

# A STORM IN TABRÍZ

BY SUSAN ENGLE

**I**t started just after noon. The raging storm slammed dust against the house. Above the wind, I could hear frantic voices outside. Flurries of dust whirled in through cracks around the windows and door. The city seemed dark and dangerous.

"I've never seen a storm like this," Maman said. "Help me light the lamps." My hands shook a bit as I worked on the lamp in the kitchen.

"We'll be all right, Shirin-jún," Maman reassured me. "But hurry and get the extra sheets. They will help keep the dust from getting everywhere."

I ran to the cupboard. Maman was too big to bend over and get them from the bottom drawer.

"I hope this baby doesn't come before your father gets home tonight." She gave me a quick hug as I handed her the sheets.

"Now start the tea, will you?" asked Maman. "We need to calm our nerves."

"Tea sounds good." I poked the coals under

the samovar to get the water boiling.

CRASH! The door blew open. A cloud of dust poured into the room. Within the cloud was the shape of a man.

"Baba!" I ran to my father. "You're home. I'm so glad!"

He struggled to push the door closed against the storm. Then he smiled at me and touched my cheek. "Is tea brewing?"

"Yes, Baba."

When the tea steeped, I brought it from the samovar to the table. I poured us each a cup. Maman helped Baba with his dusty coat. He hugged her and patted her belly.

"What's going on? Why are you home so early?" Maman asked, taking a sip of tea.

Baba stared into his cup. His voice was so soft I could barely hear him. "Something strange happened today . . . two men died." He looked up at Maman, then at me, and said, "I want you to understand one thing. I didn't kill either man."



I was confused. Baba's job was to guard prisoners. Sometimes he had to shoot them, because he was commanded to do this. He was a very good soldier, and Maman and I were proud of him.

"What happened?" asked Maman.

"Our whole regiment was ordered to execute two men. But when the smoke from the rifles cleared, one man was gone. The other was standing in front of us, unharmed. 750 rifles. How is this possible?"

"Who were they, Baba?"

"I'm not sure, Shirin. I think the one who disappeared was some sort of holy man. The other was his follower."

"Where did he go?" asked Maman.

"They found him back in his cell. The most amazing thing was, there was not a bullet hole on either man."

"No bullet holes?" Maman cried. "A miracle! What did your commander do?"

"Sám Khán told us all to go home."

"Why, Baba? Was he afraid?"

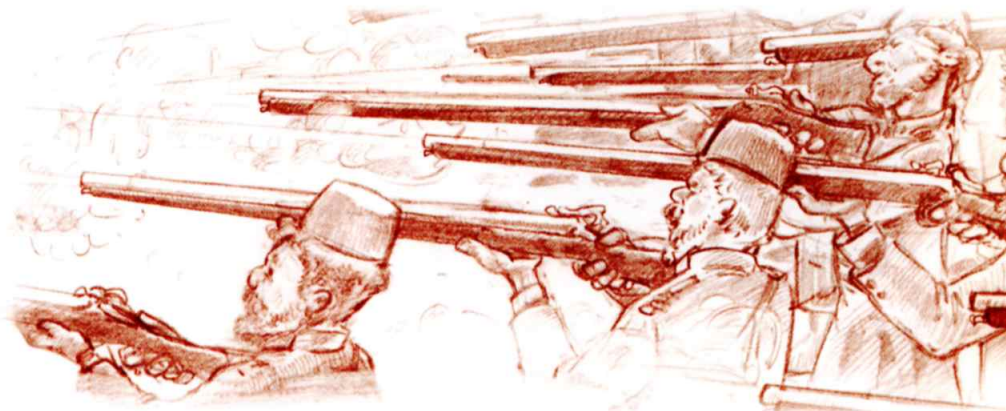
"He said he had begun to feel that the prisoners were good men. So he refused to have our regiment shoot again."

"Did they let the prisoners go?" I asked.

"No Shirin-jún. They didn't. They again hung the men from ropes against the wall, and another regiment fired their rifles. This

time, the bullets did not miss." Baba blinked quickly and cleared his throat.

CRASH! The door burst open again from the force of the wind. I jumped up to push it closed, but Baba had to help. As the door



latched, he said, "This storm!"

He began to pace back and forth. Then he stopped. "Prayers will help—prayers to bless the names of these two souls."

"What *were* their names?" I asked.

"I heard the Holy Man was the Báb, and His friend was Muhammad-'Alí."

I had so many questions to ask. Maman saw my face and pulled me close to her. I felt the baby inside her give a little kick.

That night I was awake in my bed long after the storm ended. Someday, I thought, I will tell my little brother or sister about July 9, 1850. The baby will know *everything* about that day—the day I heard the Name of the Báb for the very first time. ✨



Historical records show that on the day the Báb was martyred in Tabriz, Iran, a fierce dust storm fell upon the city. It lasted from early afternoon until night.