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*The Central Figures*

# Bahá'u'lláh

Volume Three



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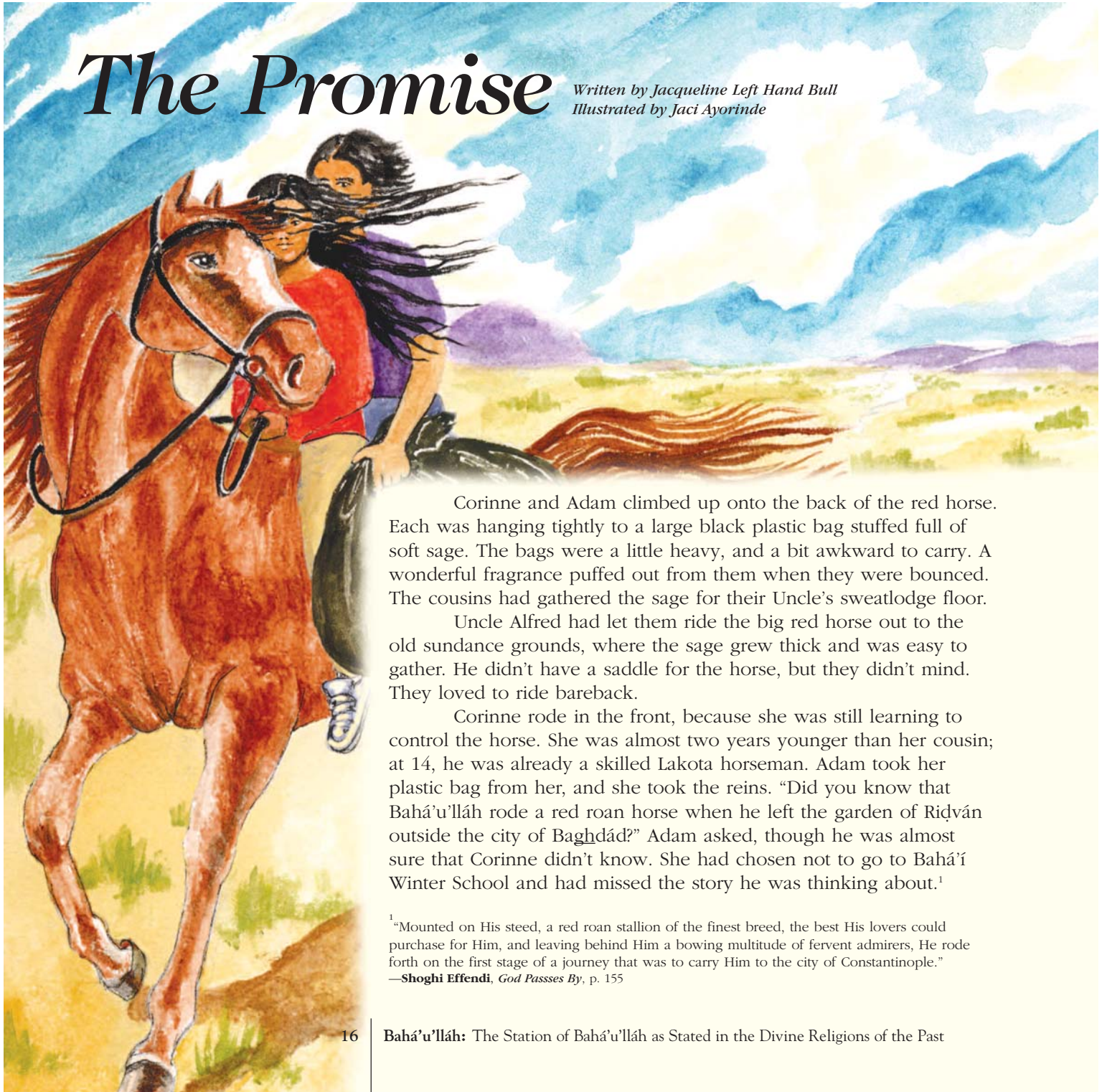
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# The Promise

Written by Jacqueline Left Hand Bull  
Illustrated by Jaci Ayorinde



Corinne and Adam climbed up onto the back of the red horse. Each was hanging tightly to a large black plastic bag stuffed full of soft sage. The bags were a little heavy, and a bit awkward to carry. A wonderful fragrance puffed out from them when they were bounced. The cousins had gathered the sage for their Uncle's sweatlodge floor.

