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The Central Figures

Bahá'u'lláh

Volume Three



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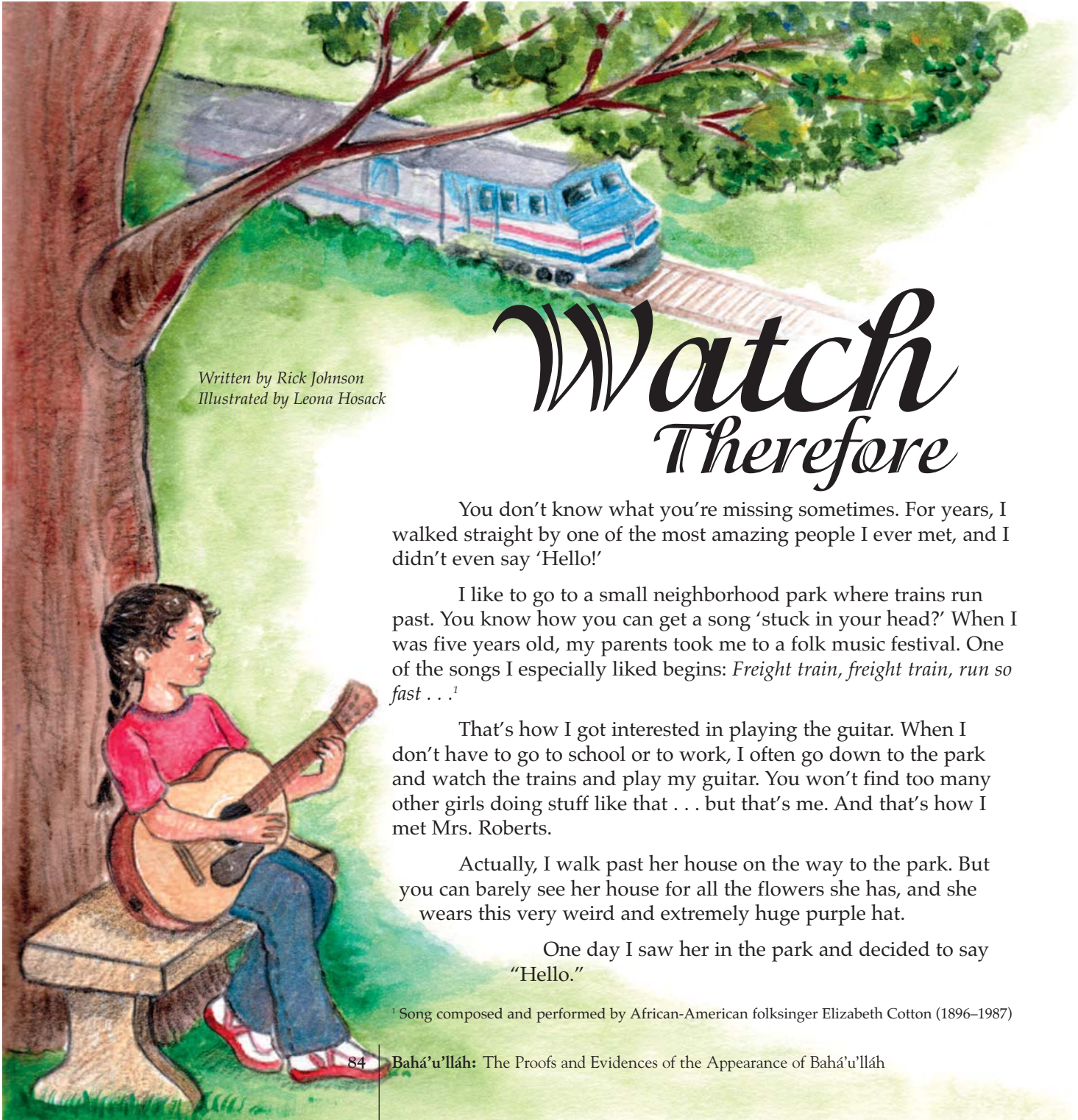
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Watch Therefore

You don't know what you're missing sometimes. For years, I walked straight by one of the most amazing people I ever met, and I didn't even say 'Hello!'

