The following story is from the book

The Central Figures

Bahá'u'lláh

Volume Three

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Core Curriculum for Spiritual Education · Stories
National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the United States

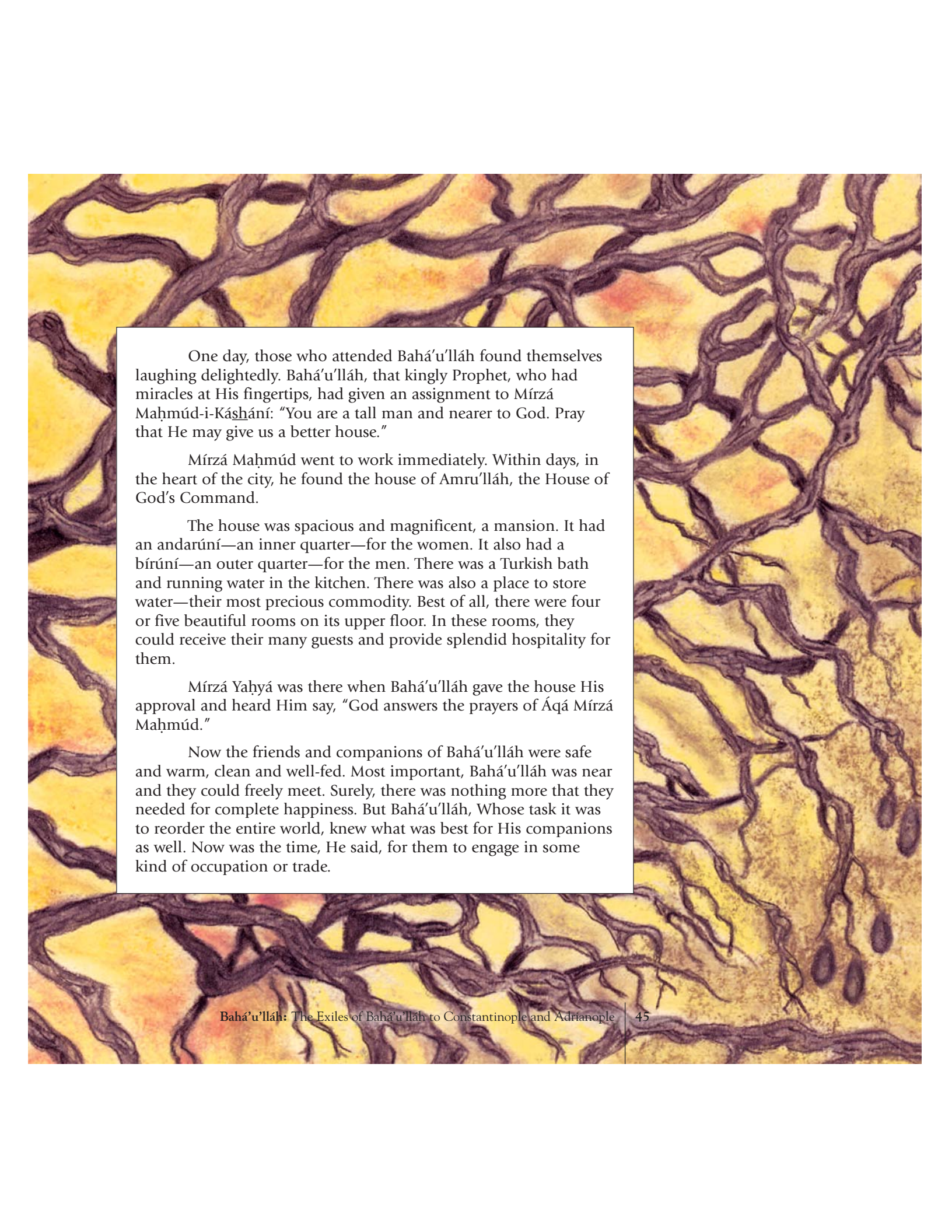Bahá'í Publishing Trust
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In the House of God's Command

Written by Jean Gould • Illustrated by Beth Fleming

One day at dusk, the Blessed Beauty and some of His companions stood facing the west. They watched as the blazing sun slowly sank from view. Unexpectedly, Bahá'u'lláh turned and pointed. Then He said, "A bird perching on a branch of this tree uttered these words three times: 'Muḥammad came and calamity came.'" Perhaps Bahá'u'lláh's companions were startled by this sudden strange remark. Of course, being merely human, no one else had heard the feathered creature speak. No one could explain the meaning of Bahá'u'lláh's statement.

