

MIRROR IMAGES

**A Play in Ten Scenes, with music**

**By  
Eliza Wyatt**

### Biographical note:

This is the story of how fanaticism inspires rebellion and more fanaticism. It is based on personal experience which covers a long relationship with my in-laws who live in an Islamic Republic, created in 1980. Forty years later, the suffering continues, and there seems to be no reform in sight. Like my fictional characters, I can only hope for patience, small acts of rebellion and a continuing passion for reason.

The specific country in this theatre piece is not mentioned. This is because the spread of fanatical thinking can be found in many Islamic countries now, from Afghanistan, through the Middle East, to some countries in Africa, the Philippines and Indonesia. There are approximately eight hundred million Muslims in the world.

### Cast

**Ingy – a twenty seven year old, recent doctor, who has studied in Paris. She wears conservative Parisian clothes, and then a headscarf and a black suit, and then a completely black top and trousers and head-covering.**

**Rahzi – Ingy’s eldest aunt, a fifty something woman, who dresses in a businesswoman’s suit for her interview, and then has to be completely covered for the prison scenes.**

**Mullah- any age, he wears an abba and a white turban, and a full beard.**

**Caj – a thirty something TV presenter, who wears a western-style suit throughout**

**Souri – Ingy’s mother, fifty years old, like her sister, Chelli, she wears simple skirt and blouse, but also a flimsy flowery patterned piece of cloth which reaches to the floor but is simply drawn round the body when needed, more often simply tied at the waist, or even discarded.**

**Chelli – Ingy’s other aunt, a woman who looks to others for her opinions.**

**Costume Note: In the last scene, Souri and Chelli are also in black trousers and coats and headscarves because they are sitting outside in their courtyard and can be seen from the road.**

### **Set**

**The staging is fluid, with lights indicating where scenes take place, i.e. The Courtyard in a suburb, a Television Studio, and in a Prison.**

### **Playwright’s Note:**

**This is a poetic attempt to portray some ugly facts. Middle-Eastern, Arabic, Iranian music should be used to convey mood, happy and sad. This will make the eventually banning of music even more tragic.**

### **Prologue**

**AT RISE: Ingy enters with a backpack. She has just seen her results posted. Paris, France.**

**INGY (To audience)**

I was just one of many students crowding the notice board, praying to Allah that my name is going to be there.

Yes, there it was! I've passed the last exam. I am now a qualified doctor. The first person I want to tell is my boyfriend, Vahan, even before my family because now he comes first with me.

*(She takes off her backpack, and takes out her books.)*

INGY (to audience)

I said goodbye to my room in Rue Saint Lazaar, because I am going back to be a citizen of my country again. After five years as a medical intern in Paris, I was a doctor and my head ached with words from chemistry, anatomy, bio-neurology, bio-chemistry, pathology. Foreign words.

*(She puts her books in a suitcase. She takes suitcase, and crosses stage.)*

INGY (to French Officer)

My passport? Yes, Monsieur, it's a different colour, different looking. Yes, that's where you'll find the stamps and visas and permissions to study medicine. And my Exit Visa. Don't laugh at the writing or hold it upset down.

*(She goes to exit, but returns for this speech)*

INGY (to audience)

When I first came, I had trouble not so much with my studies but with all the other names, of people, parts of the city, Rue de la Chat qui Peche, Rue de Rivoli, Tulleries, Place de la Republique. I had trouble sitting with so many different people

on the Metro. Now I've learned how to be a stranger, and how to talk to people slowly and carefully in their language.

(She laughs)

But that was before I met Vahan, before I found my love, who is a doctor too. And even better, he is a man from my own country. When we first met we walked and talked together, now we never stop, talk talk, and not only talk! But I'm tired of looking in the mirror and telling my reflection how lucky I am that I'm loved by a good man, and how grateful I am because I have passed my exams, and finished my studies, and how supremely lucky I am that we're both going home. Home! Such good news is too good for just myself, for just telling my reflection in the mirror. I want to tell everyone how happy I am.

(Ingy takes her case, and exits)

Scene One

*AT RISE: Ingy's mother,  
SOURI and her sister,  
CHELLI, are sitting round*

*a small pool in the courtyard.  
Souri is smoking a galleon. Chelli plucks at  
an oud, but only for her own entertainment.)*

SOURI

Have you seen the size of the raisins this year? This big, this juicy.