Uncle Alfred had let them ride the big red horse out to the old sundance grounds, where the sage grew thick and was easy to gather. He didn't have a saddle for the horse, but they didn't mind. They loved to ride bareback.

Corinne rode in the front, because she was still learning to control the horse. She was almost two years younger than her cousin; at 14, he was already a skilled Lakota horseman. Adam took her plastic bag from her, and she took the reins. "Did you know that Bahá'u'lláh rode a red roan horse when he left the garden of Riḍván outside the city of Baghdád?" Adam asked, though he was almost sure that Corinne didn't know. She had chosen not to go to Bahá'í Winter School and had missed the story he was thinking about.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>"Mounted on His steed, a red roan stallion of the finest breed, the best His lovers could purchase for Him, and leaving behind Him a bowing multitude of fervent admirers, He rode forth on the first stage of a journey that was to carry Him to the city of Constantinople."  
—Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By*, p. 155



“I bet it was really nice. Do you think that horse could be related to this one? It’s possible, you know.” Corinne evaded his question.

“Anything is possible, but I don’t think so,” Adam answered.

After a while, Corinne wondered aloud, “Why did Bahá’u’lláh leave that place?”

“They made Him leave. The king, or the one in charge, banished Him. They were afraid of the influence He had on the people,” Adam answered.

“That’s like Jesus,” Corinne said over her shoulder to Adam.

“I know. I wonder why people do things like that. It’s like they were afraid of change or something.”

“Maybe afraid of losing traditions.”

“Well, one tradition around here that’s not going to change is kids riding horses bareback. Let’s go faster! Hunta!” Adam shouted.

“You might fall off!”

“I don’t care. It won’t hurt that much,” he responded. “I’ll take the blame if I fall. Let’s go!” Adam leaned forward to balance and nudged his heel into the horse’s lower ribs, and it spurred to a faster pace. Corinne and Adam laughed with delight as their dark hair flew back from their faces.

Uncle Alfred was pleased with how much sage the cousins had gathered and praised them for their help. He said the men in the sweatlodge that evening would have a very soft, clean floor to sit on, and that they would use the sage like washcloths and towels during the ceremony.

The cousins loved to please their uncle. His kindness and care for them made them feel happy and safe. They led the horse back to the corral and made sure there was water in the barrel, and then they went inside the house to play a video game. That night they sat outside and listened to the prayer songs coming from the sweatlodge, as they had on many warm summer nights all through their childhood. Adam softly sang along with the songs he knew.

“Come eat some soup,” Grandma called. The ceremony had ended, and now it was time to eat with those who had prayed so intensely that evening.





Something about the scent of the fresh sage, the prayers, and the kindness of everyone suddenly reminded Corinne of the time she'd spent at last summer's sundance, helping to cook and serve a meal for dozens of people. It was at the end of the fourth morning of the dance. Her uncle had helped, and all the men had fasted, prayed, and danced for four days. Relatives and friends were smiling, and a few of them quietly shed tears of gratitude and happiness. She remembered vividly how wonderful she felt when she walked along the line of sundancers to shake the hand of each one and thank them. Although they didn't look directly at her, and she didn't look into their faces either, she sensed their humility. She was so proud of them, and happy to be able to serve the people as a way of honoring the dancers. But, she knew that there was much that she didn't fully understand.

"Are you going to be a sundancer?" she suddenly asked her cousin, looking at him over the bowl of boiled beef soup.

"What made you ask that?" he responded.

"Just the feeling tonight, I guess. It reminds me of last summer. Can I ask you about the sundance?" she asked.

"Why?" Adam quietly answered.

"I just want to know more. Grandma says I should watch and learn about things and not ask a lot of questions before I think," she responded, and got up to help gather the bowls for washing and to pour coffee for the adults.

Adam was a bit relieved that she didn't insist on asking her questions. He had some questions of his own. At last year's sundance, he'd been content to sit quietly, praying with the dancers and helping in his family's camp. He arose at dawn every morning and went to the dance grounds, watching the dancers take their places, all facing eastward. His heart was filled with awe and unnamed feelings at the beauty of everything as the singers began the first round of songs exactly at sunrise. He knew that the dancers were praying "that the people may live." He was filled with a sense of belonging and hope. Surely, prayers such as these had helped the nation survive so much tragedy in the past. What would the future bring? Ptehincala Skawin, the White Buffalocalf Woman, had promised a bright future. Would he see it?

