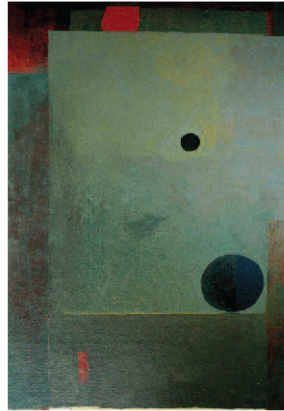


The following story is from the book

The Central Figures
The Báb
Volume Two



These stories are lovingly provided to download as a convenience to teachers or communities otherwise unable to acquire the book. Each book in this storybook series also includes an appendix with questions for discussion and reflection, a glossary of words and phrases used in the stories, a bibliography, and an index.

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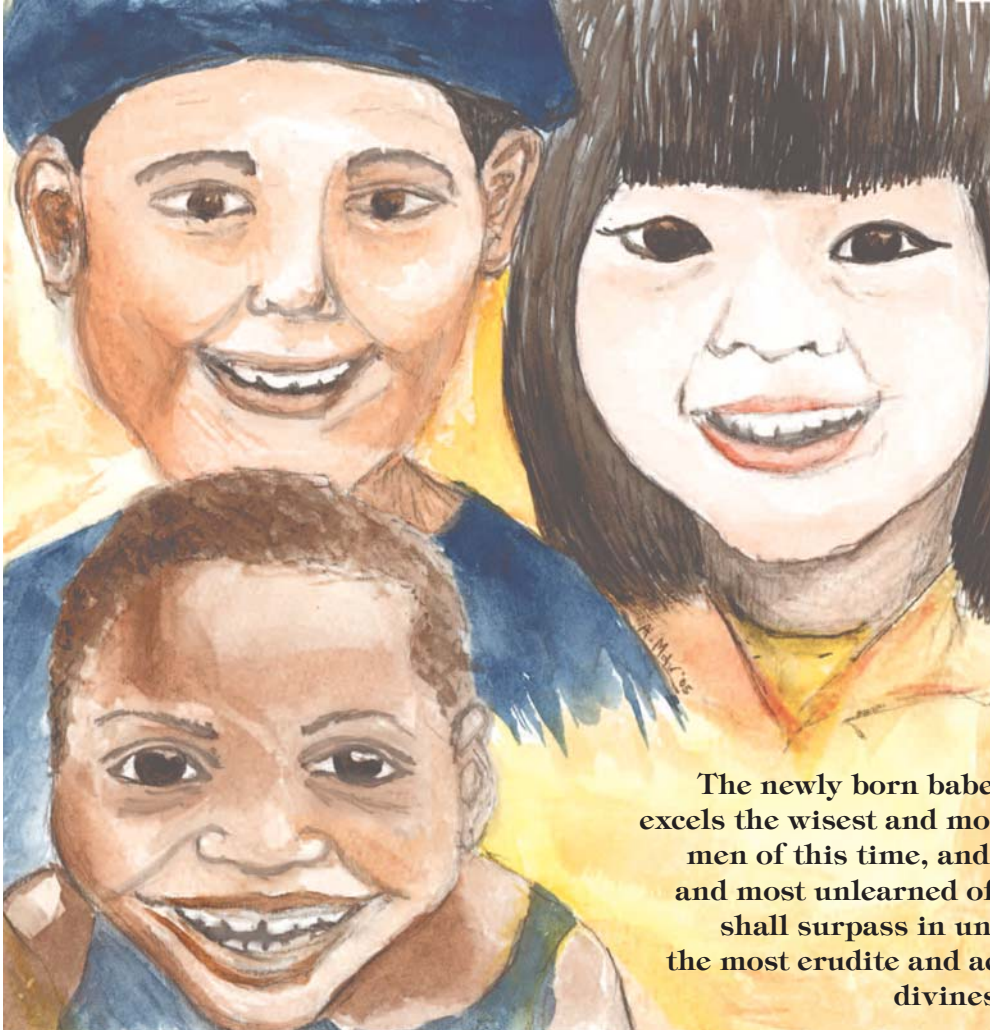
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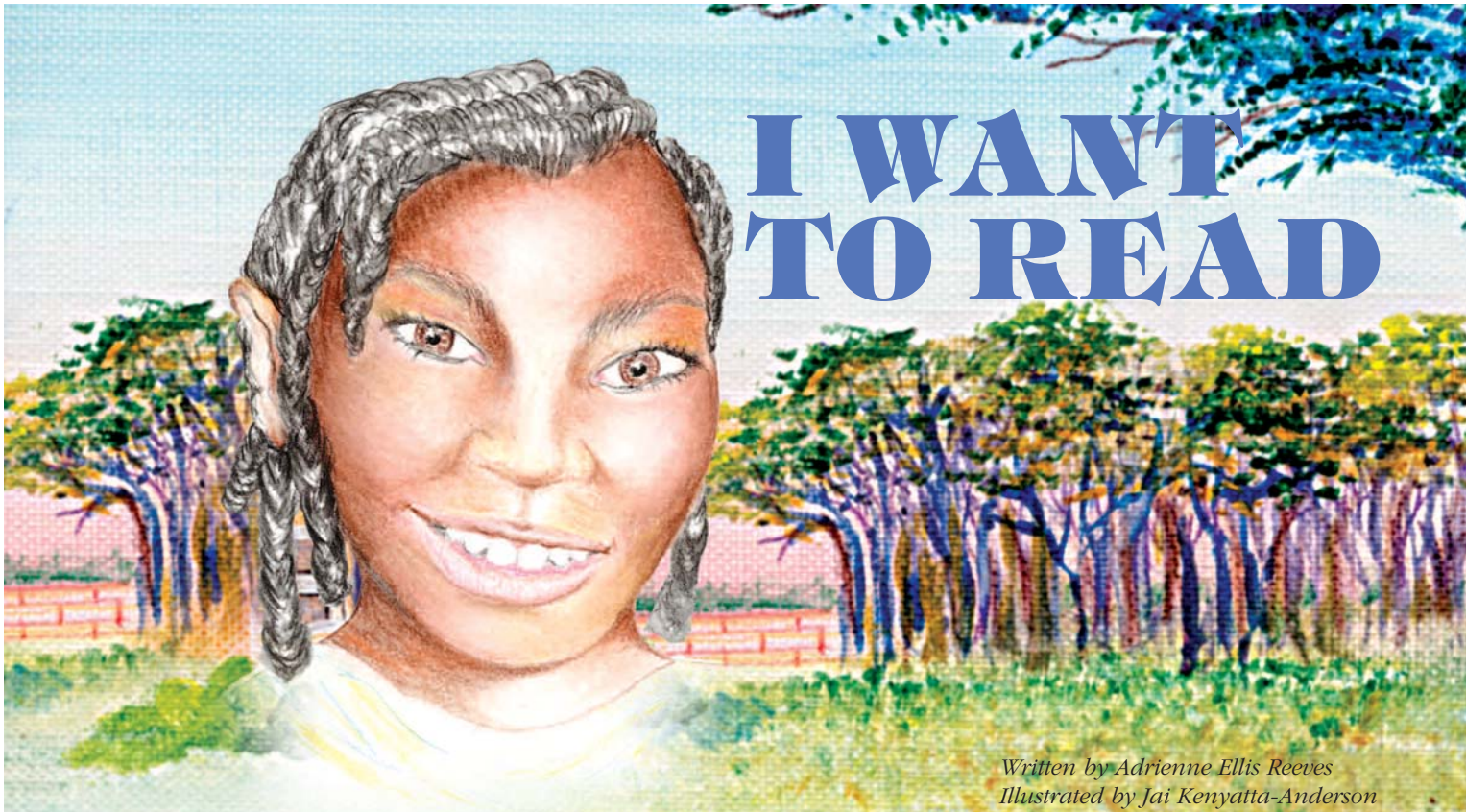

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The newly born babe of that Day
excels the wisest and most venerable
men of this time, and the lowliest
and most unlearned of that period
shall surpass in understanding
the most erudite and accomplished
divines of this age.