CHELLI

Tell me.

SOURI

We'll never see them like that again.

CHELLI

You're right sister, that's the end of them.

SOURI

Don't say that.

CHELLI

You just said it.

SOURI

I regret it.

CHELLI

The dates are big too .This year they are as big as cockroaches.

SOURI

That's good, because when Ingy comes we'll give her some stuffed with coconut.  
Nothing's too good for a daughter who's a doctor. And who is marrying one. Bliss.

CHELLI

Bliss! What is his name, sister?

SOURI

(consulting letter)

Vahan! What? You don't like that name? You are impossible with your constant  
judgment of a man's name. He is more than his name.

CHELLI

Yes, and no! That is the name his mother gave him, yes? So it says something about  
her, his mother. And don't forget we know nothing about his family.

SOURI

He's a doctor!

CHELLI

We don't know his family!

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Scene Two

*(Scene shifts to a T.V. studio,  
on a raised platform, spotlighting...)*

MULLAH(to camera)

If we consider ourselves Muslim, we must believe in Allah, the one true God and Mohammad the last of his prophets. "There will be no more prophets after me" That's what he said. Allhuahakbar!

CAJ (to camera)

Our job in television is to keep the public informed. To tell them they have a choice - even if we don't have much influence.

*(RAHZI crosses to T.V. studio.)*

RAHZI (Addresses audience)

As I was sitting in the sun one day, doing some paperwork, a sudden wind came and blew my papers away. I ran to get them back. I jumped up and chased after them, but they were gone. That's what it felt like when I lost my husband.

*(Razhi takes a seat on the platform.  
Ingy crosses with her suitcase)*

INGY (To audience)

My favourite aunt lived in the capital. She held an important position at the National Bank and now she's been appointed...but listen.

*(Lights go up on entire TV studio.  
Ingy sits as an audience member.)*

CAJ (to camera)

In the news today we've had word that there are two new departments the new Government has created, a department of religious studies and a department of welfare and public housing. And today we're happy to have in the studio with us the woman who has been chosen to head the department of welfare and public housing.. Welcome...

RAHZI

Thank you.

CAJ

Can you tell us about your appointment. Did it come as a surprise to you? Your background is in banking, is it not?

RAZHI

Yes it is...

CAJ

You've been General Manager of the Tretian Bank. And you've suddenly been appointed to this position. Is your experience in banking going to be useful?

RAHZI

Yes because it's administration, which is my experience, and my training.

CAJ

You began your career as a bank clerk, right?

RAHZI

Like my father, yes. My father was a bank clerk for thirty years.

CAJ

And you worked your way up in the bank, and married the General Manager.

RAHZI

Yes, he died last year. But please ask me about my new job.

CAJ

Go ahead, tell us about that.

RAHZI

I've been made Minister for Welfare and Public Housing, and you'll be glad to hear funding has increased and the department enlarged – which will benefit everyone.

CAJ

Good, very good! Let me also introduce my other guest, Mullah Ulema Mir. Thank you for coming into the studio and agreeing to talk to us. We are all anxious to know the results of the recent appointments in the government. Can you comment on that?

MULLAH

No, it is too soon.

CAJ

What about this new law requiring women to cover their hair, their ankles, their wrists. Do we want our women to go back to wearing the veil?

MULLAH

It's a question of women wanting to wear the veil. Being proud of it.

CAJ

Some want to wear the veil, but some don't.

MULLAH

We don't want to be corrupted by other religions.

CAJ

I'm sure no one wants to be corrupted.

MULLAH

Some do.

CAJ

It was the fashion for centuries, but then the fashion changed. Covering the head to pray, that's a tradition we inherited from the Jews, right?

MULLAH

It's throughout the world.

CAJ

It used to be, but what about today's fashion?

MULLAH

There's no difference between yesterday, today and tomorrow. This is our belief. And if you are one of us, you must obey the law, which is obeying the law of religion. It is now the law of the country. Women must obey, and we will see to it. *(He stands to say the same thing.)* Don't forget this. You must obey the law, the law of religion. It is now the law of the country. Women must obey, and we will see to it.

CAJ

Ah, thank you, thank...sorry we're out of time.

