

The following story is from the book

The Central Figures

The Báb

Volume One



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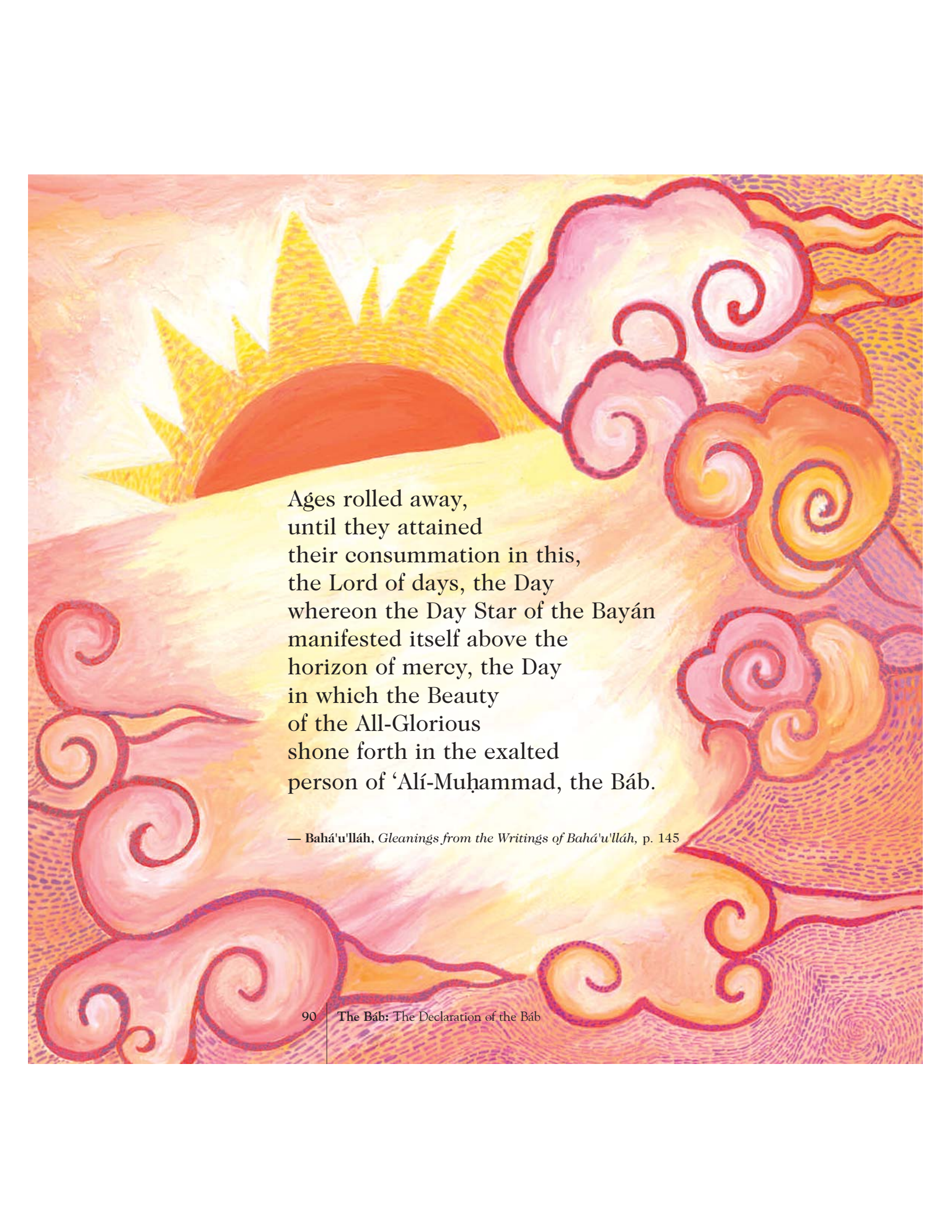
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Ages rolled away,
until they attained
their consummation in this,
the Lord of days, the Day
whereon the Day Star of the Bayán
manifested itself above the
horizon of mercy, the Day
in which the Beauty
of the All-Glorious
shone forth in the exalted
person of ‘Alí-Muḥammad, the Báb.

— Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 145

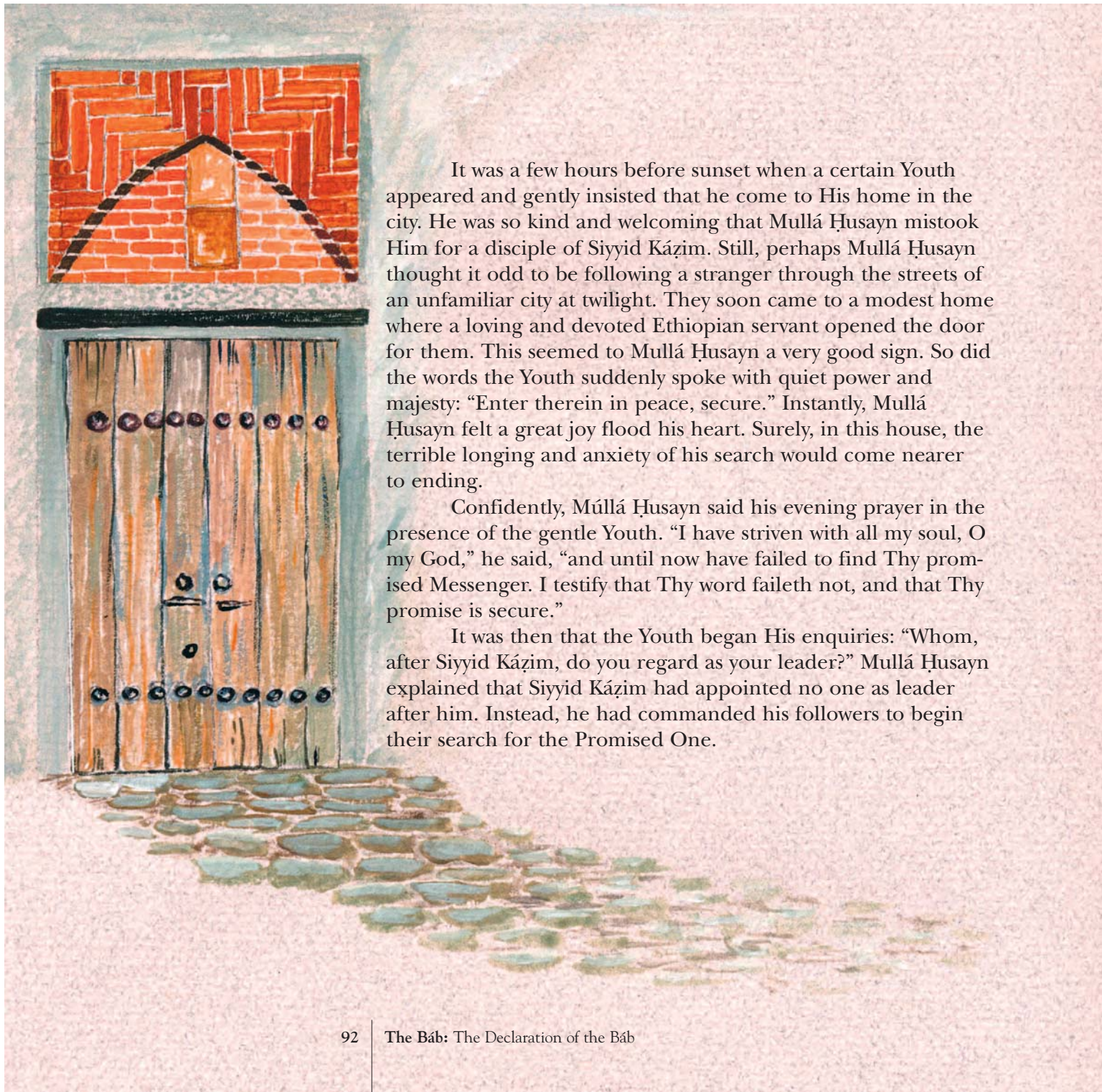


The First Believer

*Written by Jean Gould
Illustrated by Jaci Ayorinde*

Mullá Ḥusayn was in Shíráz. Months earlier, his search for the Promised One had led him to Búshíhr on the Persian Gulf. He was certain that city had felt the footsteps of his Beloved. But something had led him irresistibly north, like a magnet, to Shíráz. On this day—May 22, 1844—he found himself walking among the city dwellers outside the gates. They had come to enjoy the fresh evening air and the natural views.

