

DOOR OF HOPE

by

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DOOR OF HOPE

– an historical drama

CAST OF CHARACTERS

ROBERT TURNER, 40'S

PHOEBE HEARST, 50'S

ELLA COOPER/LUA GETSINGER, 20'S

THORNTON CHASE, 50'S

JOHN BOSCH, 40'S

[Simple set. A bench stage left.
Two easy chairs center stage.
PHOEBE HEARST sits in one chair,
unlit. ROBERT TURNER stands off
to one side.]

ROBERT TURNER
(coming downstage)

In 1855 I was born a slave. In Virginia. Born a slave but
died as high as anyone can rise on the social ladder – then
now, or ever. I died a servant – of Bahá.
(beat)

My name is Robert Turner. I'm employed in the mansion of
Phoebe Hearst.
(gestures where she sits;
lights up on her)

Mother of William Randolph Hearst. You know, the newspaper
magnate. *Citizen Kane*. But we don't have movies yet. It's the
1890's in San Francisco. We don't have cars, telephones,
electricity. You name it; we don't have it. No vote for
women, no civil rights for colored folk; no labor laws for
children; and for Asians– Well, in forty years we'll be
corralling them into relocation camps.
(shakes his head)

This is a wealthy, white man's world... But this play's about
how that all changes.
(gestures toward Phoebe)

I'm Mrs. Hearts's butler. My job is to open doors. You know,
like St. Peter.
(smiles)

ROBERT TURNER (CONT'D)

"Knock and it shall be opened to you." And it was. I became the first Negro in America to recognize the return of Christ.
(beat)

It happened when Lua Getsinger came to California and knocked on Mrs. Hearst's door. I opened it.

[Robert mimes opening a door stage right and LUA GETSINGER enters. He bows and waves her in.]

[While Robert addresses audience, Mrs. Hearst rises and shakes Lua's hand. They both then sit. Lua mimes animated conversation. Mrs. Hearst smiles and nods.]

Now in case you don't know Mrs. Hearst... She came from a humble background, married a miner, they came to California, and he struck it rich in the Gold Rush. Soon Mr. Hearst became a U.S. Senator and Mrs. Hearst one of the biggest philanthropists in America. She funded hospitals, the YWCA, and the first free kindergartens in San Francisco – so colored children could attend. Miss Phoebe founded the PTA as well. That's right. She was far-sighted – and generous. I should know....

[Robert has already wandered behind the two ladies' chairs. En route, he mimes retrieving a tea tray. As he speaks he mimes serving tea.]

I served Mrs. Hearst thirty-five years – as confidant as much as her butler. That's why when I served the tea to Mrs. Getsinger, I stood by and listened. When she noticed how closely I was listening to her message, she directed her remarks to me as well.

[Lua angles her chair to face Robert as well.]

Mrs. Hearst was very much interested in world peace, so when she heard that Bahá'u'lláh had come to unite all nations, religions – and races – we *both* became Bahá'ís.

[While the women lean forward in their chairs and mime animated conversation, Robert comes from around the back of Lua's chair and approaches downstage.)

ROBERT TURNER (CONT'D)

Mrs. Hearst had funded archeologists in Egypt, and so was planning an excursion down the Nile. She now decided to include a pilgrimage to Palestine to meet 'Abdu'l-Bahá! She not only took me along as her escort and valet, but also invited Dr. and Mrs. Getsinger and a dozen other Bahá'ís. All at her own expense! Just as she always did, Mrs. Hearst put her money where her heart was.

[Lua removes her large hat. Robert accepts it from her and hands the actress a scarf, or some other item of clothing, to indicate she is transforming into ELLA COOPER.]

[Ella Cooper comes downstage, adjusting her new outfit and holding herself differently to indicate she isn't Lua. Robert sits in her chair and has tea with Mrs. Hearst. Lights fade on Robert and Phoebe.]

ELLA COOPER

Mrs. Hearst became so enthused about the Faith she arranged for Lua to give classes in her penthouse atop the San Francisco Examiner – the newspaper building of her son William Randolph. I attended one of Lua's classes and instantly embraced the Faith. As did my mother.

