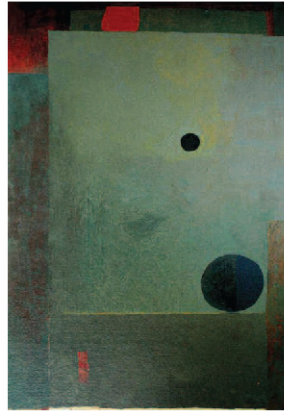


The following story is from the book

The Central Figures
The Báb
Volume Two



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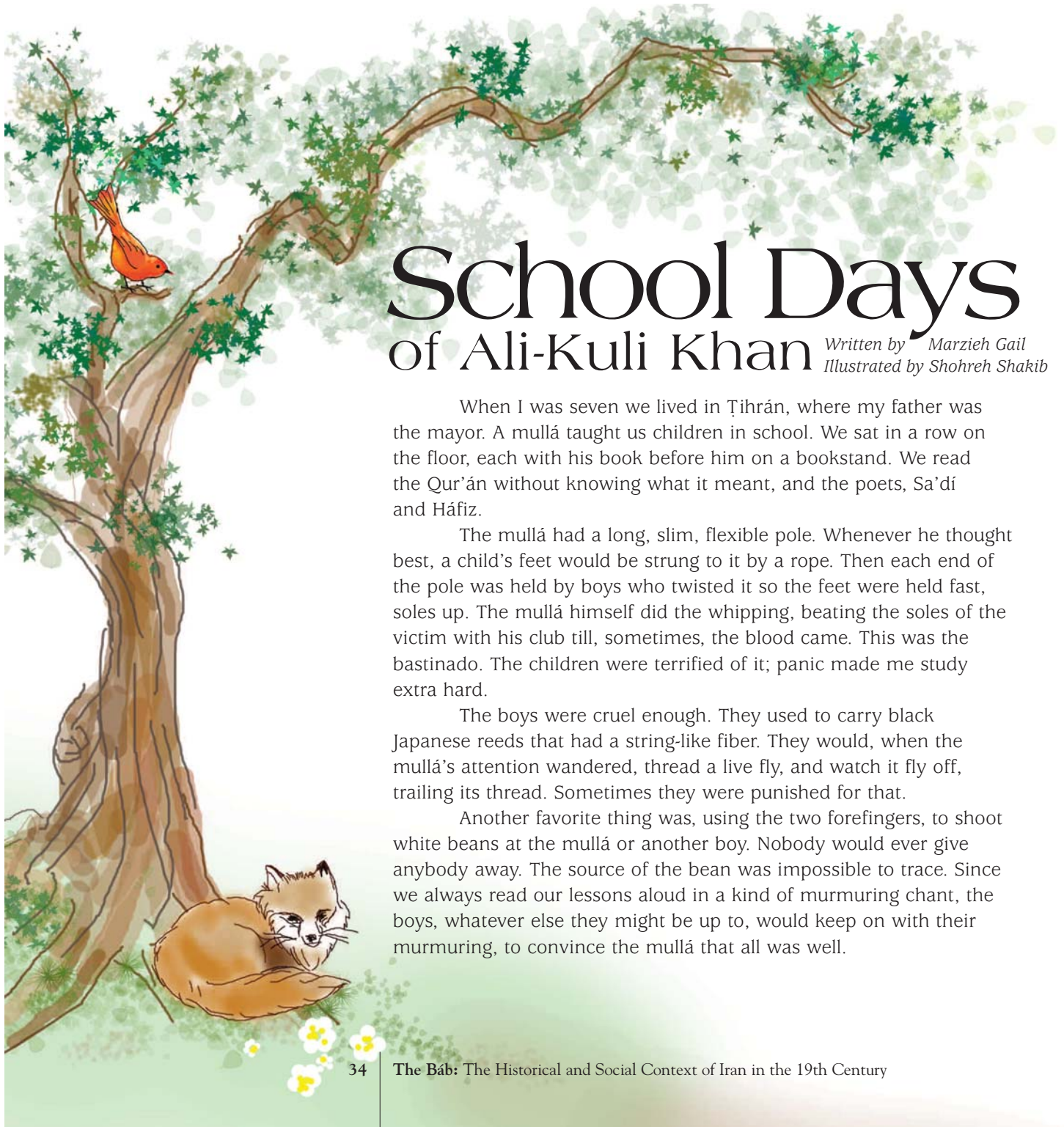
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School Days of Ali-Kuli Khan