Mullá Ḥusayn, however, was restless and waiting and strangely alert. “Something draws my heart into the city,” he said to his two companions. He instructed them to go to the prayer house, the Masjid-i-Ílkhání, and wait for him.



It was a few hours before sunset when a certain Youth appeared and gently insisted that he come to His home in the city. He was so kind and welcoming that Mullá Ḥusayn mistook Him for a disciple of Siyyid Kázim. Still, perhaps Mullá Ḥusayn thought it odd to be following a stranger through the streets of an unfamiliar city at twilight. They soon came to a modest home where a loving and devoted Ethiopian servant opened the door for them. This seemed to Mullá Ḥusayn a very good sign. So did the words the Youth suddenly spoke with quiet power and majesty: “Enter therein in peace, secure.” Instantly, Mullá Ḥusayn felt a great joy flood his heart. Surely, in this house, the terrible longing and anxiety of his search would come nearer to ending.

Confidently, Múllá Ḥusayn said his evening prayer in the presence of the gentle Youth. “I have striven with all my soul, O my God,” he said, “and until now have failed to find Thy promised Messenger. I testify that Thy word faileth not, and that Thy promise is secure.”

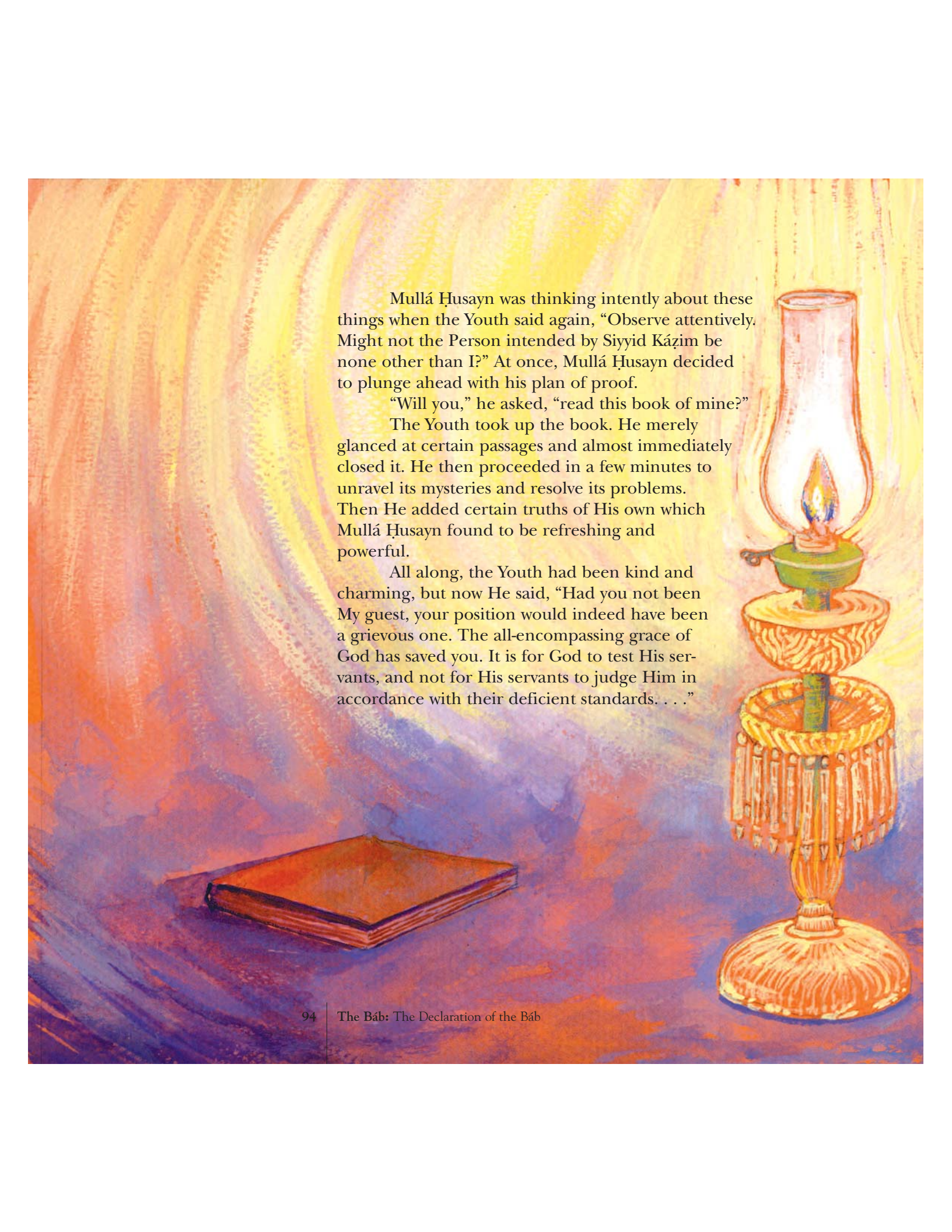
It was then that the Youth began His enquiries: “Whom, after Siyyid Kázim, do you regard as your leader?” Mullá Ḥusayn explained that Siyyid Kázim had appointed no one as leader after him. Instead, he had commanded his followers to begin their search for the Promised One.

