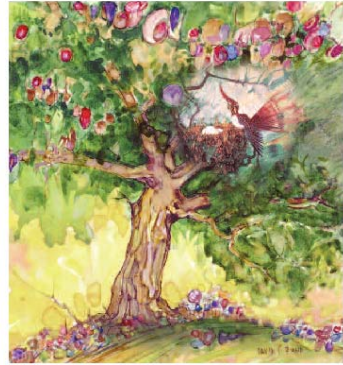


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The Central Figures

Bahá'u'lláh

Volume One



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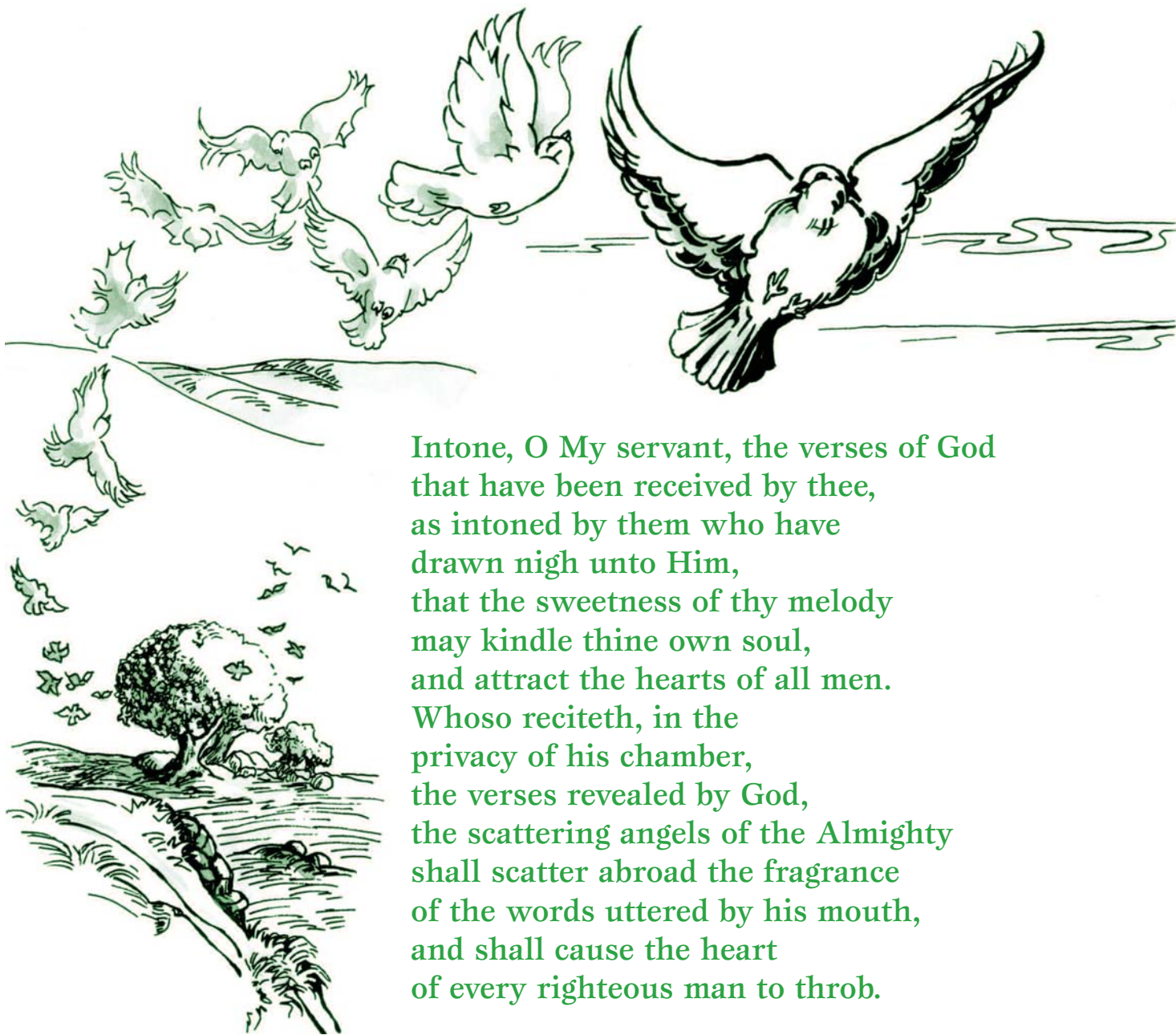
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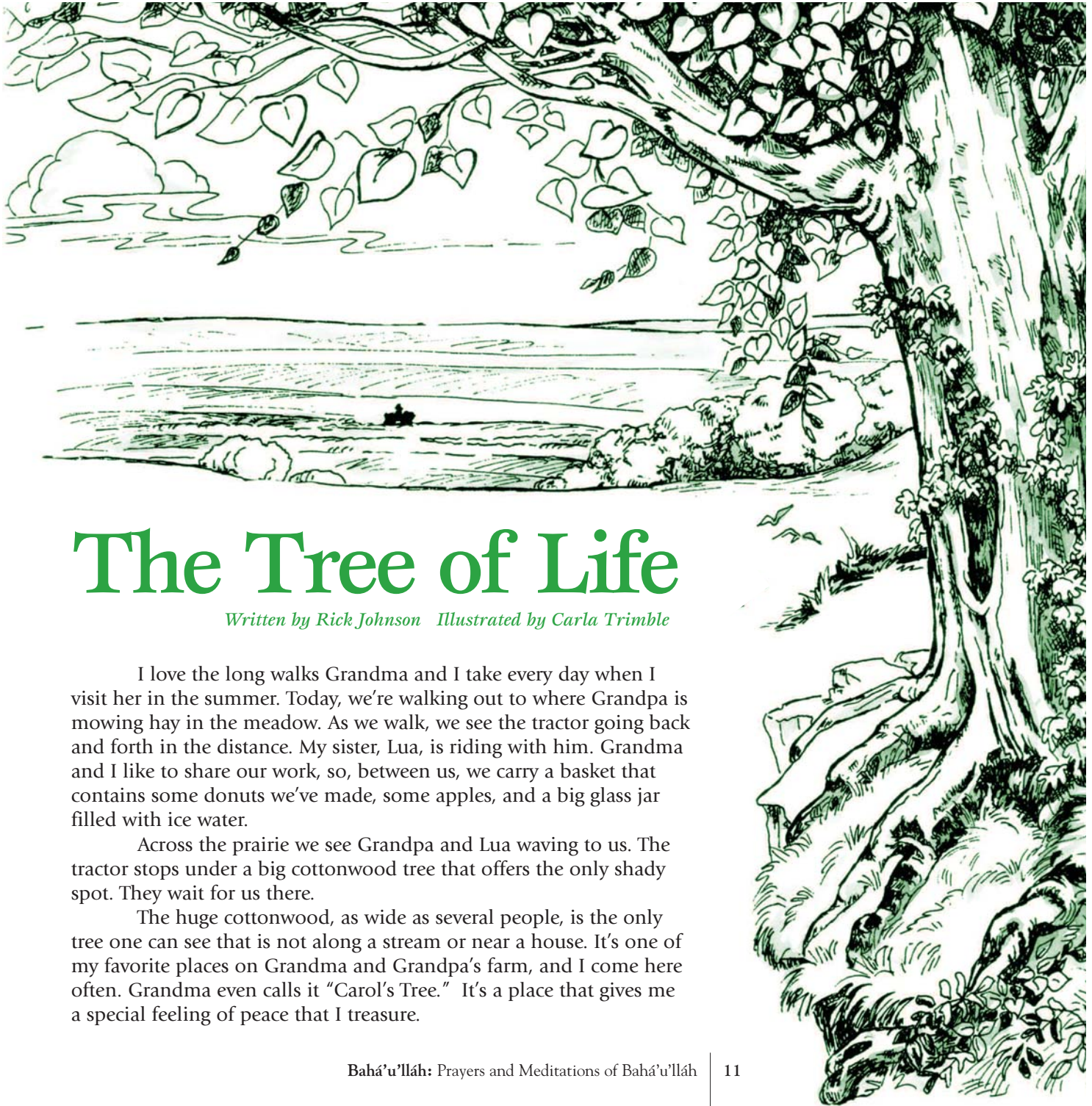
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Intone, O My servant, the verses of God
that have been received by thee,
as intoned by them who have
drawn nigh unto Him,
that the sweetness of thy melody
may kindle thine own soul,
and attract the hearts of all men.
Whoso reciteth, in the
privacy of his chamber,
the verses revealed by God,
the scattering angels of the Almighty
shall scatter abroad the fragrance
of the words uttered by his mouth,
and shall cause the heart
of every righteous man to throb.

— Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 295



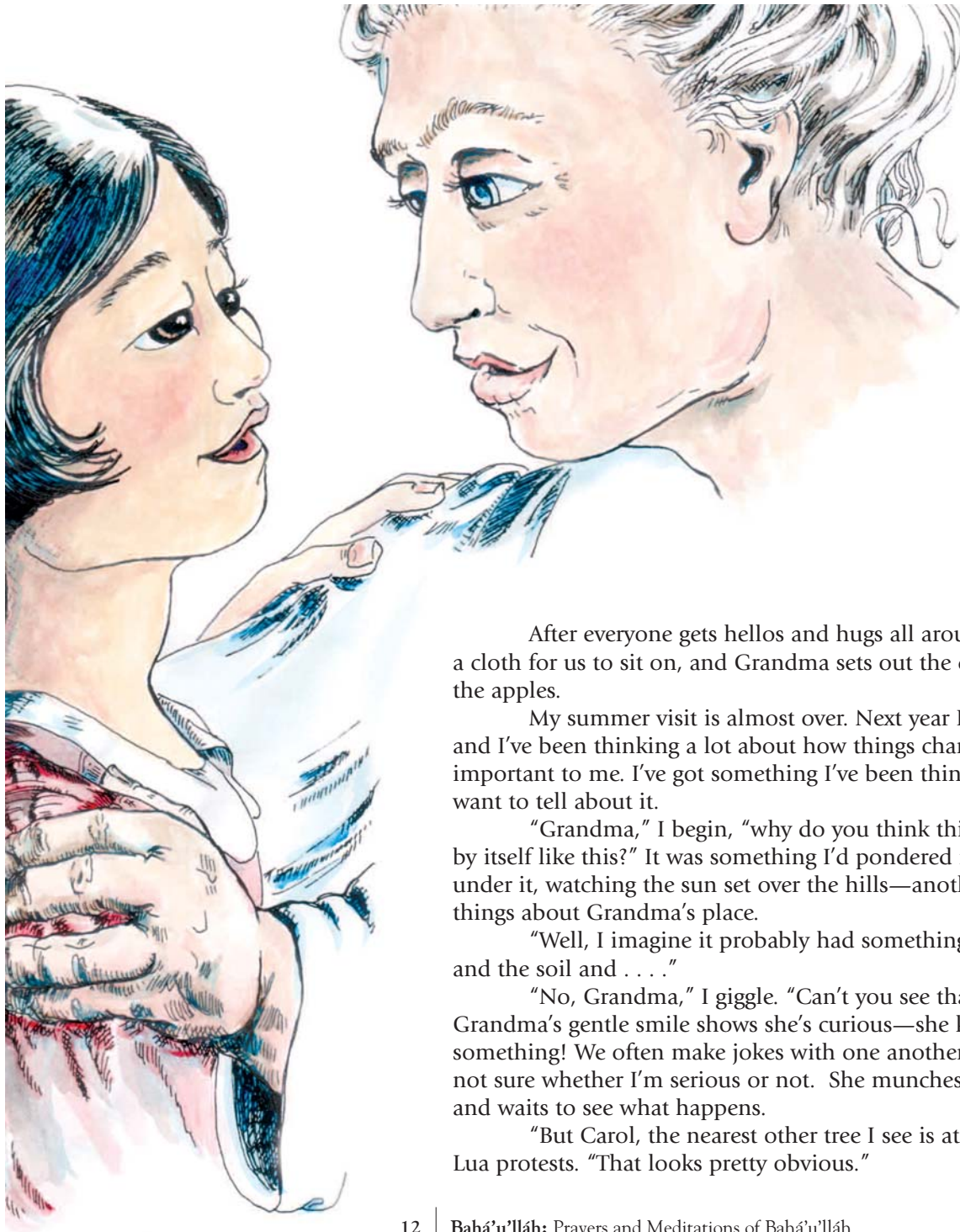
The Tree of Life

Written by Rick Johnson Illustrated by Carla Trimble

I love the long walks Grandma and I take every day when I visit her in the summer. Today, we're walking out to where Grandpa is mowing hay in the meadow. As we walk, we see the tractor going back and forth in the distance. My sister, Lua, is riding with him. Grandma and I like to share our work, so, between us, we carry a basket that contains some donuts we've made, some apples, and a big glass jar filled with ice water.

