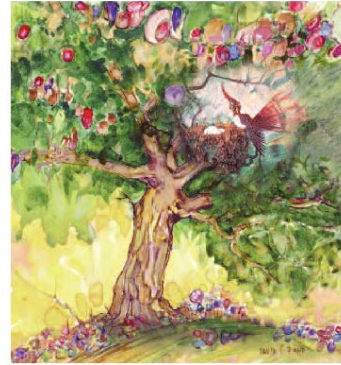


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The Central Figures

Bahá'u'lláh

Volume One



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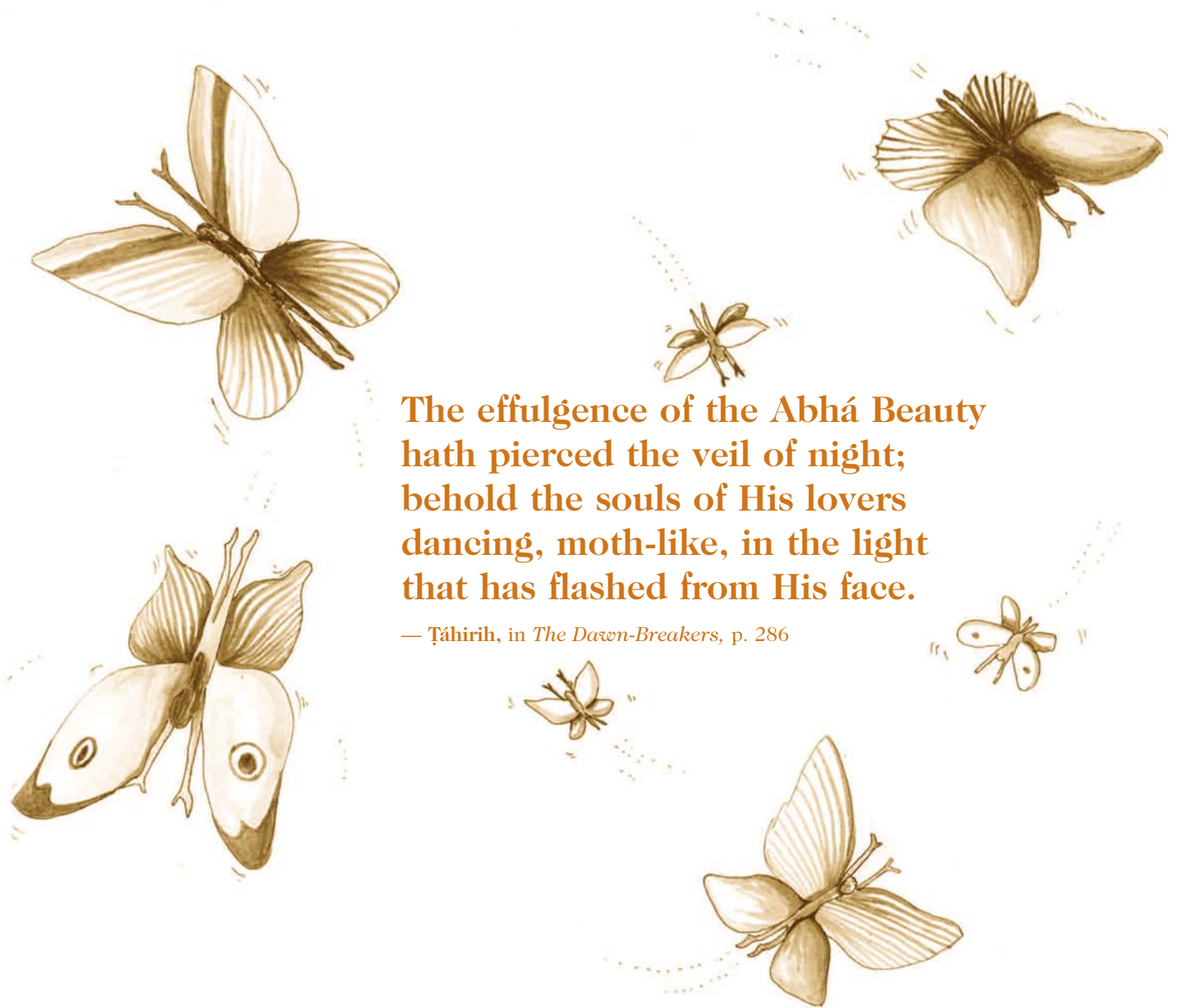
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**The effulgence of the Abhá Beauty
hath pierced the veil of night;
behold the souls of His lovers
dancing, moth-like, in the light
that has flashed from His face.**