*(MULLAH leaves, Rahzi and Mullah brush each other aside. Rahzi runs up. Caj picks up his papers.)*

CAJ

Can I help you?

INGY

Aunt, Aunt Rahzi!

*(Rahzi turns back and embraces Ingy)*

INGY

My favourite Aunt, so clever and so important, I'm so proud of you.

RAHZI

It's a responsible job.

INGY

But I'm sure you can do it.

RAHZI

Me too. But now tell me about yourself, I hear you're engaged.

*(When Caj hears this, he exits.)*

INGY

You will soon meet him. He's the perfect man!

RAHZI

And I was beginning to doubt there was such a thing!

INGY

There... *(She shows Rahzi photo)*

RAHZI

Perfect in every way. Of course I can only see the top half of him.

INGY *(laughing)*

You will soon see his entire body!

RAHZI

It's so good to have you home!

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Scene Three

*(Lights go up on SOURI and CHELLI  
in their courtyard)*

SOURI

I notice one thing, sister. There's been no invitations to this man's family, no word

from them. No introductions. So what's happening with this friend Ingy made in Paris?

CHELLI

What's so bad about that? We don't know him. She has to introduce us.

SOURI

She says she's in love, but where is he?

CHELLI

Ingy doesn't need him, she can have anyone.

SOURI

She wants this one. She's not your daughter, sister.

CHELLI

I'm simply asking one question, why marry this man we know nothing about, even if he is a doctor. Our Ingy's a doctor.

*(Rahiz and Ingy join the women)*

RAHZI

Did you watch the interview on television? I've been appointed to a position in the Government.

INGY

It was amazing, I'm sorry you missed it.

RAHZI (To INGY)

Minister of Welfare and Public Housing!

INGY (To RAHZI)

Incredible. My wonderful hard-working aunt.

SOURI (To INGY)

Oh, yes, we didn't know you were going to be on television, but we've heard about Rahzi's new appointment.

CHELLI (To INGY)

If only your husband were alive, he'd be so proud.

SOURI

If her husband were alive, they might have appointed him.

CHELLI

Don't be cynical. As if you could help it. Razhi loves working.

SOURI

Yes, she does. Loves her office. It never ceases to amaze me. But tell us about this love of yours, Ingy? Where is he? We haven't received a call from him. I expect he's busy with his new job at the hospital.

INGY

Er yes, that's it. And I've been busy at the clinic, but I don't know why he hasn't called me. Not really.

SOURI

That's no good!

CHELLI(to Rahzi)

And do you dress like that in the city, sister?

RAHZI

Yes, I'm quite respectable.

SOURI

Not according to the new laws.

RAHZI

I am a modern woman. I am a thinking woman, and I'm not particularly religious. I don't agree that any man has the right to tell me to cover myself.

INGY

But if you don't, they will arrest you.

RAHZI

I refuse.

INGY

But I'm afraid if you don't they will...

RAHZI

And what about you? What about the restrictions they've put on your hospital? I don't know how you can stand it. And where is Vahan? I thought we'd be meeting him, and celebrating with your doctor friend.

SOURI

Yes, where does his family live?

CHELLI

And what's his family name? We only know...Vahan!

INGY

Oh I don't think it matters.

CHELLI

How will we arrange the wedding?

INGY

There isn't going to be one!

*(Shocked silence)*

SOURI

You better tell us the story.

CHELLI

In good time, dear one. In your own time.

INGY

I've heard...I'm not sure because I haven't heard from him. But people say he's going to marry someone else. He's marrying the woman his mother's chosen for him.

RAHZI

Oh Ingy, I'm so sorry.

*(Rahzi hugs Ingy. They are interrupted by two men in masks and headgear (these are played by Caj and Mullah)*

RAHZI

What do you want? Who let you in? Go away!

*(They arrest Rahzi)*

INGY

Let her go! She hasn't done anything. She's only doing her job. Stop!

RAHZI

You have no authority!

INGY

There must be some mistake. She's a member of the government.

M ASKED MAN

YOU BE QUIET!

CHELLI

She's my sister...

SOURI

She hasn't done anything.

INGY

You've no right to arrest her!

MASKED MAN

Do you want to be silent, or do you want us to silence you?

(They drag Rahzi away)

INGY

I'm not going to allow them to do this. I'm going to the city to see what I can do for her. I'm going to protest this.

