

The following story is from the book

The Central Figures

The Báb

Volume One



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It is seemly that the servant should, after each prayer, supplicate God to bestow mercy and forgiveness upon his parents. Thereupon God's call will be raised: 'Thousand upon thousand of what thou hast asked for thy parents shall be thy recompense!' Blessed is he who remembereth his parents when communing with God. There is, verily, no God but Him, the Mighty, the Well-Beloved.

— The Báb, *Selections from the Writings of the Báb*, p. 94





The Power of Sacrifice

*Written by Rick Johnson
Illustrated by Leona Hosack*

There's a beautiful park around the Convention Center where I like to rollerblade. Lots of tourists go there, too. It's a popular hangout for homeless people, who the tourists mostly ignore. But one day, I saw some tourists taking pictures of a homeless alcoholic sprawled under a bush. They were making fun of him. "Hey, Jack, let's tie his shoelaces together!" one guy smirked.

I got really angry. "Stop it! That poor guy is not a tourist attraction!" I yelled. "Give him some respect! Leave him alone!" They laughed at me, but they quit.



“O God, my God, my beloved,

Mama taught me to respect others. Take Sally Humbolt, for example. She talks and talks but hardly ever makes any sense. Don't let her stop you on the street—everyone knows that.

But Mama crosses the street specifically to meet Sally! She even runs to catch up with her. When I see Sally, I know Mama will say something like: “Oh, Beezer, there's Sally Humbolt. I've got to tell her that chicken is on sale at the SuperSav.”

I hear neighbors gossip about Mama sometimes. “You know, Maddy Morgan visits Sally Humbolt's house! Can you imagine? I hear the place smells like goats!”

But I don't care. I love Mama for what she does and admire her sweet but independent-minded ways. I want to be like her.

But be careful what you hope for—you might get it! After I told off the tourists, I sat down on a bench to rest. Somehow, I just knew a particular woman I saw was going to sit down beside me. My heart jumped to my throat.

I'd seen this lady before. Her face was horribly disfigured. She was always pulling a small cart packed with stuff. She was probably homeless, and I definitely tried to avoid her.

I thought about leaving, but my conscience bothered me. “You always say you love and respect everybody. So what about her?” Part of me was saying, RUN! But I stayed put.

“O God, my God, my Beloved, my heart's Desire.” I began repeating my favorite prayer of the Báb over and over, silently. The Báb used that prayer Himself many times. I love the way it sounds and the way

my heart's desire."

I feel as I say it. And it is short—which is what I needed right then!

I was calming down, when the bombshell hit. "I heard what you told those tourists. I admire what you did." I still couldn't look directly at the woman, but I managed to mumble, "Thanks." And so it began.

Two hours later we were still talking. Her name was Rose. She wasn't homeless, but lived in a boarding house some distance away.

