntie?

**Mother:** Yeah! You look gorgeous. But it's not a bad idea to put on more indigo. Now if my son doesn't fall in love with you at once, he is unworthy. (*Lifts the charcoal holder of the hookah and calls*) Mashd Akbar! Mashd Akbar!

## SCENE TWO

(Mother, Zinat, Mashdi Akbar)

*Mashdi Akbar's clothes: an egg-shaped felt hat, a scarf, colorful woolen socks, in short, old-fashioned costume.*

**Mashadi Akbar:** Yes ma'am?

**Mother:** Take away this hookah. Stand by the door and watch; let us know immediately as soon as Ja'far Khan arrives.

**Mashadi Akbar:** Thank God, ma'am, I've lived long enough to see Master again. You know ma'am, I love Ja'far Khan more than my own son. I was the one who took care of him... I've checked the door more than a hundred times today. Whenever someone knocked, I thought it must be Master. But once it was the butcher; once the

wife of Ali, the undertaker; and the other time the Jewish cloth merchant. I was about to kiss the Jew by mistake. I can't see well anymore. (*Wipes away his tears*)

**Zinat:** Why are you crying Mashd Akbar? It wouldn't be a problem even if you had kissed the Jew. (*Laughs and begins to cough.*)

**Mother:** Hit her on the back; that will make it stop. (*Hits Zinat on her back*)

**Mashadi Akbar:** No problem, Miss. Coughing is a sign for souvenirs. May God give Master a long life. Now that he is bringing great things from Europe, he might also bring me a pair of glasses or a pair of artificial eyes as a souvenir.

**Zinat:** What's an artificial eye, Mashd Akbar? How can eyes be artificial? (*Laughs*)

**Mashadi Akbar:** Phew, Miss, great artificial eyes. I read in the papers that the Germans have now invented a new kind which can even see better than human eyes. Now I should take away Ma'am's hookah. (*Takes the hookah*)

**Mother:** Do you have the lamb ready, Mashd Akbar?

**Mashadi Akbar:** Yes ma'am. I've asked the butcher to sharpen the knife too. He'll bring it any minute. (*Exits*)

**Mother:** What happened to your Great Uncle, Zinat? Isn't he coming today?

**Zinat:** Sure, he's coming. He went to the Shah Mosque to buy a prayer charm for Ja'far Khan. He'll come here right after that. Where did you put the cleansing clay, Auntie?

**Mother:** It's in the closet.

**Zinat:** I'm going to finish putting on my makeup and will be back then. (*Exits to the right*)

### SCENE THREE

(Mother is alone. After a few minutes, Mashadi Akbar enters)

**Mother:** (*Rising*) I should clean up here a little bit so my son won't be offended. The desk and the chair are ready; I've made these pajamas for him myself. (*Takes the pajamas, folds them, and puts it on the table*) And I've put his bed in the other room. He is Westernized and needs these things. (*Knocking on the door*) Someone is knocking. (*Calling*) Mash Akbar! Mashd Akbar! Oh, my God! It's my dear Ja'far. (*Calling*) Mashd Akbar!

**Mashadi Akbar:** (*Enters from the left*) You called me, ma'am?

**Mother:** Someone's knocking. Hurry up, go open the door. It must be my dear Ja'far.

**Mashadi Akbar:** Did anyone knock? I didn't hear, ma'am. My eyes don't see well. I'm going, I'm going. (*Exits*)

**Mother:** (*Alone*) Oh God, if only I can make him marry and see half a dozen kids around him, playing, running, shouting, and making noise. Then I can die and have no more wishes. Zinat isn't a bad choice; she is useful to me too. She can help me at home, clean herbs, patch things, iron, and read the Koran. She's Ja'far's cousin and a relative. Plus it's said that cousins' marriages are made in heaven. I've talked with my brother and he agreed too. She'll marry Ja'far and we'll ask them to stay here, both of them with us.

### SCENE FOUR

(Mother, Mashadi Akbar)

**Mashadi Akbar:** (*Has a business calling card in his hand*) Ma'am, ma'am, reward the good news; it's him, Ja'far Khan, he's here at the door. Thank God!

**Mother:** Where is he? Why didn't he come in?

**Mashadi Akbar:** Oh God! I don't know ma'am. I opened the door and saw a very handsome young man in front of the door. I recognized him immediately. I said, "Dear Master, you've finally come?" Then I went to embrace and kiss him but he pushed me back and said, "Monsieur, do not spit on me; you have *germs*."

**Mother:** Okay, okay, now tell me why did not he come in?

**Mashadi Akbar:** I asked but he didn't come in. He said, "Take this card in while I'm taking my baggage down from the carriage." (*Shows the card*) See if Madam is free or not.

**Mother:** (Takes the card.) Ok, what's this? I can't read; see what's written on it. (*Gives the card to Mashadi Akbar*)

**Mashadi Akbar:** But ma'am, it's in a foreign language and I can't read it either. Master told me...mm, what did he say? (*Thinks for a moment*) Oh, he said, "This is a business card."

