



“You Can Kill Me as Soon as You Like,” She Said

By Caitlyn Shayda Jones

Published: May 22, 2012

Permalink: <http://239days.com/2012/05/22/you-can-kill-me-as-soon-as-you-like-she-said/>

THE CAKE COLLAPSED IN THE OVEN THE FIRST TIME, so they gathered around the second cake. Sixty-eight candles stuck out of its moist surface. Three flags decorated it: an American flag, a Persian flag, and a British flag. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá lit the first candle, and then asked the guests to take turns lighting the rest. It was his birthday.

On his second day in Boston, a hundred guests had gathered to celebrate at the home of Alice Breed. But ‘Abdu’l-Bahá never celebrated his birthday. In fact, he left his own party early. This was because, on the very day he was born something else had also happened, which he considered to be far more important.

‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s mother, Asiyih Khanum, gave birth to him in Tehran. But early that morning in Shiraz, a city 440 miles due south, a young man who called himself the “Báb,” meaning “The Gate,” began what soon became the greatest upheaval in the Persia’s history, by declaring himself a messenger of God. Within six years, mobs throughout the country, instigated by religious leaders and aided by the Persian military, had massacred 20,000 of his followers and had executed him by firing squad.

Among them was a woman named Táhirih. Three days ago, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá had spoken to an audience of suffragists at the Metropolitan Temple in New York. What few of them knew was that, when he was just three or four years old, he used to sit on Táhirih’s lap in his father’s house in Tehran. She was the first women’s suffrage martyr.

Táhirih accepted the teachings of the Báb in her twenties, to the consternation of her father and her husband, and became one his most fearless and brilliant advocates. She was renowned for her learning and her skill in argument. At a conference near the village of Badasht, she shocked her fellow believers by appearing before the all-male gathering without a veil. One of them was so scandalized that he slit his own throat. By imposing this new image of equality on the Bábís, Táhirih forced them to make a critical break with the past.

On her way back to Tehran she was arrested, sent to the capital, and brought before the king, Násiri'd-Din Sháh. If she would only renounce the Báb and return to Islam, His Imperial Majesty told her, he would make her his bride. She turned him down with a poem:

*Kingdom, wealth, and power are for thee,
Beggary, exile, and loss are for me.
If the former is good, it's thine.
If the latter is hard, it's mine.*

The day before they killed her the Shah again summoned her. Again she rebuffed him. They strangled her with a scarf and threw her body down a well. The Times of London reported her death on October 13, 1852. She was thirty-six years old.

Táhirih remained defiant until the end. "You can kill me as soon as you like," she said as she faced her murderers, "but you cannot stop the emancipation of women."

How to Cite this Article

The formatting below is from the *Chicago Manual of Style*, 17th Edition. For other academic citation styles, please adapt accordingly. Since the **239 Days** site and its contents may be updated from time to time, we recommend you include a “Last modified” date, which is provided at the top of both the web and PDF versions of this article.

FOOTNOTE/ENDNOTE:

Caitlyn Shayda Jones, “‘You Can Kill Me as Soon as You Like,’ She Said,” *239 Days in America*, ed. Jonathan Menon and Robert Sockett, May 22, 2012, <http://239days.com/2012/05/22/you-can-kill-me-as-soon-as-you-like-she-said/>.

BIBLIOGRAPHY:

Jones, Caitlyn Shayda. “‘You Can Kill Me as Soon as You Like,’ She Said,” *239 Days in America*. Edited by Jonathan Menon and Robert Sockett. May 22, 2012. <http://239days.com/2012/05/22/you-can-kill-me-as-soon-as-you-like-she-said/>.

HOW TO CITE THE *239 Days in America* WEBSITE IN A BIBLIOGRAPHY:

Menon, Jonathan, and Robert Sockett, eds. *239 Days in America*. <http://239days.com/>.

Terms of Use

239 Days in America™ and the 239Days.com website is licensed under a Creative Commons 3.0 License as specified at this link: <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/3.0/>. **This PDF file** is shared with you with the following additional terms:

YOU MAY quote from this PDF file with proper attribution. Your citation must include the author's name and the **239 Days in America** project's name. You may download and print this PDF file, and you may share individual PDF files in print or electronic form.

Although we want to make our work easy to share, we also wish to maintain the unity and integrity of **239 Days in America** as a whole. Therefore,

YOU MAY NOT republish or rebroadcast our PDF files in a public forum—such as by uploading them to a blog, app, or other web property, publishing them in print form, or distributing them widely using electronic means—without our prior written consent. We invite you to discuss such opportunities with us by contacting the Editor-In-Chief at editor@239Days.com. Otherwise, please share the permalinks displayed at the top of each file.

YOU MAY NOT extract pages from this file, recombine this PDF file with other documents, assemble its contents into any free or paid product, app, ebook, collection, compilation, or archive, nor remove this page of Terms. The **Adobe PDF**™ security features employed in this document have been selected to prevent such use. You may not circumvent these security features in any way.