CHELLI

My poor Rahzi!

SOURI

My poor Ingy!

INGY

No, it's good. It will give me something to believe in.

(Ingy exits, Chelli plucks the oud, and Souri puts on some music as lights fade on courtyard.)

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Scene Four

*(Lights go up on TV Studio. Caj is at his desk, not interviewing. Ingy enters, in a skirt & headscarf)*

INGY

Thank you for helping me find my aunt, but do you know why they arrested her?

CAJ

They're being evasive about her crime.

INGY

They must know she's innocent.

CAJ

Not really, she got too important for a western-dressed woman.

INGY

She's never worn the veil. I'm only wearing this headscarf because I was in the street.

CAJ

They're making new laws everyday. Soon you won't be able to wear that skirt.

INGY

Why not?

CAJ

It shows your legs.

INGY

But they can't put her into prison for that.

CAJ

They're teaching her a lesson.

INGY

What about her job?

CAJ

They've already appointed someone else. Mirani, I think his name is.

INGY

Why is all this happening? If you knew the restrictions on the hospitals now. I've been sent to work in a women's clinic.

CAJ

Someone has to.

INGY

Are you defending the fanatics?

CAJ

No, I'm probably going to lose my job even if I'm not political. Trouble is, I'm not religious.

INGY

It's just not fair. The Government says they want to make things better for people, that's what they say. But who can believe them when they pass laws like this? And why only restrictions for women? Why are we the ones who have to fade into the background, and pretend to be only servants? They're tyrants, that's what they would be called in Paris.

CAB

It must be difficult for you to understand, because you've lived in France. Go back to Paris, then.

INGY

I've been reading the Koran. Carefully this time. 'Men are superior to women because they use their wealth to feed and clothe them!' I work, I support myself. And nowhere in the Koran does it say you have to cover your head, your bosom yes, your head when I pray to God but not just in the company of men. Why? They are just men. They are not gods. I don't want to go back to Paris. This is my country.

CAJ

Welcome!

INGY

I don't feel welcome!

CAJ

Welcome to how things are now!

(Lights fade)

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Scene Five

*(Lights go on up Rahzi  
completely in black)*

RAHZI(By rote)

All women prisoners will pray. Five times a day. Five arkan. Five times a day.

ALL women prisoners will pray. Face the right way. ALL women prisoners will pray. Pray with us. You're not better than us. You're not better than we are. So, So, you think you're better?

We're the same, the same. We're all going to pray in the same way. We're all going to pray because you're no different from us.

*(RAHZI thinks about this for a minute and then answers herself.)*

RAHZI (To herself)

But I am, I am... if they want to pray, and I'm being forced to. I am different from them. How can you force someone to pray? And if they do, what are they going to pray for?

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Scene Six

INGY (To audience)

I started work at the clinic, grateful for being able to work, and the women - because I only have women patients - were grateful too. But I don't like the look of myself anymore. I don't like to see myself in the mirror.

*(Lights go on up Courtyard, with Chelli and Souri. Ingy enters with mirror and bangs it down.)*

SOURI

Now, you've broken it...

CHELLI

Into a thousand pieces...

SOURI

But you can still see yourself...only much smaller than before.

INGY

That's right, much smaller than before.

CHELLI

Islam means submission.

INGY (To CHELLI)

Not suppression.

INGY

At least I'm being allowed to visit my Aunt.

SOURI

You're not going?

CHELLI

Be careful!

INGY

I have to go. She says she's not going to obey the new laws. She says they're there to humiliate women and she won't be humiliated even if she spends the rest of her life in jail.

*(Chelli and Souri salaam her goodbye.)*

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Scene Seven

*(Lights on (Rahzi writing in prison))*

RAHZI

The day dawns, and there's a weight on my feet and legs, I look down and see nothing there, but that's the only feeling I have left. Don't come near this place of hopelessness. I don't want you to look into the dull centers of my eyes. I want you to remember me how I was. On television...

*(Ingy visits her in prison)*

INGY

I want to look into the dull centers of your eyes.

RAHZI

Surrounded by so many strange faces and stone walls, I confuse living with dreaming. I'm only half alive.

INGY

I want to feel the stone.

RAHZI

I never thought I'd see you again.

INGY

We're doing our best, trying to find people to bribe, and we are bribing people, but they lie.