**Mother:** Anyway, tell him to come in.

**Mashadi Akbar:** I'm going, ma'am. (*Exit.*)

**Mother:** (*Alone*) Poor child has just arrived and is too tired and drowsy. He should eat something. I've prepared cookies and nuts for him, and here is the knife and fork. He must be thirsty. I should get him some lettuce. (*Exits to the right*)

## SCENE FIVE

(Mashadi Akbar, Ja'far Khan, Carotte)



*Ja'far Khan's clothes: grey jerkin and pants. Latest Paris fashion. Pants are ironed well, with a full crease. A soft collar, a cravat, a pochette, and solid color socks. Over these clothes, a belted raincoat. Lemon yellow gloves. Lots of dust on the shoes and the hat. When he enters, he has a small suitcase in his right hand, and a leash for a puppy in his left hand. Mashadi Akbar enters from behind Ja'far Khan. He, too, has a suitcase, some umbrellas and canes and travelling stuff in his hands, which he puts on the table. Ja'far Khan speaks Persian with some difficulty.*

**Ja'far Khan:** *(Puts his suitcase on the floor)* Phew, we arrived *enfin*. But it was such a long way! But we had a lot of dust and *germs!* *(Wipes off the dust from his shoes and hat with a handkerchief and puts the hat on the table. To his puppy)* Ici, Carotte. *(Looks at his watch)* We left at seven fifteen this morning, and it *put* us precisely eight hours and twenty three minutes to get here.

**Mashhadi Akbar:** Well, Master, was the travel fun during these years?

**Ja'far Khan:** Not bad. Yes, how that works you, Mashd Akbar? Haven't you died yet?

**Mashhadi Akbar:** Few years has remained yet due to your affluence. Praise to God, finally my Master came back from the West. Now God willing, he'll marry a girl here...

**Ja'far Khan:** Me? No, Mashd Akbar. You are mistaken. One would never get a wife for himself. *(To the puppy)* *N'cest-ce pas, Carotte?* *(To Mashadi Akbar)* Give me that *valise*.

**Mashhadi Akbar:** What, Master?

**Ja'far Khan:** That *valise*... I mean... the suitcase.

**Mashhadi Akbar:** Oh, ok. Sure, Master.

**Ja'far Khan:** (*Takes the suitcase from Mashadi Akbar, opens it, takes out some stuff from it, and puts them on the table. Among which are: a brush, a French book, an atomizer, and a comb*) Where is Madame... ma'am, then?

**Mashhadi Akbar:** She'll come in a minute.

**Ja'far Khan:** (*Gives Mashhadi Akbar the leash*) Hold this, Mashd Akbar.

**Mashhadi Akbar:** Oh, Master, but it's unclean.

**Ja'far Khan:** Is Carotte unclean? He is a hundred times cleaner than you. I wash him with this soap every morning! *Allons, Carotte, allons.* (*Mashadi Akbar takes the leash, but tries to stay away from the dog*)

**Mashhadi Akbar:** (*Nagging*) What the hell is this? After eighty years of being a Muslim, now I should keep this puppy!

**Ja'far Khan:** The air is stuffy in here. (*Sprays perfume with the atomizer*) It must be full of germs.

**Mashhadi Akbar:** Master, could not you bring us anything better than the puppy as a souvenir? A European puppy! Instead of bringing a pair of glasses for me...

**Ja'far Khan:** What do you need glasses for?

**Mashhadi Akbar:** I'm old now, Master. My ears don't hear and my eyes don't see.

**Ja'far Khan:** *What age do you have, Mashd Akbar?*

**Mashhadi Akbar:** When your late grandfather came back from the West with "the Martyr King", you weren't even born yet. That year, I remember, Ma'am lost two teeth. (*Counts*) Twenty years here, twenty-five years there would be fifty-six years... fifty-six years. Plus seventeen years more... seventeen years... I should be eighty, eighty-five years old, dear Master.

**Ja'far Khan:** Eighty-five years! This is a bad habit for health. You should break this habit.

**Mashhadi Akbar:** This is a bad habit?

**Ja'far Khan:** No doubt. If one wants to follow the rules and *systèmes*, one should die after seventy years. This is a very bad habit for health. (*Comes to the front stage, aside*) ... Let's take a shower, and clean myself; it's five ten, and I promised to go to Madame *Halvapazoff's* house. I met this Caucasian lady en route. We traveled together from Baku on. I plan to go to her house in the evening, and she'll *présenté* me to her husband, who sells cars. He might be useful sometime.

## SCENE SIX

(Mother, Mashhadi Akbar, Ja'far Khan, Carotte)

**Mother:** (*Holding a head of lettuce in hand*) Oh my God! My dear Ja'far!  
(*Kisses Ja'far*) My baby! (*Cries out of happiness*)

**Ja'far Khan:** Why are you crying then?

**Mother:** You have no idea how long I've been waiting for you, how long I've grieved... let me, one more (*Kisses him*)... after eight years... thank God. (*Cries*)

**Mashhadi Akbar:** Ma'am, he's here safe and sound now. Why are you crying then?

**Mother:** Yeah, you're right. It's over, it's over. (*Wipes her tears*) If you only knew how many candles I have lit for you, and how much money I have given to charity...