(beat)

I'm Ellen Cooper. My mother was Helen Goodall, whom I'm sure you've heard about – all her selfless services for the Faith in California. Helen Goodall. "All good" as 'Abdu'l-Bahá said, calling mother a "treasure" because "she had no other thought," He said, "than to serve the Cause." Anyways, that day in Lua's class, when I wrote my declaration of Faith in a letter to 'Abdu'l-Bahá, Lua got so excited she jumped up and hugged me. To celebrate she sent out to a nearby saloon for an oyster loaf and bottle of white wine.

(smiles sheepishly)

Things were different in 1898. We had none of the Baha'i Writings to guide us!... In any event, Mrs. Hearst soon invited mother and me to join her pilgrimage group. Unfortunately, Mother fell ill.

ELLA COOPER (CONT'D)

I nursed her till she was well, but she didn't feel up to traveling overseas. Mother insisted, however, that I go – so I caught up with the Bahá'í pilgrims in Cairo.

[Ella steps to the side and turns to face Robert and Phoebe.]

[Lights rise on them as they come downstage to join Ella. Although the women flank Robert, facing front, Robert hangs back, a few steps upstage.]

[All three speak directly to the audience.]

ELLA COOPER (CONT'D)

We had to arrive in 'Akká in four separate groups. 'Abdu'l-Bahá was still a prisoner of the Turkish Empire.

PHOEBE HEARST

His every movement was watched with suspicion. His life was in grave danger. Such a large a group of Westerners – fifteen in number – could not all visit at once.

ROBERT TURNER

Finally, we entered 'Akká – the “door of hope” of the Bible.

ELLA COOPER

Someone went before us with a small piece of candle, which cast strange shadows on the walls of this silent place. Suddenly the light caught a form that at first seemed a vision of mist and light.

ROBERT TURNER

(stepping back reverently)

It was the Master which the candle-light had revealed to us! His white robe, and silver, flowing hair, and shining blue eyes gave the impression of a spirit, rather than of a human being.

[During the following Robert will gradually back upstage, until he is shielded behind a chair.]

ELLA COOPER

“Welcome,” said 'Abdu'l-Bahá. “Welcome.”

PHOEBE HEARST

We tried to tell Him how deeply grateful we were at His receiving us.

ELLA COOPER

"No," he answered, "you are kind to come."

PHOEBE HEARST

This was spoken in very careful English.

ELLA COOPER

Then He smiled and we recognized the light was the radiance that moved across His noble face.

PHOEBE HEARST

He asked if all were present. "Yes, my Lord," we said.

ELLA COOPER

"Where is Robert?" He asked.

PHOEBE HEARST

We looked around in surprise. I had assumed that Robert would follow us.

[Robert Turner comes out from behind the chair and kneels.]

ROBERT TURNER

My Lord! My Lord! I am not worthy to be here.

[Robert bows his head. He then lifts up his elbow, as if he is being raised to his feet.]

ELLA COOPER

'Abdu'l-Bahá raised Robert to his feet.

PHOEBE HEARST

And embraced him like a loving father.

[As Robert comes slowly forward,
his face growing radiant, the two
women turn to face him.]

ELLA COOPER

"Robert, your Lord loves you," said the Master.

PHOEBE HEARST

"God gave you a black skin," He added, "but a heart white as snow."

ELLA COOPER

"Thou art like unto the pupil of the eye which is dark in color..."

PHOEBE HEARST

"...yet is the source of light and the revealer of sight."

ELLA COOPER

(to Robert)

"If you remain firm and steadfast until the end, you will be a door..."

PHOEBE HEARST

(to Robert)

"...a door through which an entire race will enter the Kingdom of God."

[Each woman takes one hand of
Robert as he holds his head high.
All three turn to the audience.]

ROBERT TURNER

(after a pause; in glowing
light)

I had been carried suddenly to too great a height, my soul had come in contact with the Divine Spirit... I, a colored butler in 1898, who opened doors for white folk, was to become a door to heaven. St. Peter only opens heaven's gate, but 'Abdu'l-Bahá promised I would be the gate itself – through which an entire race would enter the Kingdom of God. It was too much to take in!