Illustrated by Anna Mohr

— **The Báb**, quoted in
The Dawn-Breakers, p. 93



I WANT TO READ

“Sudie! Come to the kitchen.”

Sudie ran from around the front of the house into the kitchen.

“Teacher just rode up, Mama.” The wide eyes in her dark brown face sparkled with excitement.

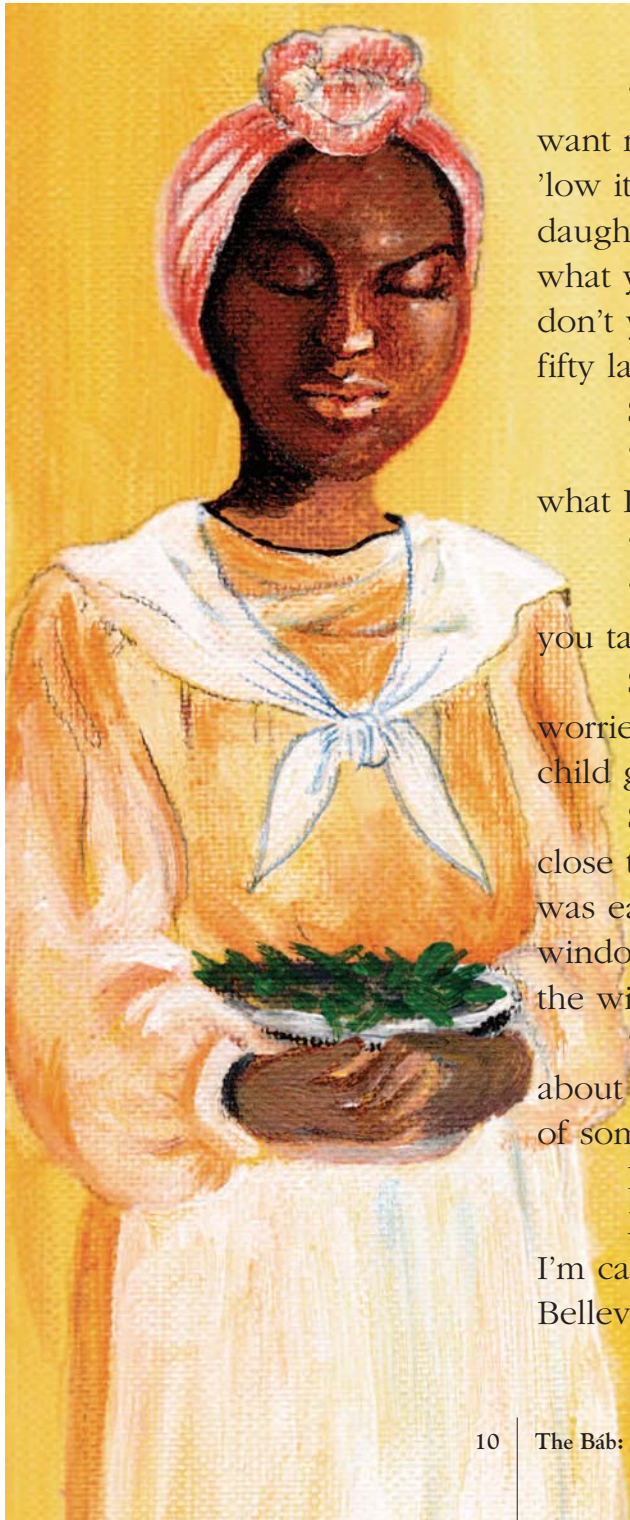
“It’s time for Little Missy’s lesson, so she won’t be wanting you for an hour. I need you to snap these beans for me.”

“Mama, why can’t I hear what Teacher tells Missy? We’re both ten, and I want to know what’s in those books just like she does.”