— Ṭáhirih, in *The Dawn-Breakers*, p. 286

Escape to Ṭihrán

Written by Jean Gould
Illustrated by Jaci Ayorinde



Bahá'u'lláh knew that Ṭáhirih was in trouble. Probably any intelligent, outspoken woman in Persia at the beginning of Ramaḍán, the Muslim period of fasting, in 1847, would be in trouble. Women in Persia in 1847 were expected to remain silent and behind their veils. A beautiful, courageous poetess who had proven herself so capable of convincing people to join her in following the Báb would be in serious trouble, however.

It began in Qazvín when Mullá Taqí, Ṭáhirih's uncle and father-in-law, tried to force her to give up her faith in the Báb and return to her husband, who shared his father's malice for the Báb and His followers. The husband expected her to always obey him, to keep quiet, and limit her attentions to traditional womanly concerns. When she refused to meet these demands, her uncle became so angry that he struck the beautiful Ṭáhirih—not once, but several times. Into the silence that



followed this terrible moment, she suddenly cried, “O Uncle, I see your mouth fill up with blood.” These prophetic words heralded a catastrophic chain of events.

It wasn’t long before Mullá Taqí, who had certainly disregarded the words of a mere woman, was in the mosque one morning at dawn where he was soon to lead the people in prayer. As he knelt on his prayer rug, a man suddenly rushed from the shadows, threw the Mullá onto his back, and plunged a dagger into his mouth. Then he ran away into the dark while Mullá Taqí lay in a growing pool of blood that flowed from between his lips.

The killer was a follower of Shaykh Ahmad and Siyyid Kázim, holy men who had foretold the coming of the Báb. He had been on his way to try to secure an audience with the Báb when he came across a ruthless mob tormenting a fellow Shaykh. When he learned that Mullá Taqí had issued the order for the torment, he formed his simple, deadly plan and carried it through immediately.

When the real killer could not be found, Ṭáhirih’s enraged husband and his relatives were delighted to accuse Ṭáhirih, the Pure One, of orchestrating the death of her father-in-law. “No one else but you is guilty of the murder of our father,” they accused. “You issued the order for his assassination.”

They managed to imprison Ṭáhirih in her father’s house and surround her with women who were instructed to keep her in her room, except to perform her ablutions, when she washed for prayers. This was certainly not enough for a pack of relatives thirsting for blood. They demanded that many Bábís must die to pay for the death of Mullá Taqí.

The Muslim leaders and their followers joined the relatives in the hunt. Together, they sprang upon defenseless victims and used appallingly creative ways to slaughter them—men, women, and children—with no mercy and certainly no fear of reprisal.

Some Bábís were put into chains, herded to Tīhrán, and imprisoned in the house of one of the headmen, or kad-khudá, as they were called. It was then that Bahá'u'lláh entered this particular fray. Ever the Father of the Poor, ever the Champion of the oppressed, He determined to intervene on behalf of His fellow Bábís.

“Oh, yes,” said the greedy kad-khudá when Bahá'u'lláh came to see him. “They are destitute of the barest necessities of life. They hunger for food, and their clothing is wretchedly scanty.” When, at Bahá'u'lláh's command, the money and food began to pour into the house, the kad-khudá informed his superiors, who saw the perfect opportunity to take advantage of Bahá'u'lláh's legendary generosity.

