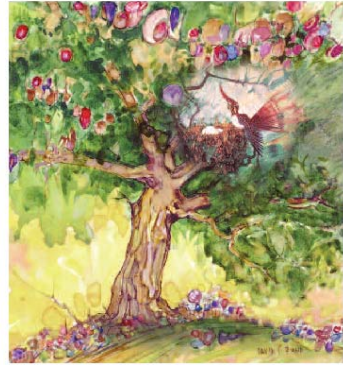


The following story is from the book

The Central Figures

Bahá'u'lláh

Volume One



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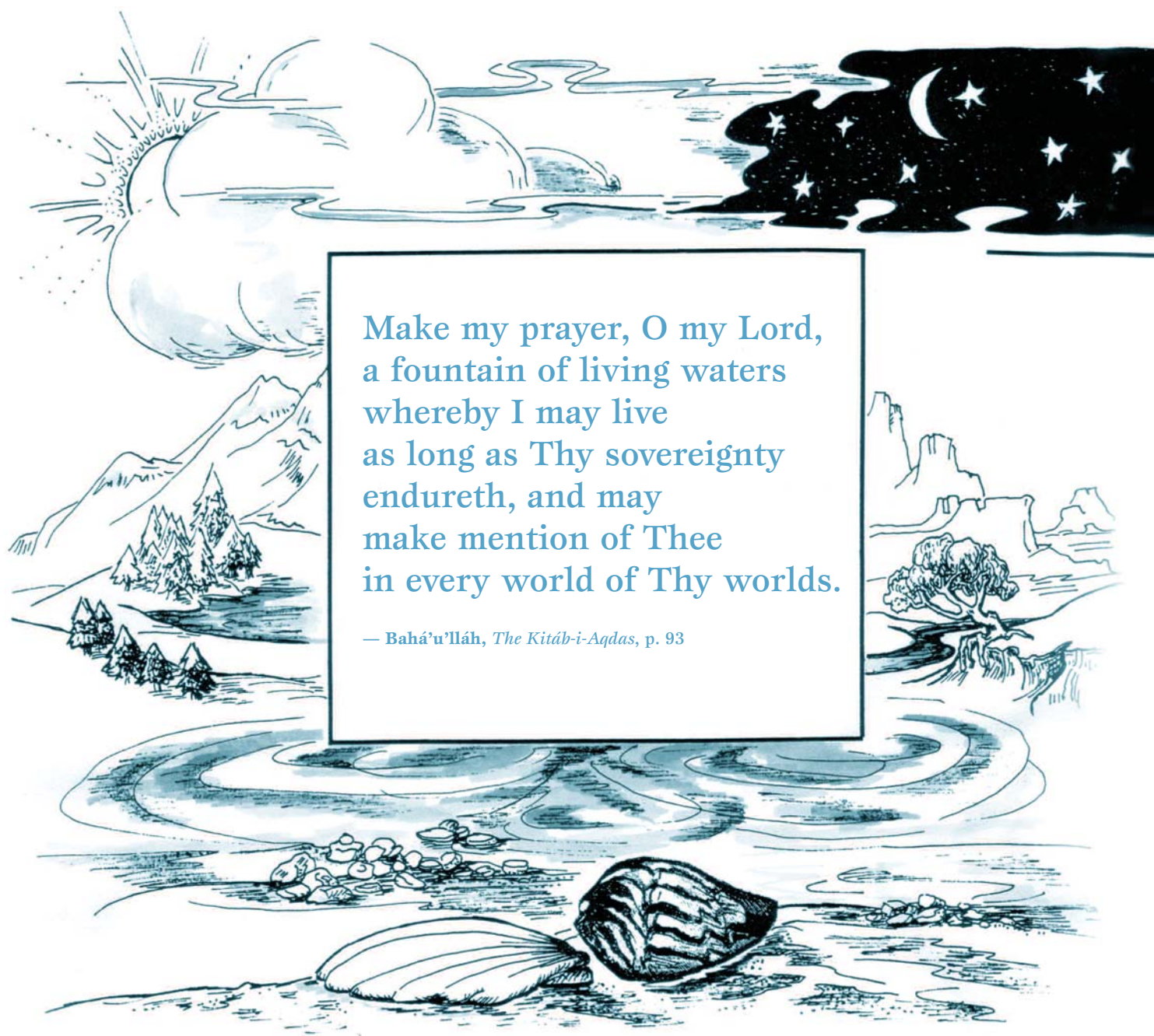
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Make my prayer, O my Lord,
a fountain of living waters
whereby I may live
as long as Thy sovereignty
endureth, and may
make mention of Thee
in every world of Thy worlds.

