

The following story is from the book

The Central Figures
The Báb
Volume Two



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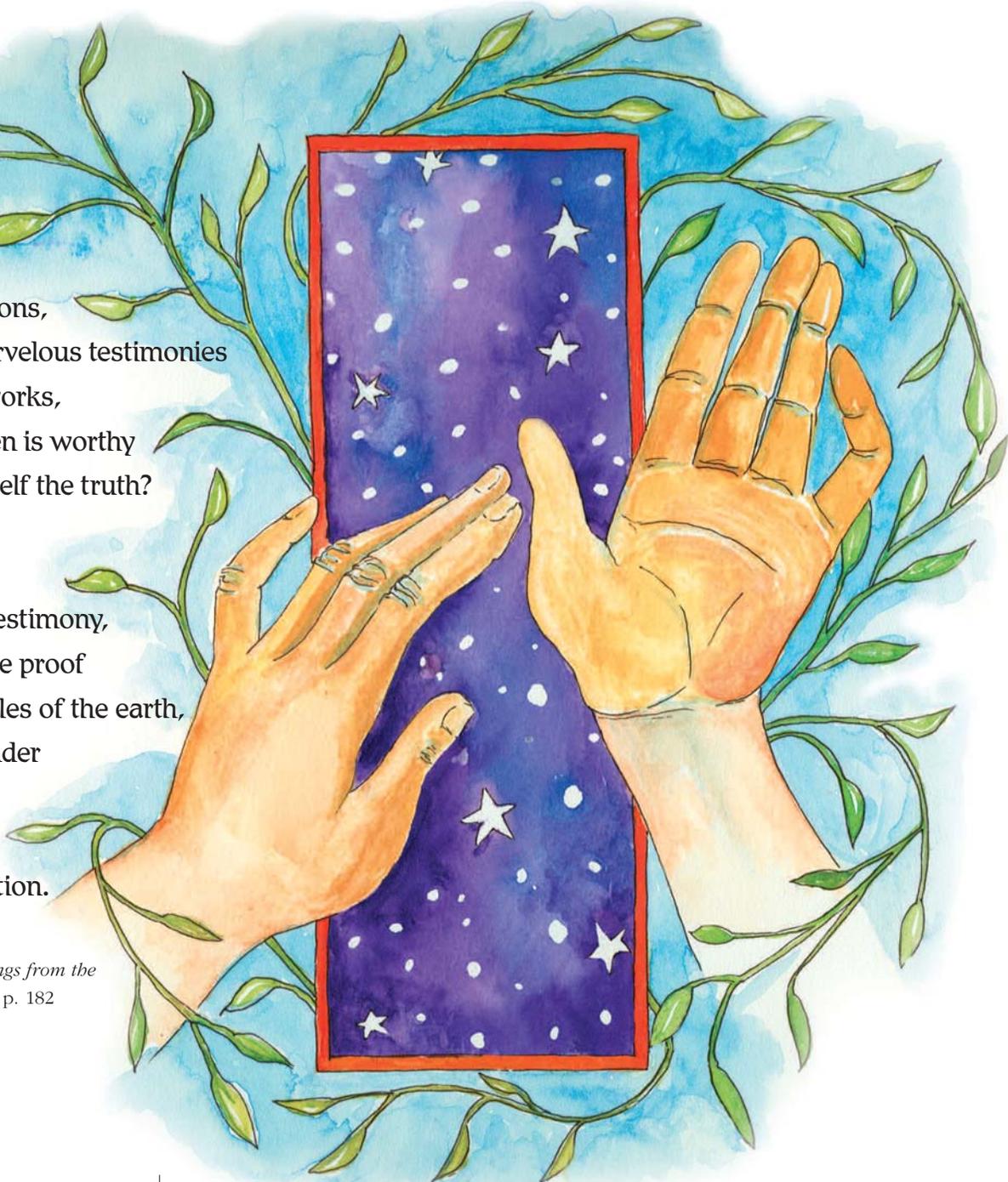
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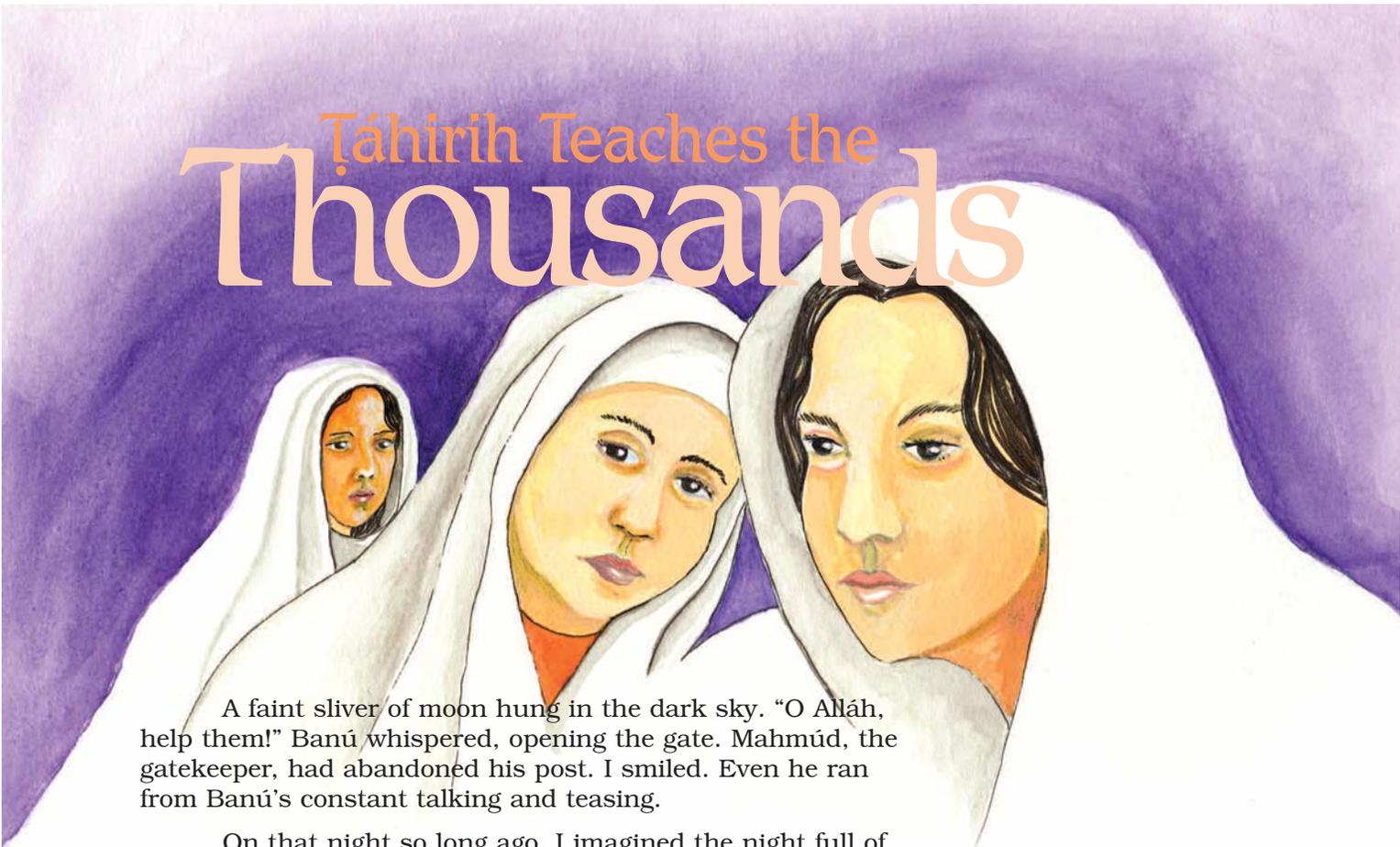
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If these companions,
with all their marvelous testimonies
and wondrous works,
be false, who then is worthy
to claim for himself the truth?
I swear by God!
Their very deeds
are a sufficient testimony,
and an irrefutable proof
unto all the peoples of the earth,
were men to ponder
in their hearts
the mysteries
of Divine Revelation.

— Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Babá'u'lláh*, p. 182



An illustration of three women wearing white headscarves (chador) against a purple background. The woman in the foreground on the right is looking slightly to the left. The woman in the middle is looking forward. The woman in the background on the left is looking to the right. The title 'Táhirih Teaches the Thousands' is written in orange and white text across the top of the illustration.

Táhirih Teaches the Thousands

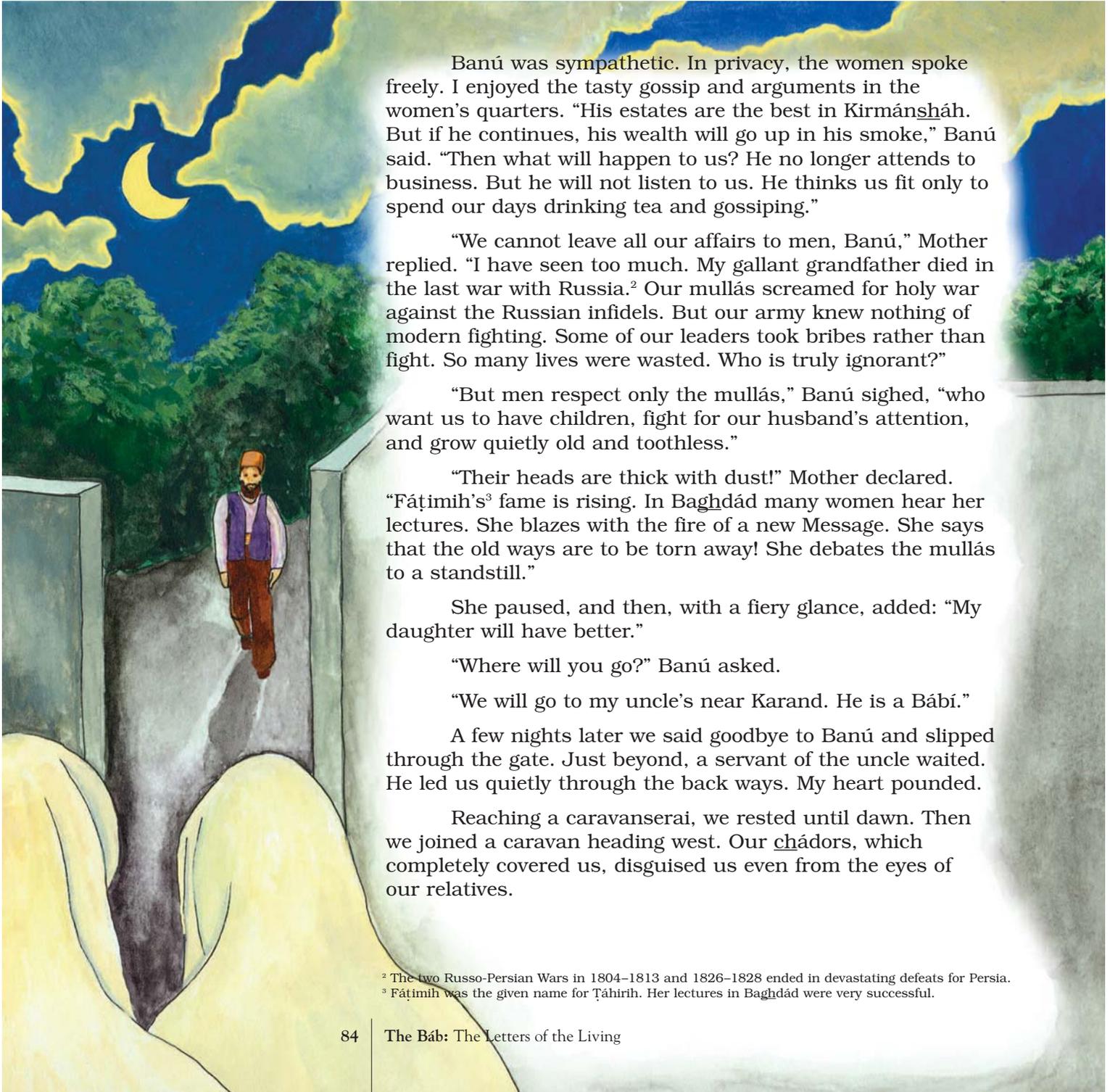
A faint sliver of moon hung in the dark sky. “O Alláh, help them!” Banú whispered, opening the gate. Mahmúd, the gatekeeper, had abandoned his post. I smiled. Even he ran from Banú’s constant talking and teasing.