But they had learned something in their days with Bahá'u'lláh. If they didn't understand His words immediately, they must be patient and wait. If they were alarmed by the word "calamity," they were easily calmed by remembering that they were with their Lord. The only true calamity was to be separated from Him.

They were convinced of this. Any one of them could have left Bahá'u'lláh and almost certainly found an easier life. Yet the entire company had made the treacherous journey from Constantinople to Adrianople during the worst winter anyone could remember. Even though they were badly-housed, poorly-clad, and their future was dark and uncertain, they had the one thing that really mattered: They were in the presence of Bahá'u'lláh.
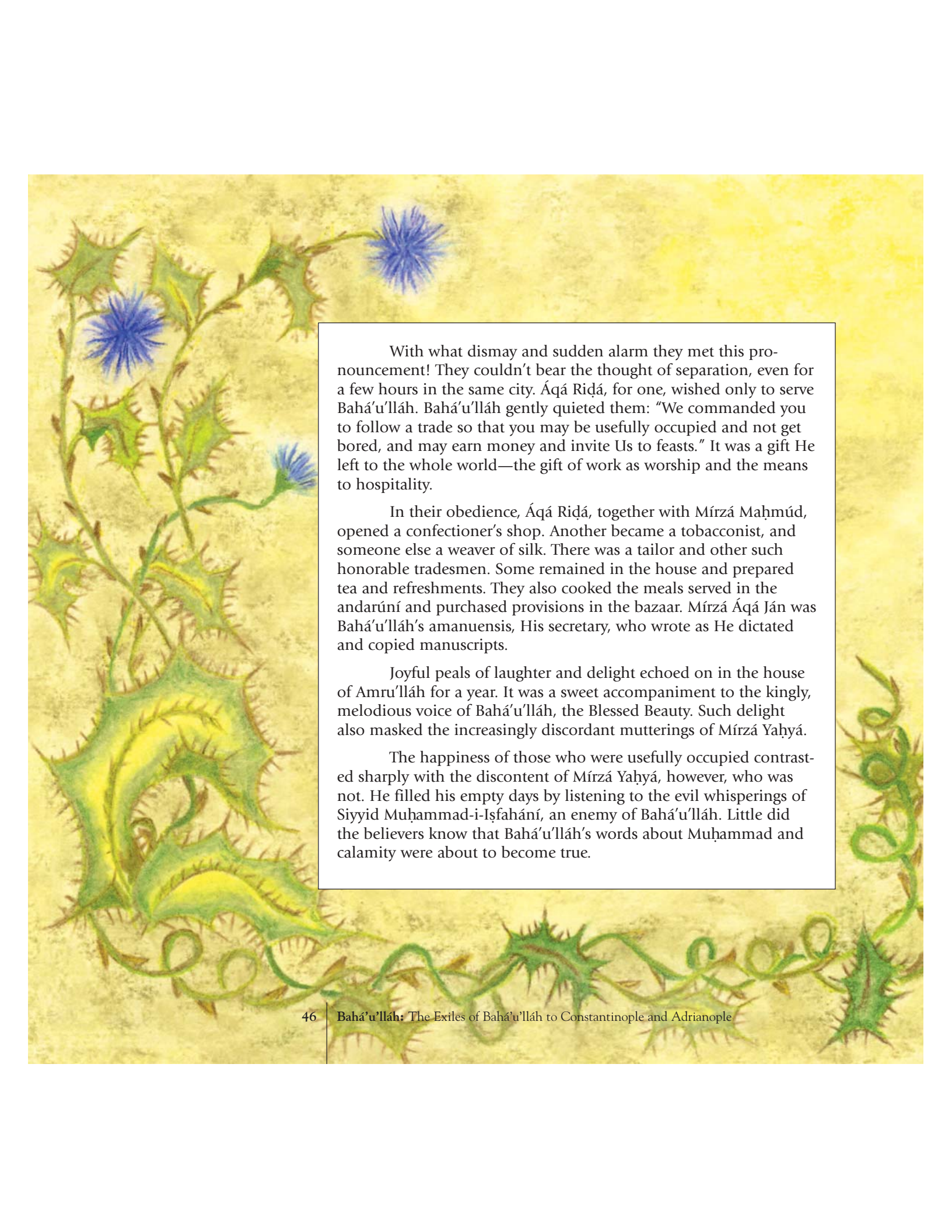
One day, those who attended Bahá'u'lláh found themselves laughing delightedly. Bahá'u'lláh, that kingly Prophet, who had miracles at His fingertips, had given an assignment to Mírzá Maḥmúd-i-Káshání: "You are a tall man and nearer to God. Pray that He may give us a better house."