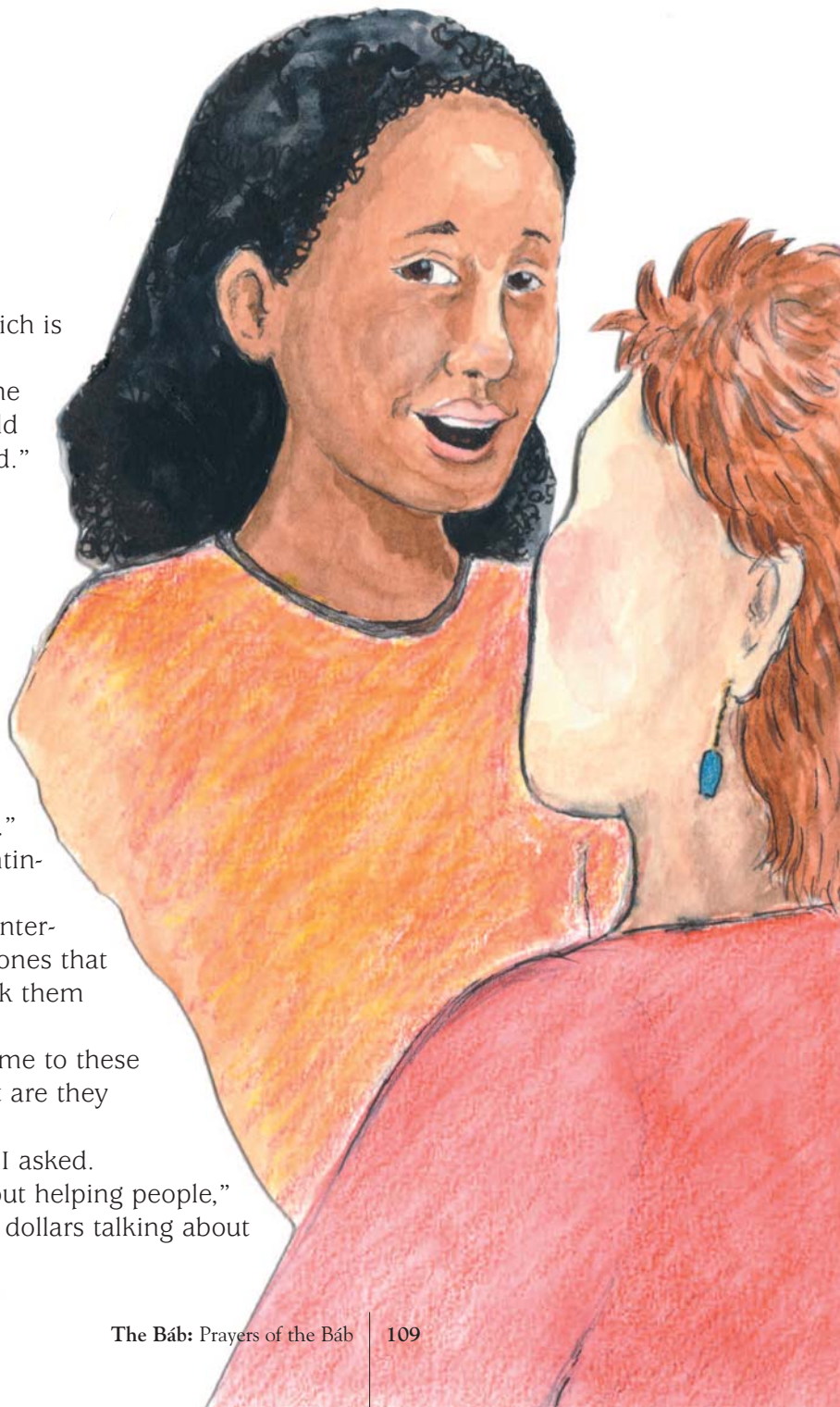
"I walk over here every few weeks," Rose said. "I shop at the second-hand stores on Beech Street."

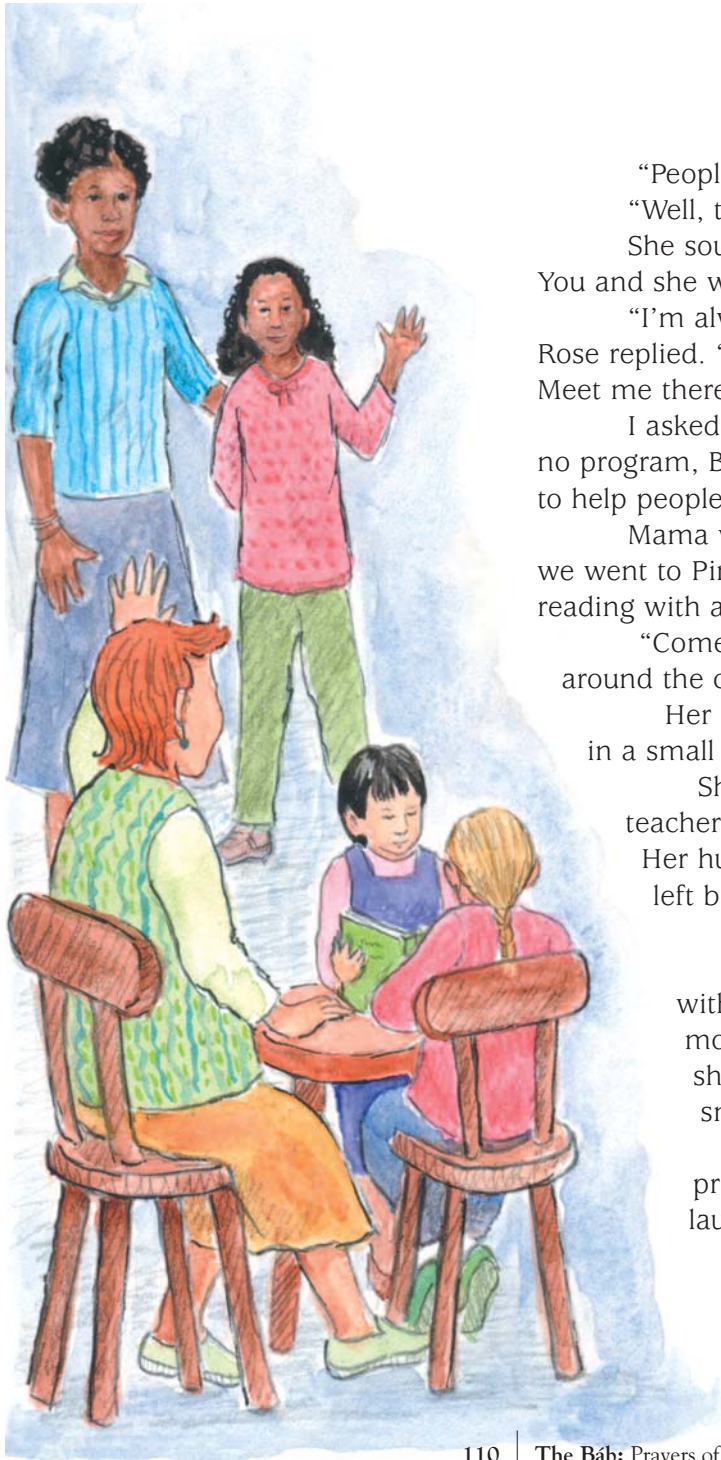
"Then, I come here," she continued. "The Convention Center brings people from all over the world. It's interesting. I talk to some of them—the ones that don't run!" She smiled. "I always ask them what they're meeting about."

