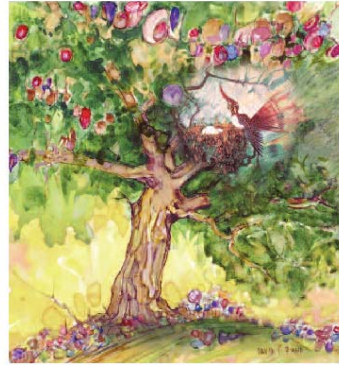


The following story is from the book

The Central Figures

Bahá'u'lláh

Volume One



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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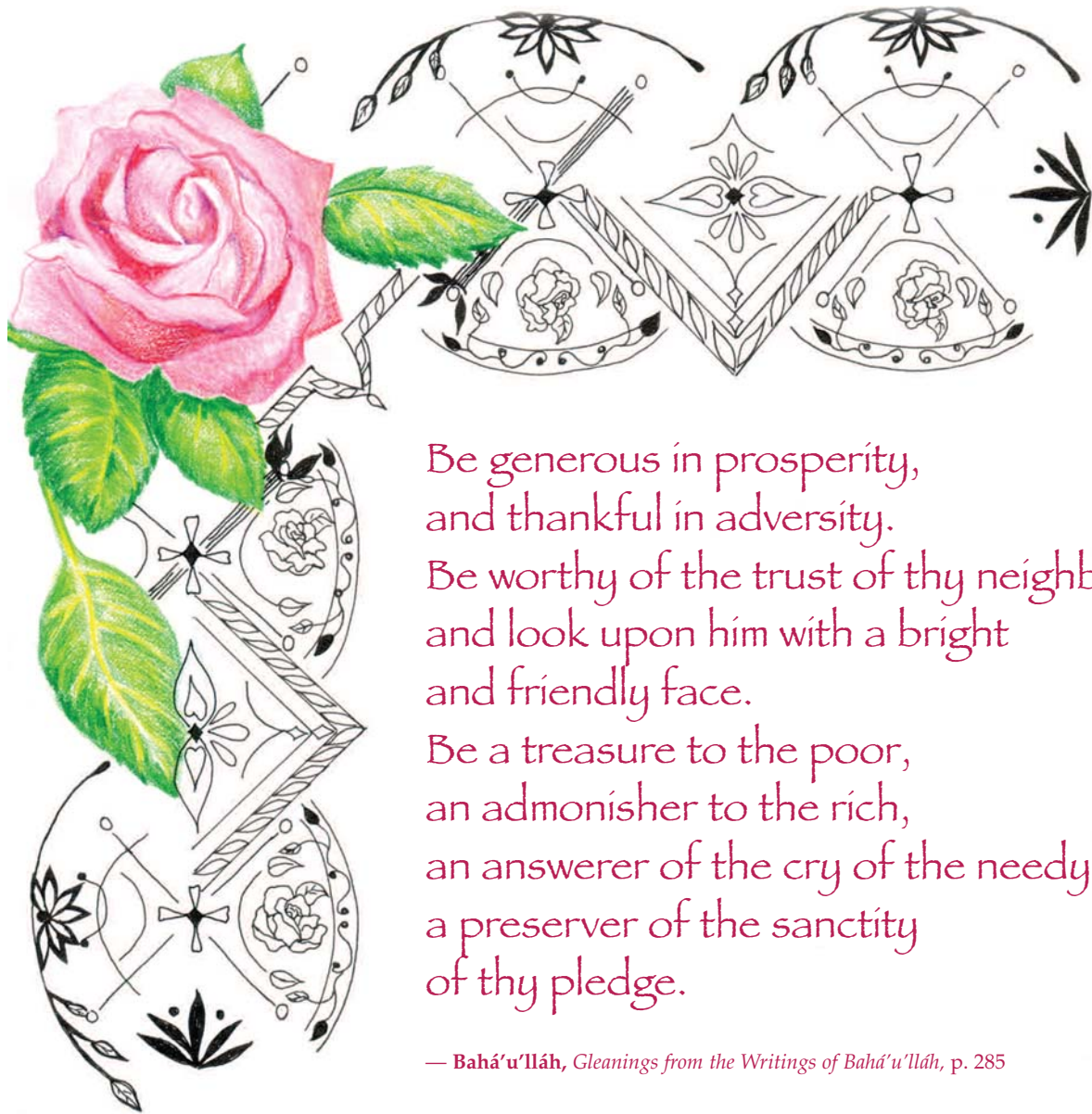
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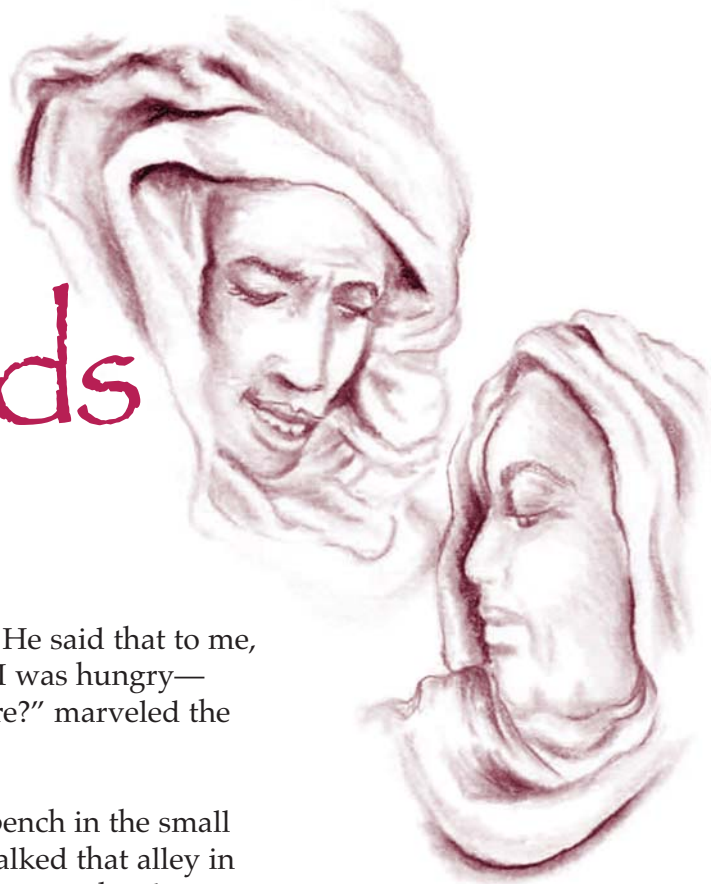