ELLA COOPER
(backing stage left)

We could not remove our eyes from the Master's glorious face; we heard all that He said; we drank tea with Him at His bidding; but existence seemed suspended; and when 'Abdu'l-Bahá arose and suddenly left us, we came back with a start to life; but never again, oh! never again – thank God! – the same life on this earth.

PHOEBE HEARST
(moving stage right)

Those three days were the most memorable days of my life... We God-intoxicated pilgrims left for home – some for France, some to England, most to the United States, but all of us on fire with faith and purpose. We fanned out in a flurry of teaching activity.

[Ella and Phoebe now stand at opposite corners of downstage. With palms turned up, they seem to radiate the good news.]

ELLA COOPER

In Honolulu the first Japanese believer became the first Asian Bahá'í.

PHOEBE HEARST

In England the first Jewish Westerner embraced the Faith.

ROBERT TURNER

In Washington D.C., a segregated, southern city at the time, where Mrs. Hearst had a second home, she hosted a reception for prominent educators of the Negro race. She spoke ardently to them about the coming of Bahá'u'lláh, and soon, a small but *consistent* stream of African-Americans embraced the Faith.

ELLA COOPER

By 1900, 2000 Bahá'ís lived in the United States! Mother and I were even able to establish the first Local Spiritual Assembly in San Francisco!

PHOEBE HEARST

The teaching work been so successful 'Abdu'l-Bahá then vowed to underrtake a personal mission to the West!

ELLA COOPER

He was coming to America!

[Ella hurries off right, as if to prepare. Robert hurriedly turns to retrieve the tea things, as if preparing for 'Abdu'l-Bahá's visit. Phoebe gestures toward chairs. Robert steps toward them, but then notices his hands are full.]

[Phoebe beckons for the tea tray. Robert hesitates, but she smilingly insists. Robert moves the easy chairs stage right, while exits with tray.]

[THORNTON CHASE enters left, eating an ice cream. Robert does a double-take. But then resumes re-arranging furniture while he speaks and continues speaking while he works.]

ROBERT TURNER

Oh, that's Thornton Chase. He was the first American to become a Bahá'í. Back in 1894. While looking for someone to teach him Sanskrit, he met a Syrian who told him of the Cause. Mr. Chase embraced the Faith that very same year.

(comes downstage;
confidentially)

Raised an orphan, in 1863 during the Civil War, Mr. Chase became Captain in the Union army. He was only 16 years old but he was one of the few white officers willing to lead a regiment of Negro soldiers – freed slaves – against the Confederate forces. I was only seven years old myself in 1863, but I'll never forget it. That was the year President Lincoln passed his Emancipation Proclamation, freeing my family from slavery. Of course, back then neither Mr. Chase nor I knew that all this was being set in motion a world away. In Baghdad. IN a Ridvan Garden. We only knew that the Son of Baha'u'llah, who had set this New Day in motion, was coming to America!

[With a skip in his step,
Robert Turner exits.]

[Thornton Chase, having finished
his ice cream, wipes his handlebar
mustache with his handkerchief,
As he comes downstage center.]

THORNTON CHASE

In 1898, I too had been invited by Mrs. Hearst to accompany her party on pilgrimage. But Union Mutual Life Insurance wouldn't give me time off from work... Such cruel irony. Bahá'u'lláh was my life insurance, and teaching His Cause my only true work.

(beat; looks offstage)

It broke my heart to see them leave without me... But at least Union Mutual sent me all over the country, so I was able to teach the Cause and visit the friends. We had no Bahá'í literature in English then, so I also wrote pamphlets. Helped start the Bahá'í Publishing Society. But soon Union Mutual took issue with all my Bahá'í activities. They demoted me, cut my salary, and exiled me to Los Angeles. They hoped my isolation in California would force me to spend more time working for the company and less for the Faith. With a wife to support and a son in college I was soon in financial straits. My wife, knowing my Bahá'í work had caused my demotion, became increasingly antagonistic to the Faith. Meanwhile, my health was failing. Stomach trouble.

