

The following story is from the book

The Central Figures

The Báb

Volume One



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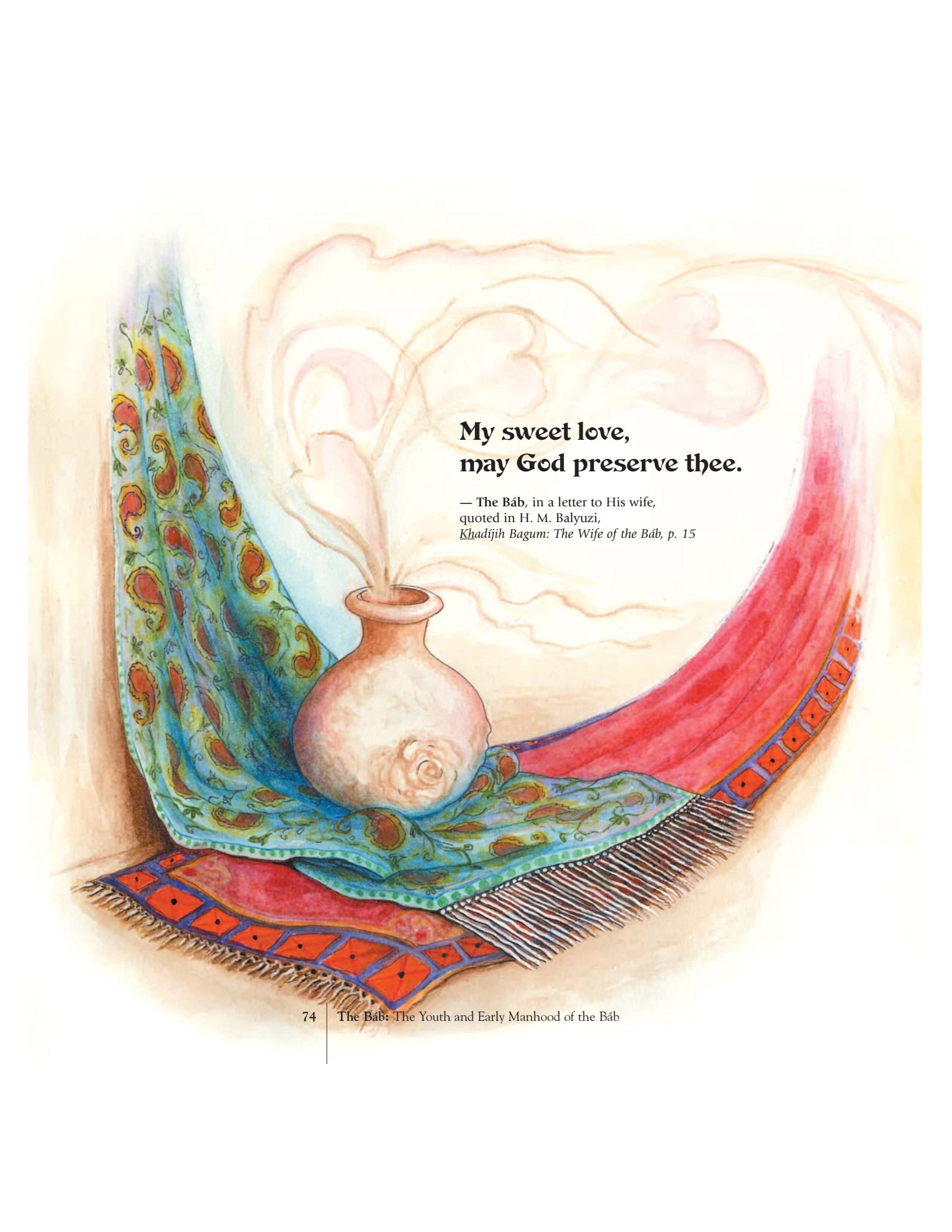
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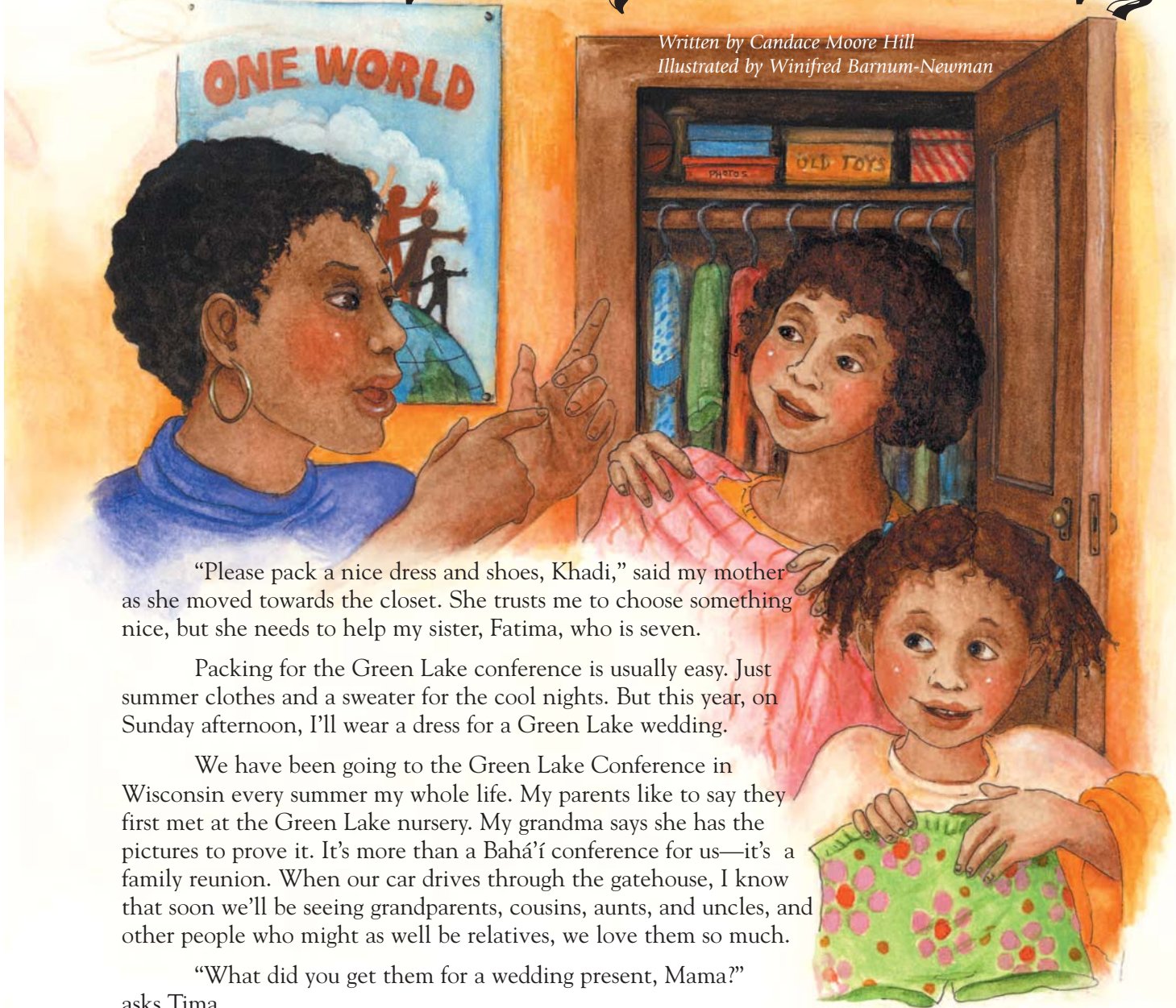
A watercolor illustration of a terracotta vase on a patterned cloth. The vase is light brown and has a small, stylized rose or floral design on its front. From the top of the vase, a plume of white smoke or steam rises, drifting upwards and to the right. The vase sits on a blue and green patterned cloth with a floral motif. This cloth is draped over a red and blue patterned rug with a fringe. The background is a soft, warm wash of yellow and orange, suggesting a bright, sunlit interior. The overall style is soft and painterly.