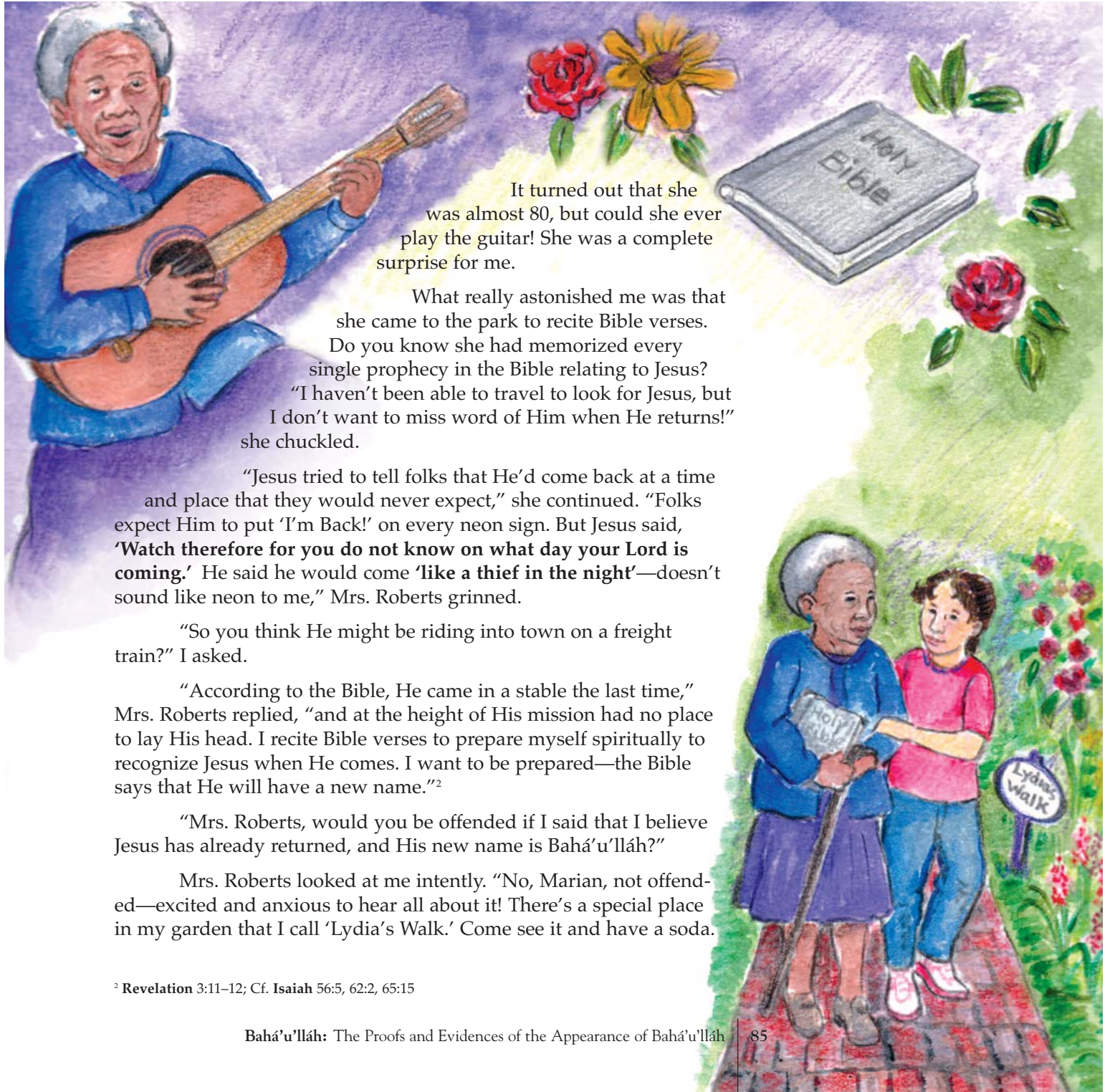
I like to go to a small neighborhood park where trains run past. You know how you can get a song 'stuck in your head?' When I was five years old, my parents took me to a folk music festival. One of the songs I especially liked begins: *Freight train, freight train, run so fast . . .*¹

That's how I got interested in playing the guitar. When I don't have to go to school or to work, I often go down to the park and watch the trains and play my guitar. You won't find too many other girls doing stuff like that . . . but that's me. And that's how I met Mrs. Roberts.