On that night so long ago, I imagined the night full of pursuers. But only memories followed us—memories of that awful, haunting odor. The sickening smell—like charcoal and honey mixed together—always hung about my father as he reclined against his pillows, deep in an opium stupor. Mother and Father had ferocious fights about his opium smoking. She was famed throughout the women’s quarters.¹ None of the other wives dared to confront him.

Banú was Mother’s best friend among Father’s wives. “Banú, I am so unhappy,” Mother said when she asked for help with her escape. “We are playthings of an opium addict. Yet he calls *us* ignorant! I will not allow my daughter to be raised by such a man.”

*Written by Rick Johnson
Illustrated by Jaci Ayorinde*

¹ Muslim traditions often required separate living areas for women and men. In the houses of the very wealthy, there could be several wives, and the separate areas might be large.



Banú was sympathetic. In privacy, the women spoke freely. I enjoyed the tasty gossip and arguments in the women's quarters. "His estates are the best in Kirmánsháh. But if he continues, his wealth will go up in his smoke," Banú said. "Then what will happen to us? He no longer attends to business. But he will not listen to us. He thinks us fit only to spend our days drinking tea and gossiping."

"We cannot leave all our affairs to men, Banú," Mother replied. "I have seen too much. My gallant grandfather died in the last war with Russia.² Our mullás screamed for holy war against the Russian infidels. But our army knew nothing of modern fighting. Some of our leaders took bribes rather than fight. So many lives were wasted. Who is truly ignorant?"

"But men respect only the mullás," Banú sighed, "who want us to have children, fight for our husband's attention, and grow quietly old and toothless."

"Their heads are thick with dust!" Mother declared. "Fāṭimih's³ fame is rising. In Baghdád many women hear her lectures. She blazes with the fire of a new Message. She says that the old ways are to be torn away! She debates the mullás to a standstill."

She paused, and then, with a fiery glance, added: "My daughter will have better."

"Where will you go?" Banú asked.

"We will go to my uncle's near Karand. He is a Bábí."

A few nights later we said goodbye to Banú and slipped through the gate. Just beyond, a servant of the uncle waited. He led us quietly through the back ways. My heart pounded.

Reaching a caravanserai, we rested until dawn. Then we joined a caravan heading west. Our chádors, which completely covered us, disguised us even from the eyes of our relatives.

² The two Russo-Persian Wars in 1804–1813 and 1826–1828 ended in devastating defeats for Persia.