**My sweet love,
may God preserve thee.**

— The Báb, in a letter to His wife,
quoted in H. M. Balyuzi,
Khadījih Bagum: The Wife of the Báb, p. 15

Green Lake Wedding

Written by Candace Moore Hill
Illustrated by Winifred Barnum-Newman

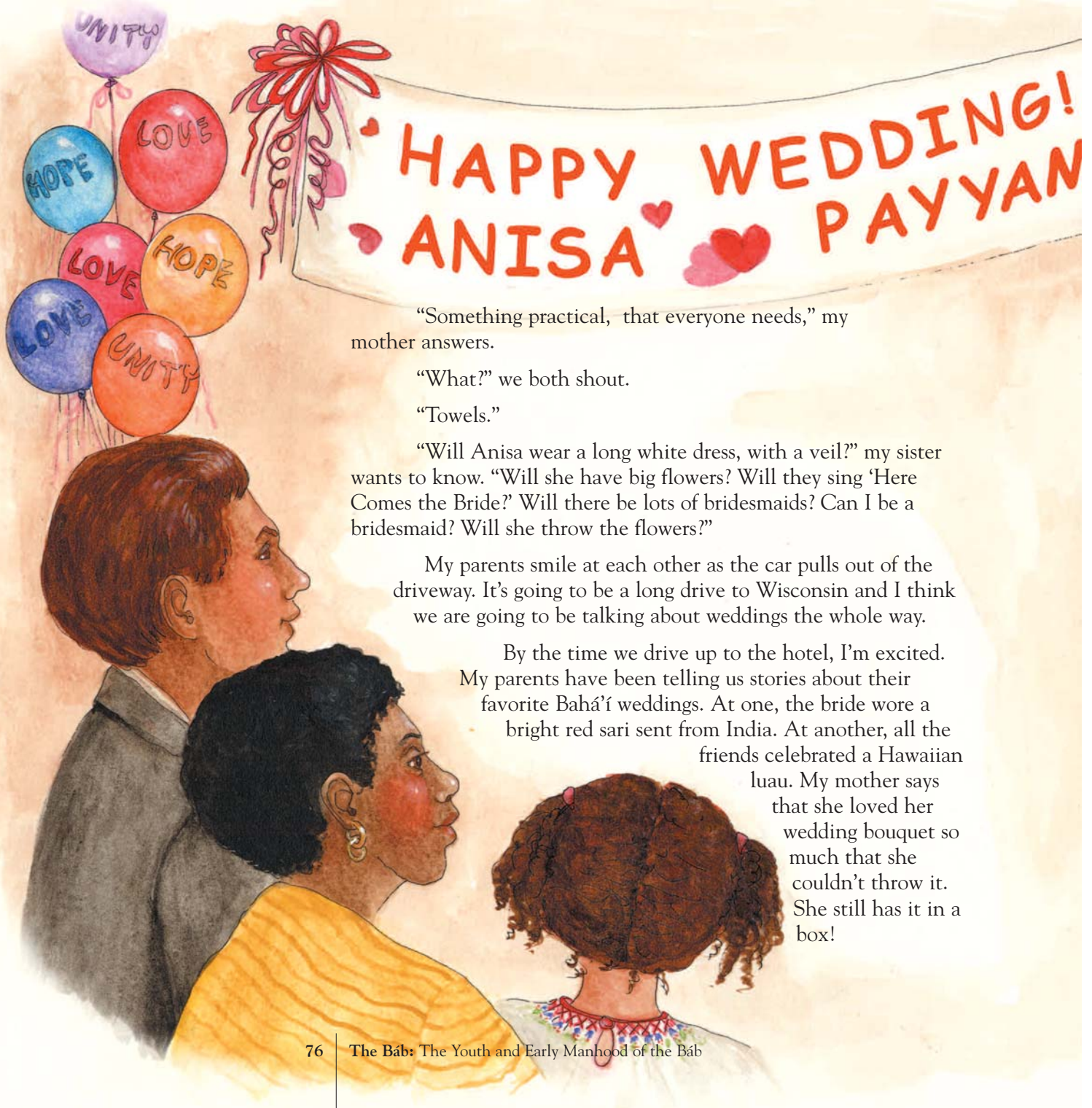


“Please pack a nice dress and shoes, Khadi,” said my mother as she moved towards the closet. She trusts me to choose something nice, but she needs to help my sister, Fatima, who is seven.

