

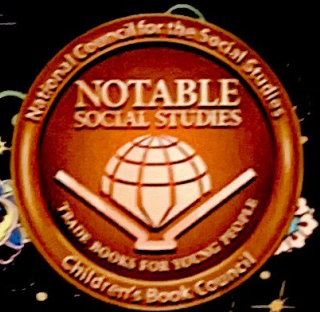
# BRAVE W I T H BEAUTY

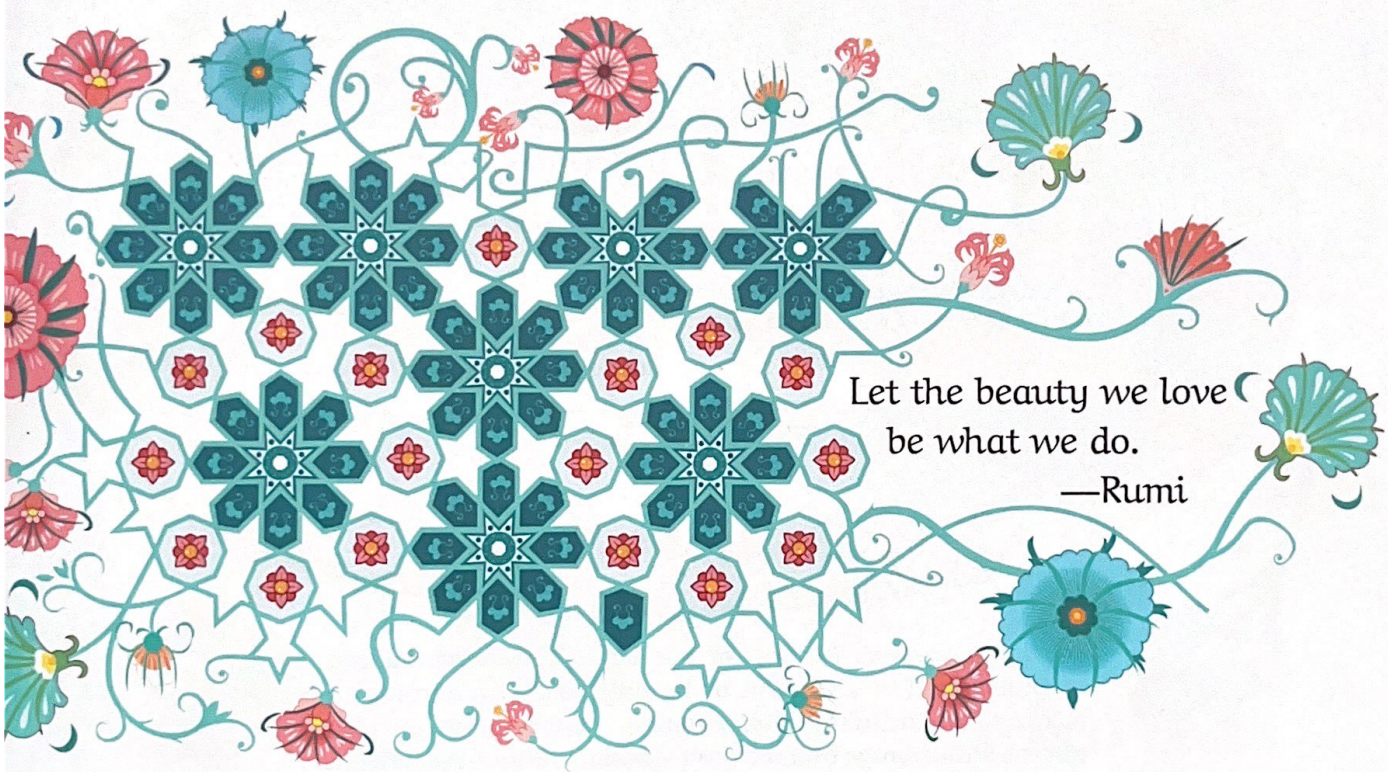
A STORY OF AFGHANISTAN



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Let the beauty we love  
be what we do.  
—Rumi





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Text on page 7 excerpted from the poem, **A Potted Plant**, by Hafiz that appears on page 65 in the book, **The Subject Tonight Is Love: 60 Wild and Sweet Poems of Hafiz**, rendered by Daniel Ladinsky, Penguin Books, copyright 1996 and 2003 by Daniel Ladinsky and used with his permission.