RAHZI

Rules change, not people. Forget me and my rebellion, let me go, don't come and visit me. You have to let me go.

INGY

You're a little thinner.

RAHZI

Yes. The nights are cold, but the hot days are the worst but I'm thirst for the wind in the mountains, wild flowers, water jumping over rocks, chasing you to come and eat the picnic.

INGY

Oh, the cutlets and chicken you cooked. How good they were.

RAHZI

Because of the fresh air you ate with them. That's what I miss most the air.

INGY

I can't leave you here.

RAHZI

This is where I've chosen to be. It's not for you. Don't come again. My boredom and depression will catch you, drag you down with me.

INGY

Are they... are you... do they hurt you?

RAHZI

They don't torture us. Except by telling us every night about how they USED to torture political prisoners before the rule of religion, how lucky we are, how thankful we ought to be, to be prisoners in the name of the One True God.

INGY

Maybe we're being proud and stiff-necked.

RAHZI

I am, you don't have to be.

INGY

But for how long? How long do you want to stay here?

RAHZI

As long as I can bear it. My presence here is my protest, but also a mark against them. That's how I see it. But you must carry on with your life, and do what you have to do. Let me be...let me be here!

(Ingy says goodbye to Rahzi)

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Scene Eight

*(Lights up on Courtyard with Sourì and Chelli)*

SOURI

*(Lighting up a galleon)*

We're tobacco addicts, you know.

CHELLI

I've heard tobacco's bad for you.

SOURI

So much is, sister, so much...

CHELLI

At least it's not banned, not like music.

SOURI

Music's banned now? That's why I don't hear any music any more on the radio.

CHELLI

That's right, only prayers. Prayers for music.

SOURI

Time to move on. You know our grandmother was a Baktiari, and they moved from place to place? They followed the seasons.

CHELLI

I remember she hated staying in her house, and it was a nice house. She said, now my man goes off without me. In the old days, the whole family, many families, they all travelled together.

SOURI

Bliss.

CHELLI

That's what it was, heaven!

SOURI

Not a bit uncomfortable?

CHELLI

But heaven!

Maybe!  
SOURI

Patience...  
SOURI (To CHELLI)

Patience...  
CHELLI (To SOURI)

(Ingy enters, tired from work)

Look after her!  
CHELLI

SOURI  
My dearest, you're tired. Sit and I'll get you something to eat. My brave girl.

INGY  
I'm not hungry.

SOURI  
You're working too hard.

INGY  
It's not that. I can't sleep. I can't stop thinking about Paris. Paris where the nights are, at this very moment, full of lights... music and dancing. I long to go back, and try and make the city mine, my home. But I don't want to leave you alone.

SOURI (To INGY)  
This place was a desert without you.

INGY (To her aunts)  
I've sent for a map of Paris.

CHELLI  
Tell us about the time you lived there.

SOURI (To INGY)  
Tell us everything. Say flowers...

CHELLI  
Say flowers... let us hear them.

INGY  
Oh, Paris...

SOURI  
We'll all go sometime.

CHELLI

Will they laugh at us though? Because we cover our heads?

INGY

No, no. That's your choice. They won't laugh. I hope they won't. Ah, Paris... did I tell you how slow the cars move because there are so many of them?

SOURI

It's that way here now, too.

CHELLI

Oh, yes, everything's changing...

SOURI

Everything. Our sister's in prison.

INGY

At least she's making a political statement.

CHELLI

But for how long? How long will she stay alive? If you can call that living.

INGY

It is for her. She's the brave soul. She wants to show everyone.

SOURI

Excuse me, my dear daughter, I hope you won't mind if I say this...

CHELLI

Go on, say it...

SOURI

I don't like to...but you're beginning to smell.

CHELLI

When was the last time you had a proper bath, a proper wash?

INGY

I can't. They can force me to wear this uniform, but they can't force me to wash.

CHELLI

But think of us!

SOURI

How long since you washed? When are you going to wash? Come with us to the bath house.

INGY

I can't. I can't see all that...nakedness...skin, flesh, I can't bear it. Don't force me.

SOURI

Then take a shower here!

INGY

I don't want to see myself either! Me, a doctor! How can I be a doctor if I don't want to see skin...I must give up my profession.

CHELLI

This is all that man's doing!