Packing for the Green Lake conference is usually easy. Just summer clothes and a sweater for the cool nights. But this year, on Sunday afternoon, I’ll wear a dress for a Green Lake wedding.

We have been going to the Green Lake Conference in Wisconsin every summer my whole life. My parents like to say they first met at the Green Lake nursery. My grandma says she has the pictures to prove it. It’s more than a Bahá’í conference for us—it’s a family reunion. When our car drives through the gatehouse, I know that soon we’ll be seeing grandparents, cousins, aunts, and uncles, and other people who might as well be relatives, we love them so much.

“What did you get them for a wedding present, Mama?” asks Tima.



“Something practical, that everyone needs,” my mother answers.


“What?” we both shout.

“Towels.”

“Will Anisa wear a long white dress, with a veil?” my sister wants to know. “Will she have big flowers? Will they sing ‘Here Comes the Bride?’ Will there be lots of bridesmaids? Can I be a bridesmaid? Will she throw the flowers?”

My parents smile at each other as the car pulls out of the driveway. It’s going to be a long drive to Wisconsin and I think we are going to be talking about weddings the whole way.

By the time we drive up to the hotel, I’m excited. My parents have been telling us stories about their favorite Bahá’í weddings. At one, the bride wore a bright red sari sent from India. At another, all the friends celebrated a Hawaiian luau. My mother says that she loved her wedding bouquet so much that she couldn’t throw it. She still has it in a box!