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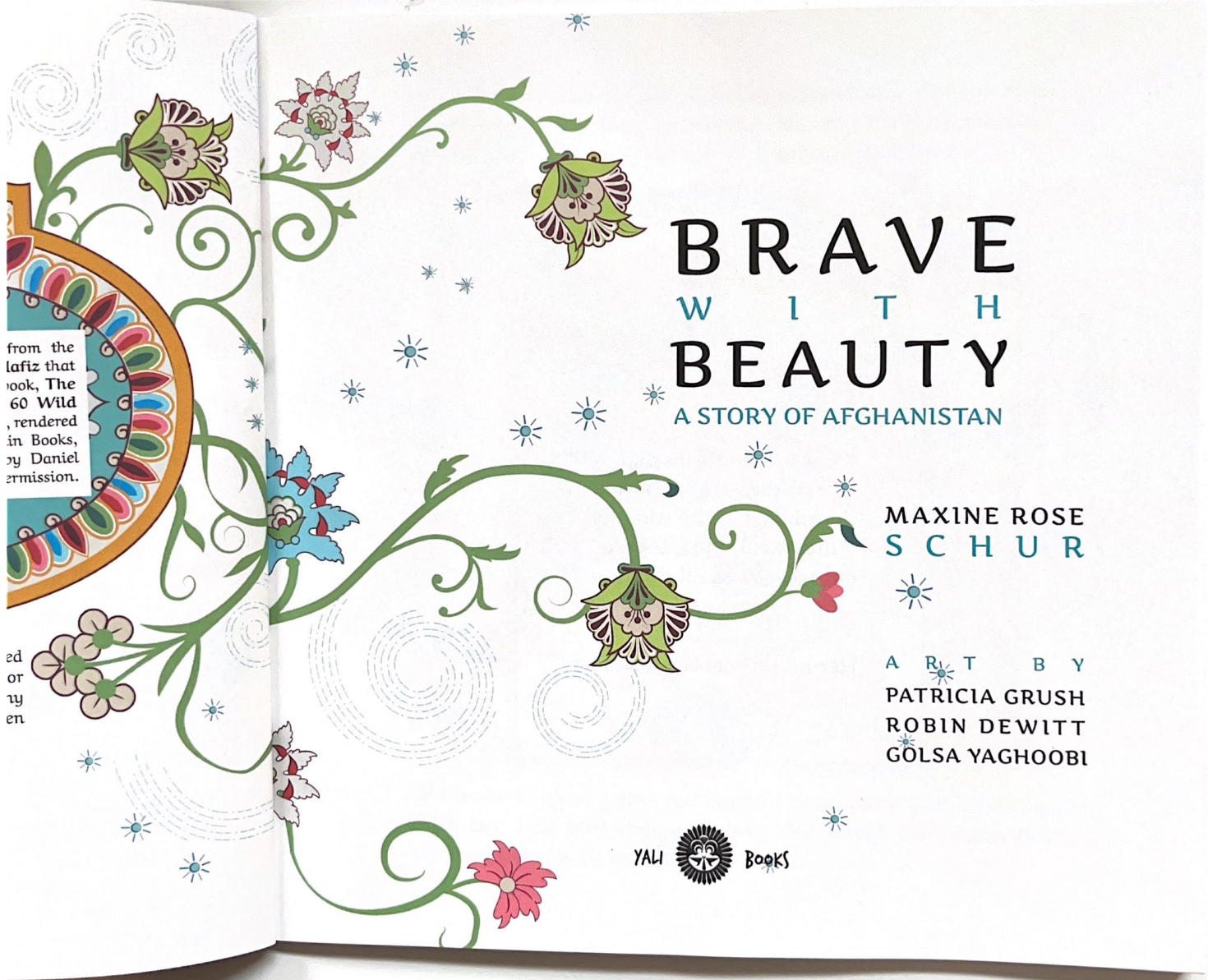
# BRAVE WITH BEAUTY

