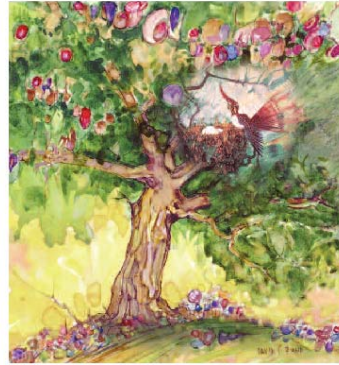


The following story is from the book

*The Central Figures*

# *Bahá'u'lláh*

*Volume One*



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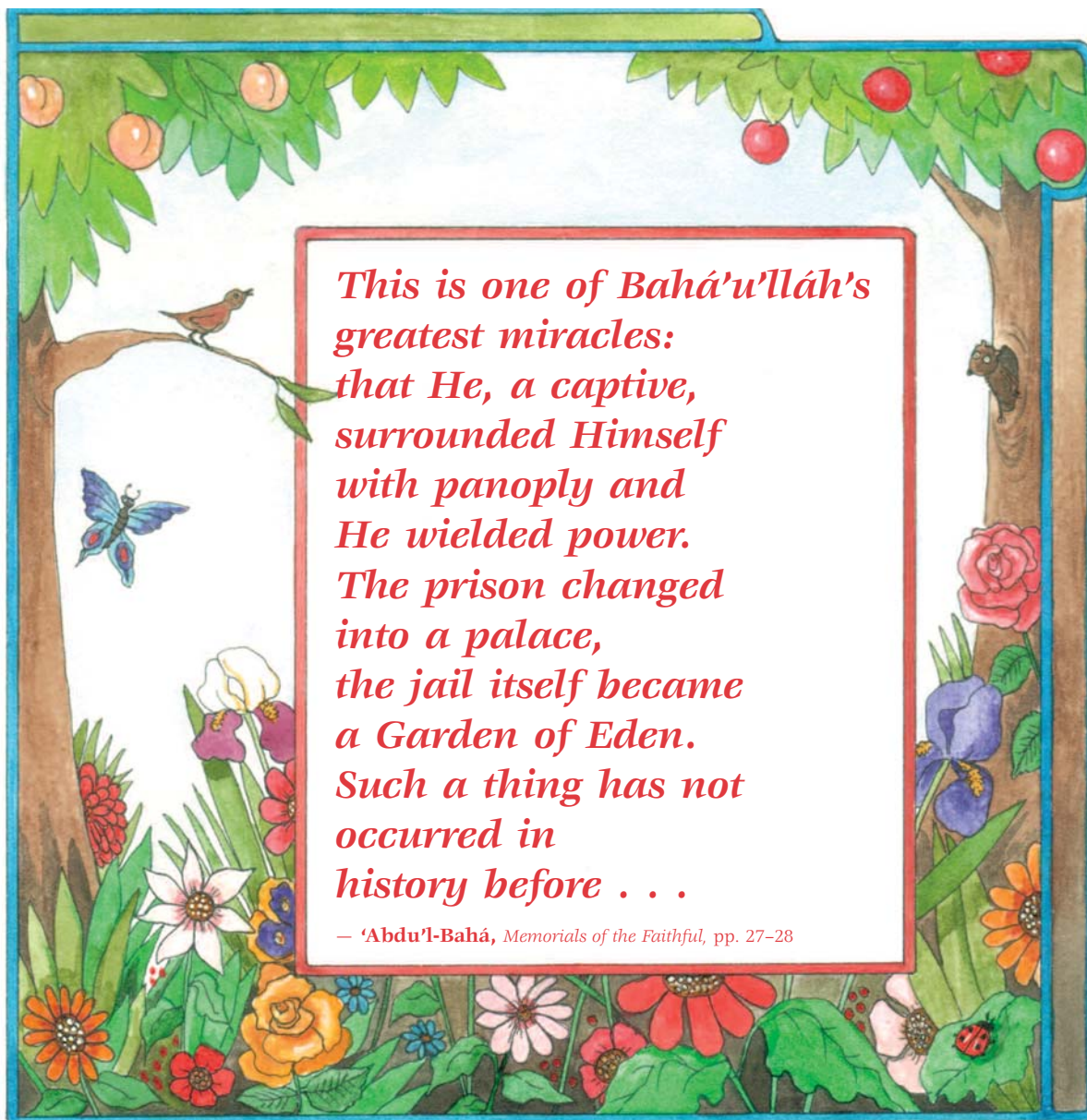
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# *The Greatest Father-Son Story of All Time*

*Written by Rick Johnson  
Illustrated by Winifred Barnum-Newman*



When I was eleven, something wonderful happened. A new clerk appeared behind the counter at the corner store. It turned out that he and his wife had bought the grocery and were now living in the small apartment upstairs over the store. His name was Ken, and his wife's nickname was Bates.