Be generous in prosperity,
and thankful in adversity.
Be worthy of the trust of thy neighbor,
and look upon him with a bright
and friendly face.
Be a treasure to the poor,
an admonisher to the rich,
an answerer of the cry of the needy,
a preserver of the sanctity
of thy pledge.

— Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 285

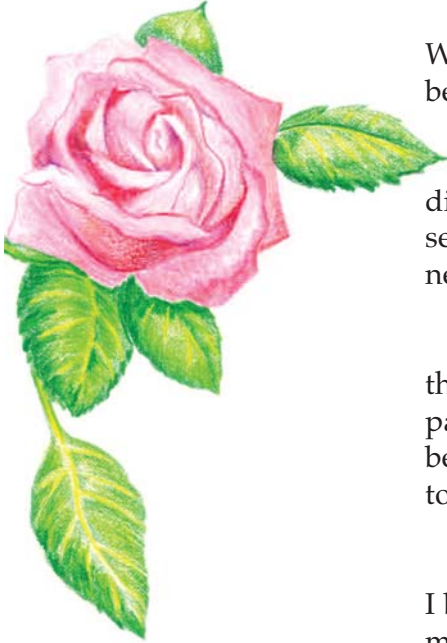
The Friend at the Crossroads

Written by Sally Cordova
Illustrated by Jai Kenyatta-Anderson



“ ‘How long have you been hungry?’ He said that to me, Maryam. He didn’t know me, but He knew I was hungry— hungry for many things. Why should He care?’ marveled the old woman. “But He did.”