"People pay big money to come to these meetings," she mused. "Why? What are they accomplishing? So, I ask them!"

"And what do you find out?" I asked.

"There's lots of meetings about helping people," Rose laughed. "They spend a zillion dollars talking about helping people."





“People talk too much,” I agreed. “Talk, talk, talk!”

“Well, talk is fine,” Rose replied. “But we need more deeds.” She sounded like Mama. “You’ve got to meet my mama! You and she will really get along.”

“I’m always in Pinkard Square on weekdays after 3:00 p.m.,” Rose replied. “I teach reading to the kids having trouble in school. Meet me there and we’ll go to my place.”

I asked her what literacy program she was with. “There’s no program, Beezer. I just help kids read. I don’t need a program to help people.”

Mama was excited to hear about Rose, and next Thursday, we went to Pinkard Square. We found Rose sitting at a table reading with a couple of kids.

“Come on,” she invited when she finished, “I live right around the corner.”

Her place was tiny, but neat and sunny. She put water in a small teakettle and turned on the stove.

She offered us tea and we visited. She had been a teacher until she and her family were in a terrible accident. Her husband and two small children died, and Rose was left badly scarred.

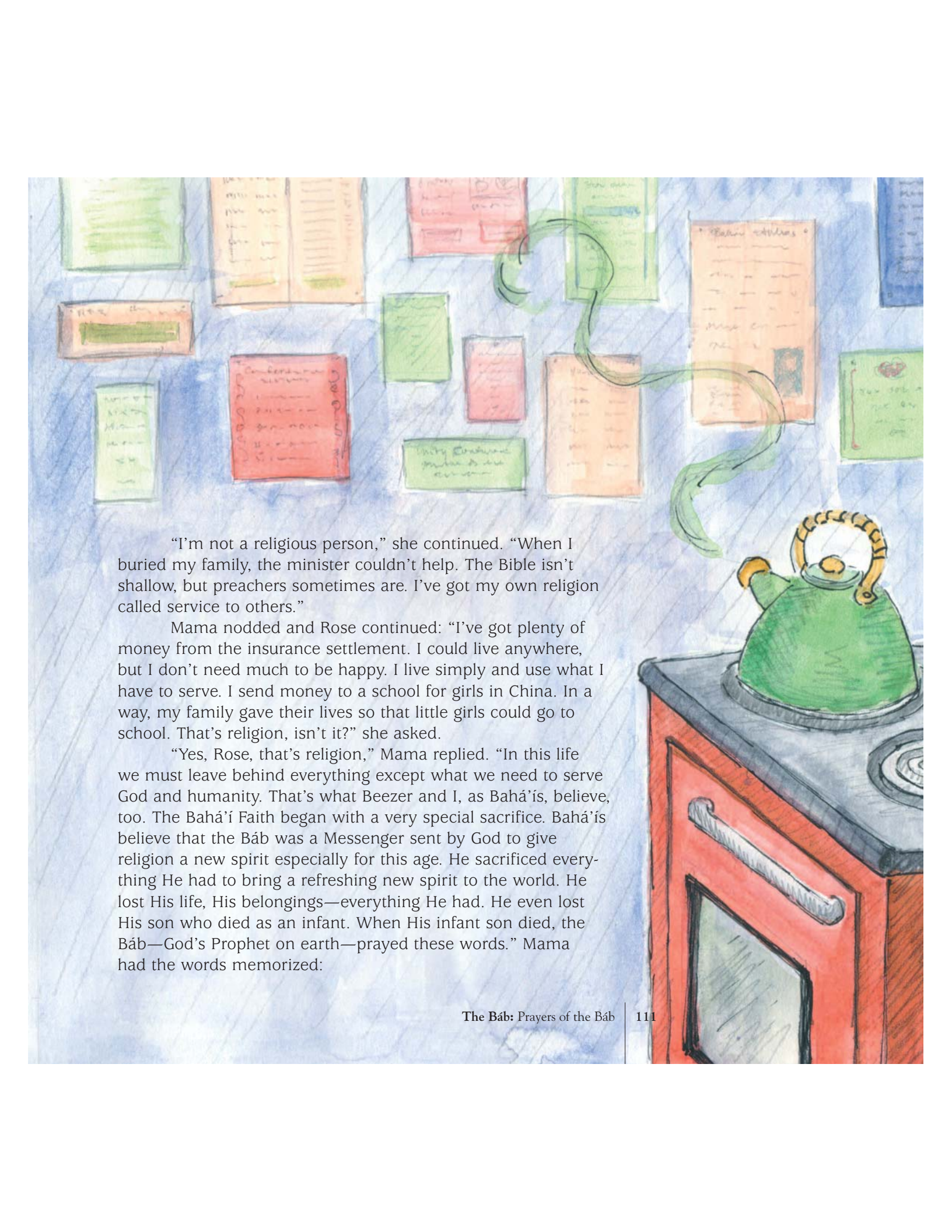
“My career ended,” she smiled, “but I still teach!”