**Ja'far Khan:** Why did you light candles?

**Mother:** So that you'd come back sooner, my dear.

**Ja'far Khan:** Oh!

**Mother:** Well then, tell me, your trip wasn't bad. You didn't catch a cold, right?

**Ja'far Khan:** No, the trip wasn't hard, except that Carotte made some trouble.

**Mother:** Who's Carotte, my dear?

**Ja'far Khan:** Oops, I haven't *présenté* him yet. (*Shows the dog*) This is Carotte. (*To the puppy*) Shake hands with Madame! He doesn't know Persian well yet. *Donne la patte, Carotte, donne la patte!*

**Mother:** (*Stays away from the dog*) Ah! No dear! It's unclean. Why did you bring it with you?

**Mashhadi Akbar:** (*Approvingly*) God only knows!

**Mother:** Well dear, tell me about there, about those damned Europeans, who kept my poor child away so long. (*Sighs*) Thank\_God, I've seen you once more before I die. If you only knew how much Zinat and I prayed, how many times we have gone to the shrine?

**Ja'far Khan:** Who's Zinat?

**Mother:** What? My God? Don't you know her? Your cousin... Ms. Roghayeh's daughter... who breastfed you when I took a shower or went to Shabdolazim. You have forgotten that?

**Ja'far Khan:** Oh, ok, Zinat; now I remember.

**Mother:** Yeah, you played together when you were young.

**Mashhadi Akbar:** Master Ja'far used to tease Miss Zinat, he called her "Zin." She would sit on your back and say: "Now I'm a saddle, what does that make you?"

**Ja'far Khan:** She was very young when I left.

**Mashhadi Akbar:** Oh, now she's grown up, like a lady, she's beautiful and knowledgeable... she's here, you'll see.

**Mother:** Yes my dear, when she comes, keep her company. I've proposed to her for you, that you marry her.

**Ja'far Khan:** *Merci beaucoup!* I've just arrived and you've made families for me? What should I do with her after marriage?

**Mother:** Huh, why do people marry women? She'll have children, do the household chores, and put on makeup for her husband.

**Mashhadi Akbar:** (*Aside*) I should ask Master about the eye and see if that's true. (*Loud*) Master, is it true that they make artificial eyes in the West?

**Ja'far Khan:** Geez, eyes? They make artificial noses and ears, even... well, they make everything.

**Mashhadi Akbar:** Damn the Europeans! They are more tyrant than Satan! The only thing they haven't done is invent an artificial human.

**Ja'far Khan:** Artificial human? I guess they'll make it in five or six years.

**Mother:** What? My goodness! Man-made man?

**Ja'far Khan:** Sure... There's an American doctor who's working on it now. Last year, all the American and European newspapers were full of this news. Many conferences and movies about it... The U.S government has given four million dollars to that doctor for doing this up to now.

**Mashhadi Akbar:** See? Damn the Europeans! I go to take Master's baggage.

**Ja'far Khan:** Bring my *toilette* stuff too. I want to take a shower.

**Mashhadi Akbar:** Excuse me? Stuff for what, Master?

**Ja'far Khan:** *Toilette*, shower goods.

**Mashhadi Akbar:** Yes, Master. Anything else?

**Ja'far Khan:** Take Carotte and arrangé a room for him. His sleeping kit is in that big *valise*. You should have respectable manner towards him. Carotte has dignity and is well-trained; he's an English breed.

**Mashadi Akbar:** (*Aside*) I've never seen a dignified dog before! (*Loud*) But, Master, he doesn't know a human language, and I don't know French, how should we speak together?

**Ja'far Khan:** Talk to him in Persian; he's intelligent and will learn soon. If you want, you can call his Persian name; Carotte means "Carrot".

**Mashadi Akbar:** Carrot, Master? Ok, Carrot! Let's go Monsieur Carrot! (*Exits with the dog*)

## SCENE SEVEN

(Mother, Zinat, Ja'far Khan)

**Zinat:** (Enters suddenly without chador from the right door) Auntie, the rouge...  
(*Sees Ja'far Khan, screams, and runs away*)

**Ja'far Khan:** (*Aside*) Pas Mal! She doesn't look bad. Just her moustache...

**Zinat:** (*Enters from the same door; veiled, wearing a chador*) Hello.

**Ja'far Khan:** Hello Mademoiselle. How are you doing?

**Zinat:** Thank you, sir.

**Ja'far Khan:** How *goes* Morteza Khan? Hasn't he come with you?

**Mother:** Her brother is in Tajrish.

**Zinat:** He was very eager to meet you but he was feeling a little bit sick and couldn't come to the city.

**Ja'far Khan:** Then I'll go to *visite* him on Friday.

**Mother:** Yes, dear child, you should go.

**Ja'far Khan:** We were just talking about you now.

**Zinat:** I'm so honored that you talked about me! Surely you've seen enough beautiful ladies to count us as nobody.

**Ja'far Khan:** Well, It won't last the same. You'll be somebody too, soon. By the way Mademoiselle, how come you haven't gotten married yet?

**Zinat:** It hasn't been my fate.

**Mother:** Oh dear, so many lovers admire Miss Zinat because of her great skills. They've proposed to her but her uncle hasn't agreed. She knows everything a woman needs to make her husband's life comfortable: she can apply indigo, make halva, tell fortunes, cast spells, and...