*Written by Adrienne Ellis Reeves
Illustrated by Jai Kenyatta-Anderson*

When the Báb appeared to the people of Persia, the practice of slavery was still taking place in the southern states of America. The Báb’s Message about the dawn of a new age and the oneness of humanity was a Message of freedom for all: *O Lord! Thou art the Remover of every anguish and the Dispeller of every affliction. Thou art He Who banisheth every sorrow and setteth free every slave, the Redeemer of every soul!*¹ In this story a 10-year-old girl with an independent mind is willing to suffer for her vision of what a new age means.

¹The Báb, *Selections from the Writings of the Báb*, p. 193



“Sudie, I’ve told you over and over, Master don’t want none of his slaves to read or write. He just won’t ’low it.” She bent down so she could look at her daughter eye to eye. “Honey, your daddy and I know what you want, and we wish you could have it. But don’t you remember last year when Master gave Henry fifty lashes ’cause he could read and write?”

Sudie’s eyes became sad. “I remember.”

“You’re only a little girl, Sudie. I don’t know what I’d do if Master took the whip to you.”

“But Mama.”

“No more talk, Sudie. Go outside and be sure you take off the end of the beans nice and clean.”

She shooed her daughter out, but there was a worried look on her face. Dear Lord, don’t let my child get herself in trouble, she prayed.

Sudie crept around to the music room, keeping close to the house so no one would see her. It was easy to hear Teacher’s voice through the open window. She crouched down to sit directly under the window with the pan of beans in her lap.

“Today, Missy, I want you to tell me a little story about yourself,” Teacher said. “Pretend you’re in front of some people who don’t know anything about you.”

I can do that, Sudie thought.

Missy said, “My name is Martha Belleville, but I’m called Missy. I’m ten years old and I live at Belleville Plantation in Yemassee, South Carolina. I’m

learning to play the piano. When I grow up I want to go on a ship to England, because we have many beautiful things in our house that came from there.”

“Good. Now write down what you just said. I’ll help you with the big words.”

Sudie forgot about the beans. With her finger she wrote in the dirt. “I am Sudie, ten years old and tall. I live at Belleville and help take care of Master’s daughter, Missy. When I grow up I want to be like Teacher. Mama says no, but I’m going to find a way to teach children their letters and numbers.”

She almost jumped when seven-year-old Alice sat down beside her.

“You making words?” Alice whispered.

Sudie nodded.