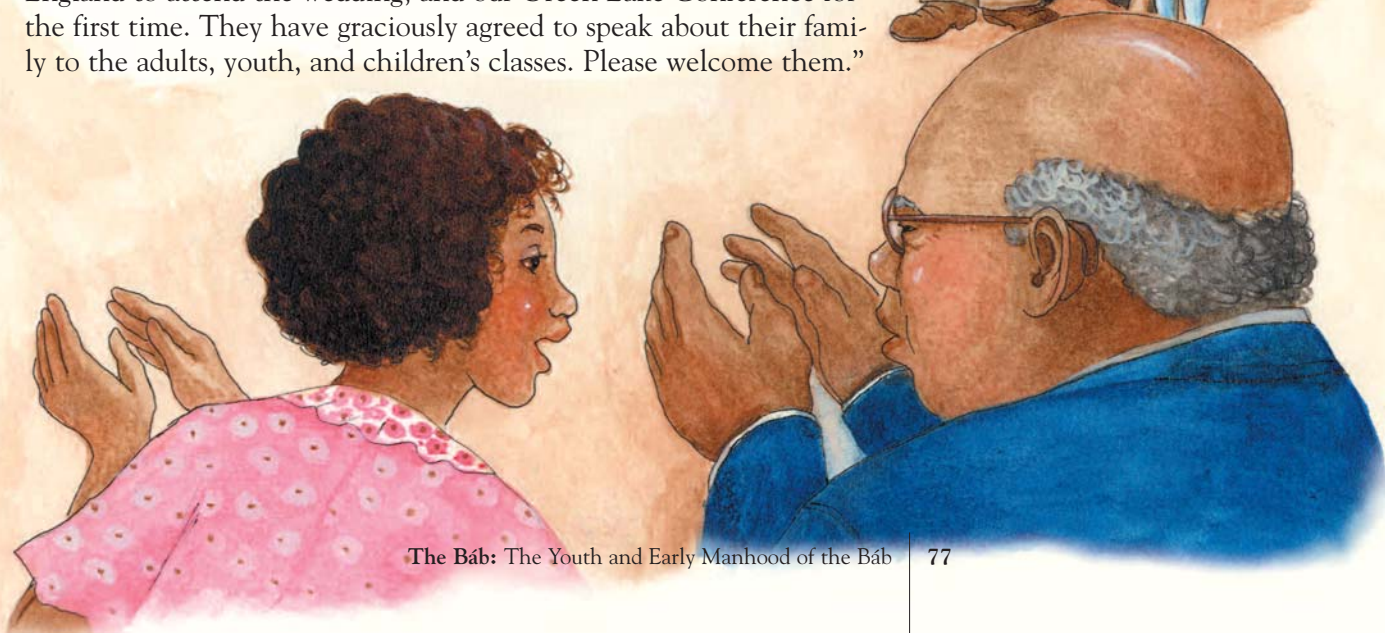


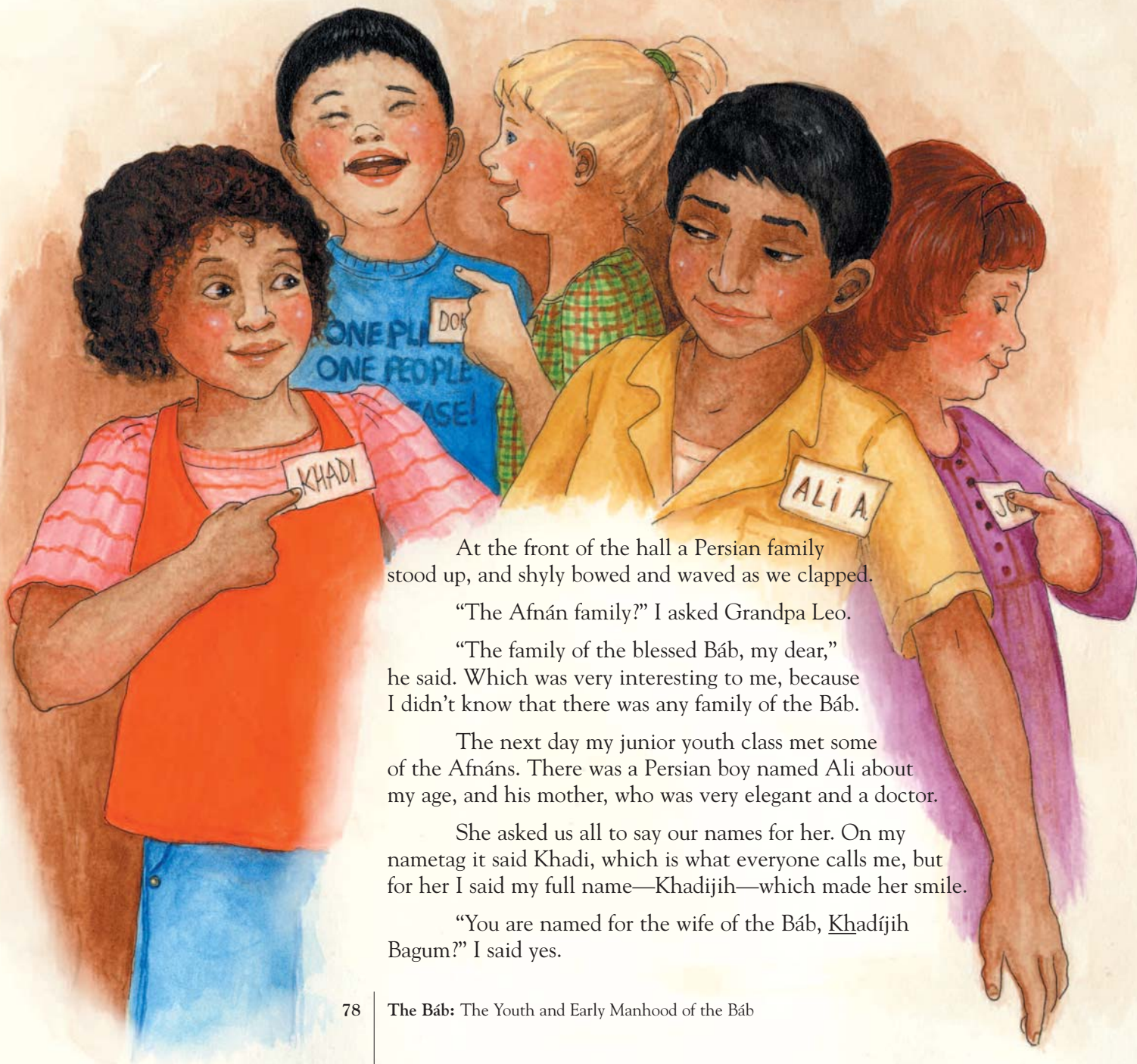
“Bahá’í weddings are really very simple,” Dad explained. “Once you have your parents’ consent and have arranged witnesses acceptable to your local Spiritual Assembly, all you must do is repeat the vow. The bride and groom can be as creative as they want. A Bahá’í wedding can be formal, with long dresses and such. Or it can be very simple. We had friends married near a duck pond at dawn.”