Mírzá Maḥmúd went to work immediately. Within days, in the heart of the city, he found the house of Amru'lláh, the House of God's Command.

The house was spacious and magnificent, a mansion. It had an andarúní—an inner quarter—for the women. It also had a bírúní—an outer quarter—for the men. There was a Turkish bath and running water in the kitchen. There was also a place to store water—their most precious commodity. Best of all, there were four or five beautiful rooms on its upper floor. In these rooms, they could receive their many guests and provide splendid hospitality for them.

Mírzá Yaḥyá was there when Bahá'u'lláh gave the house His approval and heard Him say, "God answers the prayers of Áqá Mírzá Maḥmúd."

Now the friends and companions of Bahá'u'lláh were safe and warm, clean and well-fed. Most important, Bahá'u'lláh was near and they could freely meet. Surely, there was nothing more that they needed for complete happiness. But Bahá'u'lláh, Whose task it was to reorder the entire world, knew what was best for His companions as well. Now was the time, He said, for them to engage in some kind of occupation or trade.
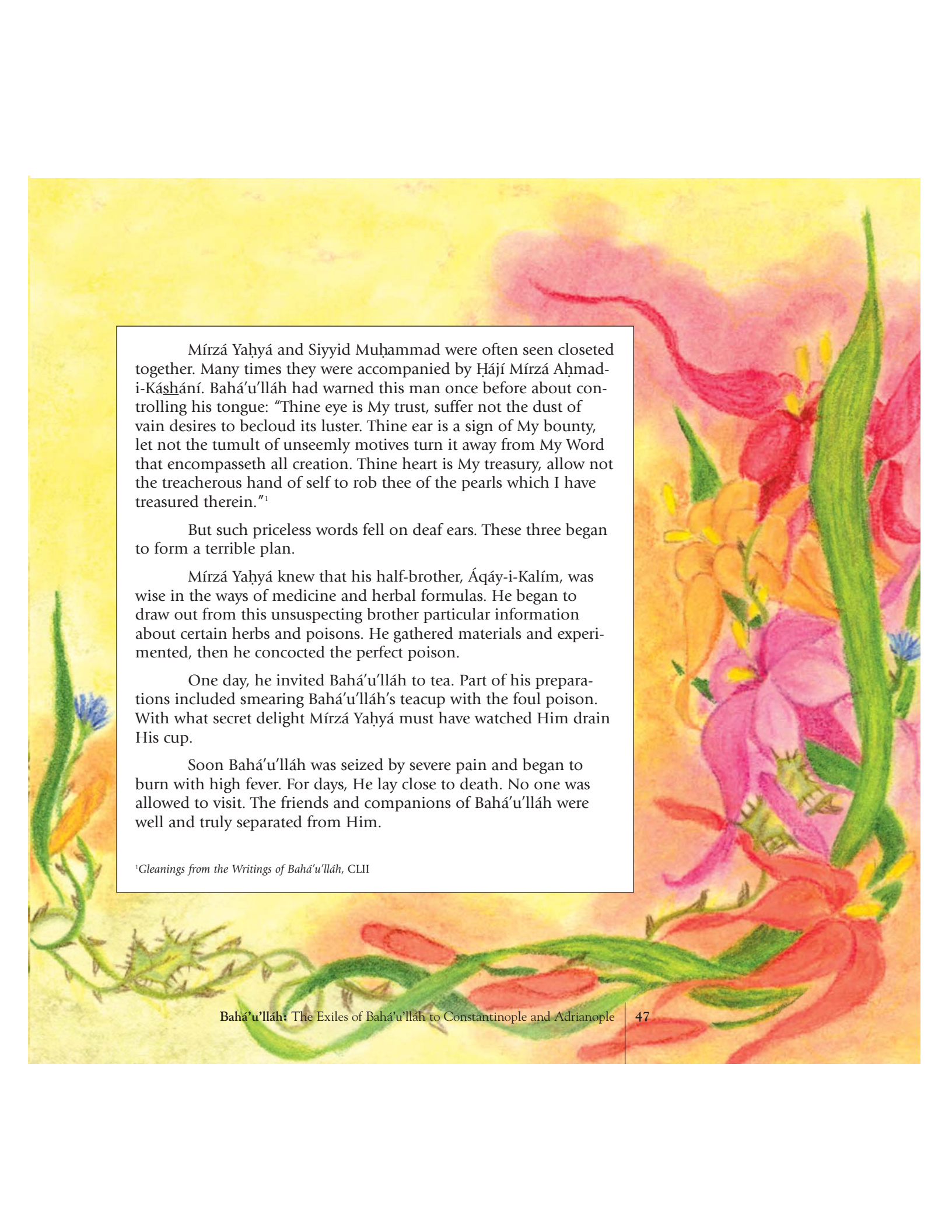
With what dismay and sudden alarm they met this pronouncement! They couldn't bear the thought of separation, even for a few hours in the same city. Áqá Riḍá, for one, wished only to serve Bahá'u'lláh. Bahá'u'lláh gently quieted them: "We commanded you to follow a trade so that you may be usefully occupied and not get bored, and may earn money and invite Us to feasts." It was a gift He left to the whole world—the gift of work as worship and the means to hospitality.