Across the prairie we see Grandpa and Lua waving to us. The tractor stops under a big cottonwood tree that offers the only shady spot. They wait for us there.

The huge cottonwood, as wide as several people, is the only tree one can see that is not along a stream or near a house. It's one of my favorite places on Grandma and Grandpa's farm, and I come here often. Grandma even calls it "Carol's Tree." It's a place that gives me a special feeling of peace that I treasure.



After everyone gets hellos and hugs all around, I spread out a cloth for us to sit on, and Grandma sets out the donuts. Lua slices the apples.

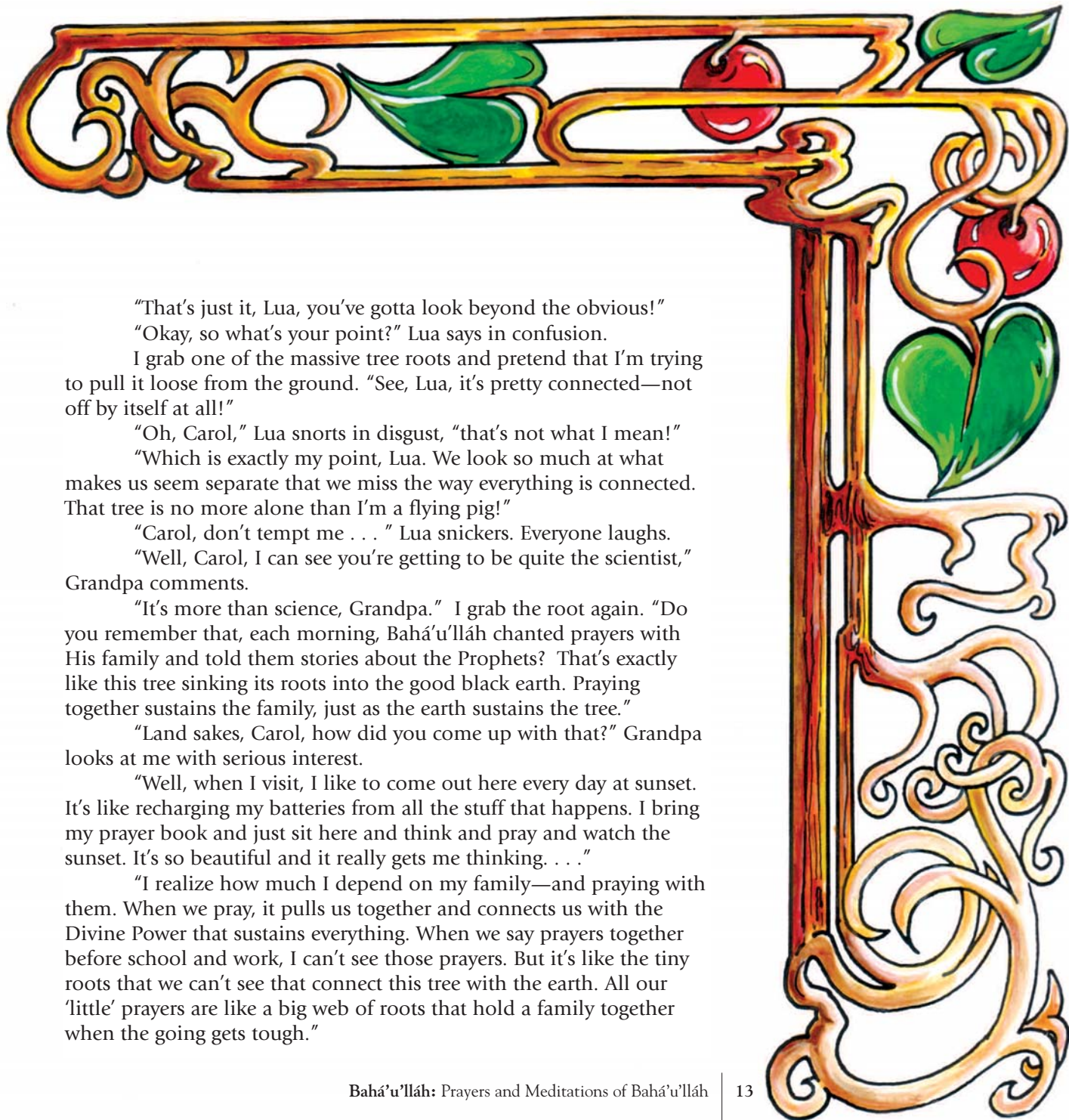
My summer visit is almost over. Next year I go to college, and I've been thinking a lot about how things change and what's important to me. I've got something I've been thinking about, and I want to tell about it.