After dinner, we are off to the meeting hall. Tonight there will be singing, dancing, and visiting. But prayers come first. Then the welcomes and the introductions. I like sitting with my Grandpa Leo because he answers my questions.

“Welcome to Green Lake,” says the first speaker. “Some of you know that a special event has been planned for Sunday afternoon. Anisa Morse and Payyam Nagani have chosen this lovely spot in which to celebrate their wedding. Considering that our theme this year is marriage and family life, we are happy to celebrate with them.”

“What you may not know, is that Payyam’s family is related to the Afnán family. Some of the Afnán family have come from England to attend the wedding, and our Green Lake Conference for the first time. They have graciously agreed to speak about their family to the adults, youth, and children’s classes. Please welcome them.”





At the front of the hall a Persian family stood up, and shyly bowed and waved as we clapped.

“The Afnáns family?” I asked Grandpa Leo.

“The family of the blessed Báb, my dear,” he said. Which was very interesting to me, because I didn’t know that there was any family of the Báb.

The next day my junior youth class met some of the Afnáns. There was a Persian boy named Ali about my age, and his mother, who was very elegant and a doctor.

She asked us all to say our names for her. On my nametag it said Khadi, which is what everyone calls me, but for her I said my full name—Khadijih—which made her smile.

“You are named for the wife of the Báb, Khadijih Bagum?” I said yes.

“It is her family that are the Afnán, the relatives of the Báb’s mother. We were called so by Bahá’u’lláh, and many members of the family use that name. You are to study marriage this weekend?” Our teacher nodded.

“Would you like for me to tell you about Khadíjih Bagum and her marriage to the Báb?” she asked. Of course, we said. Who doesn’t like wedding stories?

“First you should know that the Báb’s father died when He was a little boy. It was His mother’s brother who helped raise Him. The Báb’s mother—her name was Fátimih-Bagum—was a dear woman from a large family. In fact, the family lived right next door, which was nice for her because women were expected to stay at home.