Actually, I walk past her house on the way to the park. But you can barely see her house for all the flowers she has, and she wears this very weird and extremely huge purple hat.

One day I saw her in the park and decided to say "Hello."

¹ Song composed and performed by African-American folksinger Elizabeth Cotton (1896–1987)



It turned out that she was almost 80, but could she ever play the guitar! She was a complete surprise for me.

What really astonished me was that she came to the park to recite Bible verses. Do you know she had memorized every single prophecy in the Bible relating to Jesus? "I haven't been able to travel to look for Jesus, but I don't want to miss word of Him when He returns!" she chuckled.

"Jesus tried to tell folks that He'd come back at a time and place that they would never expect," she continued. "Folks expect Him to put 'I'm Back!' on every neon sign. But Jesus said, '**Watch therefore for you do not know on what day your Lord is coming.**' He said he would come '**like a thief in the night**'—doesn't sound like neon to me," Mrs. Roberts grinned.

"So you think He might be riding into town on a freight train?" I asked.

"According to the Bible, He came in a stable the last time," Mrs. Roberts replied, "and at the height of His mission had no place to lay His head. I recite Bible verses to prepare myself spiritually to recognize Jesus when He comes. I want to be prepared—the Bible says that He will have a new name."²

"Mrs. Roberts, would you be offended if I said that I believe Jesus has already returned, and His new name is Bahá'u'lláh?"

Mrs. Roberts looked at me intently. "No, Marian, not offended—excited and anxious to hear all about it! There's a special place in my garden that I call 'Lydia's Walk.' Come see it and have a soda.

² Revelation 3:11–12; Cf. Isaiah 56:5, 62:2, 65:15



You can tell me all about it.”

“Lydia’s Walk” was at the rear of Mrs. Roberts’ house. A brick path led to a small but lovely shelter with two benches inside. The tiny prayer house had a small but beautiful stained glass window with the words “**Watch Therefore**” . . . on it.

“My Great-Aunt Lydia gave my mother that stained glass when she left for Palestine in 1894,” Mrs. Roberts explained. “Aunt Lydia wasn’t very popular in our family, but my mother loved her dearly. She started preaching the Gospel in 1844, when she was 16. She heard a preacher’s sermon about Christ returning soon; and when the sermon was over, she spontaneously knelt down and led a prayer. That was the beginning of her preaching and a life-long search for the Promised One.”³

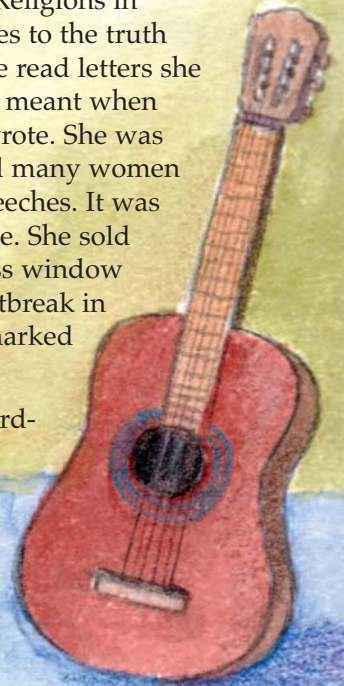
“What became of her?” I asked.

“She attended the World Parliament of Religions in Chicago in 1893. That gathering opened her eyes to the truth that lay in religions other than Christianity. I’ve read letters she wrote to my mother. ‘Maybe this is what Jesus meant when He said He would have a “new name!”’ she wrote. She was astonished to see so many different faiths, and many women addressing the sessions, and blacks giving speeches. It was marvelous to her. In 1894, she left for Palestine. She sold everything she had and gave her stained glass window to mother. We think she died in a cholera outbreak in Palestine, because her last letter was postmarked Haifa . . .”