I never saw a place change so fast! Almost any time of day, junk and dust were flying out the door—they were really cleaning the place up! A run-down convenience store became a place that had fresh cookies for kids after school.

Even my mom started coming by the grocery store to drink a soda with Bates on Sunday mornings. It wasn't long until she and Bates were friends, and they'd spend hours talking together.



I was so lucky! On Sunday mornings, while Mom and Bates talked, I'd watch Ken play chess with some of the senior citizens. And when Ken had to serve a customer, he'd say to me, "OK, Chip, you take over for a couple of turns!" I felt so proud to be sitting across the chessboard from old Mr. Scroggins. I usually held my own, although I did lose Ken's queen a couple of times. But he didn't seem to mind, and sometimes it seemed that Ken let me play most of a game, kind of like he was making work for himself to let me go on. I liked that.

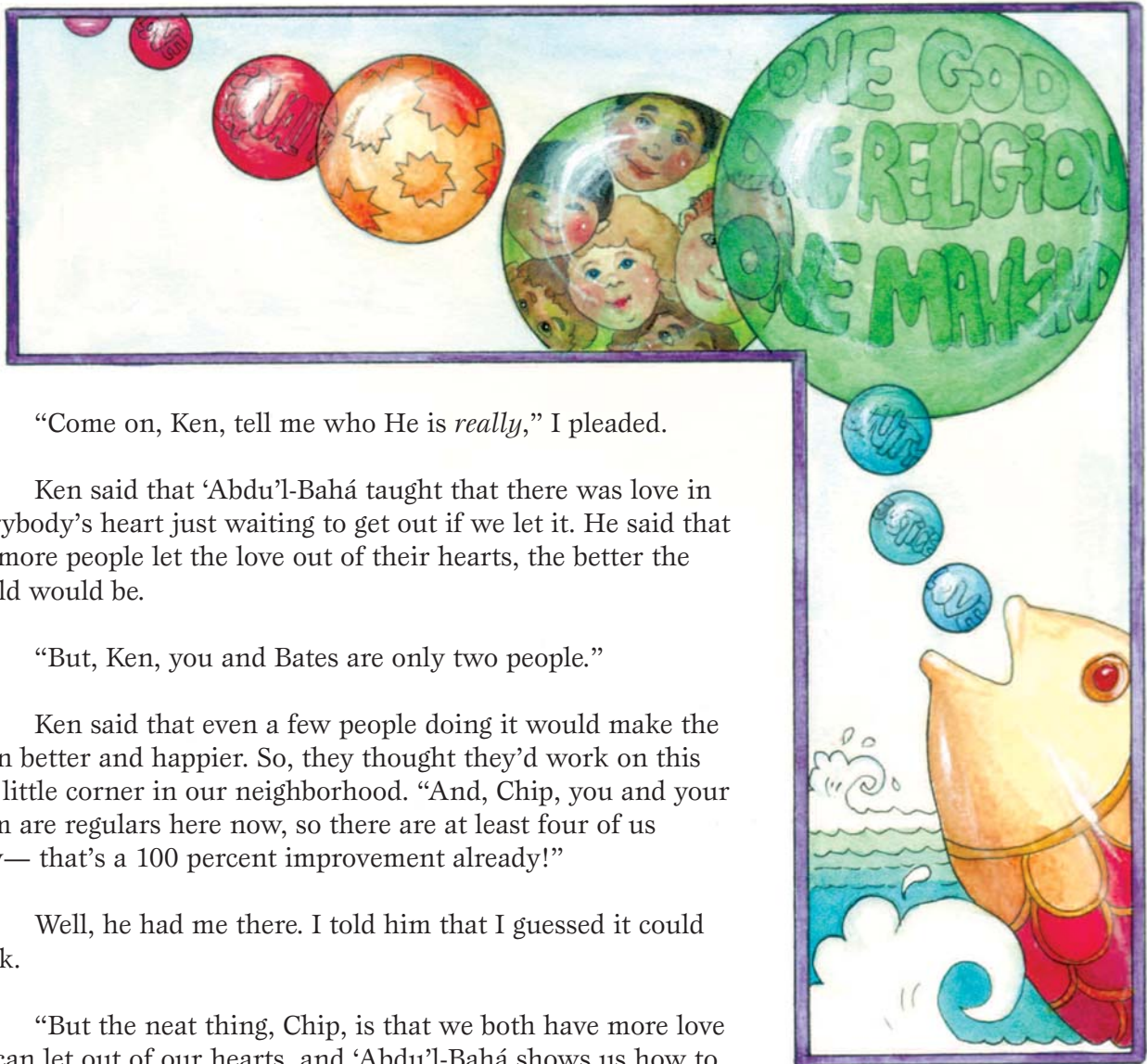
About the third month that Mom and I spent Sunday mornings at the store, I asked Ken what made him so special. I just couldn't get out of my head what a difference he and Bates had made in such a short time.