In their obedience, Áqá Riḍá, together with Mírzá Maḥmúd, opened a confectioner's shop. Another became a tobacconist, and someone else a weaver of silk. There was a tailor and other such honorable tradesmen. Some remained in the house and prepared tea and refreshments. They also cooked the meals served in the andarúní and purchased provisions in the bazaar. Mírzá Áqá Ján was Bahá'u'lláh's amanuensis, His secretary, who wrote as He dictated and copied manuscripts.

Joyful peals of laughter and delight echoed on in the house of Amru'lláh for a year. It was a sweet accompaniment to the kingly, melodious voice of Bahá'u'lláh, the Blessed Beauty. Such delight also masked the increasingly discordant mutterings of Mírzá Yaḥyá.

The happiness of those who were usefully occupied contrasted sharply with the discontent of Mírzá Yaḥyá, however, who was not. He filled his empty days by listening to the evil whisperings of Siyyid Muḥammad-i-Iṣfahání, an enemy of Bahá'u'lláh. Little did the believers know that Bahá'u'lláh's words about Muḥammad and calamity were about to become true.

Mírzá Yaḥyá and Siyyid Muḥammad were often seen closeted together. Many times they were accompanied by Ḥájí Mírzá Aḥmad-i-Káshání. Bahá'u'lláh had warned this man once before about controlling his tongue: "Thine eye is My trust, suffer not the dust of vain desires to becloud its luster. Thine ear is a sign of My bounty, let not the tumult of unseemly motives turn it away from My Word that encompasseth all creation. Thine heart is My treasury, allow not the treacherous hand of self to rob thee of the pearls which I have treasured therein."[1]
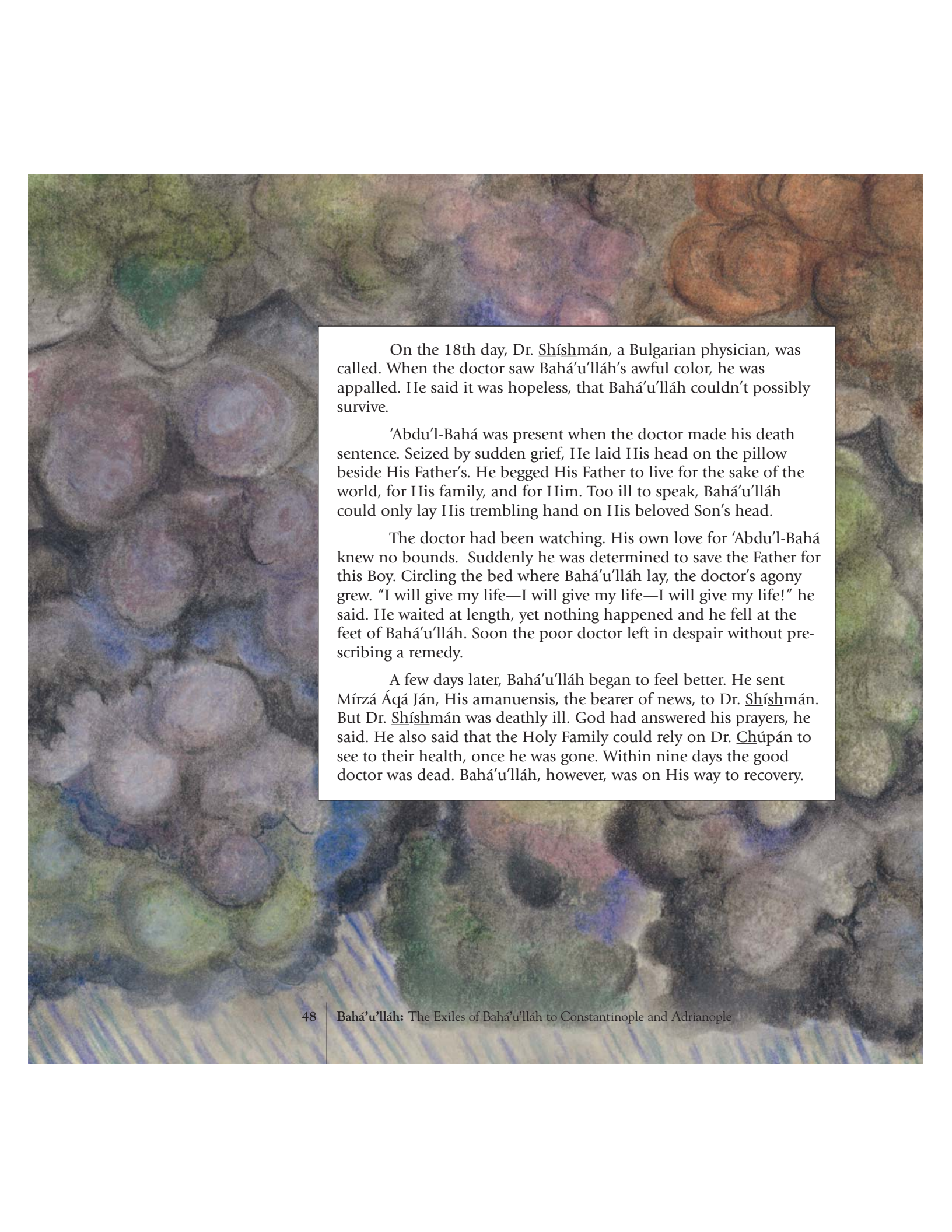
But such priceless words fell on deaf ears. These three began to form a terrible plan.