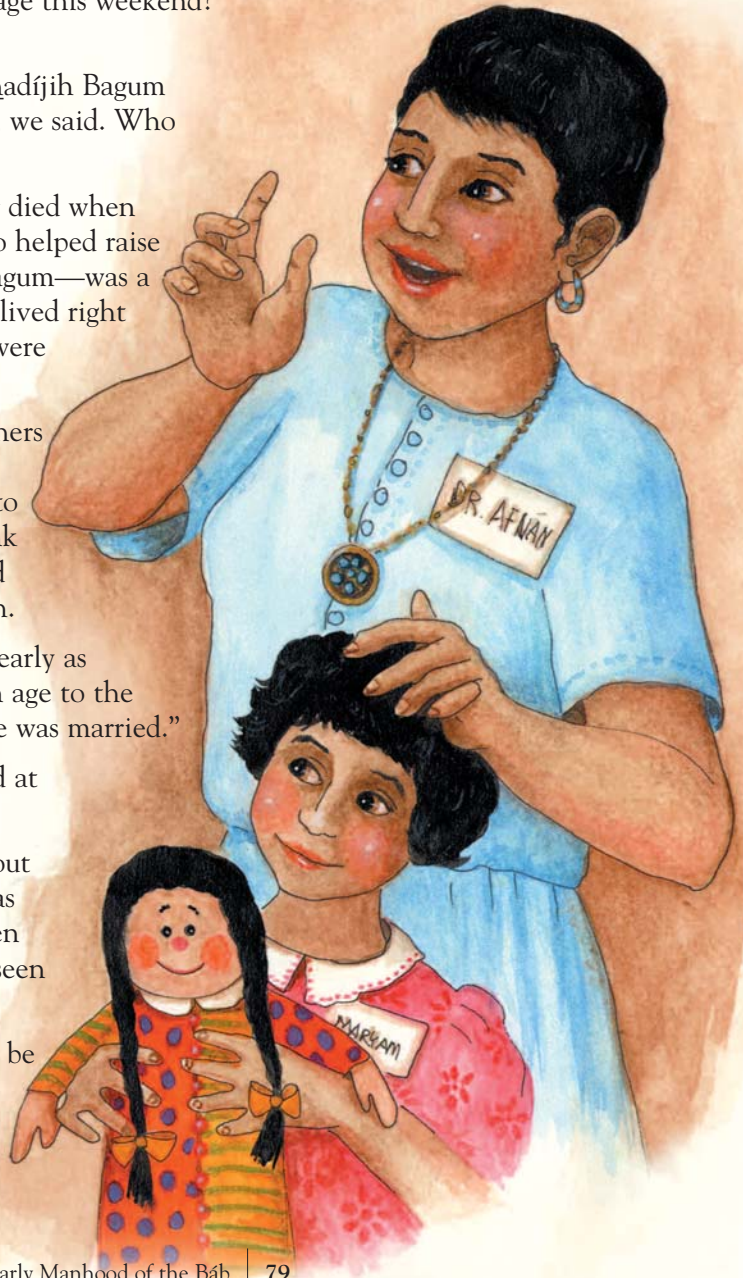
“As children, Khadíjih Bagum and her brothers and sisters played with the Báb, then called ‘Ali-Muḥammad. They were all cousins. He didn’t like to play games very much. He liked to pray and to think quietly. But when He did play, He was fun and kind and cheerful. Khadíjih Bagum liked Him very much.