A STORY OF AFGHANISTAN

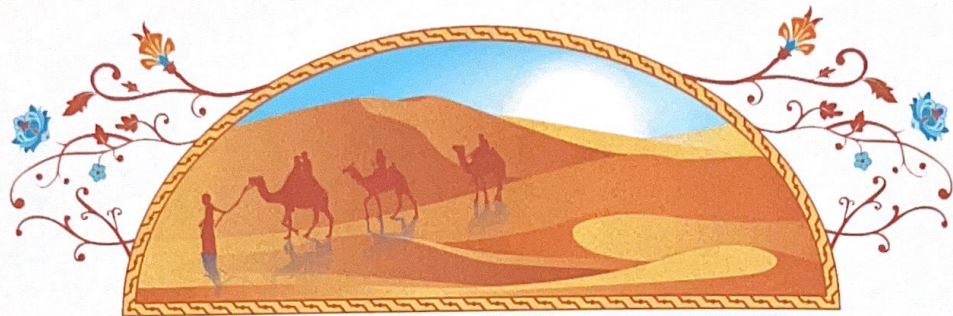
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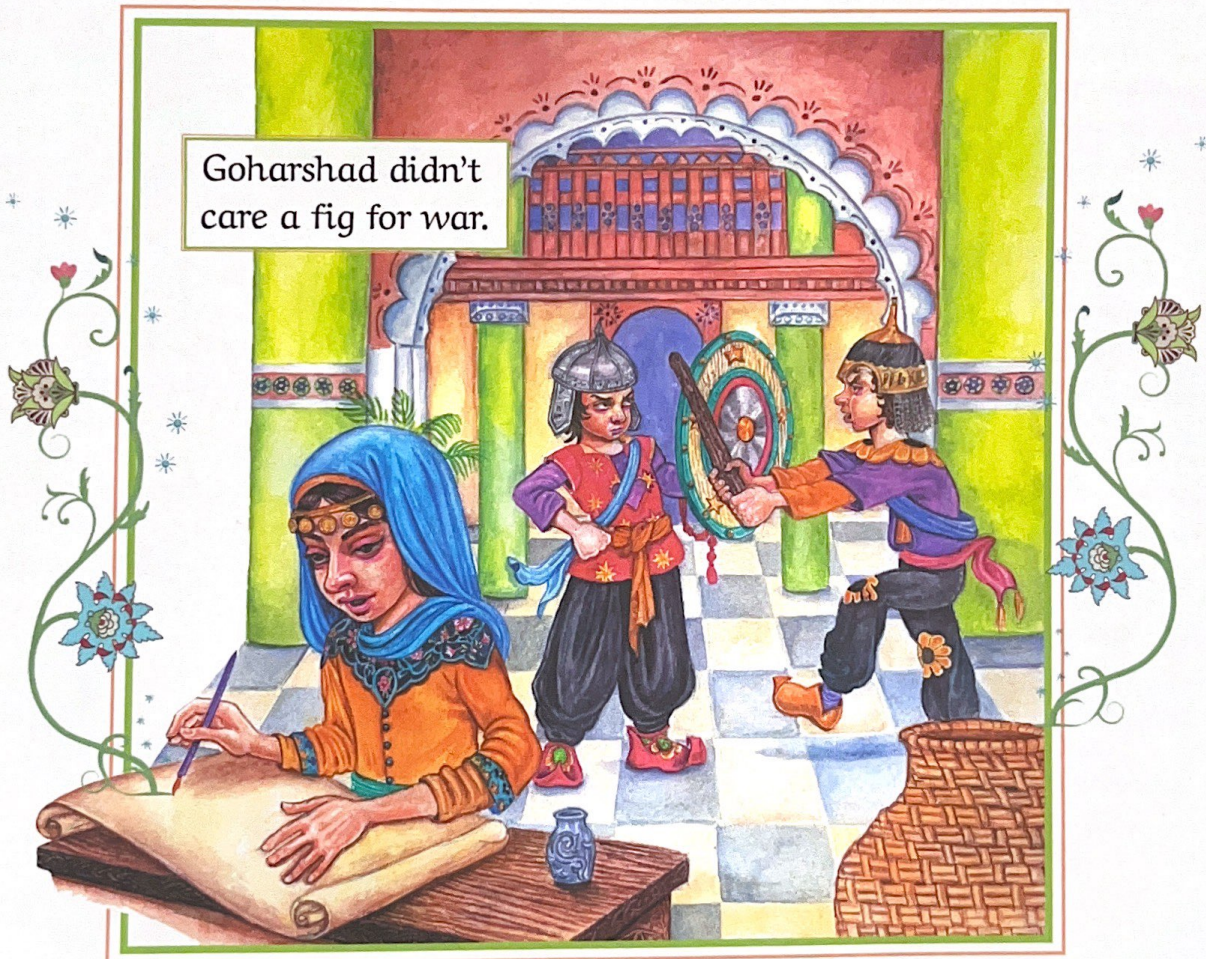


Seven centuries ago,  
when the great caravans  
journeyed to the edges of  
the world, there lived a  
girl who loved all things of  
beauty.

Her name was Goharshad.



Her older brothers played at being conquerors. They wanted to be like Genghis Khan, a warrior so fierce on the battlefield that he would be remembered for thousands of years.



What she liked best was to imagine beautiful things to draw. With her little ivory box of paints, she would then paint the pictures she saw in her mind.



And, she loved to make words.

In the afternoon, when the sun topped the mountains of the Hindu Kush with glowing embers, Goharshad would pick up her brush made from a single squirrel hair. Holding it loosely in her hand, she shaped letters that stretched and whirled and danced. Stringing the letters together like pearls, she would copy words from poems, like this one by the poet Hafiz—







I  
pull  
a  
sun  
from  
my coin purse each day.

And at night I let my pet, the moon,  
Run freely into the sky meadow.  
If I whistled,  
She would turn her head and look at me.  
If I then waved my arms,  
She would come back wagging a marvelous tail  
Of stars.