“Haifa!” I gasped. I could hard-

³ Although ‘Lydia’ is fictional, there were a large number of female preachers in the 1800s. Their churches officially encouraged some, while others worked independently.

⁴ Historically accurate.



ly hold my soda steady!

“Yes, she had heard something at the Parliament that greatly excited her about Palestine,”⁵ Mrs. Roberts responded, “and because many Christian prophecies point to Palestine as the place for Christ’s Return, she felt strongly attracted there. In the 1800s, some Christians expected the Return of Christ with such certainty that they moved to Haifa, because they were certain that was where He would appear. Great-Aunt Lydia had some of that spirit in her. I’ve wondered what she was seeking there, but I’ve never been able to find out.”

“Mrs. Roberts,” I exclaimed, “those prophecies are about Bahá’u’lláh, whom Bahá’ís believe is the Return of Christ! He fulfilled every Biblical prophecy regarding Christ’s Return . . . and His Mission came to its climax around Haifa!” Mrs. Roberts jumped from her seat and pulled on my arm excitedly.

“Marian, you’ve got to take a look at something! Come with me!” We walked rapidly into her house.

Mrs. Roberts carefully opened a worn leather box. “These are the letters Great-Aunt Lydia sent my mother,” she said. “I want you to look at this one especially—it’s the last one she sent from Haifa.”

My dearest Abigail,

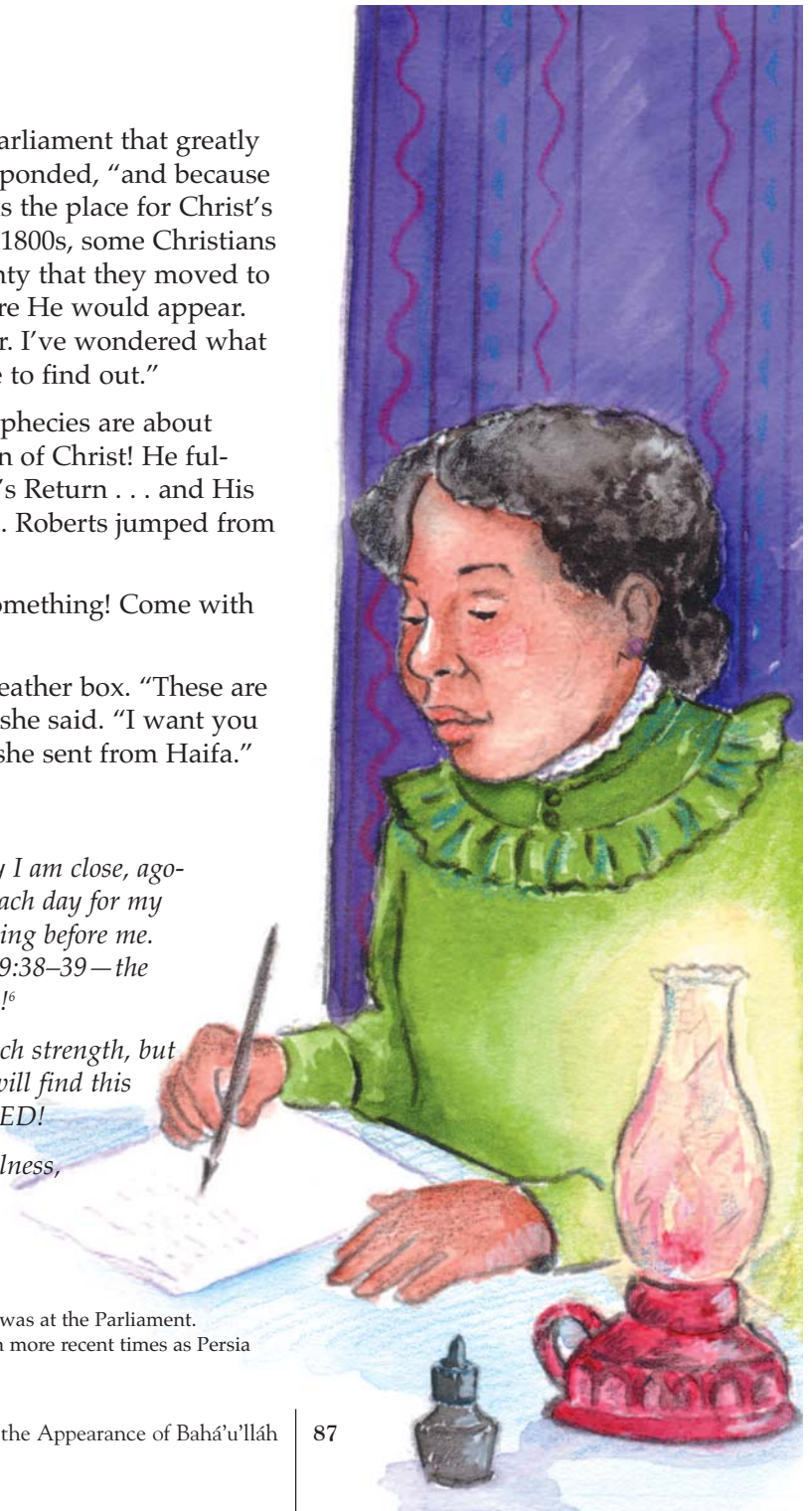
I arrive in Haifa and sense strongly I am close, agonizingly close to the answer I seek. I pray each day for my sight to be clear, and I feel that clarity opening before me. Jesus walks again, I feel certain. Jeremiah 49:38–39—the Promised One comes from Elam—PERSIA!⁶

