

The Gibran Portrait

A Short Play in one Act by Graham Nicholson ©

Cast

Juliet Thompson (1873-1956) – an attractive middle aged woman from New York of Celtic origins, painter, author, somewhat of a socialite in her past and now a Baha'i.



Khalil Gibran (1883 – 1931) – A Lebanese Christian mystic, artist, poet and author, staying at the time in New York.

Percy Stickney Grant (1860-1927) – Protestant Episcopalian Rector of the Church of the Ascension in New York at the time these events occurred, and with whom Juliet was then apparently in love.

Scene 1

Narrator: Welcome everyone to our Play. This Play is about the meetings between ‘Abdu’l-Bahá (1844-1921), the leader of the Baha’i Faith since 1892 following the passing in the Holy Land that year of His Father, the Prophetic figure Bahá'u'lláh, and Kahlil Gibran. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá was freed from His confined status in 1908 and as an elderly man visited New York in 1912 for the start of his visit to the North American Continent. It was here that he first met Kahlil Gibran, although they may have known of each other when they both resided in the eastern Mediterranean. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá was known to the Baha’is as the “*Master*”. Out of respect He is not shown in the Play. We view the events that took place through the eyes of Juliet Thompson.

We are in an upstairs studio room in a house at 48 West 10th Street Greenwich Village, New York, furnished in part-Eastern, part-Western décor, where Juliet Thompson does her work. It is April 1912. As you can see, Juliet is at an easel painting. (She turns her head to talk to the audience)

(For a photo of Juliet in this room, see O Z Whitehead, “[Some Early Baha’is of the West](#)”, 84-85, also the frontispiece to M Gail, “[The Diary of Juliet Thompson](#)”)



48 West 10th Street NY, as seen in 1912 and as seen today

Juliet – “Oh, hi there! A very warm welcome to you all to my modest little studio. Let me introduce myself. My name is Juliet Thompson. Please sit back and make yourself comfy. Let me leave this painting for the time being and we can talk. Ah, there. I’ll just put my brushes down.” (pause)

“Well then, where to begin. I suppose you want to know a little about me and how I came to meet Monsieur Gibran. Not a lot to know about me I suppose, I’m not

usually one to talk about myself very much. But seeing you have gone to all the trouble to come along, I hope you don't mind if I burden you with a bit of background leading up to our meeting with Kahlil. Is that OK with you? Yes!"

"I've lived in this house for some years now with my friends Daisy¹ and Helen². We have had lots of visitors of all sorts - of many colors and races, many nationalities, just like you. We seem to be always entertaining visitors - artists, authors, poets, spiritual people and many others, just like you. We love it. You are very welcome!"

"Let me tell you that after I joined the Baha'i Movement in Paris around the turn of the new century, this room became the rendezvous for many Baha'i meetings. We have had weekly meetings for the friends in New York as well as many other gatherings. I was so excited when we received the news that the Master, er, that is, His Holiness 'Abdu'l-Bahá, had been released from confinement in the Holy Land, and may be coming to the West. But I couldn't wait. A group of us made a pilgrimage to Haifa and Akka in the Holy Land to see Him, and I tell you I was overwhelmed by the experience. From the time I first saw Mount Carmel there, it was singing in my head, over and over, - "*Jesus from the ground suspires*" - as I thought about meeting the Master for the first time; the living Redeemer returned to earth in this holy place. From the very moment of first meeting the Master, the phenomenal world just faded away, just disappeared, and I was lifted up to some new, sublime level. I felt transported with the deepest feelings of love. After that, I could not put the beloved Master out of my mind. He was there all the time. When a cable came from Him last year calling me to Europe to meet him, I just dropped everything, made a booking as soon as possible and boarded the Lusitania for England. I attained His presence again in Europe. The experiences I had there set me on fire with His love. Even now, after returning home, that feeling is still with me, right now, as we contemplate the imminent arrival of our Beloved to these shores. He will be here, in New York, very soon you know. Incredible!"

"So I now have two special loves in my life - that of the beloved Master, who I worship, and that of my dear, handsome Percy Grant, who I desire to marry. Both are very special to me. Percy is the Rector at the Church of the Ascension nearby.

¹ Marguerite (Daisy) Pumpelly Smythe, an artist and friend.