"Grandma," I begin, "why do you think this tree grew alone by itself like this?" It was something I'd pondered many times as I sat under it, watching the sun set over the hills—another of my favorite things about Grandma's place.

"Well, I imagine it probably had something to do with weather and the soil and . . ."

"No, Grandma," I giggle. "Can't you see that it's not alone?" Grandma's gentle smile shows she's curious—she knows I'm up to something! We often make jokes with one another like this, so she's not sure whether I'm serious or not. She munches on an apple slice and waits to see what happens.

"But Carol, the nearest other tree I see is at least a mile away," Lua protests. "That looks pretty obvious."



"That's just it, Lua, you've gotta look beyond the obvious!"

"Okay, so what's your point?" Lua says in confusion.

I grab one of the massive tree roots and pretend that I'm trying to pull it loose from the ground. "See, Lua, it's pretty connected—not off by itself at all!"

"Oh, Carol," Lua snorts in disgust, "that's not what I mean!"

"Which is exactly my point, Lua. We look so much at what makes us seem separate that we miss the way everything is connected. That tree is no more alone than I'm a flying pig!"

"Carol, don't tempt me . . ." Lua snickers. Everyone laughs.

"Well, Carol, I can see you're getting to be quite the scientist," Grandpa comments.

"It's more than science, Grandpa." I grab the root again. "Do you remember that, each morning, Bahá'u'lláh chanted prayers with His family and told them stories about the Prophets? That's exactly like this tree sinking its roots into the good black earth. Praying together sustains the family, just as the earth sustains the tree."

"Land sakes, Carol, how did you come up with that?" Grandpa looks at me with serious interest.

"Well, when I visit, I like to come out here every day at sunset. It's like recharging my batteries from all the stuff that happens. I bring my prayer book and just sit here and think and pray and watch the sunset. It's so beautiful and it really gets me thinking. . . ."

"I realize how much I depend on my family—and praying with them. When we pray, it pulls us together and connects us with the Divine Power that sustains everything. When we say prayers together before school and work, I can't see those prayers. But it's like the tiny roots that we can't see that connect this tree with the earth. All our 'little' prayers are like a big web of roots that hold a family together when the going gets tough."



"I guess that's why this tree has been able to stand here through all the storms, blizzards, and droughts," Grandma remarks. "It doesn't seem to mind all the changes in weather."

"Roots growing deep in the earth can always find water and have something solid to hold onto," Grandpa observes. "We can pull on that root all day, and it won't budge!"

"When I think of all the suffering that Bahá'u'lláh and His family endured," I add, "it just seems so clear that, because they prayed together, they could find the 'water of life' and have something solid to hold onto."

"I guess there's no such thing as being completely alone, is there?" Grandma says, taking my hand and squeezing it.

"We look alone, but really, everything is connected. The tree 'knows' that's true without even having to think about it," I reply.

"But we can fool ourselves, can't we?" Lua asks.

"That's part of it," I respond, "but I've got another question—How are roots and leaves alike?"

Lua lets her eyes follow the sturdy trunk up into the graceful, curving branches and delicate leaves. "Well, they're part of the tree. . . ."

"And they've gotta have each other, Lua! Just like in a family, the roots die without the leaves, and the leaves die without the roots."

Grandma gives me a wonderful look of love and respect. I love the way she listens to me.

"In a family, prayer is the root and love is the branch," Grandma says. "Because I love you and you love me, I want more than anything to be kind to you. Kindness just feels like the right thing when there's real love. In Bahá'u'lláh's family, courtesy and kindness were so natural that everyone acted that way without thinking about it—it was almost born into them."