Goharshad's brothers mocked her. "You play at nonsense," they taunted. "You're soft and fearful as a rabbit. But we're hard and brave as soldiers!"



"It's true I am not good with arrows or spears," she replied, "but I am brave. I am brave with beauty."





Her brothers howled with laughter. “What you say makes no sense!” One of them grabbed her papers, crumpled them into a ball and threw it to his brother, who promptly flung it out the window. The two ran back to their games.

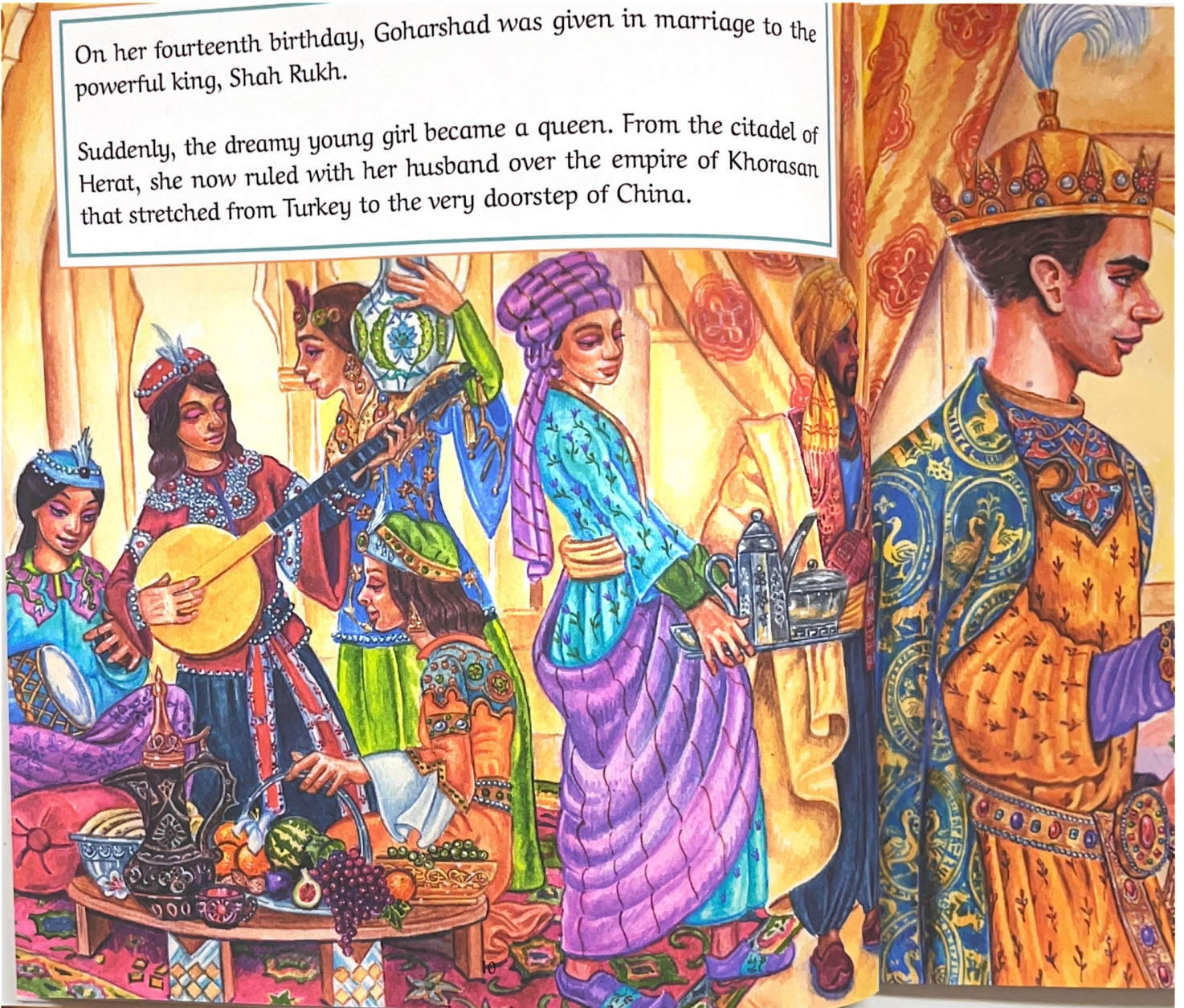
Goharshad did not cry. And though she did not know exactly what being ‘brave with beauty’ meant, she vowed, “I will not be afraid. Not now. Not ever! One day I will make the most beautiful things in the world.”





On her fourteenth birthday, Goharshad was given in marriage to the powerful king, Shah Rukh.

Suddenly, the dreamy young girl became a queen. From the citadel of Herat, she now ruled with her husband over the empire of Khorasan that stretched from Turkey to the very doorstep of China.