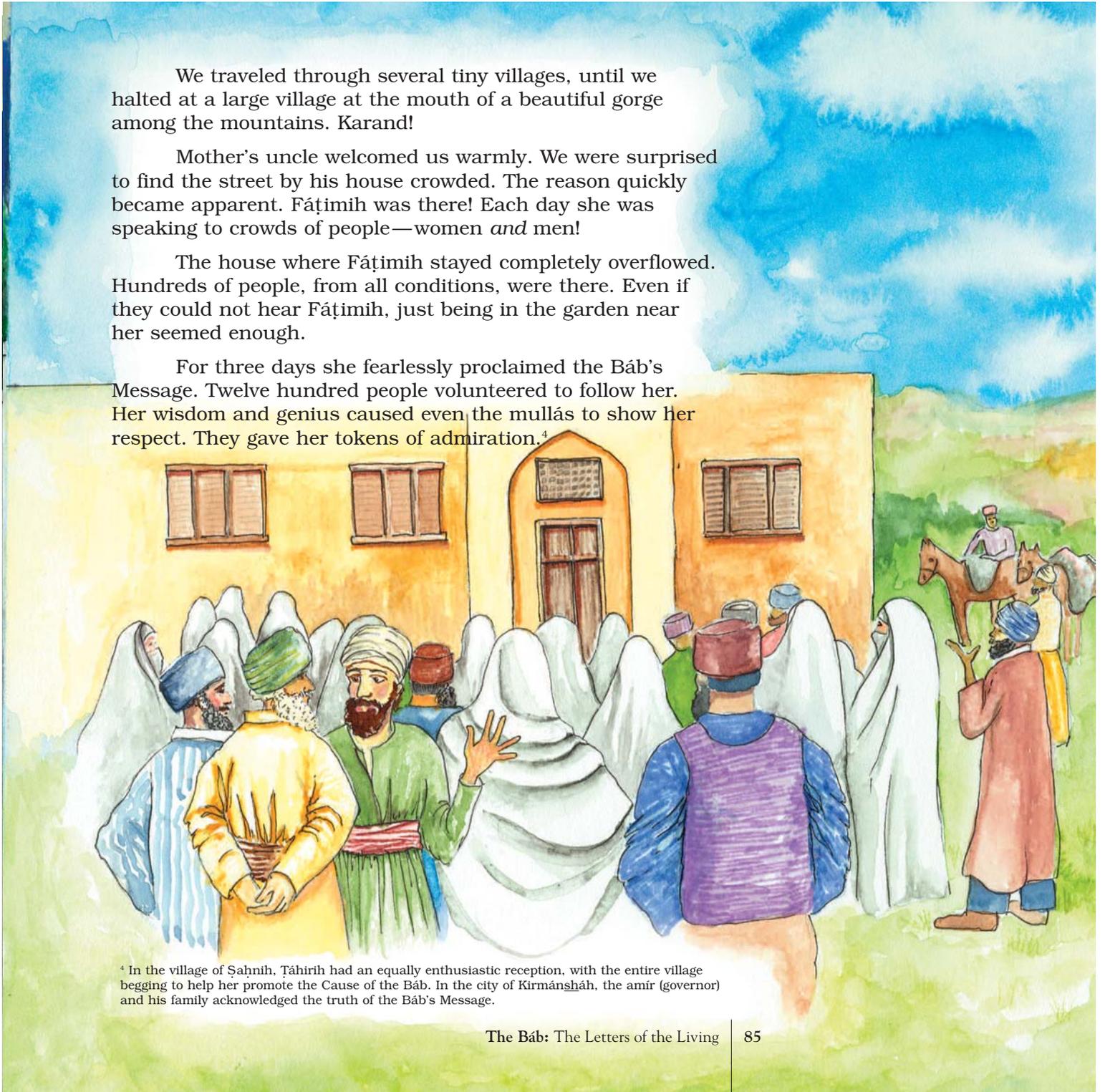
³ Fāṭimih was the given name for Ṭáhirih. Her lectures in Baghdád were very successful.

We traveled through several tiny villages, until we halted at a large village at the mouth of a beautiful gorge among the mountains. Karand!