² Helen James, Juliet's devoted black friend and companion/servant.

You can get a glimpse of the Church if you look out the window. See! At first he was hostile to the visit of the Master, but after we discussed the matter he changed his view. Percy is a very broad minded man in that respect, and has offered to have the Master as a special guest to his Church service when the Master arrives. Oh, that Percy could come to see in the Master what I see in him, and to love Him like I so love Him. This is my dearest wish. I hope you will meet Percy later. He really is a nice man.”

“And now I want to tell you about another very interesting and talented man I know, Monsieur Kahlil Gibran, who is from the Middle East but is now living here. He is by nature a quiet and modest man, with a high, delicate voice. But he is also a passionate man, who holds strong views on religion and other matters. It was not my religious beliefs, but my interest in art, that first drew me to Kahlil. But having known him even for a relatively short time, I can tell that we share a deep spirituality. I now hope to help make a connection between him and the Master, as the two of them will be in New York at the same time. I know Kahlil is interested in the Baha’i teachings – he has read some of Bahá'u'lláh’s writings in Arabic, and described them as stupendous Arabic literature. I didn’t even know him personally before he came to New York not so long ago. He began staying in Greenwich Village last year after leaving Paris, and since then he has alternated between Boston and New York. He now lives at 51 West 10th Street, just over the way. A Syrian man brought him to meet me – I can’t even remember the man’s name now, but it doesn’t matter. We have become very close friends in a short time. Kahlil always says I was his first friend in New York. He says he loves New York best, and that he senses in the City the spirit of America whose destiny was strong and healthy and eager. And he particularly likes the artists’ area of Greenwich Village, where we both live in close proximity to each other. He says that he finds this area quite spiritual. Well, he is himself a very spiritual man. This is reflected in his drawings you know, which are very poetic and mystical. He has thrown himself into his art now that he has settled down here a bit. It is really nice to have him around - I hope he will have time with the Master as he wants to draw His portrait. His drawings are more beautiful than his paintings.” (She pauses in contemplation of the mystical)

“The great news is that ‘Abdu’l-Bahá will be here very soon. I’m told that He is due to arrive at the docks this Wednesday³ and I am bursting to see Him. So I must get ready and sort out a few things first. I want to look my best. Will you please excuse me if I go now? Ah, yes. We will see each other again very soon. I hope to talk with you some more about Kahlil and the Master. As Kahlil says, au revoir!”

³ 10 April 1912. In fact He disembarked on Thursday morning 11 April 1912.

Scene 2

Narrator: It is a few days later, but still at Juliet's home

Juliet – “Oh, hi there again! You are all most welcome once more! Well, I tell you that the arrival of the Master was really incredible. We finally got word that He was arriving Thursday morning aboard the SS Cedric. He could have come over on the amazing new liner called the Titanic but He chose this smaller ship, no doubt a lot less expensive. We waited for hours at the docks, eager to meet the Master, but He did not appear. In the end Mr Kinney was asked to board the ship. He had of course been involved in the arrangements for the visit. Mr Kinney returned after a while with a message that ‘Abdu’l-Bahá would meet the friends at the Kinney home at 4 o’clock that afternoon, so we did not wait there any longer. I must say that we were a little disappointed, not to see Him, but we did not wish to show disrespect by clambering around Him on the docks after such a long and slow voyage. He is not a young man, you know.”

“Instead, the delay only increased our fervent anticipation. A large crowd gathered at the Kinney’s later in the day. Almost everyone was weeping as they saw the regal figure of the Master in his flowing robes for the first time. After all, it was like a face to face realization of the Christ returned. He addressed a warm welcome to all those present in the Persian language, called Farsi, using a translator, and then went around the room and had a few words with each person. He did not really need a translator, as His close attention to each person, His flashing eyes, flowing gestures and warm countenance clearly indicated that a heart to heart connection had been made. It was a moving scene, I can tell you, all those present were profoundly affected, myself included. Tingles went up my spine.”