[Thornton glances down at the
ice cream stick in his hand.
He tosses it away.]

But that wasn't my only trouble..

(beat)

I also had doubts. One night I could not pray at all. I doubted everything. My head throbbed and pounded. I didn't feel I was doing enough for the Faith. Stuck in Los Angeles, I couldn't do my editing work. You see, back in Chicago I had tutored the young Persian translators... Seeing my Bible lying on the table, I opened it on impulse and the words "envious of the foolish" stared up at me in accusation. I fell into a restless sleep, and awoke the next morning with the same doubts. About everything. So I wrote to 'Abdu'l-Baha.

(comes downstage;
intimately)

THORNTON CHASE (CONT'D)

"... so far, all my efforts to teach, to serve Baha'u'llah in any way, have been in vain... My heart has been torn with jealousies and envyings of others who have been commanded to go forth and work and who have developed abilities to do so, while I could do nothing but try to help a little in correcting translations! I have battled within myself to overcome those awful sins of jealousy and envy, and I think God is helping me to do so. With His help, they shall not possess me.

(beat)

"Dear Master, Thou seest that I am laying my heart bare before Thee, hoping that Thou mayest give me some balm for my misery... I believe that Thou hast the Power of Salvation, and I, more than most men, need salvation. Dear Master, Help me!"

(beat; looks up;
eyes bright)

The Master then invited me to come to 'Akká on pilgrimage.

[Lights up on John Bosch,
stage left.]

JOHN BOSCH

Thornton Chase was as humble as he was steadfast.

[Thornton turns and walks briskly to the bench, stage left. He sits. As John comes downstage center and addresses audience, Thornton sits erect, eyes closed, as if in communion with 'Abdu'l-Bahá]

JOHN BOSCH (CONT'D)

He had an electrifying presence. Whenever he came into a room, joy walked in with him. You just felt happy to see him. And goodness, could he teach! In one three-month period Mr. Chase traveled 13,000 miles. In Denver alone he held four Bahá'í meetings in eight days! A hundred years ago, most American Bahá'ís had no understanding of Bahá'í administration, and even less interest. But Thornton saw to it that a local Houses of Spirituality was elected in Chicago. When he moved to Los Angeles some 30 Bahá'ís were scattered across Southern California. Within three months of his arrival, he saw to the election of a governing board of five believers. Thornton Chase understood Bahá'í Administration, that the spirit needs a body. I myself became confirmed in the Faith reading pamphlets written by him.

(beat)

I'm John Bosch, by the way. Wine merchant. Swiss born. I studied wine-making in France and Germany. Moved to California, purchased 35 acres in the Napa Valley and became superintendent of the Sonoma County Wineries. Business often took me to San Francisco on the train, and one day in 1903, I was riding home when I saw a woman I knew from the Theosophist Society. I was a Mason as well - 32nd degree, Scottish Rite. I'd always been a seeker of truth, and not due to misery or dissatisfaction either. So when she greeted me and I saw she had a book, I was intrigued to know what she was reading.

[Thornton Chase opens his eyes, sits back, and removes a book from his breast pocket. John pulls a chair up beside him and bends politely as he addresses him]

JOHN BOSCH (CONT'D)
(charming)

If I sit next to you, I'm not going to let you read - we're going to talk.

[Thornton smiles and hands John the book. John takes it, sits, and begins reading. Thornton takes out a candy bar and unwraps it. As he stands, he takes a bite.]

THORNTON CHASE

Before pilgrimage I had formed an idea of Jesus as meek and gentle, soft and sweet. But after meeting 'Abdu'l-Bahá, I revised my idea of Jesus. I found in 'Abdu'l-Bahá a Man of Authority, whose words penetrated hearts. He was strong and powerful, yet as informal as a father with his family. His every movement bespoke power and dignity. One day at lunch he spoke about how all matter in nature needs to decompose before its recomposition can take place. He said it was the power of the Word of God that decomposed the self of man in order that he might be recreated. My pilgrim companion and I looked at each other in amazement. Just that morning on Mt. Carmel we had noted the crumbling rock, and I happened to comment how rock had to be decomposed into soil before its chemical values could be released and transmuted into plant life. And there, at noon of the same day, 'Abdu'l-Bahá was addressing this same subject! Later He visited me in my room and brought up the topic again. He said that decomposition and division were death, but recomposition and unity were life. Then He picked up my fountain pen and said, "The battle axe must fit the hand of the wielder." After He left, I thought long about those words.

