

Baha' u' llah and the Homeless Stranger

BY SUNITA PANT BANSAL

If you walked through the streets of Tehran on a winter morning in the early 19th century, you would have had to pull

your cloak tight around you. The wind from the Alborz mountains had no manners at all. It rushed through the alleys as if chasing someone, lifted loose snow like it

was flour, and whistled around people's ears as if scolding them!

And the city itself was never quiet. Even in winter, the bazaars buzzed with life. Merchants shouted prices for spices, their voices rising over the bleating of goats and the jingling bells of donkey carts. Children darted between adults carrying baskets half their size, dodging stall owners who waved ladles at them.

"Slow down!" an old woman would shout.

"Catch me first!" a boy would yell back, laughing.

But all this noise faded as soon as the sun dipped low. Winter nights in Tehran brought to life a different world. The streets emptied. Doors were shut tight. Windows were covered.

And inside the houses, families sat close together, warming their hands by clay stoves and sharing their food.

For the poor — the travellers, the orphans, the old ones without family — these winter nights were cruel. Too cold to sleep, too dark to see, too lonely to bear. Many huddled in corners of

courtyards or curled under city gates, hoping to keep their hearts beating until the sun rose again.

In one of the quieter neighbourhoods of the city lived a man named Baha' u' llah, though most people then knew him as Mirza Husayn-Ali.

He belonged to a noble family and lived in a large home with an inner courtyard, a garden of cypress trees, a fountain and a tall boundary wall. His carpets were soft, his rooms were warm, and the kitchen always smelled of bread or stew.

His life was filled with comfort, but that was not important to him. Something else was...

If a poor person knocked at the gate, Baha' u' llah opened his door to them even before the servant finished announcing the visitor. If anyone asked for help, he listened to them with the same attention he would give to a scholar.

If a child tugged at his sleeve, he knelt immediately to match the child's height and speak to the child as an equal.



"Father gives away half the world," his children would say proudly, "and keeps only a smile for himself."

The servants, however, had their own version of this story.

"He gives away too much," one muttered while kneading dough.

"At this rate, one day he'll give away the house," another grumbled.

"And then what will we do? Sleep in the garden?" a third sniffed.

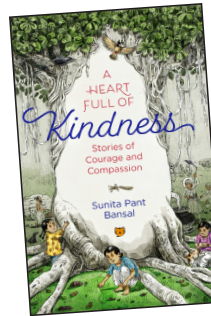
But whenever these worries reached Baha' u' llah, he would simply smile. "What is ours," he would say, "is only ours if it can help someone."

That winter, the winds grew colder than usual. It was the sort of cold that bites your nose and makes your ears feel like they have turned into walnuts.

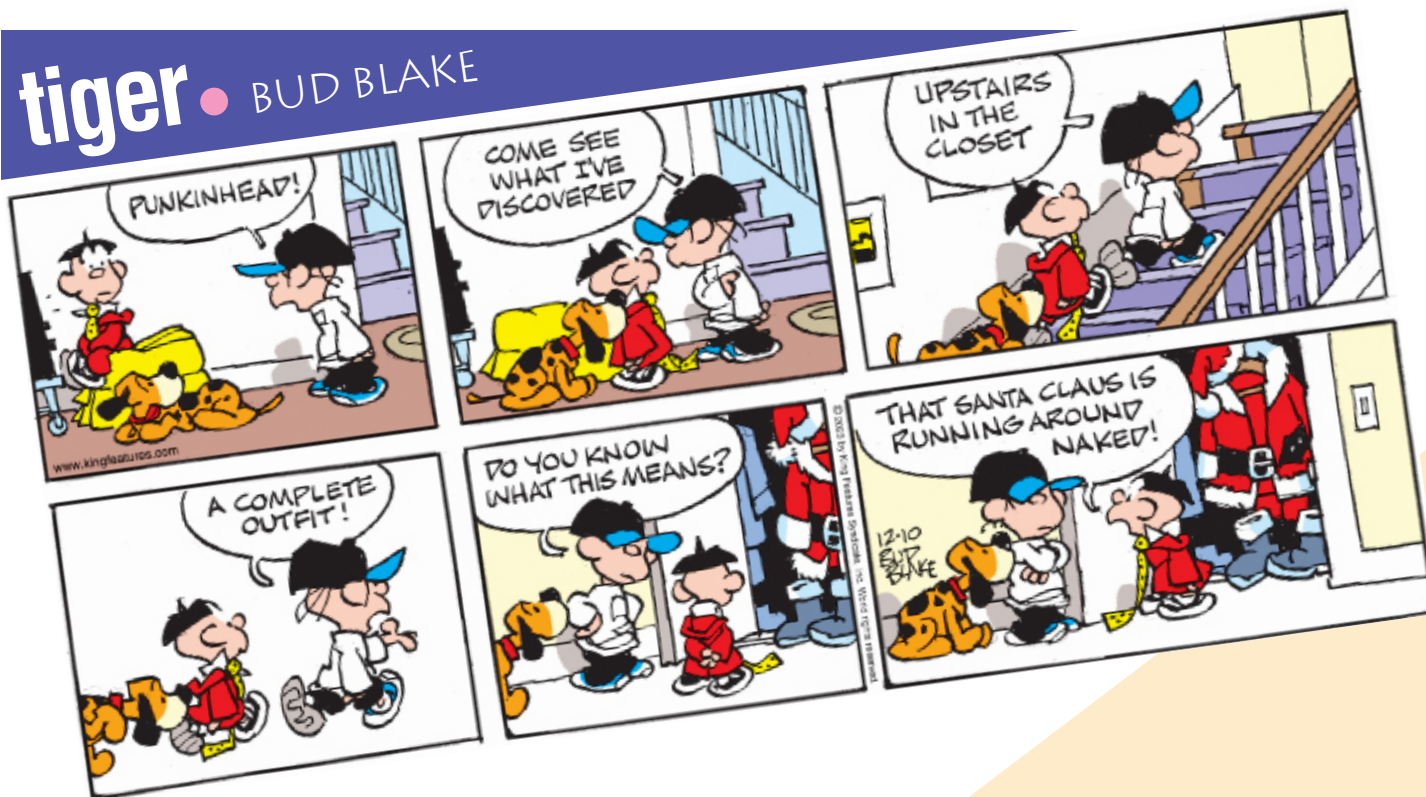
Even inside warm homes, people wrapped themselves in extra shawls and blankets. Outside, the world seemed frozen.

► **To be continued**
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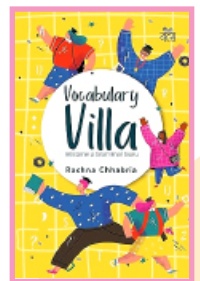
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