**Ja'far Khan:** (*Aside*) These skills can *are* so useful to me. (*Loud*) Ok, Mademoiselle, what else do you know? Do you *hit* music? Paint? Or *do* tennis?

**Zinat:** Oh no! God forbid! Am I a dancer or a reveler?

**Ja'far Khan:** Well, we Persians believe that...

**Mother:** Damn me! He is from Sanglaj and says "we Persians!"

## SCENE EIGHT

(Mother, Zinat, Ja'far Khan, Mashadi Akbar)

**Mashadi Akbar:** I took the lamb to the kitchen, Ma'am. Because you wanted to divide it up yourself, I'll wait till you come. Our neighbor Ali, the undertaker, has sent his wife asking for their share.

**Mother:** Good, we'll give it to them. Come Zinat, come and help me out.

**Mashadi Akbar:** But don't forget to give me its head, hooves, and rumen, as you said, Ma'am.

**Mother:** Okay, Mashd Akbar. I'll give them to you.

**Zinat:** *(to Ja'far Khan, flirtingly)* Ja'far Khan, keep yourself busy reading this newspaper till we get back. *(Takes the paper from the table and gives it to Ja'far Khan)*

**Ja'far Khan:** Merci, Mademoiselle.

## SCENE NINE

*(Ja'far Khan, Uncle)*

**Uncle:** *(Aside)* How come? He's eating roasted chickpeas and raisins with a knife and a fork! *(Loud)* Ja'far Khan!

**Ja'far Khan:** *Tiens* Uncle. *(Rises and wants to shake hands with Uncle)*

**Uncle:** *(Pushes aside his hands)* What the hell is this? I don't understand handshaking. *(Gives him two juicy kisses on cheeks)* Welcome. Ok, tell me now, how was it?

**Ja'far Khan:** It was very well. Always comfortable, relaxing, and fine. You were very missed.

**Uncle:** No way! Never wish me that! By the way, how do you like Tehran?

**Ja'far Khan:** I find some *changement*.

**Uncle:** What? What did you find?

**Ja'far Khan:** Some... mm... some changes, like the electricity, watering the streets...



**Uncle:** What else?

**Ja'far Khan:** It seems as if the Alborz Mountain has become taller!

**Uncle:** No, it's not that. Electricity? Watering? They're destroying Tehran with the excuse of constructing the city. What does Tehran need electricity for? Why pavements? They've moved the poor and the mad outside of the city and say: "we've built houses for the poor, houses for the mad, and houses for the handicapped."

**Ja'far Khan:** That's really good. This would bring about *progrés* and *civilization* for a country. All over Europe, they have *asile des aliénés*, *asile des pauvres*, and *orphelinat*...

**Uncle:** (*Stops him*) Hold on, bro. hold on. First, if you're talking to me, speak a human language so that I can understand. I don't understand your language.

**Ja'far Khan:** I mean... if we want... mm... to progress, we should do as Europeans.

**Uncle:** No sir, what are you talking about? There was no European, houses for the handicapped, or *université* or *institut pasteu*, as you say in prophet Soliman's time. People were leading comfortable lives. These houses for the handicapped has made us disabled too. Sir, I'm telling you, imitating the west is of no use to us.

**Ja'far Khan:** (*Aside*) My uncle and I- as the carriage rider told me on way- "cannot see eye to eye with each other," so discussion is useless.

**Uncle :** Boo ! You entered the room with your shoes ? Take them off, sir. Take them off.

**Ja'far Khan:** Take my shoes off?

**Uncle:** Yeah, take them off.

**Ja'far Khan:** But for *hygiène*...mm... sanitation...

**Uncle:** What do you have to do with sanitation? You're making everywhere dirty. You should pray on this rug.

**Ja'far Khan:** If I take them off, my feet will get dirty.

**Uncle:** No, take them off sir.

**Ja'far Khan.** (*Aside*) If they want to bother me from the very beginning, I'd not stand it. (*After hesitating*) It doesn't matter. It's better to be patient for now, it'll go on better later. (*Takes his shoes off*)

**Uncle:** You sir, now that you've come back to your own country safe and sound, you should get used to Iranian traditions: eat with your hands, cleanse your mouth after drinking alcohol, sleep on the floor, and.... Oh, where's your hat?

**Ja'far Khan:** I took it off so that my hair gets some fresh air, for being healthy...

**Uncle:** Healthy? Go and put on your hat fellow. You're Iranian and shouldn't talk like that. (*Wants to put the hat on Ja'far Khan's head*)

**Ja'far Khan:** (*Resists*) But doctor said, if I always wear the hat, I'd get *chauve*.

**Uncle:** What?

**Ja'far Khan:** Oh, mm, I'll get bald.

**Uncle:** Damn him! Doctors know nothing. Now listen to me. In this country, if you don't wear a hat, they'll deceive you. (*Puts hat on Ja'far Khan's head*) We Iranians should hold our hats tight because that's the only thing that is left for us.