THORNTON CHASE (CONT'D)

How a single letter is of small worth compared to its value in a word, and how much more value a letter has when it's part of a sentence. I realized an individual must enter into unity with others to increase his own value. And I saw that my writings – that all my work – had to be a point of unity, and never of division. 'Abdu'l-Bahá's love crumbled the stones of envy in my heart.

(beat)

The day I left 'Akká the Master embraced me and promised that I would see Him again. But as I re-entered the world I felt an icy chill. Descending into a world of greed, surrounded by clamoring beggars and vendors, I saw the animalism that possesses man. I shrank back. But then I saw so clearly the condition of these beggars, their sickness and grief, and a tenderness welled up in my heart, a great wish to pour out good-will and love, to lift them up to the light, to serve them, even unto death of self. I realized love was all. I was nothing without love. The clay of my being had been re-molded by 'Abdu'l-Bahá!

[As Thornton sits on bench beside John Bosch, John holds up the book.]

JOHN BOSCH

This was just what I wanted! This was the connecting link I was missing!

(stands up)

My Theosophist friend referred me to a Mrs. Helen Goodall of Oakland for further investigation. But it was the busy season, grape-picking season. For three months I couldn't go.

(comes downstage)

Then one November afternoon I went. A radiant Japanese butler opened the door. He too was a Bahá'í! I bought every Bahá'í pamphlet Mrs. Goodall had – all written by Thornton Chase.

(clutches book to his chest)

From that day forward I attended the meetings at Mrs. Goodall's home. Some days I had to choose between my Masonic club, the saloons and the Bahá'í meetings. I would have one foot on the ferry and one on the wharf, but something inside would say, "I'd better go over to Oakland." Sometimes Mrs. Goodall had between 20 and 40 women there – like a tea party – and I was the only man. I never said a word. Let them all chatter away. But I stuck with it. Their focus on the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh kept me attending. That's how I met Thornton Chase; he was on business in San Francisco.

JOHN BOSCH (CONT'D)

It was nice having another fellow to chat with, and we soon became close friends... Then, one morning very early I went down to the winery office and wrote 'Abdu'l-Bahá: "May my name be entered in the Great Book of this Universal Life... Humbly Thy servant, John Bosch."

(beat)

In a flash, my life work, which had seemed so settled and satisfying, turned on another course.

[Thornton Chase rises, takes John's hand and pumps it. They embrace. Arm in arm, they cross the stage]

JOHN BOSCH (CONT'D)

Whenever Mr. Chase came up to San Francisco on Union Mutual business, he'd cable me. We'd stay in different hotels, but always dine together - and discuss the Faith.

[They reach the chairs, stage right and sit. Thornton indicates the book.]

THORNTON CHASE

But the faith is a way of living. It's not the principles. It's not even the teachings - except to the extent that they are internalized. 'Abdu'l-Bahá rarely gave us formal instruction in 'Akká. He gave us His example. He loved us.

JOHN BOSCH

Do you think He will come to America? Many of the friends are sailing to Europe to see Him. They don't want to risk disappointment, should He decide not come to the States.

THORNTON CHASE

It's a sorrow to me that I cannot go. But I just can't get time off from work. In any event, I doubt my sour stomach would survive the high seas. Besides, the physical meeting matters not so much.

JOHN BOSCH

(to audience)

We'd sit long over coffee. Mr. Chase always ate two or three ice creams for dessert. Always dug a big bite right out of the middle of it to start with. Finally, around eleven o'clock, he'd say:

THORNTON CHASE

Now, John, I guess it's about time to take you to your hotel.

[They rise. Arm in arm, they cross to stage left at a leisurely pace.]

[Ella Cooper enters right. She looks on until Thornton and John sit stage left. She then turns to address the audience, while they mime their animated conversation.]