“Later on, I was able to have a few words with the Master in private. It was overwhelming to see Him again, here, on my own soil. He spoke very affectionately to me and I once again felt that radiating love that I had previously experienced. But there was no time to waste. I was given two tasks, to which I readily agreed. At Monsieur Gibran’s request, the Master had agreed to meet with my dear friend for a portrait. He has sent for Kahlil. I was asked to arrange the meeting. Incredible! And the Master also agreed to attend dear Percy’s Church

that coming Sunday and to address the congregation. Again, I was to make the arrangements with Percy. Oh, I feel so happy to be able to serve the Beloved Master again. (pause for a small tear) Sorry, my apologies. I don't mean to be so dramatic." (another pause)

"Now Kahlil will be here any moment. I've asked him over to discuss the arrangements. In fact, I think that is him now (just as there is a knocking noise). I'll just go and let him in. Excuse me, can you wait a moment please. I'll be right back."

(Juliet leaves, then returns into the room with Gibran)



Gibran: "Bon jour, my dear friend Juliet, what is the news of your Baha'i leader?"

Juliet: "He is here Kahlil, staying at the Ansonia. And He wants to meet you before you start the portrait. Yes, I conveyed to Him your request to undertake his portrait and you will be pleased to know that He has agreed. You will want to meet Him first to better get to know Him and to catch His spirit in your art. I believe you can do it. You will be very happy to meet Him, I know. You will have much in common."

Gibran: "I certainly would like to meet Him too. From all reports, He is a most spiritual man. I feel a little humble to meet such a person. As you say, the challenge will be to capture His essence in my drawing. When can I meet Him Juliet?"

Juliet: "The sooner the better, I think. He has a very tight schedule. Why not later today?"

Gibran: “Very good! I am looking forward to it. I will call on Him this afternoon if that is alright.”

Juliet: “Yes, it should be. I would tentatively suggest at 4 o’clock, if that’s ok with you. (Gibran nods in agreement) You may have to wait a little, but I know you will not mind that. I will do my best to arrange it for 4, then.”

Gibran: “Merci, merci beaucoup Juliet. I will try my best to make a good drawing, but it is a daunting prospect. But now I must go. I don’t mean to be rude but I have a lot to do. (he kisses her on both cheeks) Yes, I must go, sorry. So for now, yalla bye!”

Juliet: “Bye Kahlil!”

(Gibran exits with Juliet following him to the door. Juliet pauses, steps back a few paces, then turns to the audience)

Juliet: “Wonderful. That time should be ok. I am so pleased that it seems to be working out just fine. I have every confidence that Kahlil will capture the essence of the Master in the portrait. ”

“But there is so much to do at the moment. I don’t seem to have time for my own art, but that will just have to wait. I very much love my painting, and portraiture in particular. I have been fortunate to paint several prominent people. But at present there is too much happening in my life and I have to put off the important things for the very important things. Excuse me if I don’t go back to my art work won’t you. I must contact the Ansonia and confirm the arrangements for this afternoon. Don’t you all go away now.”

(Juliet muses on her canvas for a few moments and then starts to make ready to leave. Then there is another knock on the door)

Grant: “Hello there Juliet, it’s just Percy! Can I come in?”

Juliet: “Oh,... what, Oh, is that you Percy, Oh do come in, I was just about to..... well never mind (then she turns to the audience quietly) Oh, I’m glad Percy didn’t turn up a few moments ago when Kahlil was here. (She turns towards Grant) Percy! It is so nice to see you my dear Percy. Please come in and sit down. There. Very nice to see you.”

Grant: “Thank you dear Juliet. I hope you do not mind me coming over to see you like this. It’s just that I think I would make a good Romeo for you. My, you do look nice today. (he kisses her hand briefly) No painting?”

Juliet: “No time for that at the moment Percy. Of course, you are welcome any time here. It’s good that you came over now. As you know, we have ‘Abdu’l-Bahá here, and He has asked me to speak to you about attending this Sunday’s service. You remember? You said you would welcome Him to the Church.”



Grant: “Yes, I did say that.”

Juliet: “So is this Sunday ok? I don’t wish to rush you, but the Master is very happy to accept your invitation, and He is only here for a short while. Perhaps He could say a few words at the service. I have heard Him speak, and I can assure you He is most inspiring. He is the embodiment of divine love.”

Grant: “Well, that may be so. For your sake, Juliet, I am happy to honor my invitation to him. Does that make you happy?”