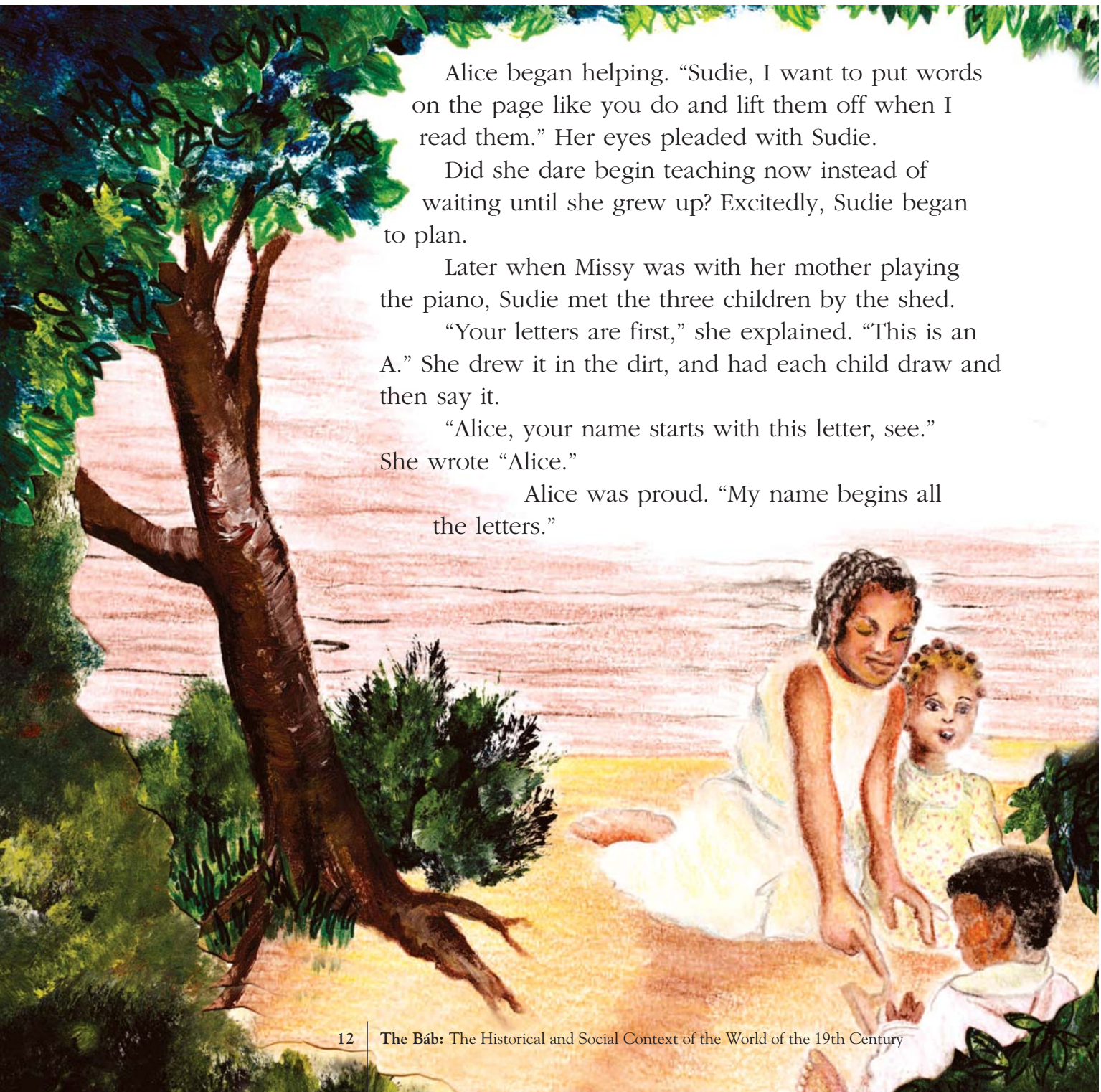
“Show me how.”

Alice, Luke, and Sally, the other slave children on the plantation, had learned Sudie’s secret one day when Sudie was practicing her letters and numbers in the dirt behind an old shed. Sudie had been teaching herself from the time Missy began lessons when they were both eight.

Now every day the three children begged Sudie to teach them what she knew. She didn’t care if Master whipped her, but she didn’t want the younger children hurt so she made excuses.

“I have to finish these beans. Mama’s waiting for them.”





Alice began helping. “Sudie, I want to put words on the page like you do and lift them off when I read them.” Her eyes pleaded with Sudie.