I am feeling ill and do not have much strength, but my heart is happy. When I feel stronger, I will find this modern Elamite who is my Lord RETURNED!

Pray for me. Pray that my watchfulness, so long nurtured and sharpened, may not fail me now.

⁵ The first public mention in America of Bahá’u’lláh’s Teachings was at the Parliament.

⁶ In the days of Jeremiah, the Biblical writer, the region known in more recent times as Persia (Iran) was called Elam.



Your Lydia

"Marian, tell me—did this man you call Bahá'u'lláh come from Persia?"

"Yes," I replied.

"Ezekiel," she continued, "saw a vision of the Glory of God coming to Palestine from the east by way of a gate . . . Bahá'u'lláh fulfills this prophecy?" It was less a question than a statement.⁷

"Mrs. Roberts," I answered, "Bahá'u'lláh means The Glory of God in Arabic. He came to Palestine from the East, and His coming was foretold by a Prophet known as the Báb, which means the Gate."

"Lydia went to Haifa," Mrs. Roberts said, "because she knew the prophet Isaiah is very specific that the Promised One—he calls Him the glory of the Lord—will go unto Achor, Mt. Carmel, and the Plain of Sharon. Lydia knew that all these places were near Haifa."⁸

"She was right, Mrs. Roberts. Bahá'u'lláh lived in 'Akká, His Shrine where He is buried is near there, and the World Center of His Faith today is on Mt. Carmel. Your Aunt Lydia found the Promised One."

Mrs. Roberts covered her eyes with her hand as her eyes filled with tears. "I hope she lived long enough to know that for sure," she said.

"Reading that letter, I don't have a doubt that she knew it," I replied. "She knew the truth. Perhaps she was not able to meet Bahá'u'lláh in this life, but she knew she was in the Promised Land."

"The Bible says, 'And I will give . . . the valley of Achor for a door of hope,' " Mrs. Roberts mused, wiping away her tears. "I'm ready to enter that doorway of hope . . ."⁹

"Your Great-Aunt Lydia will be watching for you," I laughed, looking at the sun being scattered into many brilliant colors through the stained glass window. ★

⁷ Ezekiel 43:2

⁸ Isaiah 35:2, 65:10. Achor (modern-day 'Akká) and Mt. Carmel are both on the Plain of Sharon.

⁹ Hosea 2:15