ELLA COOPER

In 1910 John Bosch received a tablet from 'Abdu'l-Bahá: "The drinking of wine is, according to the text of the Most Holy Book, forbidden," He wrote, "for it is the cause of chronic diseases, weakeneth the nerves, and consumeth the mind. 'Drink ye...' Bahá'u'lláh has affirmed, "the Mystic Wine from the cup of My words.' I hope thou mayest become exhilarated with the wine of the love of God," added 'Abdu'l-Bahá. "The after-effect of drinking is depression, but the wine of the love of God bestoweth exaltation of the spirit."

(beat)

John Bosch then wrote to 'Abdu'l-Bahá asking for advice. In reply the Master suggested that it would be better to engage in another business, but gradually, He added.

(beat)

Over the next few years, Mr. Bosch gradually severed his connection with the California Wine Association. In 1916, he started the California Grape Nectar Company. Through an improved process of sterilization, he produced a superior quality of unfermented grape juice.

(smiles)

And wouldn't you know it: just in time for Prohibition.

(beat)

But that was after the Great War. Right now, it was 1912, and Mother and I had just received a telegram. It was from 'Abdu'l-Bahá. He had just arrived in New York. He doubted He could come west, so he wanted us to come east. Without hesitation, mother and I hopped on a train and traveled across the continent. So did John Bosch. But poor Thornton. Once again, he could not get away from his job.

[Lights rise on Thornton and John. Mr. Bosch leans forward in the midst of an animated account.]

JOHN BOSCH

As soon as I arrived in New York I went straight to His hotel and up to His suite. When I entered His room I had a pocketful of questions. I went as a businessman. For advice. But when I saw Him I forgot everything. "'Abdu'l-Bahá," I foolishly said, "I came three thousand miles to see you." "Well," He said with a big laugh, "I came eight thousand miles to see you!"

(smiles)

Then He told me all the things I had planned to ask! Answered all the questions I had forgotten!... Except about the vineyards. He never said a word about my two million gallons of wine! Only words of encouragement... But I'm thinking about becoming a fruitarian. Have I told you?

THORNTON CHASE

(shaking head)

Oh, I so wish He would change His mind about coming west. I had hoped to travel to Chicago while he was laying the cornerstone, but this abominable insurance matter is forcing me to remain in San Francisco - for the next two months!

JOHN BOSCH

Fear not! The West Coast friends have been sending letters to the Master begging Him to come to California. I cabled him myself this morning, pleading that He change His mind.

THORNTON CHASE

Maybe its too soon, John. Do you think the friends here are ready to receive Him?

JOHN BOSCH

Well, I'm ready.... I'm going to organize the California groups to telegram Him daily till He reconsiders!

THORNTON CHASE

(suddenly happy)

I'll send one too!

JOHN BOSCH

(stands)

On that note, Mr. Chase, allow me to take you to your hotel. It's one o'clock in the morning!

[Thornton glances at his watch in surprise. They both laugh at the hour. As lights rise on Ella Cooper, Thornton and John cross the stage left to right, arm in arm.]

ELLA COOPER

Mr. Chase and Mr. Bosch used to wonder what the policeman on the beat thought about their going back and forth between hotels all night. One night they brought each other home till four o'clock in the morning!

[When John reaches the chair stage right, he stops. But Thornton walks all the way stage right, and stops facing the wings. John sits and takes out a telegram. He reads it and then waves it at Thornton.]

He's coming! He's coming west! But He says only to San Francisco. He won't travel north or south of here! So your insurance work finally pays off for you, Mr. Chase. You'll be here in San Francisco!

[Thornton turns and begins slowly walking upstage, hugging stage right. John folds up the telegram, pockets it and rises. He comes downstage to address the audience]

JOHN BOSCH

While 'Abdu'l-Bahá visited Denver, all the Bahá'ís of the West Coast prepared for his arrival. It was then Thornton fell ill - while on the road. Two brief hospitalizations were necessary. When he got back to Los Angeles his condition worsened. He was rushed to Angelus Hospital, and immediately scheduled for surgery. He wrote me from the hospital

THORNTON CHASE
(stops; turns)

They have just brought me to the hospital and are going to operate. It's a very serious operation and will tie me up here for two weeks. Please let 'Abdu'l-Bahá know.