Mírzá Yaḥyá knew that his half-brother, Áqáy-i-Kalím, was wise in the ways of medicine and herbal formulas. He began to draw out from this unsuspecting brother particular information about certain herbs and poisons. He gathered materials and experimented, then he concocted the perfect poison.

One day, he invited Bahá'u'lláh to tea. Part of his preparations included smearing Bahá'u'lláh's teacup with the foul poison. With what secret delight Mírzá Yaḥyá must have watched Him drain His cup.

Soon Bahá'u'lláh was seized by severe pain and began to burn with high fever. For days, He lay close to death. No one was allowed to visit. The friends and companions of Bahá'u'lláh were well and truly separated from Him.

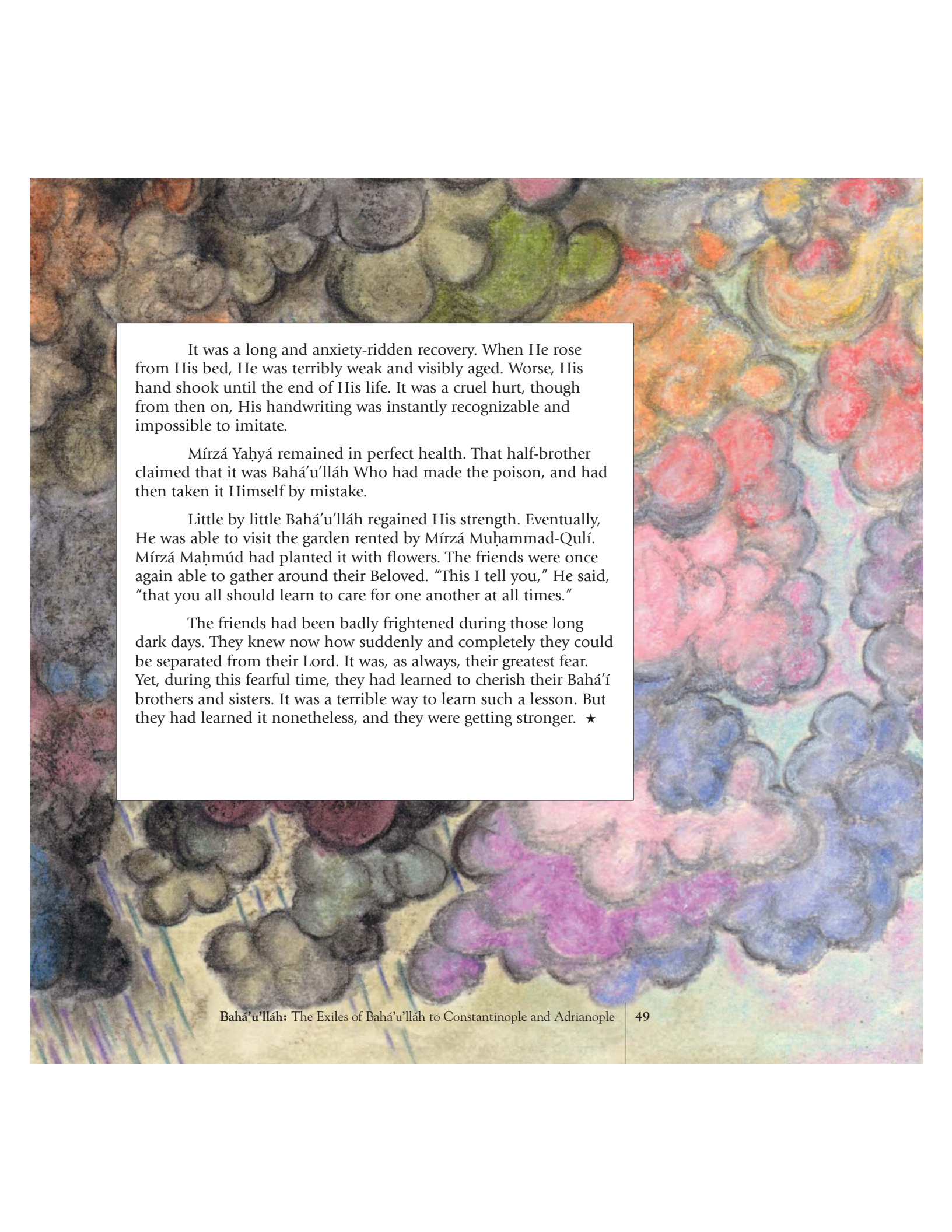[1]*Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, CLII*

On the 18th day, Dr. Shíshmán, a Bulgarian physician, was called. When the doctor saw Bahá'u'lláh's awful color, he was appalled. He said it was hopeless, that Bahá'u'lláh couldn't possibly survive.

'Abdu'l-Bahá was present when the doctor made his death sentence. Seized by sudden grief, He laid His head on the pillow beside His Father's. He begged His Father to live for the sake of the world, for His family, and for Him. Too ill to speak, Bahá'u'lláh could only lay His trembling hand on His beloved Son's head.

The doctor had been watching. His own love for 'Abdu'l-Bahá knew no bounds. Suddenly he was determined to save the Father for this Boy. Circling the bed where Bahá'u'lláh lay, the doctor's agony grew. "I will give my life—I will give my life—I will give my life!" he said. He waited at length, yet nothing happened and he fell at the feet of Bahá'u'lláh. Soon the poor doctor left in despair without prescribing a remedy.