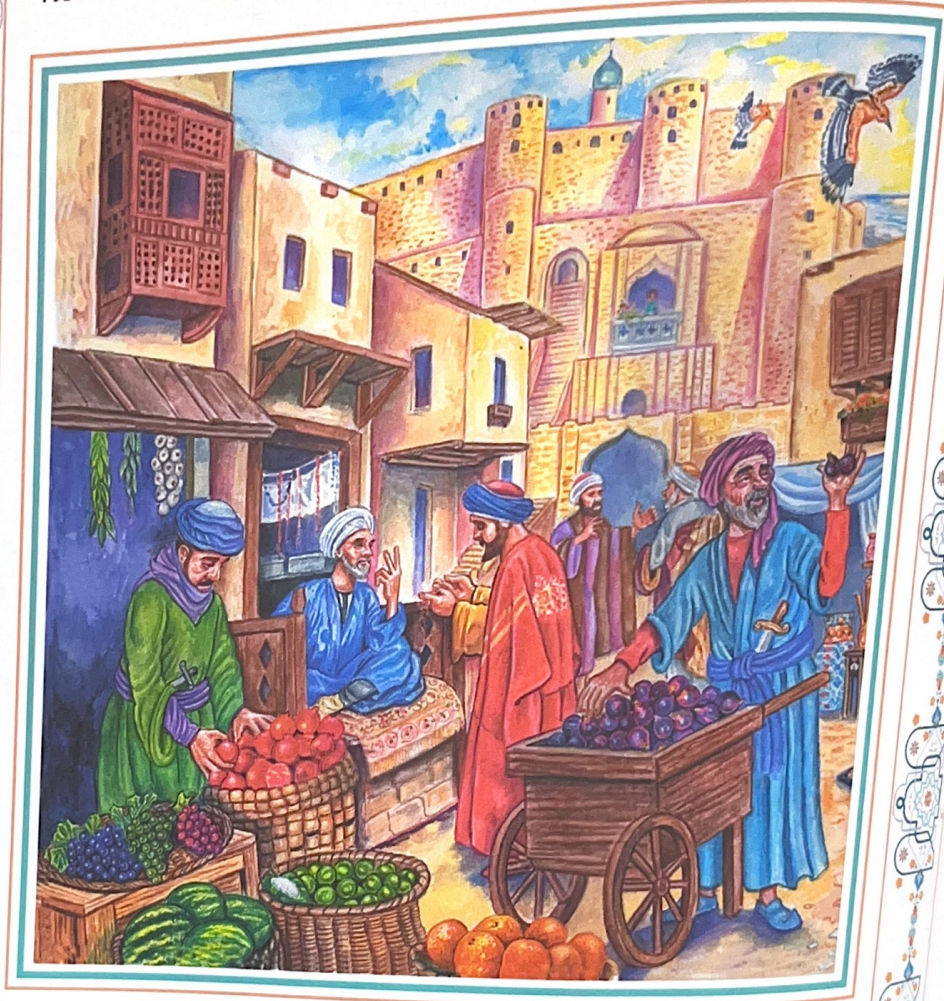








Early one summer morning, she looked across the city from her balcony. Herat was awakening.