JOHN BOSCH

He enclosed a check for \$50. Repayment of money I barely remembered lending him. Then he reminded me I was his literary executor. That worried me.

(beat)

The operation wasn't a success. For the next five days Thornton suffered tremendous pain. Increased by worrying whether or not he'd be able to come north to meet the Master. 'Abdul-Baha was traveling by train through Utah, so it was difficult informing Him of Thornton's condition. Finally in Salt Lake City, my telegram reached Him.

THORNTON CHASE

'Abdu'l-Bahá cabled me, assuring me that he was coming to California and that "God willing, he would see me soon."

JOHN BOSCH

On Sunday, September 29th, the Los Angeles Bahá'ís sent telegrams all over the West Coast asking the friends to pray for Thornton's recovery. On Monday morning Thornton felt very low, but rallied. Twenty Bahá'ís gathered at his home to pray for him.

[John Bosch mimes answering a phone, while Phoebe Hearst quietly enters down left and Ella Cooper down right. Robert Turner appears upstage center in a different light.]

JOHN BOSCH (CONT'D)

The sun was just setting when the phone rang.
(beat; steps forward)

Friends, he has gone.

Robert Turner welcomes Thornton Chase and stands beside him, both men bathed in the numinous light of the afterlife.]

ELLA COOPER

(coming forward)

Thornton Chase's death was totally unexpected... The next day, when 'Abdu'l-Bahá's train pulled into the San Francisco station, He was informed of the sad news... The Master then made a special trip to Los Angeles.

ELLA COOPER (CONT'D)

I would not have gone to Los Angeles," He later said, "had it not been to visit the tomb of Mr. Thornton Chase."

(beat)

When 'Abdu'l-Bahá arrived at the cemetery, He entered very quietly and, without asking its whereabouts, walked straight to Mr. Chase's grave. After arranging flowers on the site, the Master turned in the direction of Bahji and chanted Bahá'u'lláh's Tablet of Visitation. Next He chanted a prayer he had revealed for Thornton Chase. Then He spoke words of high praise for Mr. Chase, saying, "This revered person was the first Bahá'í in America. He served the Cause faithfully, and his services will ever be remembered throughout future ages and cycles... For the present his worth is not known, but in the future it will be inestimably clear. His sun will ever be shining... As many times as possible, at least once a year," He added, "you should make it a point to visit his tomb... This personage will not be forgotten. He is now in the presence of Bahá'u'lláh."

(beat; backing up)

Finally, 'Abdu'l-Bahá knelt on the ground and kissed the grave of Thornton Chase."

PHOEBE HEARST

(coming forward)

My dear Robert was also in the presence of Bahá'u'lláh. Three years before, after serving me faithfully for 30 years, Robert had passed away. He died in his own home surrounded by family. They reported later that as he lay dying, he kept repeating a strange, foreign-sounding phrase. You see they were not Bahá'ís, so they did not understand what he was saying.

ROBERT TURNER

(stage whisper)

Yá Bahá'u'l-Abhá... Yá Bahá'u'l-Abhá... Yá Bahá'u'l-Abhá!

PHOEBE HEARST

Unfortunately, at that time, I was estranged from the Bahá'í community. Due to the greed of a few Bahá'ís who had tried to extort money from me. One even went so far as to lie and say the funds were for 'Abdu'l-Bahá. But I knew the Master never accepted money for Himself. For I believe with all my heart that He *is* the Master. My greatest blessing in life was that I was privileged to have been in His presence, and to look upon His sanctified face...

PHOEBE HEARST (CONT'D)

So when I heard 'Abdu'l-Bahá had arrived in San Francisco, I had my driver take me Helen Goodall's home, where I invited Him to stay as guest in my own home.

(beat)

'Abdu'l-Bahá graciously returned with me and stayed for three days, never once mentioning the Faith. Until I did. I reminded Him of a prayer He had chanted in Arabic while I was on pilgrimage. Its stirring effect had stayed with me all these years. So I asked if He would kindly chant it again for me. 'Abdu'l-Bahá kindly agreed, and his voice rang out powerfully in prayer. My other guests, although unfamiliar with Arabic, sat spellbound. As did I – once again, as I had in 'Akká.