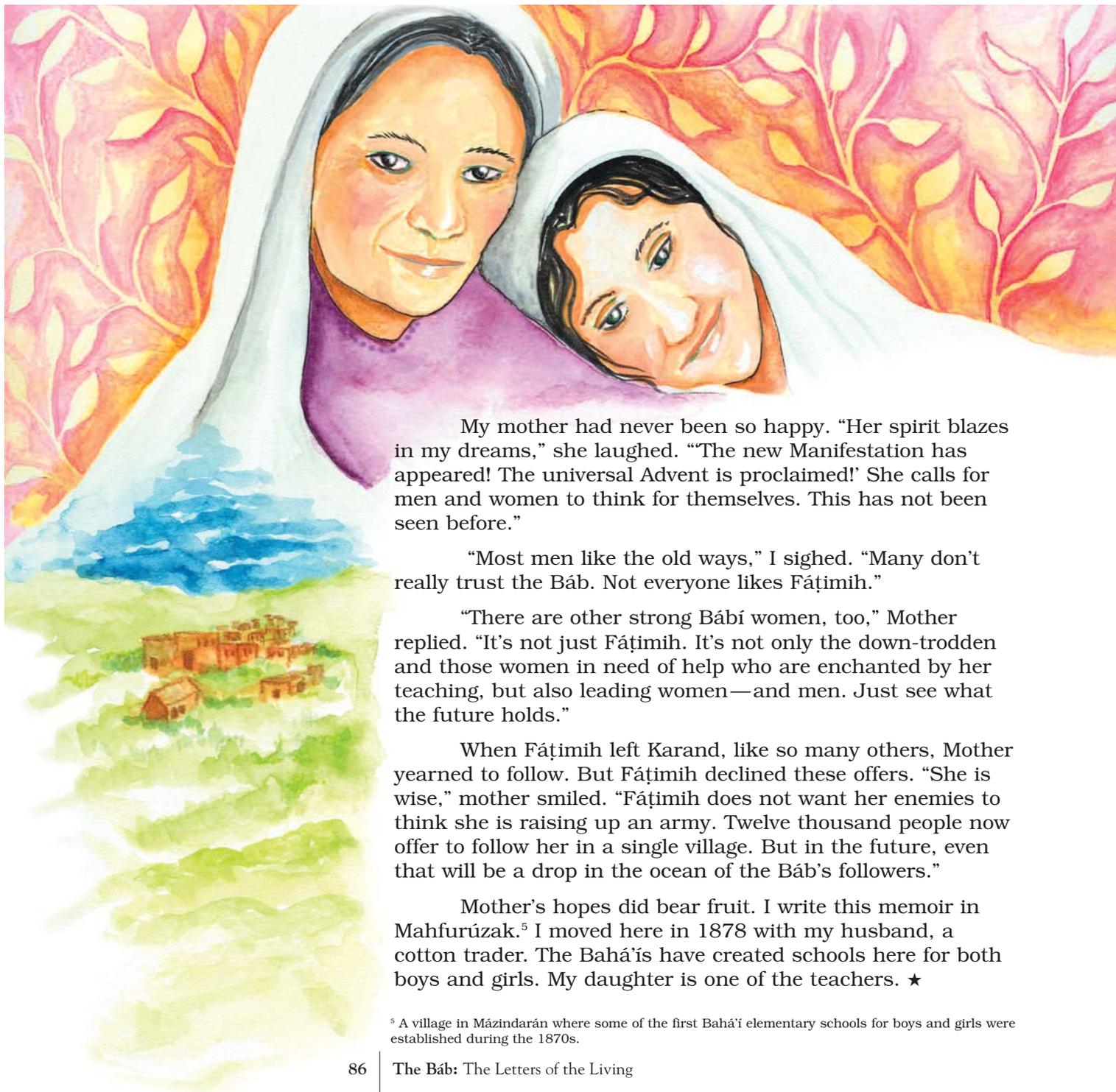
Mother's uncle welcomed us warmly. We were surprised to find the street by his house crowded. The reason quickly became apparent. Fâṭimih was there! Each day she was speaking to crowds of people—women *and* men!

The house where Fâṭimih stayed completely overflowed. Hundreds of people, from all conditions, were there. Even if they could not hear Fâṭimih, just being in the garden near her seemed enough.

For three days she fearlessly proclaimed the Báb's Message. Twelve hundred people volunteered to follow her. Her wisdom and genius caused even the mullás to show her respect. They gave her tokens of admiration.⁴



⁴ In the village of Şahñih, Ṭâhirih had an equally enthusiastic reception, with the entire village begging to help her promote the Cause of the Báb. In the city of Kirmânshâh, the amir (governor) and his family acknowledged the truth of the Báb's Message.



My mother had never been so happy. “Her spirit blazes in my dreams,” she laughed. “The new Manifestation has appeared! The universal Advent is proclaimed! She calls for men and women to think for themselves. This has not been seen before.”

“Most men like the old ways,” I sighed. “Many don’t really trust the Báb. Not everyone likes Fāṭimih.”

“There are other strong Bábí women, too,” Mother replied. “It’s not just Fāṭimih. It’s not only the down-trodden and those women in need of help who are enchanted by her teaching, but also leading women—and men. Just see what the future holds.”

When Fāṭimih left Karand, like so many others, Mother yearned to follow. But Fāṭimih declined these offers. “She is wise,” mother smiled. “Fāṭimih does not want her enemies to think she is raising up an army. Twelve thousand people now offer to follow her in a single village. But in the future, even that will be a drop in the ocean of the Báb’s followers.”

Mother’s hopes did bear fruit. I write this memoir in Mahfurúzak.⁵ I moved here in 1878 with my husband, a cotton trader. The Bahá’ís have created schools here for both boys and girls. My daughter is one of the teachers. ★

⁵ A village in Mázindarán where some of the first Bahá’í elementary schools for boys and girls were established during the 1870s.