**Ja'far Khan:** (*Takes off his coat. Aside*) Ah, I'm getting *nerveux!*

**Uncle:** This should be our standard. Hat shows politeness, history, country, and... (*Sees Ja'far Khan's tie and pocket square*) What's this? What's this? See how he looks! (*Advising*) Go and throw these away soon sir.

**Ja'far Khan:** (*Angryily*) Throw away? Sir, this is a *pochette* and this one is a tie. These are civilization! How can I throw them away?

## SCENE TEN

(Uncle, Mashhadi Akbar, Ja'far Khan, Carotte)

**Mashhadi Akbar:** ( *Holding the leash in his hands*) Master, Monsieur is making troubles. He's gone to the kitchen and licked all the votive rumen.

**Ja'far Khan:** This is impossible Mashd Akbar. Carotte is a well-behaved and a gentleman dog. He'd never eat rumen.

**Uncle:** My goodness, what's this? (*To Mashhadi Akbar*) Where did you get this dog from?

**Mashhadi Akbar:** Well, what should I say? Mr. Carrot belongs to Master; he's brought it from Europe.

**Uncle:** (*To Ja'far Khan*) What the hell is this? (*To Mashhadi Akbar*) Take it to the street and leave it there. He'll make the whole place unclean.

**Ja'far Khan:** Why? Why should he leave Carotte on streets? It's Madame Halvapazoff's *souvenir*. I've spent more than fifty tomans for its customs, ship and carriage fare from Baku to here. Now you are saying it's unclean?

**Uncle:** What are you talking about? It's true that Europe makes people mad. (*To Mashhadi Akbar*) Take it out, take it out. (*Mashhadi Akbar is leaving*)

**Ja'far Khan:** I *proteste*. (*Runs after Mashhadi Akbar*) Don't listen to him, Mashd Akbar. Don't leave him on the streets, ok? (*Mashhadi Akbar leaves with the dog*) (*Aside*) When will they be *civilise*?

**Uncle:** My dear sir, listen: you are not in Europe anymore. We are Iranians and Muslims. We don't need pouchette, civilization, nor should eat with puppies. If you

want to live here, you should forget about them: you should send the puppy away, wear a cloak, should not iron your pants, and never have a personal opinion. Now go and change your clothes and come back soon. I'll tell you the rest then.

**Ja'far Khan:** *Mais...*

**Uncle:** No, no, listen to me: go and wear a cloak, you'll understand better then.  
*(Sends him out from the right door. Aside)* My goodness!

### SCENE ELEVEN

(Uncle, Mother)

**Mother:** *(Holding a tray and a cup of coffee in her hands)* Where's my boy? I've brought chocolate for him.

**Uncle:** Chocolate? Let it be. Haven't they spoiled him enough there now you want to make it worse?

**Mother:** Well, my child has become Westernized, he's used to...

**Uncle:** No way, you shouldn't listen to him. Never ever. *(Mother puts the tray on the table)* Throw this away, what does he need the chair for? The fork? We should teach him right. He's mad! He's brought a puppy into the room! I'm telling it for his own sake. On the other hand, we want him to marry Zinat. If he doesn't change his behavior, how can they live together? He'll make tons of troubles for this poor girl in future. He'll say: "you should sleep on bed, eat at the table, don't belch, and should wash your teeth with toothbrush..." I'd never allow myself see her misery. Since her dad's death, I'd taken care of her like my own children. Now, she's a grown-up woman. From now on too, I should treat her like a father.

## SCENE TWELVE

(Mother, Uncle, Mashhadi Akbar)

**Mashhadi Akbar:** Ma'am! Ma'am! Ja'far Khan is naked, standing in the yard pouring water from the pitcher over his head. I asked him: "what are you doing?" and he said: "I'm taking a shower." I looked around but couldn't see what he was showering. Now he's gone to the closet and is looking through the late master's clothes. I asked: "what are you doing for, Master?" And he said: "Don't speak, I'll get *nerveux*." God forbids, I'm afraid Master is getting mad.

**Uncle:** (*To Mother*) See, I told you. We should start teaching him.

**Mother:** It wouldn't last like this. He's arrived recently, and still has some of his meaningless habits. His father had similar habits when he got back from Europe.

**Mashhadi Akbar:** (*Aside*) Like father, like son!

**Mother:** But gradually... he'll learn to behave, I promise. He'll even sleep under \*korsi when winter comes, wouldn't take shower, or shave his face.

**Uncle:** No, no, we should make him quit his habits as soon as possible, it'd not be useful anymore later.

**Mashhadi Akbar:** Yes, as you say; you're absolutely right. Can you believe he told me one should die after living for seventy years!

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\* A Korsi is a type of low table found in Persia, with a heater underneath it, and blankets thrown over it. It is traditional furniture of Iranian culture.

### SCENE THIRTEEN

(Mother, Uncle, Mashhadi Akbar, Ja'far Khan)

**Ja'far Khan:** (*Has taken off his collar and tie and worn a cloak*) I only found one cloak and it's a little bit loose.