“Has your teacher given you any detailed indications as to the distinguishing features of the Promised One?” Mullá Ḥusayn replied that He was of pure lineage and descended from Fáṭimih, the daughter of Muḥammad. He was more than 20 and less than 30. His knowledge was innate, not learned. Furthermore, He was of medium height and free from bodily deficiency.

There was a pause. Suddenly, vibrantly, the Youth spoke: “Behold, all these signs are manifest in Me!”

Mullá Ḥusayn was amazed. He had thought to get nearer to the goal of his quest in this house, not to actually find it. Politely he said, “He whose advent we await is a Man of unsurpassed holiness, and the Cause He is to reveal, a Cause of tremendous power. . . .”

Instantly, Mullá Ḥusayn was seized by fear and guilt, which he could neither hide nor explain away. He could, though, soften his tone and open his heart. The solution to his problem was simple. He had two standards with which to discover the truth of the Promised One. One he had written himself. It was a document concerning some of the hidden teachings of Siyyid Kázim. The other was a request to comment on the Súrih of Joseph, a chapter from the Qur’án about a story from the Bible. This commentary must be delivered without hesitation or thought. Mullá Ḥusayn had already asked Siyyid Kázim to do this, but he had refused. “This is, verily, beyond me,” he said. “He, that great One, who comes after me will, unasked, reveal it for you. . . .”