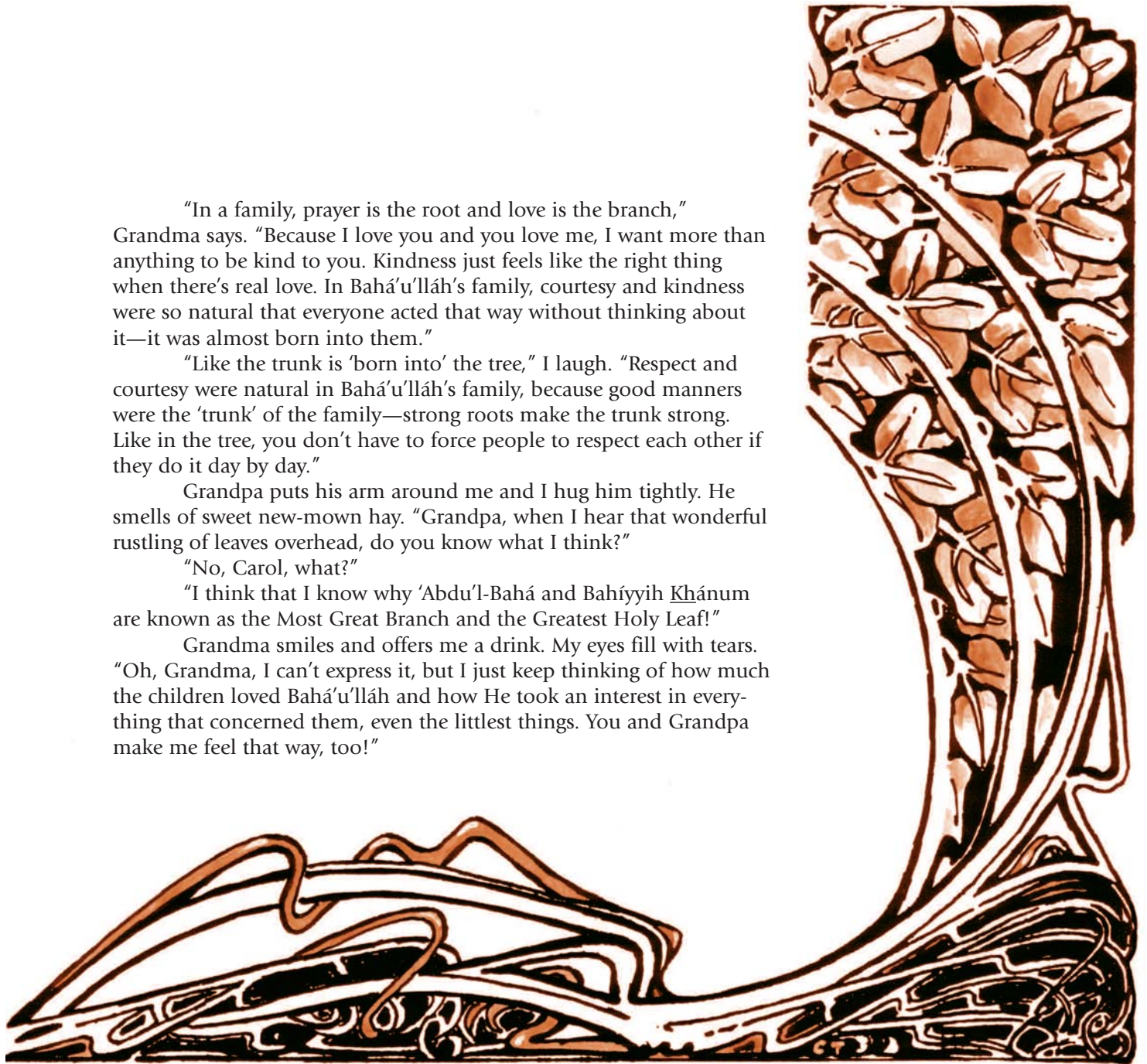
"Like the trunk is 'born into' the tree," I laugh. "Respect and courtesy were natural in Bahá'u'lláh's family, because good manners were the 'trunk' of the family—strong roots make the trunk strong. Like in the tree, you don't have to force people to respect each other if they do it day by day."