Rose had a wall covered—almost like wallpaper—with colorful conference programs. “I collect the prettiest, most interesting programs from the Convention Center,” she explained. Even more surprising, however, was her small framed picture of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá!

She had framed photos from some conference programs. “I frame the most memorable photos,” she laughed, “because photos of people deserve respect.”

She knew a little about the Bahá’í Faith.

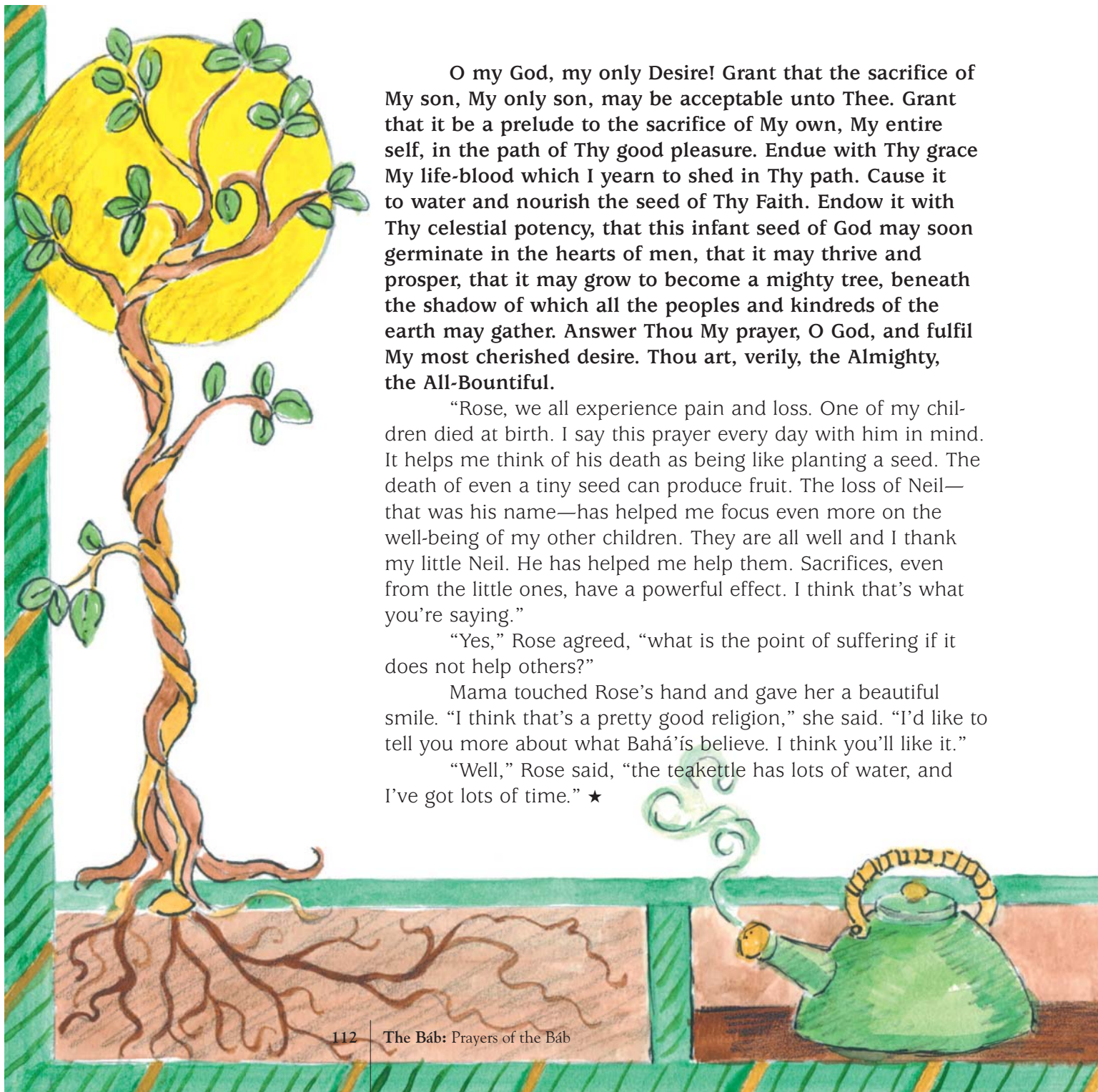
“Heavens, yes!” she said. “I’ve met some Bahá’ís attending conferences.”