SOURI

Is this because of Vahan? You're in mourning for him, but mourning comes to an end. We have to have a Hadra for her.

CHELLI

That's right, we have to cure you with a Hadra.

INGY

I don't like that traditional music and dancing.

*(Souri and Chelli ignore this, and play a recording of traditional music. They dance.)*

INGY(*sitting*)

I can't dance.

CHELLI(*dancing*)

Not me, I can't dance.

SOURI(*dancing*)

I can't dance. Never been good at dancing.

*(They continue to dance. Then they pull Ingy up to dance.)*

INGY

No, no, you can't force me!

*(Ingy gradually joins the dance.)  
(Noise outside and the two masked Men enter.)*

INGY

What are you doing here?

MASKED MAN

No music or dancing!



You lost your job?

CAJ

I knew it! There's nothing to do, but wait it out.

INGY

How many years? That's not a good attitude to take, we've got to do something.

CAJ

You have a medical degree, you can go back to Paris.

INGY

It's not easy to always be a stranger. Always talking another language, every, every day!

CAJ

You have the choice, most of us don't have the choice. We have to keep silent. Yes, me, a television interviewer, has to be silent.

INGY

I'm sorry.

(She holds out her hand and he takes it.)

CAJ

I understand that our country shouldn't be run by western powers, or eastern powers, I understand that. BUT...now they've outlawed music and dancing, art of all kinds.

INGY

I've been reading the Koran, it says...'every age shall have its scriptures.'

CAJ

As the poets say, this too will pass.

INGY

You can't quote poets, I'm sure they're also banned.

CAJ

We can help each other.

INGY

I hope so. By being friends, you mean?

CAJ

That's a good start.

INGY

Friends are important, but when I had a love, when times were better, when I was happy, yes, not so long ago; that happiness was precious because it was real and because it was real it made us, it made me feel...victorious.

CAJ

You look different from when I first saw you. Apart from the black...

INGY

I haven't looked in the mirror recently.

CAJ

You know there's a law against mean speaking to unattached females.

INGY

Forty lashes?

CAJ

Don't laugh, it has happened.

INGY

We better get engaged immediately.

CAJ (also laughing)

I'll give you a ring.

INGY

For my finger, or for my nose?

CAJ

I'm sure laughing's forbidden! (They laugh) Friends?

INGY

Yes!

*(They shake hands)*

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Scene Ten

*(Lights fade on TV. and go up on courtyard)*

SOURI

If only there weren't so many flies.

CHELLI

Strange summer without flies.

SOURI

But they're so big this year. They're enormous!

CHELLI

But have you noticed, there are not so many mosquitoes.

SOURI

The flies have eaten them.

CHELLI

Stop this talk of insects. You'll bring the locusts down on us.

SOURI

They're here already.

CHELLI

They come and go. Patience.

SOURI

How long patience?

CHELLI

Until the next generation?

SOURI

If they'll be one!

CHELLI

Imshallah!

(Lights fade on courtyard)

Epilogue

(TV studio as in beginning.)

RAHZI (to camera)

As I was sitting in the sun one day, doing some paperwork, a sudden wind came and blew my papers away. I ran to get them back. I jumped up and chased after them, but they were gone. I ran to get my papers back. I leapt up and disobeyed. Now that's all I can do - disobey.

CAJ(to camera)

We all consider ourselves Muslims. But that doesn't mean we should be taken back to the age when the best in the world came from this part of the world, the maths, the art, the science and the religion. That may have been a good time for us, the best time for us, but we have to realize it vanished and now we are just a country that has to move forward into the future, with hope, art, and music.

MULLAH

When the Lord God came to Mohammad, his first words were - rise up and recite in the name of your Lord who created Man from clots of blood. It was He who gave your ears, eyes, and hearts; yet you are seldom thankful. It was He who placed you on the earth and before Him you shall all be assembled.

(At a sign from the Mullah, lights dim)

INGY (To audience and then to herself)

I have a map of Paris, but I don't want to be there. I belong here. But that does not stop me hoping! Gare du Montparnasse, Rue de Rivoli, Place de la Republique. Liberty, Fraternity Egalite. Liberty, Fraternity, Egalite. Liberty, Fraternity, Egalite. Eternity!

(We hear the same music as at beginning, but we hear its mournful note now.)

END OF PLAY