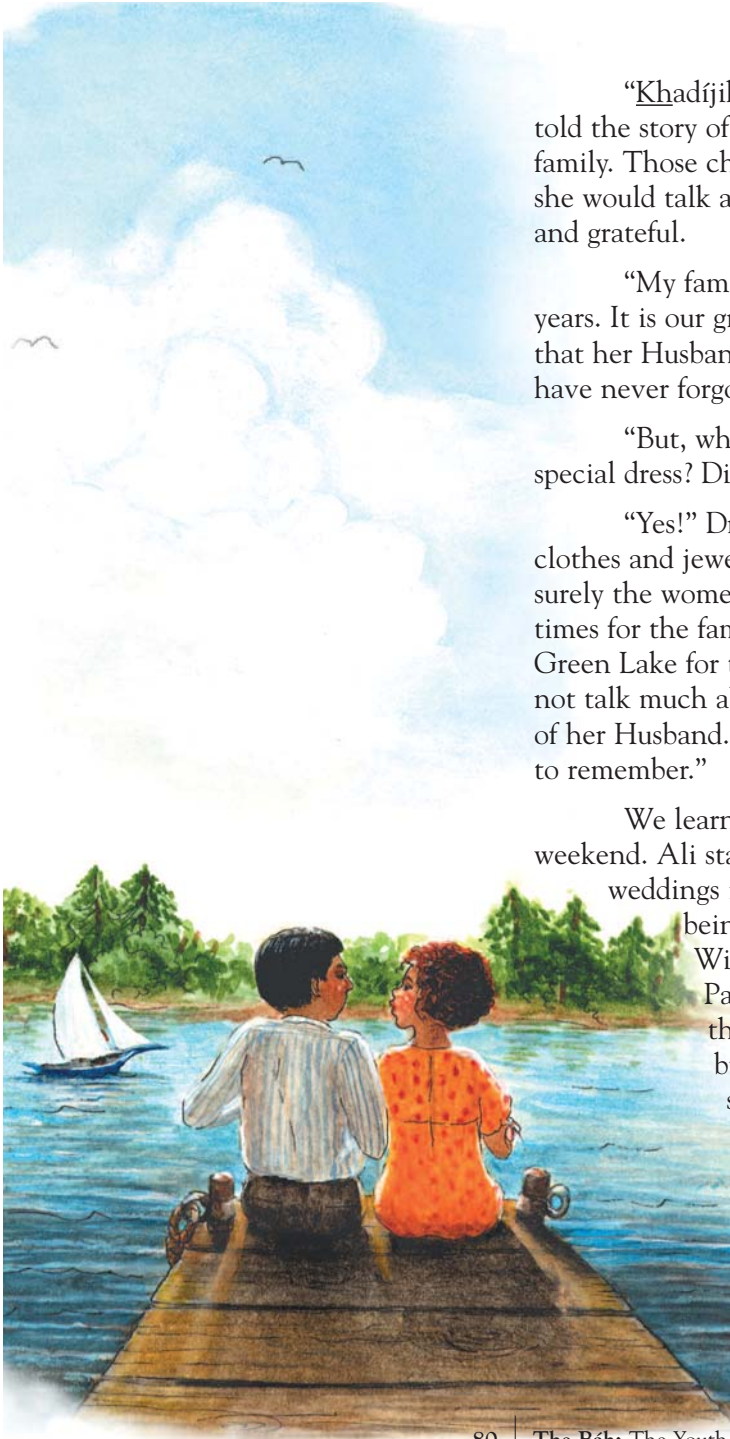
“In those days, girls were married young, as early as 15 or 16, but not Khadíjih Bagum. She was close in age to the blessed Báb, and it was not until He was 23 that He was married.”

Dr. Afnán stopped for a moment and looked at us—then she asked a question.

“How do you think Khadíjih Bagum felt about having her marriage arranged to her Cousin? He was already working in His uncle’s business. He had been traveling and living in another city. They had not seen each other for long time.”

We didn’t know what to say. What would it be like to be told whom you were going to marry? To have all your plans made for you? To not be able to choose your own husband or wife?





“Khadjjih Bagum lived to be a very old woman. She often told the story of her wedding and marriage to the children in her family. Those children always remembered how her eyes shone when she would talk about her beloved Husband. She was elated and proud and grateful.

“My family has told the story of Khadjjih Bagum for 150 years. It is our great honor. She was the very first person to know that her Husband was a Prophet of God. She was our treasure and we have never forgotten her life of love and sacrifice.”

“But, what about the wedding?” I asked. “Did she wear a special dress? Did she have flowers?”

“Yes!” Dr. Afnán smiled. “She had all those things, pretty clothes and jewelry. There were wedding feasts and prayers, and surely the women sang and danced together. Persian weddings are times for the family to come together. Just as we have come to Green Lake for the wedding of our cousin. But Khadjjih Bagum did not talk much about her wedding. She talked about the kindness of her Husband. They loved each other. And that is what we like to remember.”

We learned quite a lot about love and marriage that weekend. Ali stayed with our class. He told us stories about Persian weddings in England. I told about my mother and father being married at the Bahá’í House of Worship in Wilmette. Two days later we were watching Anisa and Payyam say their wedding vows. Everyone was there on the lawn by the lake. Anisa wore a pretty white dress, but it wasn’t long. Payyam looked very handsome in a suit. There were flowers and music, and real Persian dancing. My mother cried. So did Dr. Afnán.

Ali and I took our cake and walked together to sit at the end of the boat dock. We talked. And laughed. We exchanged addresses that day. I wonder when we will see each other again. . . . ★