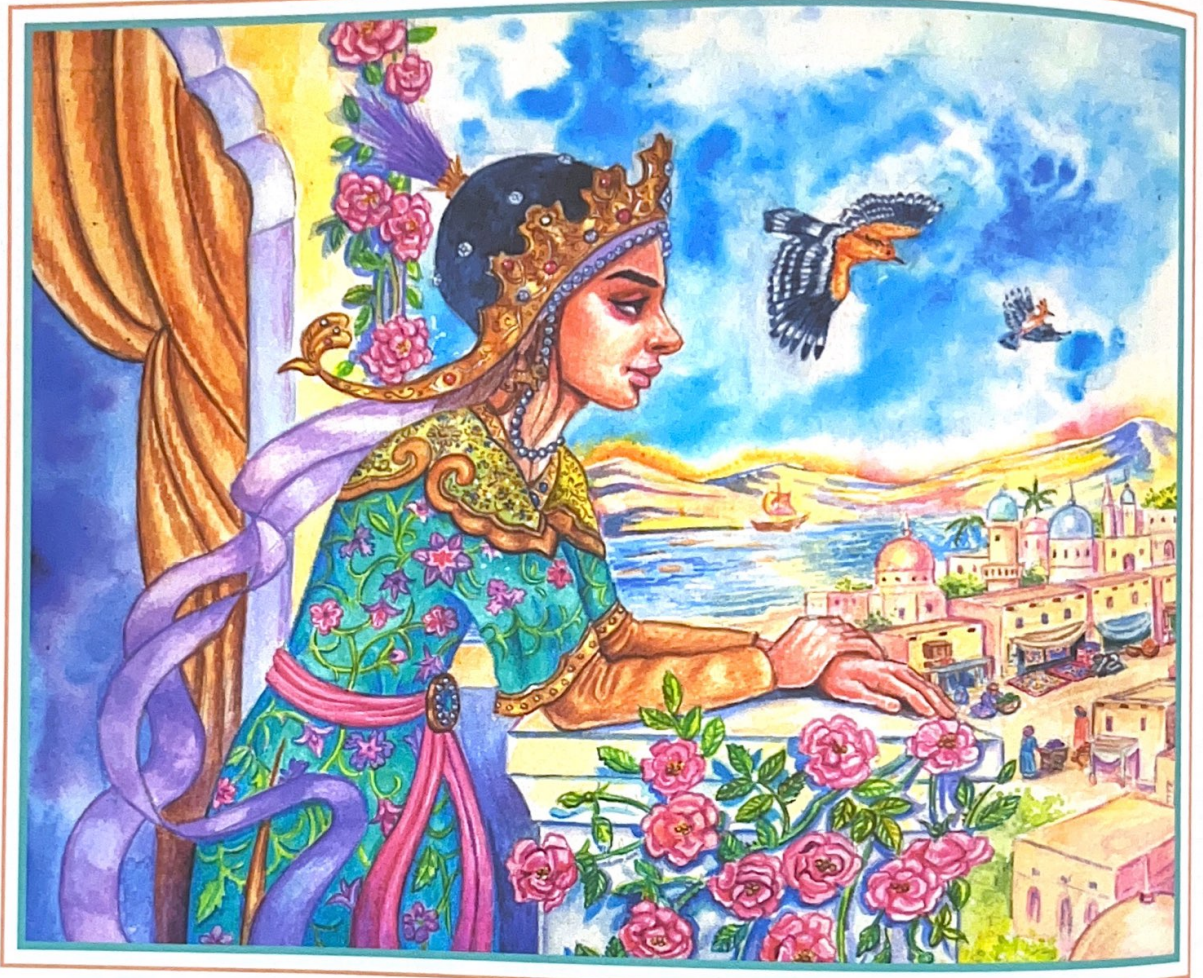
She saw a fig seller making his way through the marketplace, pushing his cart piled with purple, turban-shaped figs.



She watched carpet traders unroll their rugs, making the ground look as if abloom with flowers. Pink hoopoe birds, bright as butterflies, fluttered over the market stalls on their way toward India. And, on the Hari Rud River far in the distance, she spied a boat that appeared small as a leaf.