Juliet: “Oh yes Percy, sweet Percy. Thank you, thank you.” (Juliet holds his hands)

Grant: “Well that is settled then. You will also come, of course. This Sunday it is. I will attend to the program to include Him and to make Him feel welcome. It could be quite interesting to have an Eastern mystic at my service, something many of the parishioners will never have experienced.”

Juliet: “You are very brave, Percy. I really admire you.”

Grant: “Oh, just doing my job my dear. I don’t see the Church as being so hidebound that it is afraid to listen to spiritual men from the east, whatever their

beliefs. God is not afraid of man, so nor should the followers of God be afraid of man. Now will I see you again before Sunday?”

Juliet: “I hope so Percy, yes, well, I certainly hope so, although I am quite busy at the moment. You know, there are many things to do to make the Master’s visit a success. This is very important to me. And I want to take advantage of His visit to hear Him speak as much as possible. There might not be a chance again.”

Grant: “I see. I am not sure that I understand, though. I know something of the history of His beliefs, but I need to find out more about His personal history and to understand more of His teachings.”

Juliet: “Oh Percy, I do hope that you will come to understand. It’s not that I don’t want to spend time with you, of course I do. But please try and understand.”

Grant: “Well, I am quite busy myself, what with the Church activities, my writing and other things. Anyway, it is lovely to see you, and I am quite looking forward to Sunday. It will be interesting. I will research this matter a bit more. Have you some literature I can borrow?”

Juliet: “Well, yes, I certainly have some material you can read. Now where is it? Ah, yes, here is an introduction that you can borrow. I hope that will suffice. Thank you Percy.”

Grant: “Thanks my dear. I promise you I will read it. Oh well, I suppose I had better move on. Things to do. The life of a Rector is a busy one.”

Juliet: “Yes Percy.”

Grant: “Yes. Well, must go.”

Juliet: “My dear Percy, thanks for coming over.”

Grant: “My privilege. I look forward to seeing you on Sunday, if not before.”

Juliet: “Yes, goodbye Percy. I’ll see you out.”

Grant: “Yes. God bless.”

(Grant leaves)

Juliet: “There. That was excellent that Percy called in when he did. I was able to get the two matters attended to that the Beloved Master asked me about. He will be pleased with me. So, where was I? Ah yes, I was going over to the Ansonia about this afternoon. Better hurry up. So will you excuse me for the time being if I go now. Thanks for being patient with me. See you all shortly.”

Scene 3

Narrator: It is the day after the Church Service that was held on Sunday 14 April 1912. Juliet is in her house attending to some cut flowers.

Juliet: “Hello everyone, So nice to see you all back. My, what a busy time we have had lately. So much news. And reports of some terrible things happening amidst all this happiness with the Master’s visit. Let me tell you all about it to bring you up to date. My, where to start?”

“Oh, perhaps I should first of all mention the meetings between the Beloved Master and dear Kahlil. Do you know that the Master is presently upstairs, here, with several of the Persian friends, having a private talk with Kahlil. Yes, really! I suppose they are talking about the portrait which Kahlil will be doing, but I don’t really know. They seem to be getting on very well together, so I will just leave them alone until they are finished. They might like a coffee then. Kahlil has already met once earlier with the Master and I believe he has done a smaller sketch, no doubt preliminary to the main portrait. I am very keen to see the result, aren’t you? Oh, that my humble home has been chosen for the Master’s visit, incredible! And I am so happy that Kahlil is doing the portrait. It will be excellent, I know.”

“Now let me tell you about the Church service on Sunday morning with Percy. It was a grand occasion, and quite a number of the friends came. All in all there was a very large crowd there, maybe in the thousands. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá stole the whole service with His majestic bearing and powerful address from the pulpit. To think that Percy’s Church was the first church in America to be honored with the presence of the beloved Master. Percy and I met with ‘Abdu’l-Bahá in the Rectory about a half an hour before the service, as He had to have a short rest first to gather His strength. We moved to the vestry-room and then entered the Church through the side door in procession because of the crowds. Percy was most generous in welcoming Him. I was very pleased. Then there were some prayers, after which dear Percy spoke eloquently about the history and teachings of the Baha’i Movement, referred to the Epistle to the Corinthians and then introduced the Master in his own charming way. The friends present were quite elated. The Master was taken by the hand by Percy and escorted to the podium. Percy insisted