"Well," Ken responded, "if it's OK with your mom, I'll introduce you to someone who helps me—His name is 'Abdu'l-Bahá."

I asked my Mom if I could meet this special friend of Ken's, and she smiled at Bates and gave her one of those "I-know-what-you're-thinking" looks, and said, "Maybe I could 'meet' Him too, since we were just talking about the same thing."

Ken took us behind the counter, and there, hanging on the wall in their tiny office, was a picture of a man with a long white beard and a kind of funny turban-style hat. It looked a little strange for our neighborhood, but He had the happiest eyes I'd ever seen—except maybe for Ken and Bates. So this was where the sparkle in their eyes came from!

"This is 'Abdu'l-Bahá," Ken told me. He leaned over to me and whispered, "He's my coach when I need to know how to beat you at chess." The twinkle in his eyes told me he was teasing me.



“Come on, Ken, tell me who He is *really*,” I pleaded.

Ken said that ‘Abdu’l-Bahá taught that there was love in everybody’s heart just waiting to get out if we let it. He said that the more people let the love out of their hearts, the better the world would be.

“But, Ken, you and Bates are only two people.”

Ken said that even a few people doing it would make the town better and happier. So, they thought they’d work on this one little corner in our neighborhood. “And, Chip, you and your mom are regulars here now, so there are at least four of us now— that’s a 100 percent improvement already!”

Well, he had me there. I told him that I guessed it could work.

“But the neat thing, Chip, is that we both have more love we can let out of our hearts, and ‘Abdu’l-Bahá shows us how to do it.

“Come on, Chip, I’ll show you what I mean. We’re going to plant some flowers out in front of the store. You can help.”

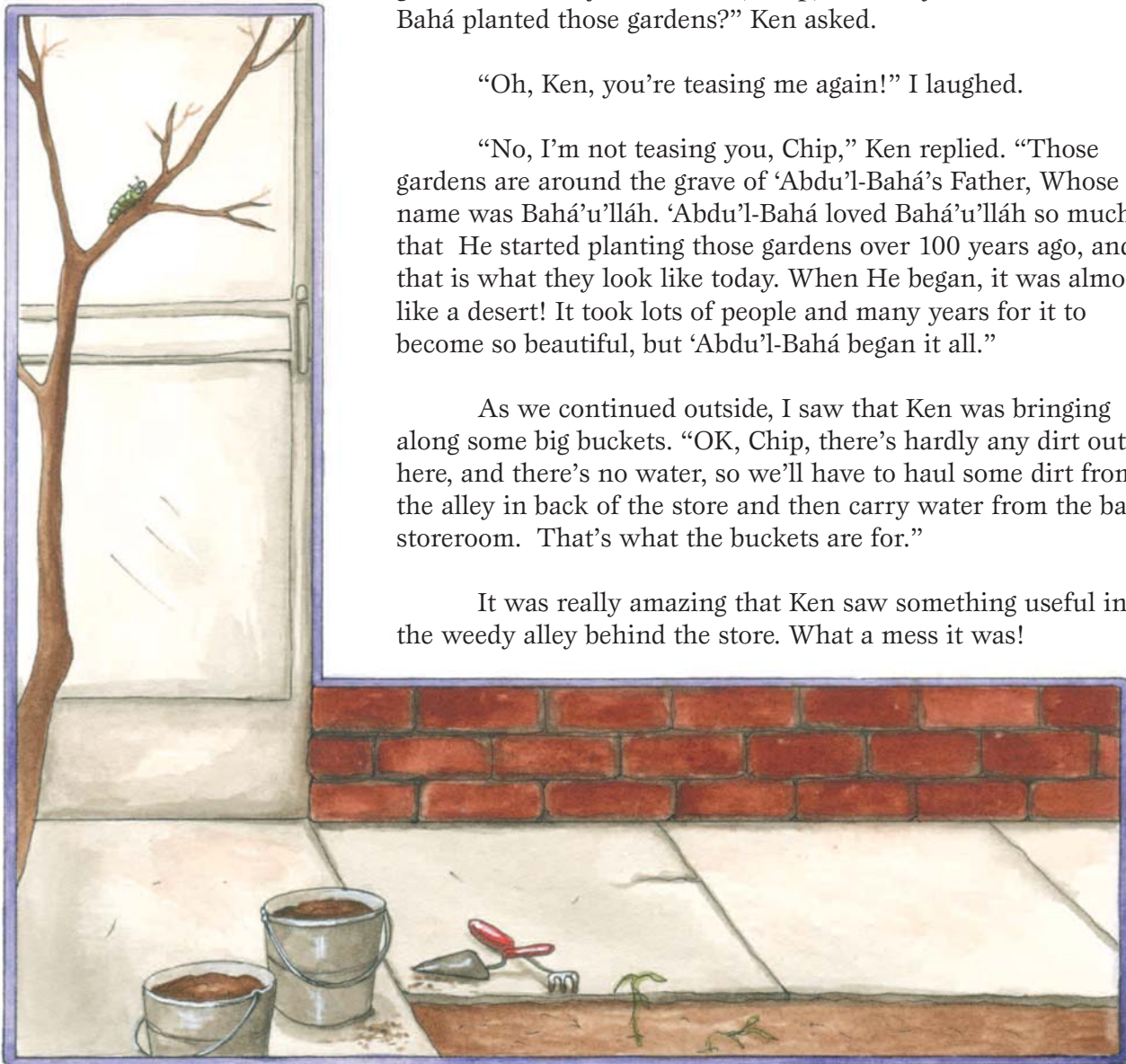
On the way out, Ken pointed out another picture hanging on the wall. It was a photo of a large and incredibly beautiful garden. “Would you believe it, Chip, if I told you that ‘Abdu’l-Bahá planted those gardens?” Ken asked.