**Mother:** That's fine, sweetie. Nobody will notice that.

**Mashhadi Akbar:** Good, now you're a Muslim.

**Ja'far Khan:** (*Aside, smiling*) They think I'll keep this... Well, for the first few days, I should do as they wish. Later, I will teach them right. This is similar to Talleyrand diplomacy. (*To Mashhadi Akbar*) Bring me a glass of water; it should be boiled water, with no germs.

**Mashhadi Akbar.** Sure Master. (*Exists*)

**Mother.** (*To Ja'far Khan*) Come here my child. Instead of your collar, I've made an Iranian one for you. (*Hangs an evil eye on it*)

**Ja'far Khan.** What's this? What are you doing?

**Mother.** Don't touch it my dear, don't touch it. It's an evil eye.

**Ja'far Khan:** Evil eye?

**Uncle:** Come here man, tie this magic on your arm as well. When I went to the King's Mosque today and I bought it especially for you. (*Ties the magic to his arm*)

**Ja'far Khan:** Magic? What should I do with it?

**Uncle:** Once you have it with you, you'll never get sick anymore.

**Ja'far Khan:** (*Shakes his head. Aside*) Well...

**Mashhadi Akbar:** (*Enters having a glass in his hands*) Here you are Master, some water.

**Ja'far Khan:** Did you boil it? Did you pay *attention* carefully? There's no germ in it, right?

**Mashhadi Akbar:** Yes sir, they're all cooked well. Check it yourself.

**Ja'far Khan:** (*Takes the glass and observes*) Ok. (*While he wants to drink the water, Mashhadi Akbar sneezes*)

**Mashhadi Akbar:** Achoo! Achoo!

**Mother:** Patience, patience Ja'far!

**Ja'far Khan:** What?

**Uncle:** Don't drink the water, you should wait.

**Ja'far Khan:** Don't drink? I needed the water to drink it.

**All:** No, no, it's not good, you should wait.

**Ja'far Khan:** Ah, wait for what? I'm thirsty. (*Wants to drink the water*)

**Uncle:** (*Takes the glass from him*) Wait, it's not a good sign.

**Ja'far Khan:** (*Imploringly, aside*) What can I say?

**Mashhadi Akbar:** Dear Master, when one sneezes, you should be patient; otherwise, God forbids, you'd do harm to yourself... For instance, water gets stuck in throat, or you can't swallow it, or (*sneezes*) Achoo! Achoo!

**All:** Oh, you should hurry!

**Uncle:** Hurry up !(*Takes the glass to Ja'far Khan*) Now you can drink sir.

**Ja'far Khan:** How come? If it's bad to drink water after sneezing, it's bad now too.

**Mother:** No sweetie. The first was patience then and now it's hurrying.

**Ja'far Khan:** What do you mean by "patience" and "hurrying"? Leave me alone. I'm not thirsty anymore.

**All:** But you should hurry!

**Uncle:** Hurry up, you have to drink. (*Makes Ja'far Khan drink the water*)

**Ja'far Khan:** What the hell is this!

**Uncle:** (*To Mother and Mashhadi Akbar*) I want to talk a little bit with Ja'far Khan about his wedding. You'd better leave us alone.

**Mother:** Ok, we're leaving then.

(*Mother and Mashhadi Akbar exit*)

#### SCENE FOURTEEN

(Uncle, Ja'far Khan)

**Uncle:** Ja'far Khan, come and sit here: I've a word with you.

**Ja'far Khan:** Okay. (*Wants to sit on the chair*)

**Uncle:** No, no. (*Points to the floor. They both sit, but Ja'far Khan with great difficulty*) Now that you've returned from the West and won't leave Iran anymore...

**Ja'far Khan:** Who knows? *Au contraire*, I think...

**Uncle:** No, don't think *au contraire*. Now that you're going to stay here, you should think about a small place to live, make your life, and marry. Your mom and I have already talked about it and decided to choose Zinat for you.

**Ja'far Khan:** You decided? *Grand merci!*

**Uncle:** It's \*Rabi' Al-Thani now, not good month to marry. Hopefully next month...

**Ja'far Khan:** It's really good to marry next month? But what about my own idea?

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\* Fourth month of the Islamic year.



**Uncle:** Your mom and I have thought a lot in your place. One of these days we'll finalize the engagement, the shawl, and the ring. I'll inform Mr. Zarifol Shari'e in the next two weeks, he will do the ceremony and you'll get married by the end of \*Rajab.

**Ja'far Khan:** Ah! *Pardon!* Hold on a minute. First, I don't want to marry. Even if I wanted, I'd not marry an Iranian girl.

**Uncle:** You won't marry an Iranian girl? Ok then, Forget about the whole thing. Europeans won't let their girls marry you and if they do, they would let the ones similar to those we have seen before. (*Imitates the European accent*) "Madame Jafarkan" who would probably be a cook, a laundry girl, or a dancer.

**Ja'far Khan:** Suppose I marry an Iranian girl. Even that has a... mm... one can't do it with no *méthod*. First, one should be in touch with his *fiancée*, know her *caractère*, and see if they can get along. This process would take at least five to six years.

**Uncle:** You'll have enough time after marriage to know your wife and will need no *méthod* then.

**Ja'far Khan:** But unfortunately, it would be of no use then. Also, you should at least see how she looks, since you want to live with her for the rest of your life.