[Robert takes a step or two
downstage.]

On the third day, before departing, He asked to see all who served in my household. My maids, cook, and valets all came forward, and 'Abdu'l-Bahá spoke affectionate words of gratitude to each. He gave all a most generous gift of money – as memento, He said, of His visit.

[Robert has drawn nearer.]

As I looked around at my servants, I couldn't help but feel Robert was there, looking on.

(beat)

For you see, Robert had been forever saddened by the dust the self-serving had thrown in my eyes. But his faith, you know, his faith never wavered.

ROBERT TURNER
(stage whisper)

Yá Bahá'u'l-Abhá... Yá Bahá'u'l-Abhá.

PHOEBE HEARST

I then escorted 'Abdu'l-Bahá back to San Francisco. On the way, He counseled me never to consider anyone a true Bahá'í who was covetous of the possessions of others or who tried to procure money from them... We then spoke yet again about my devoted Robert. When my driver arrived at 'Abdu'l-Bahá's residence, we parted as warmly as we had in 'Akká – all those years ago.

[Phoebe bows her and pauses.
Robert approaches attentively,
almost to her side, but stops as
Phoebe lifts her head and speaks.]

PHOEBE HEARST (CONT'D)

'Abdu'l-Bahá is the most wonderful Being I have ever met – or ever hope to meet in this world. I believe in Him with all my heart and soul.

[Robert takes his mistress's arm.
As he escorts Phoebe toward an easy
chair, John Bosch comes down left.]

JOHN BOSCH

During His visit to America the Master had made perfectly clear that in the great adventure of reconstructing the world according to Bahá'u'lláh's teachings, people of color would not be invited along as an afterthought...

[Robert helps Phoebe into her
seat.]

...but rather play a central.

[Robert sits beside Phoebe in the
adjoining easy chair.]

ELLA COOPER
(downstage right)

In 1899, at the close of our historic pilgrimage to 'Akká, 'Abdu'l-Bahá said that if Robert Turner were to remain steadfast in his faith, that he would become "the door through which an entire race would enter the Kingdom of God."
(beat)

That door was now wide open.

PHOEBE HEARST
(reaches out and takes
Robert's hand)

'Abdu'l-Bahá sent us home with two instructions. I remember them so well. "And now I give you a commandment," He said, "which shall be for a covenant between you and Me: that ye have faith; that your faith be steadfast as a rock that no storms can move, that nothing can disturb, and that it endure through all things even to the end..."

ELLA COOPER
(downstage right)

"Another commandment I give unto you," He added, "that ye love one another even as I love you. Great mercy and blessings are promised to the people of your land, but on one condition: that their hearts are filled with the fire of love, that they live in perfect kindness and harmony like one soul in different bodies. If they fail in this condition, the great blessings will be deferred... Never forget this," He warned. "Look at Me, follow Me, be as I am..."

[Upstage center Thornton Chase strikes a match. He lights a candle.]

JOHN BOSCH
(downstage left)

"Ye must die to yourselves and to the world," He told the pilgrims, "so shall ye be born again and enter the Kingdom of Heaven..."

[Thornton Chase starts coming downstage with his candle.]

JOHN BOSCH (CONT'D)

"...Behold a candle how it gives its light. It weeps its life away drop by drop, in order to give forth its flame of light."

THORNTON CHASE
(downstage center with
candle; after a beat)

"Ye are better known to the inmates of the Kingdom on high than ye are known to your own selves... Would that ye had the power to perceive the things your Lord, the All-Merciful, doth see - things that attest the excellence of your rank, that bear witness to the greatness of your worth, that proclaim the sublimity of your station!

(beat)

"God grant that your desires and unmortified passions may not hinder you from that which hath been ordained for you."

[Phoebe and Robert rise from their chairs and come downstage, joining the other actors, while the song "Look at Me, Follow Me" plays in the theater.]

END OF PLAY

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