that He sit in the tall chair reserved for the Viceroy of Christ Jesus, that is, for the bishop. Amazing! Normally no unbaptised person is permitted behind the altar rail. After more prayers, the Master rose up from His seat, like some ancient prophet addressing His flock, His robes flowing and His long hair brilliant white. The bright light filtered through the colored windows and there were beautiful calla lilies beside the Master. It was majestic. He in turn spoke of the verse in the thirteenth Chapter of Corinthians to the effect that although we see “*through a glass darkly*”, the day would come when you would see “*face to face*”⁴. Oh, could not Percy see the significance of this? ‘Abdu’l-Bahá then gave an incredible talk about the meaning of divine civilization and about the unification of mankind. He extolled the role of both Jesus and Bahá'u'lláh. I was spellbound, so spellbound that I could not take all the talk in. Then the Master chanted a prayer of benediction at the end in a most melodious voice. That was it for me. My heart was beating so hard I was afraid I was going to faint. Percy was also visibly moved by the whole event, and made some very nice comments at the end. He said that the Master was the first great traveler from the East to the West to come with such noble principles. The Master retired to the Rectory with Percy for some time. The crowd did not disperse. Suddenly the crowds rushed up to the Master as he went to leave. I was fearful for Him but there was nothing I could do. Some women were in tears, some held to His robes. The Beloved Master remained very calm, as if in another spiritual dimension, radiating His love to everyone and offering reassuring words of comfort. Then He made a quick exit. Everyone left deeply affected and smiling. It was a truly incredible event, from which I am still shaking. It was only myself that left the Church a little saddened when Percy told me in the vestry that he did it all for me.”

“The Master, not to be overtaken by these events, still managed to give another talk that afternoon. He is not a young man, you know, but He seems to be able to draw upon inner strengths. I don’t know how He does it.”

“And I was still very proud of dear Percy, who conducted the whole event at the Church with great aplomb and dignity. His motives for doing so may have had more to do with his relationship with me than some higher motive, but I still admire his courage. I understand that Percy has received some complaints from

⁴ 1 Corinthians 13:12.

other clergymen in his Church about the visit, but Percy does not seem to be too worried. At least he seems to be quite affected by the Master and His teachings, even if he has his own reservations. He simply does not fully understand. Mmmm, he is a lovely man!”

“The next morning the Master telephoned to see how I was. How caring He is. He called me over. I went quickly as you can imagine. I was surprised to find that he wanted to talk to me about dear Percy. He said He was very appreciative of Percy’s services, but that I should be careful in my relations with him. He asked me to convey ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s greetings to Percy and that He would not forget the services Percy had rendered; that the events they had participated in would become famous in history for thousands of years. The Beloved Master said that He hoped Percy would become a believer, but that his rectorship of the Church stood in the way. I was quite taken back by these comments as I have to confess that I am in love with Percy. I sent Percy the message anyway. Later Percy telephoned me to say that that was a wonderful, wonderful message, but his voice sounded strangely upset. As you can imagine, I am left a little confused by all this; I just have to put my trust in ‘Abdu’l-Bahá that it will sort itself out.”

“But I must tell you, to change the subject for a moment, that I have just heard early reports of some great tragedy that has occurred with the SS Titanic, the great passenger liner that was meant to be unsinkable. Apparently something terrible has happened out in the Atlantic in the icy seas⁵. That is the new ship that ‘Abdu’l-Bahá was meant to come on. I pray that the tragedy is not too serious, but the reports coming in seem not too hopeful. Oh God, but that the beloved Master might have been on that ship. It is a great blessing that He was not. It is terrible to even think of that possibility. I will keep an ear out for further news about the ship and let you know. I know that the Master will be much grieved at the news.”

“Anyway, we must keep going to help make the Master’s visit a success. With His great energy and spirituality, that seems assured. I wonder how He and Kahlil are going upstairs. They have been up there for quite some time. I’d better brew some coffee just in case they come down.” (Juliet busies herself with coffee)

(Some noise of movement follows, and then a voice from upstairs)

⁵ The SS Titanic sank on the evening of 14-15 April 1912.

Gibran: “Pardon moi, my dear Juliet, I am coming down.”

Juliet: “Oh, is that you Kahlil, yes, ok, come on down, I’m just putting the coffee on.”