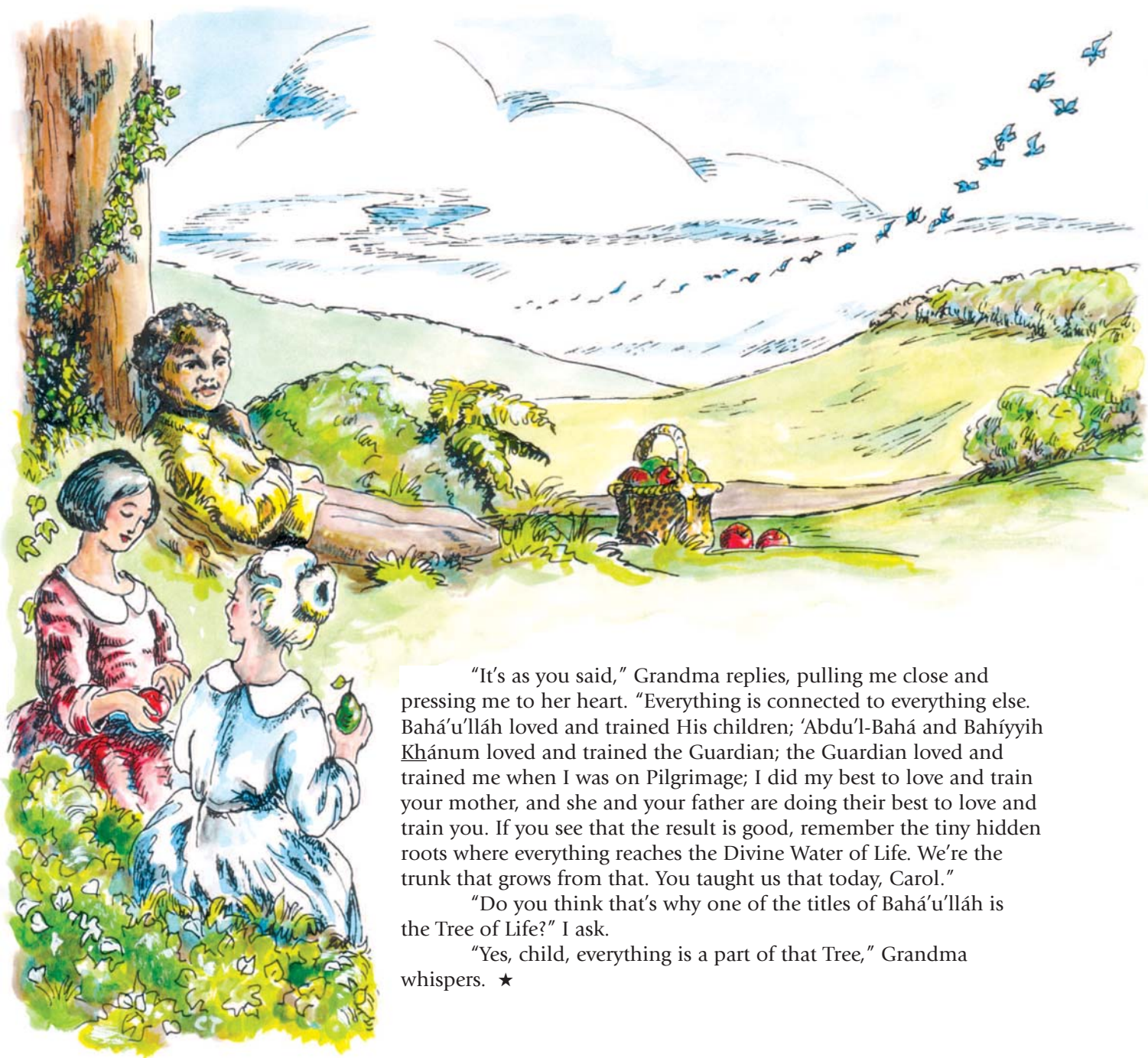
Grandpa puts his arm around me and I hug him tightly. He smells of sweet new-mown hay. "Grandpa, when I hear that wonderful rustling of leaves overhead, do you know what I think?"

"No, Carol, what?"

"I think that I know why 'Abdu'l-Bahá and Bahíyyih Khánum are known as the Most Great Branch and the Greatest Holy Leaf!"

Grandma smiles and offers me a drink. My eyes fill with tears. "Oh, Grandpa, I can't express it, but I just keep thinking of how much the children loved Bahá'u'lláh and how He took an interest in everything that concerned them, even the littlest things. You and Grandpa make me feel that way, too!"





"It's as you said," Grandma replies, pulling me close and pressing me to her heart. "Everything is connected to everything else. Bahá'u'lláh loved and trained His children; 'Abdu'l-Bahá and Bahíyyih Khánum loved and trained the Guardian; the Guardian loved and trained me when I was on Pilgrimage; I did my best to love and train your mother, and she and your father are doing their best to love and train you. If you see that the result is good, remember the tiny hidden roots where everything reaches the Divine Water of Life. We're the trunk that grows from that. You taught us that today, Carol."

"Do you think that's why one of the titles of Bahá'u'lláh is the Tree of Life?" I ask.

"Yes, child, everything is a part of that Tree," Grandma whispers. ★