A few days later, Bahá'u'lláh began to feel better. He sent Mírzá Áqá Ján, His amanuensis, the bearer of news, to Dr. Shíshmán. But Dr. Shíshmán was deathly ill. God had answered his prayers, he said. He also said that the Holy Family could rely on Dr. Chúpán to see to their health, once he was gone. Within nine days the good doctor was dead. Bahá'u'lláh, however, was on His way to recovery.

It was a long and anxiety-ridden recovery. When He rose from His bed, He was terribly weak and visibly aged. Worse, His hand shook until the end of His life. It was a cruel hurt, though from then on, His handwriting was instantly recognizable and impossible to imitate.

Mírzá Yaḥyá remained in perfect health. That half-brother claimed that it was Bahá'u'lláh Who had made the poison, and had then taken it Himself by mistake.

Little by little Bahá'u'lláh regained His strength. Eventually, He was able to visit the garden rented by Mírzá Muḥammad-Qulí. Mírzá Maḥmúd had planted it with flowers. The friends were once again able to gather around their Beloved. "This I tell you," He said, "that you all should learn to care for one another at all times."

The friends had been badly frightened during those long dark days. They knew now how suddenly and completely they could be separated from their Lord. It was, as always, their greatest fear. Yet, during this fearful time, they had learned to cherish their Bahá'í brothers and sisters. It was a terrible way to learn such a lesson. But they had learned it nonetheless, and they were getting stronger. ★