“Oh, Ken, you’re teasing me again!” I laughed.

“No, I’m not teasing you, Chip,” Ken replied. “Those gardens are around the grave of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s Father, Whose name was Bahá’u’lláh. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá loved Bahá’u’lláh so much that He started planting those gardens over 100 years ago, and that is what they look like today. When He began, it was almost like a desert! It took lots of people and many years for it to become so beautiful, but ‘Abdu’l-Bahá began it all.”

As we continued outside, I saw that Ken was bringing along some big buckets. “OK, Chip, there’s hardly any dirt out here, and there’s no water, so we’ll have to haul some dirt from the alley in back of the store and then carry water from the back storeroom. That’s what the buckets are for.”

It was really amazing that Ken saw something useful in the weedy alley behind the store. What a mess it was!



We carried soil, bucket by bucket, to the front of the store and poured it into some flower boxes Bates had prepared. Then we carried water from the storeroom.

Getting dirt and water in my socks was so much fun! It was better than finding a dollar bill on the sidewalk, even if the buckets were heavy!

“This is our little gardening project inspired by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá,” Bates said. She told about how much ‘Abdu’l-Bahá loved Bahá’u’lláh, and said that one of the ways ‘Abdu’l-Bahá showed this love was to create gardens around the Shrine of Bahá’u’lláh.

“People often saw ‘Abdu’l-Bahá carrying heavy pots of water, with sweat pouring off His face, as He planted those gardens,” Bates said as she patted the dirt around the flowers. “He even carried soil in His cloak to where He was working. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá wanted to show His love for Bahá’u’lláh so much that He did not seem to notice the hard work—even though He was over seventy years old.”

“Here comes some more water!” I yelled, running with the bucket, water sloshing merrily into my shoes.

“How in the world did ‘Abdu’l-Bahá do it?” Mom asked.

“Sometimes He walked two miles carrying flower pots on His shoulders,” Ken said. “Can you imagine Him, white hair and beard flowing, carrying these flower pots down the dusty roads of old Palestine?”

“I’ll bet the neighbors thought He was crazy,” I blurted out.

“I’d say, not crazy, but in love with Bahá’u’lláh,” Bates said. “I think it was the greatest Father-Son story of all time.





“One time, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s legs got so stiff from standing and working the water pump handle that He couldn’t walk, and his friends had to carry Him away from the pump and rub His legs. “Abdu’l-Bahá,’ they asked Him, ‘why do you tire yourself so?’ Do you know what He answered? ‘What can I do for Bahá’u’lláh?’ There just seemed to be no difficulty that could limit His service to Bahá’u’lláh. The more He remembered Bahá’u’lláh, the more He wanted to serve.”

“You were telling me that the gardens ‘Abdu’l-Bahá started are now one of the wonders of the world,” my Mom said.

“Yes,” Ken said, “He turned a desert into a garden.”

“Well, this corner wasn’t a desert exactly, but I’d say it was close enough,” I laughed. “I guess I see your point about how ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s gardening inspired what you are doing here on this corner.”

“We just think that we’re letting a little love out of our hearts in what we’re doing here, and you are too,” Bates said. “Little by little, that love will show up in the flowers; and little by little, people will notice.”

“And pretty soon they’ll be helping with the gardening!”

“Yes, Chip,” Ken laughed, “there’s a lot of room for more flower gardens on this block!” ★