— Bahá'u'lláh, *The Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, p. 93



Saving the Silver-Tongued Nightingale

*Written by Jean Gould
Illustrated by Carla Trimble*

One day, late in the 19th century, a child was born in Yazd in the ancient land of Persia. He was given the name 'Alí-Muḥammad. He grew up to become a learned man and a talented poet and thus earned the right to be called Mírzá 'Alí-Muḥammad. Eventually, Bahá'u'lláh declared that he had earned an additional name: "Varqá," which means "Nightingale."

As a poet and a writer, Mírzá 'Alí-Muḥammad Varqá certainly lived up to his name. In fact, the Hand of the Cause of God H. M. Balyuzi later referred to him as the Silver-Tongued Nightingale. In addition, he also had an exceptional knowledge of medicine, the Muslim scriptures, and the history and literature of his country. Is it any wonder that the Crown Prince of Persia

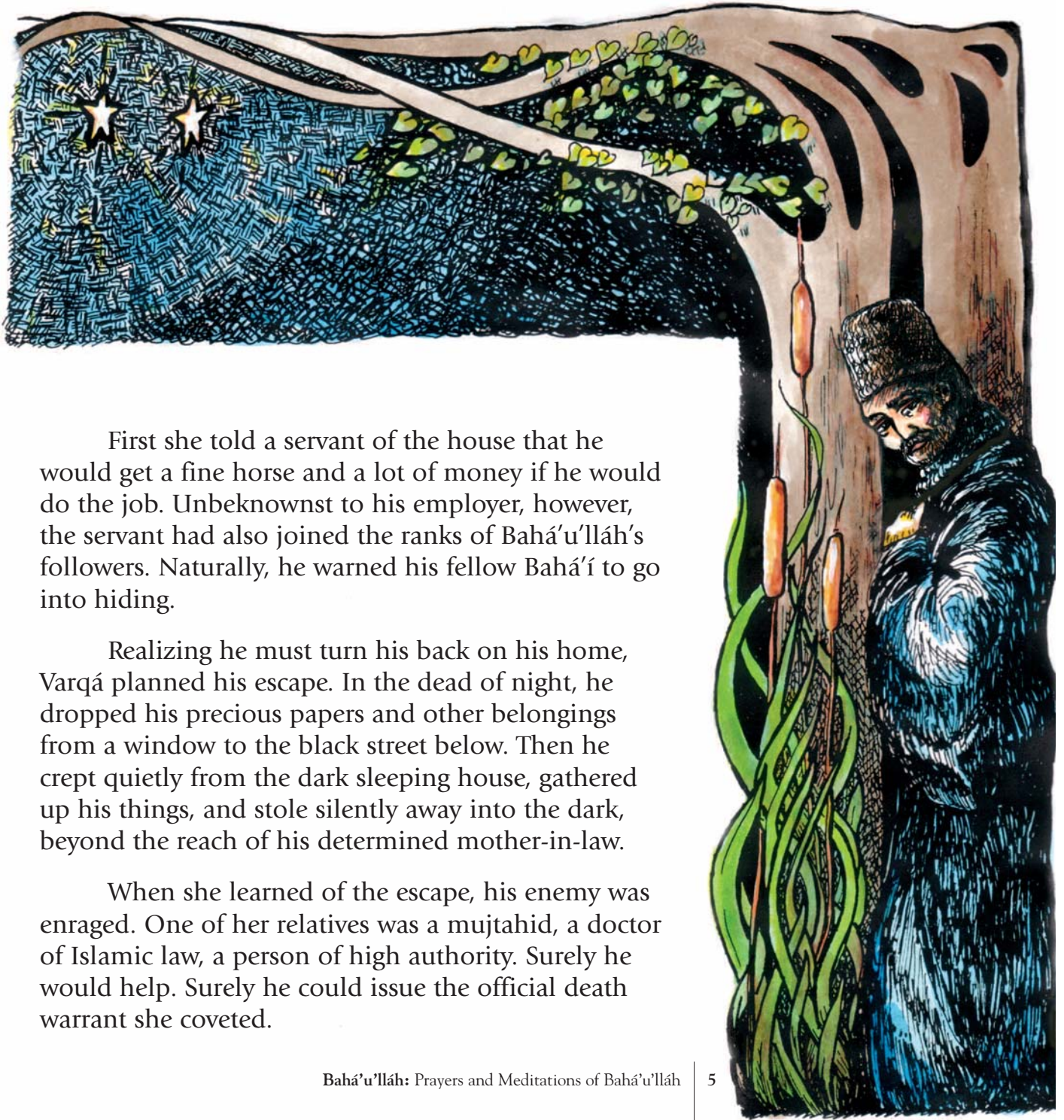


himself would often call for Varqá to sit in an assemblage of learned men so that he might charm and delight them with the music of his words?