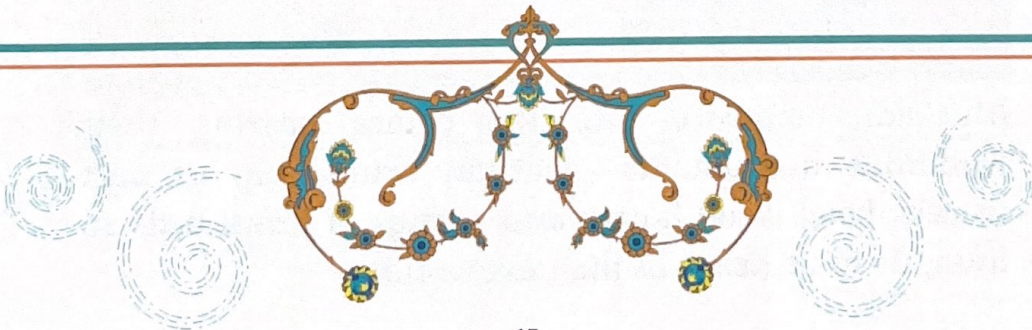






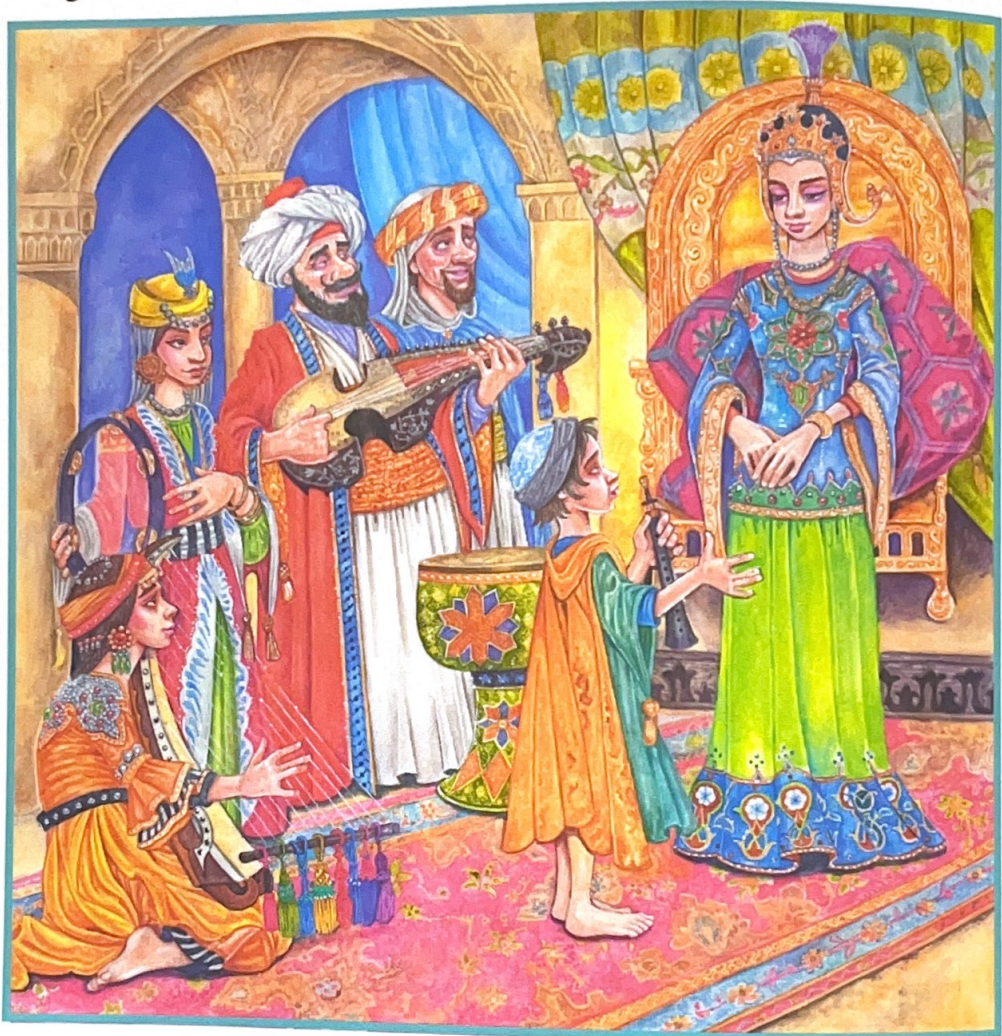
She imagined using her brushes to paint upon the scene in front of her. “And yet, this work of art feels incomplete. Perhaps I can add to its beauty.” The more she thought about this, the more confident she became.

She would begin.






First, Goharshad imagined filling the kingdom with the wonder of music. And so, she summoned the court musicians. Strumming and humming and drumming—they came!



Musicians crowded into the palace bearing their wondrous instruments—goatskin drums big as cart wheels, betel-wood harps, and strings of hawk bells so loud, as to be heard in the next world.



with  
court  
ng—



Goharshad was happy and asked everyone to play. When the music ended, she rose to speak. The palace fell silent.


“Your music makes my heart sing,” she said. She felt a bit nervous but she gathered her courage and added “I command you to compose and perform the most enchanting music each day. For your art, you will be rewarded with gold coins aplenty.”

Gold coins aplenty! The musicians were thrilled but they were in awe of their queen. They stood silent. Only the youngest, a boy who played the reed flute, dared to address her.

“Where, Great Queen? Here at your court, or beyond—for the people of the city?”


“Court and City. Both.”





“We can make music as playful as puppets or pious as prayer. Which does our Queen prefer?” asked the boy.

Goharshad thought about this for a moment for she knew some in the kingdom would disagree. Yet she summoned her courage and answered, “Playful and pious. Both!”



The land grew rich with melody. The music was so lovely that people said they could see it, for it made pictures in their minds.