The woman sat with her friend on a bench in the small dusty alley that she walked each day. She walked that alley in the hope of finding a reason to be going out. It was hard to stay indoors by herself. Her husband was long dead, as were most of the children they had had together. There was nothing to be done about it, no way to stop the sicknesses that came with each season and took so many away. The old woman often wondered why she had been spared. It seemed such a useless life with no one left to care for. Her daughters who still lived had gone with their husbands to another city, looking for a better life. They had asked her to come with them, but she was too old to go looking for better things. What could be out there for a poor woman of Baghdád?



Maryam, her friend, was almost as old as she was. When they were feeling well enough, they often sat on this bench and tried to find something new to talk about.

“Oh, Maryam, I saw Him approaching me from a great distance. Well, at least as great a distance as these old eyes can see. He walked like a king, but kings don’t come to this neighborhood!”

The two women had to laugh when they thought of that. Imagine a king getting his shoes dirty in their miserable part of the city! They stopped and regarded each other. It had been a long time since either one of them had found something to laugh about. Then they laughed again!

“Well,” said the old woman, “before I could stop myself, I bent to kiss His hand. ‘No, no, Mother,’ He said, as He helped me to stand straight again. Yes, He called me ‘Mother,’ and just for a moment, I saw my dear son, Hasan, in His eyes. Oh, that child! I thought he might outlive me. But never mind.

“I saw such tenderness in His eyes. It was as if He knew me and everything I’ve ever suffered. I wanted so to kiss Him, to give back just a little of the love He was showing me. He knew this. He bent over so I could kiss His cheeks, and He asked me, ‘How long have you been hungry?’ He gave me some money, and I knew I could eat today. But do you know, Maryam, when I was talking to Him, my belly was not talking to me!”

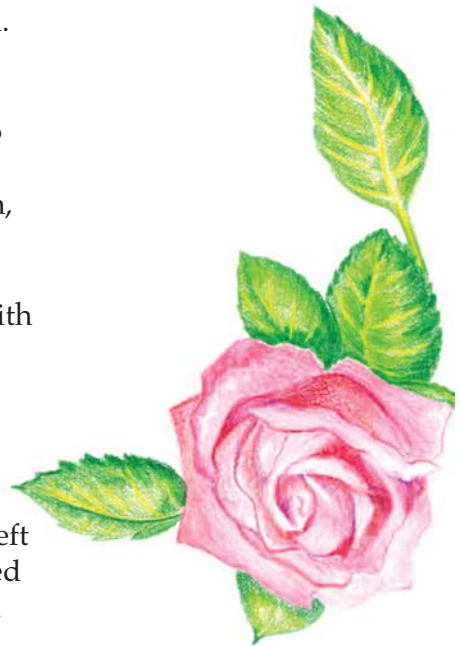
The two women laughed again.

The next day, the old woman awoke early. Something seemed different about this day. True, her stomach did not hurt. She had eaten a good dinner the night before. But it was something more. She looked around her little house. The same patched ceiling, the same crumbling walls barely keeping out the wind. Then she knew. The glow of her meeting with the kind king, which was how she thought of Him, was still keeping her warm in her drafty old room. Her arms and legs that, yesterday, had moved so slowly now seemed to be pulling her out of bed to meet this new day.

And this was to be the way she started all her days for many days to come. At first, she wondered—would He be there? And He was there, on the side of the road, on His way to somewhere else, but always with time to spare for her. There would be the coins that made sure she was no longer hungry. But, better, there would be something to tell Maryam.

“He listens to me, Maryam. He never seems to be in a hurry, but I know He must have so many important things to do. I tell Him all my troubles, but these He already seems to know. Best of all, He seems to love me. It is as if my dear son, Hasan, has been returned to me—but He is even more than that. He sees past my aching bones, my wrinkled face, my patched clothes,” she said with a wry smile. “He treats me with dignity. He makes me feel that I am important to someone, and I love Him. Who would have thought that this life had anything left for me?”

The old woman’s happy meetings with her kind benefactor, Who was, of course, Bahá’u’lláh, lasted until He left Baghdád for Constantinople. Before He departed, He arranged for a daily allowance to be given to her for the rest of her life.



“You see, Maryam, He had to leave, but He did not forget me. I have more than enough to eat, my roof is patched, and I don’t worry what will happen to me anymore. All these things are good, but He was the best thing of all. He looked into my soul and saw who I really was—and what He saw was enough.”

“Peace, Maryam.” ★