**Uncle:** After wedding you'll see enough of each other!

**Ja'far Khan:** What's the use of it after wedding then?

**Uncle:** Well, it's a sin before wedding. Besides, you don't know what's good for you, boy.

**Ja'far Khan:** Would it be inappropriate if I know my wife's nose is round, or big?

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\* Seventh month of the Islamic year.

**Uncle:** Don't worry. Fortunately, her nose is fine. But you should know this is a serious matter; stop talking about it or you'll be in trouble. There's one more thing I want to mention to you: you've been to Europe, studied for nine years, wasted your time, and returned to your country. Now that you're back in Tehran, what are your plans?

**Ja'far Khan:** I want to get into an...mm... an office, find a *carrier*, progress and reach some achievements.

**Uncle:** Ok, how will you reach them?

**Ja'far Khan:** I'll go to an office or a ministry and tell them about my education...

**Uncle:** Hold on; hold on, it's absolutely useless. You don't have any experiences, let me tell you: first, you should get to know some people with yourself, and use them as your connections. After sometime, one day you'll wear a cloak, visit a minister, bow, flatter him using sentences that have a lot of "Your Excellency" in them, and finally tell him the reason of your visit. Also, it would not be a bad idea if you use words like "home country" and "constitution" here and there. Never mention education. If he asked you about your skills or education, tell him something like: "In your majestic presence, it'd be the ultimate impertinence if I talk about my knowledge."

**Ja'far Khan:** They'd offer me a job then?

**Uncle:** No worries; if this doesn't work, you'll do something else. You'll go to see the minister, insult him, threaten him, and pay someone to write a long article in a newspaper against him the day after. Then you're good to go. Should it not work, then you'll put a complaint in an envelope (*makes the gesture of counting money*) and send it to the pantry of his Excellency. This last means would definitely work.

**Ja'far Khan:** In fact, this is an *économie politique*. I just didn't understand why I should send the complaint to the pantry of his Excellency?

**Uncle:** Well, you can give it to himself too. For the most part it was a concern for old Excellencies who used to find faults with others, and tended to take many things personal.

## SCENE FIFTEEN

(Uncle, Ja'far Khan, Mother, Mashhadi Akbar)

**Mashhadi Akbar:** Your shower stuff are ready, Master. I couldn't find any sponge and put pumice instead.

**Uncle:** You want to take a shower today?

**Ja'far Khan:** (*Rises*) Yes, I just got here, and I'm very dirty and full of germs.

**Uncle:** What day is today?

**Mother:** Tuesday.

**Uncle:** Tuesday... (*To Mashhadi Akbar*) Give me that calendar. Let me see if he can take a shower today!

**Ja'far Khan:** What?

**Uncle:** (*Takes the calendar from Mashhadi Akbar and opens it*) Hold on sir, hold on. (*Reads*) “\*Rabi Al Awwal, Rabi' Al-Thani,... Monday, Tuesday. Four hours, thirty two minutes, and seventeen seconds has passed from today, the moon enters the Scorpion. It's good to put child in cradle, cut new things, pull out teeth, and cupping; it's not proper to build mosques, visit the nobles, marry, or to seed. It's proper to circumcise, stop feeding children with milk, and send merchandise. One should not give gifts, be beaten up, enter ships, drink laxatives, or take shower. Ok, it's not good to take

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\* Third month of the Islamic year.

shower today.

**Ja'far Khan:** Why? It's sinful if I go and wash myself?

**Uncle:** Yes, you should take a shower on Friday, Friday is good.

**Ja'far Khan:** It's good? I'm very dirty. I've not changed my clothes since yesterday.

**Mother:** That's ok dear. Not a problem. Wait till Friday and you'll be rewarded as well.

**Ja'far Khan:** Leave me alone. Let me take a shower and clean myself up. It's more rewarding.

**All:** No, it's of ill omen!

**Ja'far Khan:** What the hell? Ok, I won't go, but I cannot go on Friday either. I should go to Tajrish and *visite* Morteza Khan.

**Mashhadi Akbar:** You want to go to Tajrish? But travelling is not that good either on Fridays, Master.

**Uncle:** I'll consult the calendar. (*Opens the calendar*)

**Ja'far Khan:** No need to do that, sir. I agree.

**Uncle:** Hold on a moment and let me see. (*Reads*) Rabi' Al-Thani ... Friday... Planting trees, moving, clipping nails, borrowing money is good.

**Ja'far Khan:** You're right. I agree, sir.

**Uncle:** It's not good to rent, wear socks, get sick, and do secret things...

**Ja'far Khan:** That's enough, you're right.

**Uncle:** Peeling cucumbers, laughing, cutting hair, and taking bribe is good...

**Ja'far Khan:** It was my fault to begin this conversation; stop it.

**Uncle:** It's bad to pay off debts, visit the nobles, travel on lands...

**Ja'far Khan:** Ok then, I won't travel on lands. (*Aside*) What should I do with these people? (*Angrily grabs a book from the table and starts turning pages*)

**Mother:** What's that book, my dear? If it's a prayer book keep it to yourself and read it for us from time to time.

**Ja'far Khan:** No, it's *Molière's* theater.

**Uncle:** Theater? You read theatre books?

**Mother:** Oh my God, are you like a clown?

**Uncle:** You only missed becoming a musician or a dancer.

**Ja'far Khan:** No, theater is one the most important elements of Europe. An actor or actress is even more powerful than a priest...