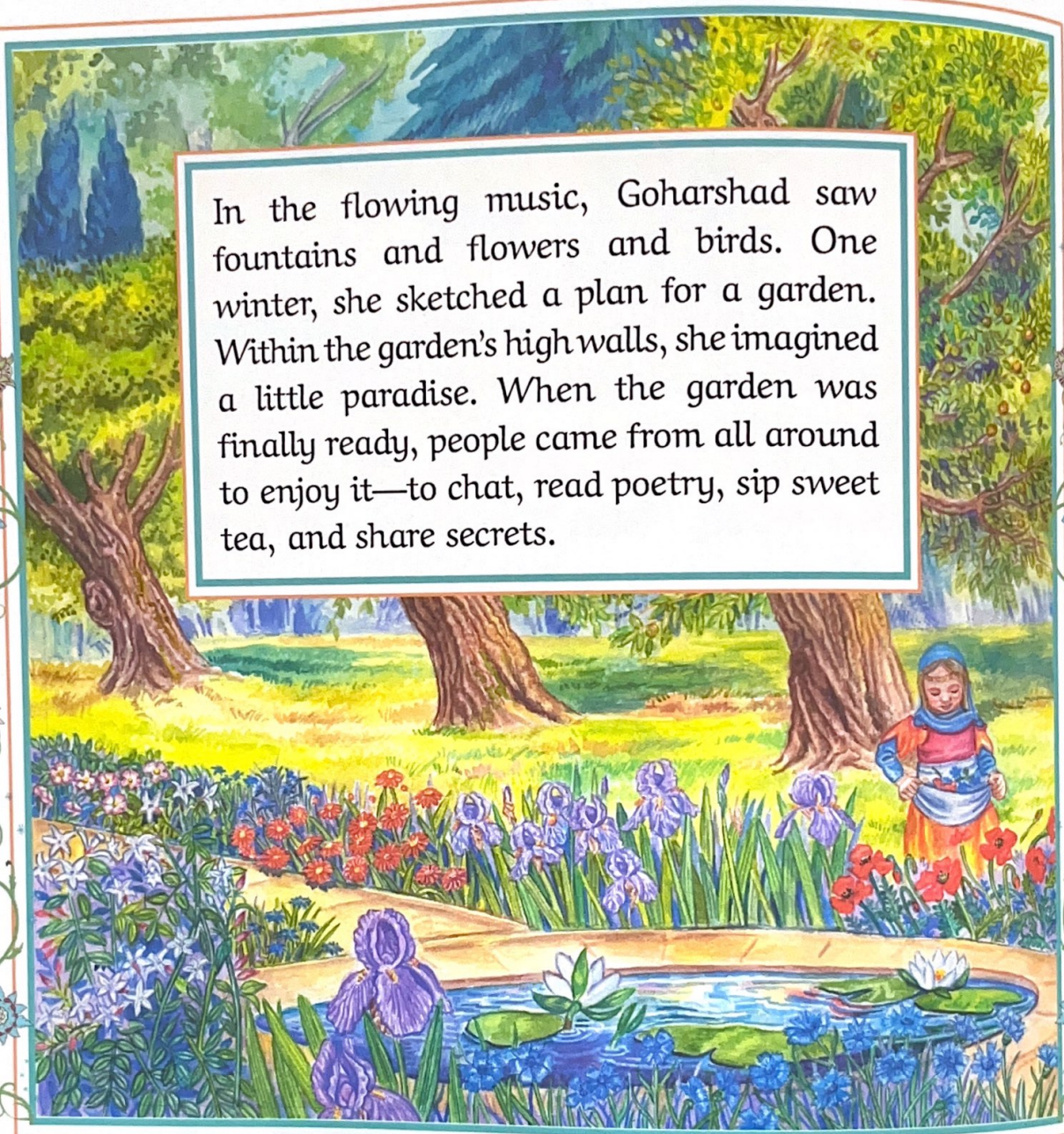
“A herd of gazelles leaping across the Hindu Kush,”  
mused an old woman.

“A lover tossing violets across the path of his  
beloved,” sighed a young man.

A little girl heard in it a new sound and whispered  
to herself, “It is the laughter of God.”







In the flowing music, Goharshad saw fountains and flowers and birds. One winter, she sketched a plan for a garden. Within the garden's high walls, she imagined a little paradise. When the garden was finally ready, people came from all around to enjoy it—to chat, read poetry, sip sweet tea, and share secrets.



Roses scented the air with their perfume. Along narrow canals ran cold water that bubbled up in fountains, making a mist that delighted the hot and tired. And, in the middle of the garden lay a pool of deep water. This water was so clear—people said if you looked into it closely, it would reflect your soul.



When the sun scorched the desert and the air hung so hot that stones seemed to quiver, the garden was Glory.



Marvelous as the garden was, Goharshad dreamed of creating something much bigger—a grand present for the western city of Mashhad.

She spent weeks drawing pictures of a spectacular place of worship for the people of the city. She then called in the court architect, Qavam al-Din Shirazi to discuss the project.

“Forgive me, Queen of Queens,” the architect said, bowing so low to the ground that his forehead touched the floor, “but it is not for a woman to design a college...nor a mosque. It is not for a woman to create such a grand and holy place.”

“Not in the past perhaps,” replied Queen Goharshad, “but now, with your talent, I will do it.”

And so the work on the mosque began, but right away it ran into trouble. The workers found a small cottage upon the land they wanted to build. Inside lived an old woman, stubborn as stone. When she saw the builders, she cried, “If the queen is going to build a great mosque here with her name on it, then I want a mosque with my name on it too!”





“Don’t cause trouble, old woman!” warned the workers.  
“The blessed and goodly Queen is willing to pay you a handsome sum for your dwelling. With the money you will receive, you can buy yourself a much finer home.”



“I won’t sell at any price,” the old woman retorted.  
“Queen Goharshad may have my cottage but only if she builds a mosque bearing my name.”