They summoned Bahá'u'lláh to their presence. They protested His actions and accused Him of partnership in the murder of Mullá Taqí. “The kad-khudá,” Bahá'u'lláh replied, “pleaded their cause before Me and enlarged upon their sufferings and needs. He himself bore witness to their innocence and appealed to Me for help. In return for the aid, which in response to his invitation, I was impelled to extend, you now charge Me with a crime of which I am innocent.”

They ignored Bahá'u'lláh's logic. It wasn't their purpose to learn the truth, and they refused to allow Him to return home. They demanded the outrageous sum of one thousand túmáns for His release.



Within a few days, these friends intervened on His behalf and used powerful words to threaten the kad-khudá and his greedy cohorts. Soon they were forced to hand over Bahá'u'lláh, along with a thousand apologies. The one thousand túmáns were never mentioned again.

Bahá'u'lláh's work was only beginning. In Qazvín, Ṭáhirih was living under terrible conditions. She was refusing food because her husband and his relatives had poisoned it, and she fretted in her "cage," grieving for the loss of so many friends. Now, her husband had determined that she should somehow suffer the same bloody fate, and he began to plot in earnest.

But Ṭáhirih, the Pure, the Fearless, had had enough. She had a steadfast and unmovable faith in a higher and unconquerable Power. With her formidable mind, she had recognized the station of Bahá'u'lláh and His ability to achieve the seemingly impossible. In her darkest hour, she issued a challenge to her husband: "If my Cause be the Cause of Truth, if the Lord I worship be none other than the one true God, He will, ere nine days have elapsed, deliver me from the yoke of your tyranny. Should He fail to achieve my deliverance, you are free to act as you desire. You will have irrevocably established the falsity of my belief."

The cowardly husband, unable to accept so bold a challenge, ignored it completely and continued his scheming ways.

Bahá'u'lláh heard and accepted the challenge, however, and determined to establish the truth of her words. From His home in the capital city of Ṭihrán, He orchestrated her escape with a wonderfully simple plan. Muḥammad-Hádí, the faithful, eldest brother of Ṭáhirih, was summoned to Bahá'u'lláh's presence and entrusted with the plan. "The Almighty will assuredly guide your steps and will surround you with His unfailing protection," He said.

Muḥammad-Hádí set out immediately for Qazvín. There



he enlisted the help of his wife, Khátúm-Ján, who was devoted to Ṭáhirih and who had become a genius at finding ways to contact her and bring her food. This time, according to divine plan, she dressed in disguise as a beggar woman to deliver a heavenly letter. After reading its fateful contents, Ṭáhirih whispered, “You go, and I will follow.” In a little while, the Pure One joined her. Miraculously, they passed from the house unnoticed. Veiled and unhindered by people or possessions, they stepped quietly through the streets past an unsuspecting populace to the house of a carpenter, a friend of Muḥammad-Hádí’s and Khátúm-Ján’s, where no lady of high status would deign to go.

Within the hour, the alarm was raised. Ṭáhirih the Bold had indeed disappeared. When the news spread, the people and the Muslim clergy raised a great cry. Under cover of night and confusion, the three friends fled to the Sháhzádih Gate and flew on wings of fear and joy past the city walls to the abattoir, the slaughterhouse, where there waited three horses to carry them away to Ṭíhrán, the city of light. Leaping onto the backs of the willing animals, the trio rode away into the darkness. Later, exhausted but triumphant, they reached the



outskirts of the capital as the day began to break. There they stopped in an empty garden to rest and hide.

When night fell, several horsemen stealthily entered the garden to pay their respects to the Pure One and deliver a final instruction. Once more, Ṭāhiriḥ mounted her horse, and together they rode to the city gates, where they slipped through unnoticed and unrecognized. Soon Baha'u'llah's vast and glittering house came into view. A door quietly opened, and Ṭāhiriḥ the Beautiful slipped from her horse, stepped across the threshold, and passed beyond the bounds of prying eyes. For the moment, she was safe within the strong fortress created by Bahá'u'lláh, the Father of the Poor, and His wife, the Mother of Consolation. ★