

Bahá'u'lláh: The Baghdad Years & Ridván
As told from the perspective of the Leaves of the Holy Family,
Ázíyih Khánum, His Wife, and Bahíyyih Khánum, His Daughter

A Dramatic Reading by Marlene Macke *

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Part III – 9th Day of Ridván, 1863

Ázíyih Khánum

With the departure of the men in our Family for the Garden of Ridván, the crowding of our home by my Husband's guests ceased. We ladies quickly packed our belongings and readied ourselves to move to the Garden. However, the river was in flood, and we were unable to cross safely until nine days later. This time allowed me to reflect on my dear children, my sons 'Abbás, who chose the name 'Abdu'l-Bahá after His Father died, my precious Mírzá Mihdí, and my incomparable daughter, Bahíyyih Khánum. I did my best to give reading and writing lessons to 'Abbás, but there was never time for Bahíyyih Khánum to learn her letters. Even as a little girl, she was ever my helper in the household tasks.

Bahíyyih Khánum

I did everything possible to relieve the burdens on my dear Mother. As an example, I took responsibility for keeping the samovar filled so that we were never without tea. One incident resulted in a great family joke. An old lady came to visit and I prepared the samovar. When full of water, it was a heavy burden for me to carry upstairs and with my thin arms, I was not the most robust young girl. The old lady said, "One proof that the Bábí teaching is wonderful is that a very little girl served the samovar!" Father, especially, found this amusing and said to me, "Here is the lady converted by seeing your service at the samovar!" It was good to laugh together.

* See more about this document at https://bahai-library.com/macke_dramatic_readings

Ázíyih Khánum

I did sometimes worry about the future of my lovely daughter. Normally she could have been married with a family of her own by this time. However, like ‘Abbás who had begged my Husband to be allowed to serve Him, Bahíyyih Khánum wanted nothing but to serve my Husband and I too. She made it clear to us she did not want to marry so that she could devote her life to our Family. She implored her Father that He grant her request to remain unmarried. And my Husband acquiesced in her wish. Suitors in our community would have been honoured to marry into our Family, but Bahá’u’lláh turned them all away. In fact, I learned that He had told one of the friends that no man was worthy to marry such purity as His daughter.

Bahíyyih Khánum

At last! We ladies were able to cross the river and join the men of our beloved Family in the beautiful Garden. Truly, this green and verdant island mirrored paradise. We learned that every morning just before dawn, gardeners had cut armfuls of roses from the bushes that lined the four avenues of the garden, and piled them in the centre of the floor of my Father’s tent. The heap of roses was so great that His companions, gathered to drink their morning tea, were unable to see each other over the flowers.

Each day great numbers of friends and admirers from the city came to the island to pay their respects to Father. Notables and dignitaries, men of learning and culture, and many ordinary people too, were among the throngs. The Bábís who accepted my Father’s declaration also came to visit Him during the daytime but only those who had no family ties were permitted to stay for the night. Some of them kept vigil around His tent.

Ázíyih Khánum

My Husband loved that Garden so much. On the ninth night, when many of the companions were asleep, He left His tent at midnight. Bathed in the soft moonlight, He paced up and down the flower-lined avenues. He listened to the enrapturing song of the nightingales and voiced odes of His own. We learned later that one of the friends overheard Him say, “Consider these nightingales. So great is their love for these roses, that sleepless from dusk till dawn, they warble their melodies and commune with burning passion with the object of their adoration. How then can those who claim to be afire with the rose-like beauty of the Beloved choose to sleep?”

Bahíyyih Khánum

When we were still in our home, we had cooked food and sent it over to the Garden every day. After we moved to the island, meals were prepared in the home of one of the friends and sent to us. Other preparations were also underway. The construction of howdahs was in hand. That’s the covered seat which was set on the back of a mule in which two people usually were accommodated, mostly the women and children. One howdah was especially built for my Father and He would use it quite often on our coming journey to Constantinople.

We were truly delighted with another development. The Governor had a very beautiful horse, a red roan stallion of the finest breed, which he wanted to send to his son in Constantinople. He asked Father to take the horse and use it on the journey. And Father agreed! My Father loved horses and was a very fine rider.

Ázíyih Khánum

Once we ladies had arrived in the Garden, the departure was scheduled for three days hence. The authorities appointed a detachment of soldiers to accompany our party on the journey to Constantinople, a protection from thieves and attacks on the roads. Then the Governor, who loved Bahá'u'lláh, offered to provide funds for the journey but my Husband declined his generous offer, saying we had all we needed. When the Governor insisted on being of some service, my Husband asked him simply to be considerate to the friends left behind in Baghdad and treat them kindly. The Governor agreed and he also wrote a letter to the officials on the route, instructing them to provide the travellers with all necessities and courtesies. My Husband took the letter but en route, He arranged to pay for all provisions instead of taking advantage of the Governor's letter.

Part IV – 12th Day of Ridván, 1863

Bahíyyih Khánum

The day of departure had arrived. Friends and companions assembled in huge numbers to say farewell, amid their tears. The details and arrangements took most of the day. The mules were loaded and the howdahs were settled upon them. We ladies and the younger children took our seats.

Toward sunset, the red roan stallion was brought out for Father. Seeing Him in the saddle, truly ready to depart Baghdad, aroused the crowds to heart-rending, unbearable cries of distress. I had no doubt that the splendid beast had a lot to do with setting the scene. There had always been horses available to my Father, but until then, He had chosen to ride donkeys. My Father's majesty was truly unveiled to the people when they witnessed Him on the mighty stallion. Some threw themselves into the path of the horse's hooves in feeble attempts to delay His departure. Later one of the friends said, "it seemed as if that heavenly steed was passing over sanctified bodies and pure hearts".

Another symbol of His new Station of divine authority was now in evidence. For the first time, when He left our home twelve days earlier, He wore a táj. This is the tall felt hat usually worn by the leaders of the Súfí religious order. He wore the táj for the rest of His life. We used our most exquisite embroidery to adorn them.

But the táj and magnificent stallion were merely outward symbols of His newly revealed Station.

The chapter in our lives spent in Baghdad drew to a close. For the past seven of those years, Bahá'u'lláh had rebuilt and consolidated the Bábí community into one unified, with its foundations reinforced, its spirit exalted and its outlook transformed. He had won conspicuous victories over those who would have harmed, even destroyed, Him.

The next chapter was ready to open. Bahá'u'lláh would further advance God's Plan for this Age and reveal the Divine Mission entrusted to Him. The future great grandson of Bahá'u'lláh defined as the Plan as "one and indivisible, whose Source is God, whose author is Bahá'u'lláh, the theatre of whose operations is the entire planet, and whose ultimate objectives are the unity of the human race and the peace of all mankind." Yá Bahá'u'l-Abhá¹.

¹O Glory of the All-Glorious