A watercolor illustration of a kitchen wall. The wall is light blue and covered with numerous rectangular notes of various colors (green, orange, red, blue) with handwritten text. In the foreground, a green teapot with a yellow handle sits on a grey stove. The stove is on a red cabinet. The overall style is soft and artistic.

“I’m not a religious person,” she continued. “When I buried my family, the minister couldn’t help. The Bible isn’t shallow, but preachers sometimes are. I’ve got my own religion called service to others.”

Mama nodded and Rose continued: “I’ve got plenty of money from the insurance settlement. I could live anywhere, but I don’t need much to be happy. I live simply and use what I have to serve. I send money to a school for girls in China. In a way, my family gave their lives so that little girls could go to school. That’s religion, isn’t it?” she asked.

“Yes, Rose, that’s religion,” Mama replied. “In this life we must leave behind everything except what we need to serve God and humanity. That’s what Beezer and I, as Bahá’ís, believe, too. The Bahá’í Faith began with a very special sacrifice. Bahá’ís believe that the Báb was a Messenger sent by God to give religion a new spirit especially for this age. He sacrificed everything He had to bring a refreshing new spirit to the world. He lost His life, His belongings—everything He had. He even lost His son who died as an infant. When His infant son died, the Báb—God’s Prophet on earth—prayed these words.” Mama had the words memorized:



O my God, my only Desire! Grant that the sacrifice of My son, My only son, may be acceptable unto Thee. Grant that it be a prelude to the sacrifice of My own, My entire self, in the path of Thy good pleasure. Endue with Thy grace My life-blood which I yearn to shed in Thy path. Cause it to water and nourish the seed of Thy Faith. Endow it with Thy celestial potency, that this infant seed of God may soon germinate in the hearts of men, that it may thrive and prosper, that it may grow to become a mighty tree, beneath the shadow of which all the peoples and kindreds of the earth may gather. Answer Thou My prayer, O God, and fulfil My most cherished desire. Thou art, verily, the Almighty, the All-Bountiful.

“Rose, we all experience pain and loss. One of my children died at birth. I say this prayer every day with him in mind. It helps me think of his death as being like planting a seed. The death of even a tiny seed can produce fruit. The loss of Neil—that was his name—has helped me focus even more on the well-being of my other children. They are all well and I thank my little Neil. He has helped me help them. Sacrifices, even from the little ones, have a powerful effect. I think that’s what you’re saying.”

“Yes,” Rose agreed, “what is the point of suffering if it does not help others?”

Mama touched Rose’s hand and gave her a beautiful smile. “I think that’s a pretty good religion,” she said. “I’d like to tell you more about what Bahá’ís believe. I think you’ll like it.”

“Well,” Rose said, “the teakettle has lots of water, and I’ve got lots of time.” ★