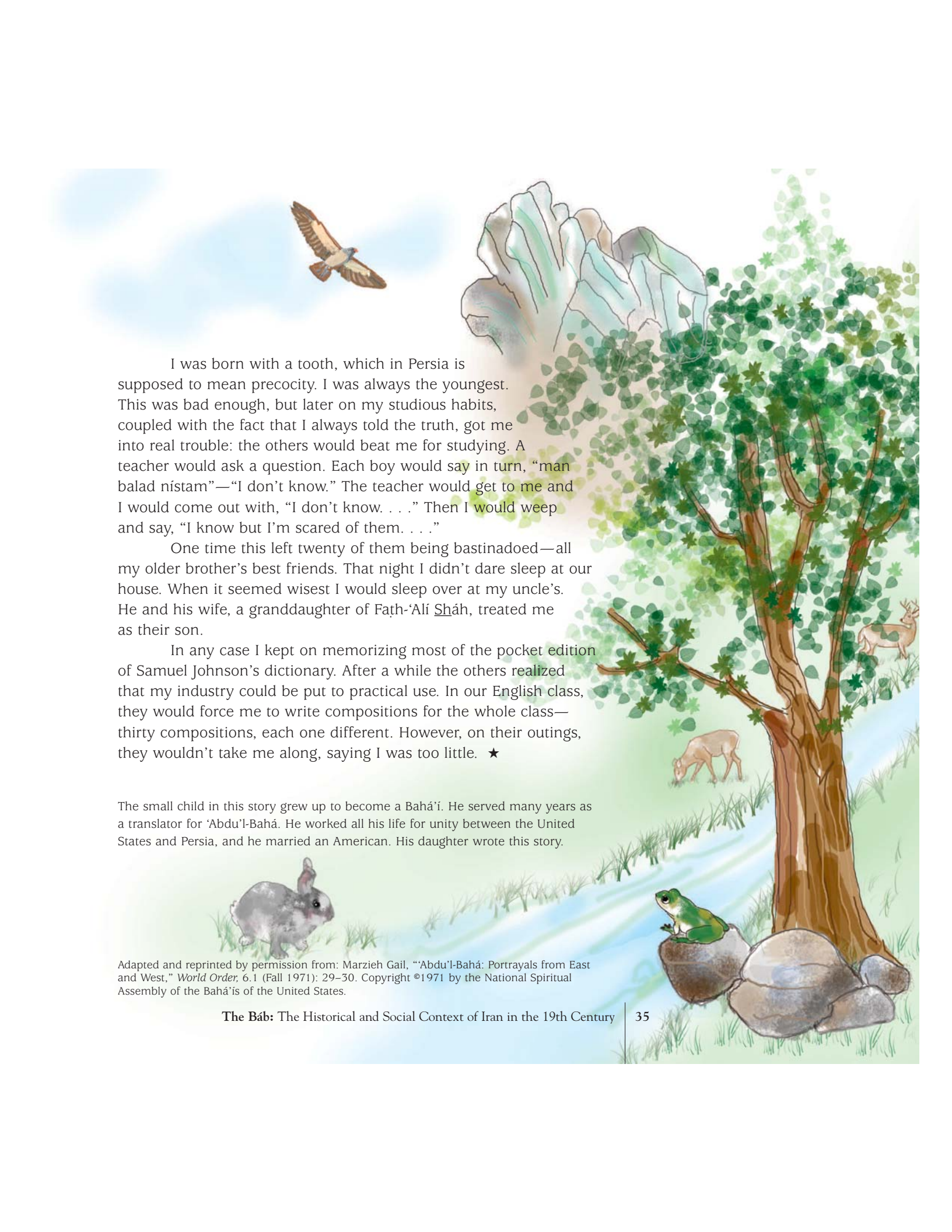
Written by *Marzieh Gail*
Illustrated by *Shohreh Shakib*

When I was seven we lived in Tīhrán, where my father was the mayor. A mullá taught us children in school. We sat in a row on the floor, each with his book before him on a bookstand. We read the Qur'án without knowing what it meant, and the poets, Sa'dí and Háfiz.

The mullá had a long, slim, flexible pole. Whenever he thought best, a child's feet would be strung to it by a rope. Then each end of the pole was held by boys who twisted it so the feet were held fast, soles up. The mullá himself did the whipping, beating the soles of the victim with his club till, sometimes, the blood came. This was the *bastinado*. The children were terrified of it; panic made me study extra hard.

The boys were cruel enough. They used to carry black Japanese reeds that had a string-like fiber. They would, when the mullá's attention wandered, thread a live fly, and watch it fly off, trailing its thread. Sometimes they were punished for that.

Another favorite thing was, using the two forefingers, to shoot white beans at the mullá or another boy. Nobody would ever give anybody away. The source of the bean was impossible to trace. Since we always read our lessons aloud in a kind of murmuring chant, the boys, whatever else they might be up to, would keep on with their murmuring, to convince the mullá that all was well.



I was born with a tooth, which in Persia is supposed to mean precocity. I was always the youngest. This was bad enough, but later on my studious habits, coupled with the fact that I always told the truth, got me into real trouble: the others would beat me for studying. A teacher would ask a question. Each boy would say in turn, “man balad nístam”—“I don’t know.” The teacher would get to me and I would come out with, “I don’t know. . . .” Then I would weep and say, “I know but I’m scared of them. . . .”

One time this left twenty of them being bastinadoed—all my older brother’s best friends. That night I didn’t dare sleep at our house. When it seemed wisest I would sleep over at my uncle’s. He and his wife, a granddaughter of Faṭh-‘Alí Sháh, treated me as their son.

In any case I kept on memorizing most of the pocket edition of Samuel Johnson’s dictionary. After a while the others realized that my industry could be put to practical use. In our English class, they would force me to write compositions for the whole class—thirty compositions, each one different. However, on their outings, they wouldn’t take me along, saying I was too little. ★

The small child in this story grew up to become a Bahá’í. He served many years as a translator for ‘Abdu’l-Bahá. He worked all his life for unity between the United States and Persia, and he married an American. His daughter wrote this story.

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