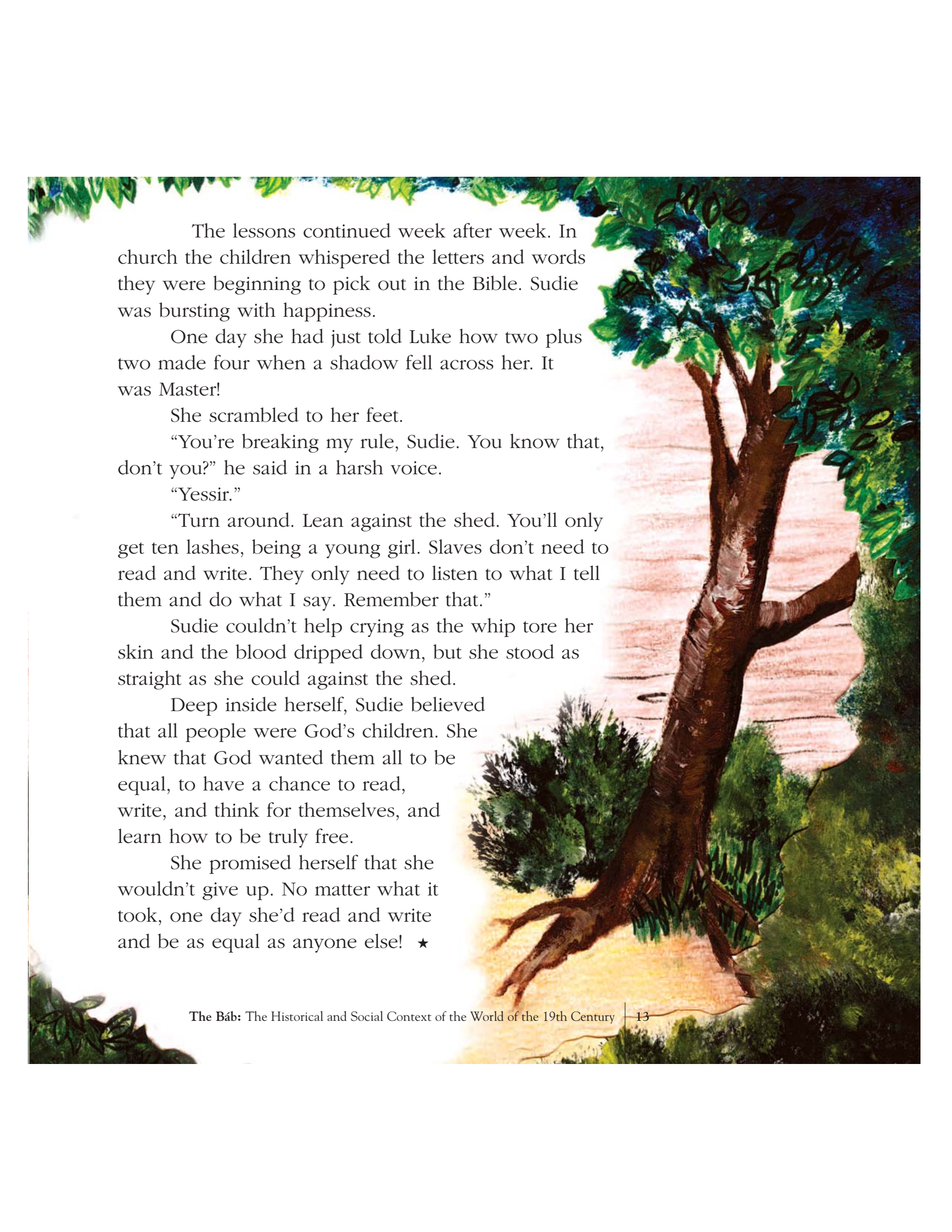
Did she dare begin teaching now instead of waiting until she grew up? Excitedly, Sudie began to plan.

Later when Missy was with her mother playing the piano, Sudie met the three children by the shed.

“Your letters are first,” she explained. “This is an A.” She drew it in the dirt, and had each child draw and then say it.

“Alice, your name starts with this letter, see.” She wrote “Alice.”

Alice was proud. “My name begins all the letters.”



The lessons continued week after week. In church the children whispered the letters and words they were beginning to pick out in the Bible. Sudie was bursting with happiness.

One day she had just told Luke how two plus two made four when a shadow fell across her. It was Master!

She scrambled to her feet.

“You’re breaking my rule, Sudie. You know that, don’t you?” he said in a harsh voice.

“Yessir.”

“Turn around. Lean against the shed. You’ll only get ten lashes, being a young girl. Slaves don’t need to read and write. They only need to listen to what I tell them and do what I say. Remember that.”

Sudie couldn’t help crying as the whip tore her skin and the blood dripped down, but she stood as straight as she could against the shed.

Deep inside herself, Sudie believed that all people were God’s children. She knew that God wanted them all to be equal, to have a chance to read, write, and think for themselves, and learn how to be truly free.

She promised herself that she wouldn’t give up. No matter what it took, one day she’d read and write and be as equal as anyone else! ★