He fervently wished that he could talk to 'Abdu'l-Bahá and ask Him what He meant when He wrote those words about Indians



in the Tablets of the Divine Plan. He had not read the whole book, but he had read that part. It made him wonder. Maybe he should read the whole book. His thoughts of last summer were interrupted by people leaving.<sup>2</sup>

The next morning, Corinne offered to help her grandmother with hanging the wash on the line to dry in the wind. “Yes, my girl. I welcome your help,” Grandma replied. Together they swept and straightened the house, and soon it was time to bring in the dry laundry. As they folded the sheets and jeans, at last Corinne asked, “Grandma, they say that the White Buffalocalf Woman said she would come back to us.”

“Yes, the songs remind us of that.”

“Grandma, I think it means her spirit will return, not that she will actually be there in the flesh like she was the first time.”

Grandma’s eyebrows raised a little, “My girl, what makes you think that? Isn’t her spirit with us whenever we burn sweet grass?”

“Well, yes, I think of her then, but I mean her spirit in a big way. Like how we feel at the end of a ceremony. It’s more than one person’s spirit; it’s the spirit that everyone feels at the same time. And everyone forgives and accepts and really wishes the best for everyone else. It’s really good. Sometimes I sort of feel like that at the Bahá’í meetings, but I’m not sure I fit there. That’s why I didn’t go with Adam to the Winter School.”

Grandma looked up at Corinne. “You are very observant. It’s good that you think about these things. So much has changed since the old days, and there will be many more changes in your lifetime. I didn’t know if I would live to see the Indian people grow strong again, but it is happening. Sometimes it seemed we would not survive at all. But, then, we have never stopped praying all through the hard times. We always remembered Ptehincala Skawin’s promises.”

Just then, the dogs started barking, and they could hear a car crunching down the dusty graveled road. Grandma went into the kitchen and lit a small fire under the coffee pot. Corinne, disappointed that the conversation had ended, slipped out the back door to look for her cousin. Maybe he would want to go swimming at the dam.

Adam was sitting on the bench in the shade of Uncle Alfred’s

<sup>2</sup>“Attach great importance to the indigenous population of America. . . . should they be educated and guided, there can be no doubt that they will become so illumined as to enlighten the whole world.” —‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Tablets of the Divine Plan*, p. 33





house, drawing designs on a board. There were geometric patterns, and as she sat down nearby, Corinne saw that he had also tried to draw a nine-pointed star. “Are you going to be a Bahá’í?” she asked.

“What’s going on? First you ask if I am gonna be a sundancer, and then you ask if I’m gonna be a Bahá’í.” He seemed annoyed. He glanced at his cousin and softened. “I don’t know yet. I have a lot of questions, too.” Corinne’s hurt feelings at her cousin’s rude response were quickly forgotten.

“You do?” she asked.

That evening, they joined their Uncle outside on the bench against the wall of the house. After a while, Adam asked, “Uncle, I’ve been learning about Bahá’u’lláh from the Bahá’ís, and even when I just hear His name I get this good feeling. I think about it a lot. Then, too, I have that same feeling when we pray in our way, like at the sundance.”

There was a moment of silence, then Uncle Alfred responded. “Nephew, there is only one God in all of the universe. God gave us everything we need. Think about that. Each time we take time to think about things we’ve been given, we understand a little more about how the world is designed. It is good. We can see where we stand in relationship to God. And we know we are related to every created thing.” He paused for a few moments, as though he were savoring the wonder of creation, and then he began talking again.

“Long time ago, the White Buffalocalf Woman brought us the pipe and the ceremonies. These things help us to honor God, and they remind us how we are to live. They keep the people together. She said a time would come when things would be very hard for the people.” Again, he paused, looking up at the starry sky. “She was a sacred woman and knew things that no one else knew at that time. It was as if God touched her spirit and sent her to us. We will never forget her, or her promises. Nephew, maybe her spirit has come back in the teachings of Bahá’u’lláh. Those teachings are good. They have found a home in your heart, and so has He. The world of the spirit is mysterious.”

Corinne felt a peace come to her heart as she heard his words. Adam felt the same thing. Surely, the White Buffalocalf Woman had kept her promise. Uncle Alfred glanced at the cousins with tenderness, and looked again at the starry sky. “Nephew, get my small drum, and we’ll sing. Even though we are pitiful, God has remembered us, and sent good things to us.” ★