Varqá, however, had a mother-in-law who was neither charmed nor delighted by his words. She was a devout Muslim lady of the Sháhsavan tribe, and she believed the lies the enemies of the Bahá'í Faith were telling about the Bahá'í believers in Persia. As well, along with most of her fellow Muslims at that time, she believed in her heart that Muḥammad was the last and final Messenger from God. She knew that Bahá'u'lláh claimed to be a new Messenger from God for this day. In her mind, this was an outrageous claim. Feeling no need to investigate the truth for herself, she simply declared Bahá'u'lláh an enemy. Of course, she also declared as an enemy any Muslim who left his faith and gave allegiance to Bahá'u'lláh.

Varqá was one of these. At an early age, he had recognized Bahá'u'lláh's station as the King of Kings. And with his silver tongue, he had been singing His praises ever since.

Such poems, such beautiful words, should win over any heart, but the Sháhsavan lady would not listen nor be convinced. Finally, only hatred for her son-in-law seethed in her heart, and she decided she must put a stop to his words, the words that were bringing such shame to their family circle. Soon it became clear to her that only death could still Varqá forever, and so she plotted to have him killed.



First she told a servant of the house that he would get a fine horse and a lot of money if he would do the job. Unbeknownst to his employer, however, the servant had also joined the ranks of Bahá'u'lláh's followers. Naturally, he warned his fellow Bahá'í to go into hiding.

Realizing he must turn his back on his home, Varqá planned his escape. In the dead of night, he dropped his precious papers and other belongings from a window to the black street below. Then he crept quietly from the dark sleeping house, gathered up his things, and stole silently away into the dark, beyond the reach of his determined mother-in-law.

When she learned of the escape, his enemy was enraged. One of her relatives was a mujtahid, a doctor of Islamic law, a person of high authority. Surely he would help. Surely he could issue the official death warrant she coveted.



"My son-in-law is a Bábí*," she shouted. "He ought to be put to death."

Unfortunately for the Sháhsavan lady, her relative was a just man. He knew nothing of the case, he said. There was nothing he could do. She must have proof if she wanted to make her case.

Fortunately for the Sháhsavan lady, Varqá had a certain son named Rúḥu'lláh. Rúḥu'lláh had been with his father when he had attained the presence of Baha'u'llah for the second time. Rúḥu'lláh was only seven then, but he had recognized the station of the King of Glory. He knew. "O the joy of that day," he said later.

Fortunately for the Sháhsavan lady as well, Rúḥu'lláh had his father's gift for poetry and clear speaking. She believed he would do very nicely for proof. On that day, Rúḥu'lláh followed his angry grandmother into the presence of the mujtahid. "I will prove to you through this child the apostasy of my son-in-law," she declared triumphantly. Could he know the meaning of such a word? Maybe not, but he certainly knew what to do when the mujtahid, that good man, asked whether Rúḥu'lláh could say his daily prayer.

* In the late nineteenth century in Persia, many people still referred to Bahá'ís as Bábís.

First there was the obligation of ablution, the washing of hands and face to prepare himself to meet his Lord in prayer. Then he turned to face the Holy Land where Bahá'u'lláh was imprisoned. He said Bahá'u'lláh's Long Obligatory Prayer. Like his father's, his voice was sweet and beautiful.

After a moment, it was the mujtahid's turn to speak. What kind of man, he said, could raise such a wonderful child? His condemnation, his death, would be a terrible thing. Her deed, her wish, was horrid and unforgivable.

She returned home shame-faced and disappointed, while the prayer of a child became a father's salvation. Mírzá 'Alí-Muḥammad Varqá, the Silver-Tongued Nightingale, had, for the moment, been set free. ★



Bahá'u'lláh: Prayers and Meditations of Bahá'u'lláh