**Uncle:** Our theatre is all about marionette, snake charming, and bald heroes. Leave them aside. If you've gone to Europe and eaten pork, you shouldn't discard whatever we have in our culture and just imitate the West.

**Ja'far Khan:** (*Aside*) They're making me *nerveux* again. (*Looks at his watch*) It's five sixteen! I'm six minutes late. Madame Halvapazoff is waiting for me, it doesn't look good. (*Loud*) I've to go. (*Wears his shoes*)

**Uncle:** Where're you going? You've just arrived.

**Mother:** Listen. Come for dinner. I've made Ghorme Sabzi for you.

**Ja'far Khan:** Ok, what time will you have dinner?

**Mother:** Mm, two, three hours after the sunset.

**Ja'far Khan:** Two or three hours after the sunset doesn't make any sense to me. If you have it by seven thirty, I'll come then; if it's a quarter to eight, I'll come then; if it's eight twenty, I'll come at that time.

**Mother:** Well, come whenever you're hungry.

**Ja'far Khan:** (*Aside*) If I could make them understand *précision* and *ponctualité* just a little bit. (*Loud*) Ok then, goodbye.

**Mashhadi Akbar:** (*Sneezes*) Achoo!

**All:** Patience!

**Ja'far Khan:** It wasn't for me this time. (*Wants to exit*)

**Uncle:** How come it wasn't for you? Patience; sir, patience.

**Ja'far Khan:** Boo, this old man might have a cold till the end of his life, it's not my business.

**All:** No, you can't go. It's of ill omen.

**Ja'far Khan:** What wired people! They don't even understand *Talleyrand diplomacy*. (*Thinks for a while*) Ok, now if someone sneezes again, I can leave, right? (*Sneezes*) Achoo! Achoo!

**Mother:** This wouldn't work, dear. It was fake.

**Mashhadi Akbar:** If there's a second sneezing, it should be I who sneezes.

**Uncle:** Phew! This is not a joke. Are you kidding?

**Ja'far Khan:** (*Aside*) I'm getting *nerveux* again. (*Loud*) I want to know what's the relation between his nose and me going out?

**Uncle:** God forbids! Stop being stubborn. You don't understand, sir. We didn't make these things up ourselves, they were always there, and will remain there forever.

**Ja'far Khan:** I can't understand these matters with my little knowledge. I'm going.

**All:** (*Stop him*) You can't, you can't.

**Ja'far Khan.** *Non, I proteste.* (*Aside*) What animals they are! (*Furiously he walks on the scene. After a few minutes*) If I stay with them for one more hour, I'll go mad. (*Loud*) Gentlemen, you've talked to me so much of "patience" that I have no more

patience myself. It was a mistake to come back to this country; I'd never do that again...  
Now I *congé* you and go. (*Packs his stuff and put them in his suitcase*)

**Mother and Uncle:** (*Together*) Why? What?

## SCENE SIXTEEN

(Ja'far Khan, Uncle, Mother, Mashhadi Akbar, Zinat, Carotte)

**Zinat:** (*Holding the leash*) I'm fed up with this puppy; it's been to the cabinets and eaten all the oil, candles, and votive halva.

**Mother:** Who cares about the Halva! Zinat, your husband is leaving for good, stop him.

**Ja'far Khan:** (*Furious till the end of this scene*) I leave everything behind... ministry position, lawyership... carriage, and car. I'm returning to our own infidels, to eat pork and olive oil. *Allons Carotte, allons!* This country isn't made for us.

**Uncle:** I told you Europe makes people go crazy, didn't I?

**Ja'far Khan:** (*Puts the magic, the evil eye and cloak on the table*) You can keep the magic and the evil eye... the cloak... and Zinat to yourself.

**Mother:** (*Awkwardly*) Damn me! What are you doing Ja'far?

**Ja'far Khan:** I just have one request from you, Mom: never light candles for me. (*Grabs his suitcase and takes the dog from Zinat*) *Allons Carotte, allons!* (*Wants to exit*)

**Uncle:** (*Takes his arm*) Where are you going? Are you out of your mind?

**Ja'far Khan:** (*Releases him arm*) *impossible.*

**Mashhadi Akbar:** You should not travel on land Master! (*Takes the suitcase from his hand*)

**Ja'far Khan:** *Non, non*, you're taking things too far. (*Takes the suitcase back from Zinat*)

**Zinat:** Wouldn't you stay for my sake?

**Ja'far Khan:** No, no, I can't bear this anymore. *Allons Carotte, allons!*

**All:** (*They all stop him. Mashhadi Akbar takes the suitcase*) We won't let you go, won't let.

**Uncle:** No travelling on land!

**Mother:** God damn me!

**Zinat:** Plague one me!

**Mashhadi Akbar:** We have Ghorme Sabzi for dinner, Master, Ghorme Sabzi!

*(The curtain falls)*



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