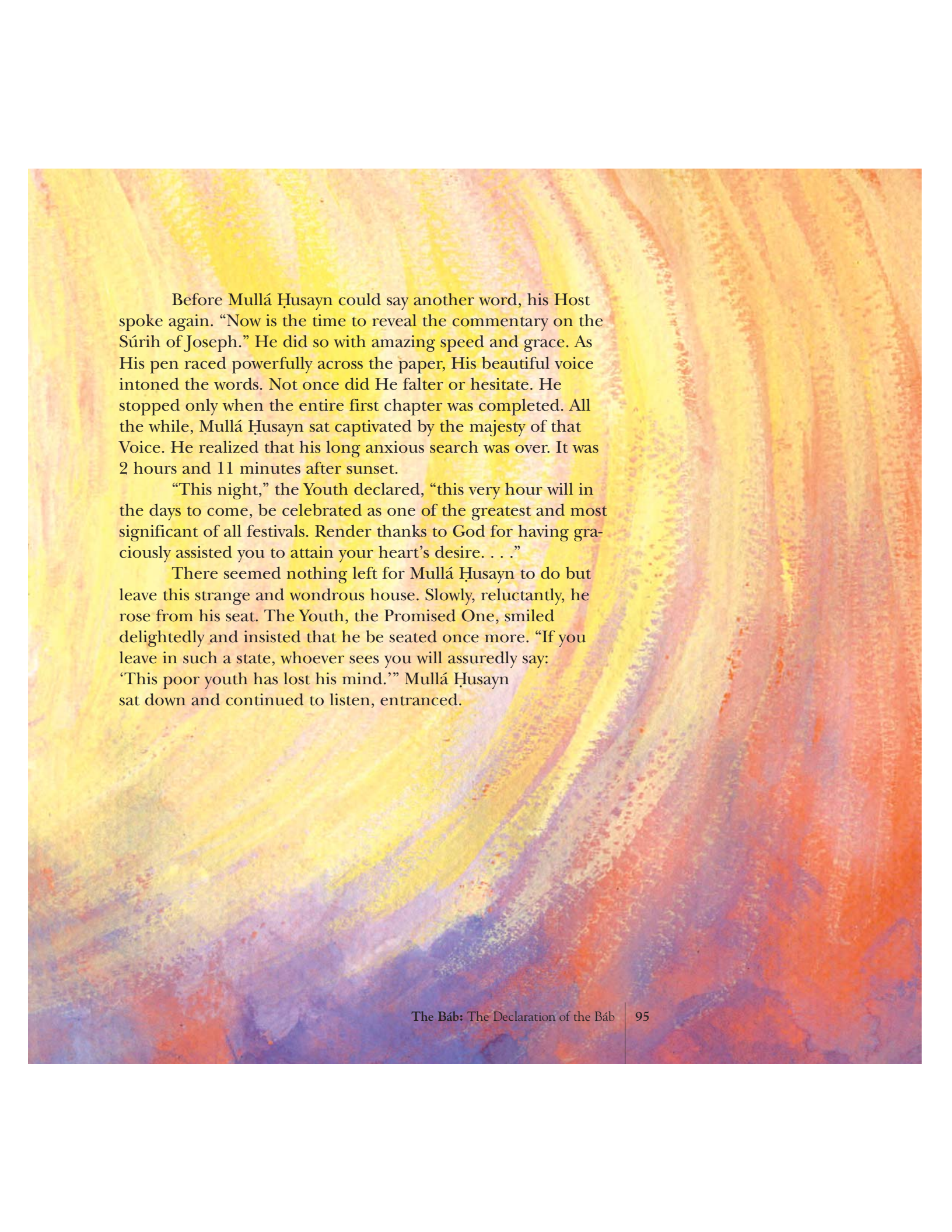


Mullá Ḥusayn was thinking intently about these things when the Youth said again, “Observe attentively. Might not the Person intended by Siyyid Kázim be none other than I?” At once, Mullá Ḥusayn decided to plunge ahead with his plan of proof.

“Will you,” he asked, “read this book of mine?”

The Youth took up the book. He merely glanced at certain passages and almost immediately closed it. He then proceeded in a few minutes to unravel its mysteries and resolve its problems. Then He added certain truths of His own which Mullá Ḥusayn found to be refreshing and powerful.


All along, the Youth had been kind and charming, but now He said, “Had you not been My guest, your position would indeed have been a grievous one. The all-encompassing grace of God has saved you. It is for God to test His servants, and not for His servants to judge Him in accordance with their deficient standards. . . .”



Before Mullá Ḥusayn could say another word, his Host spoke again. “Now is the time to reveal the commentary on the Súrih of Joseph.” He did so with amazing speed and grace. As His pen raced powerfully across the paper, His beautiful voice intoned the words. Not once did He falter or hesitate. He stopped only when the entire first chapter was completed. All the while, Mullá Ḥusayn sat captivated by the majesty of that Voice. He realized that his long anxious search was over. It was 2 hours and 11 minutes after sunset.

“This night,” the Youth declared, “this very hour will in the days to come, be celebrated as one of the greatest and most significant of all festivals. Render thanks to God for having graciously assisted you to attain your heart’s desire. . . .”

There seemed nothing left for Mullá Ḥusayn to do but leave this strange and wondrous house. Slowly, reluctantly, he rose from his seat. The Youth, the Promised One, smiled delightedly and insisted that he be seated once more. “If you leave in such a state, whoever sees you will assuredly say: ‘This poor youth has lost his mind.’” Mullá Ḥusayn sat down and continued to listen, entranced.



They talked long into the night. The voice of the Promised One rose and fell as He chanted. He ended all His verses with “. . . And praise be to God, the Lord of all beings.”

At dawn, they heard the call of the muezzin, the one who calls the faithful to prayer. Mullá Ḥusayn felt as if he were awakening. Once more, he rose to go. It was then that the Promised One revealed His true name: “O thou who art the first to believe in Me! Verily, I say, I am the Báb, the Gate of God, and thou art the Bábu’l-Báb, the gate of that Gate.”

The Báb warned Mullá Ḥusayn not to reveal the secret of His Faith and His station as the Promised One just yet. “Eighteen souls,” He said, “must, in the beginning, spontaneously and of their own accord, accept Me and recognize the truth of My Revelation. Unwarned and uninvited, each of these must seek independently to find me.” Then He committed him to the care of God.

Quietly, in the early light, Mullá Ḥusayn left that amazing house. Carrying his secret close to his heart, he at last returned to his companions. ★