Gibran: “Juliet, I am almost left wordless, I feel so moved by our meetings! It is like approaching the face of an iridescent star! “*I know faces, because I look through the fabric my own eye weaves, and I behold the reality beneath*”⁶. I must draw ‘Abdu’l-Bahá. His portrait is as necessary to my series of drawings as is that of Rodin. Ah, café, that is just what I need.”

Juliet: “Well, Kahlil, you have been up there quite a while together. I am sure you will draw well as I just love your work. The Master will understand the importance of your series, and it will be His pleasure as well as yours. Is the Beloved Master ok? Would He and the friends also like coffee?”

Gibran: “Oui, yes, I think all would like coffee, merci. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá should be down in just a moment. He is talking with His friends.”

Juliet: “Oh, good, I will have coffee for Him and the friends when they are ready. Kahlil, please sit down here. I hope you had an enlightening discussion upstairs. How is preparation for the portrait going?”

Gibran: “I think very well, yes. As you say, we have talked for some time and the Master has kindly offered a little more of His valuable time before we begin drawing. I am extremely grateful for this opportunity to get to know Him a little better. It is essential if the drawing is to succeed. I feel that I am now capable of making a great drawing of Him. We might actually begin drawing next Friday morning early.” (Gibran sits and is given a cup of coffee)

Juliet: “ I suppose you have heard the terrible news, that the SS Titanic is in difficulties on the high seas and may have met with a tragic accident?”

Gibran: “Oui, yes, I did hear something of that just before I came over. I hope it is not too serious.”

Juliet: “So do I. It is very worrying. How is the coffee Kahlil?”

⁶ Gibran, The Madman, “Faces”.

Gibran: “Excellent, merci. We can only pray by the mercy of Christ that the ship and its passengers are safe.” (Gibran fiddles for a cigarette, but then decides not to smoke and puts it away)

Juliet: “Amen! Oh, Kahlil, I am so looking forward to seeing your drawing. I hope to paint the Master myself if He agrees, but I am sure it won’t be anything as good as yours.”

Gibran: “You are too humble Juliet. You are a fine painter. It is sad that on such a most happy occasion as the Master’s visit that we have to be thinking about a shipping disaster. But then beauty and ugliness may be necessary opposites, however unfortunate that may seem to be. One side of the face of life may be pale, the others side blushing.⁷”

Juliet: “Mmmm. And to think that the Master could have been on that ship. My, what a horrible thought.”

Gibran: “Oui! Thank God! As they say in my country, insha’Allah.”

Juliet: “You are so wise Kahlil. It is really good to have you in New York. More coffee?”

Gibran: “No, no thanks Juliet. That is enough for me. It was nice. I don’t want to waste any more of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s valuable time. He will be busy today. I had better go and get on with my own work.”

Juliet: “Well, if you must go, I will see you out.”

Gibran: “Yes I must. Sorry. Au revoir for now.”

(Juliet sees Gibran out)

Juliet: “Oh, well, he has gone. A fine, wise man. And ‘Abdu’l-Bahá seems to be still busy with the Persian friends, so I won’t interrupt Him. Well, my friends, I see that you are still here. Where was I? We had been talking about the Church service yesterday, I think. What an incredible event. And the Master must have further appointments today. He seems so busy already, so much in demand. I must not hold Him up. Their coffee is getting cold, never mind, I can make them

⁷ The Madman, op. cit., “On the Steps of the Temple”.

another one later if they want it. And I have things to do here myself. So I will have to excuse myself for the time being. Look forward to catching up with you all later. Is that OK with you? Fine! See you all later.”

Scene 4

Narrator: Juliet is at home on the following Friday evening, looking earnestly at a drawing on the easel (see below).



Juliet: “Oh, welcome back all of you. I’m so glad you’ve come back as so much has happened in the last few days, you will be most anxious to hear about it.”

“I think when we last spoke, Monsieur Gibran had just met the Beloved Master for the second time here. Well, they met again during the week and confirmed the date for the portrait early this morning. Kahlil was visibly shaking in expectation when he first arrived today, on time and full of enthusiasm for the task. He said he hadn’t been able to sleep the night before. And here you can see the result, quite incredible, isn’t it? As you can see, it has been done in pencil. It seems to me to really capture the great spiritual presence of the Master. It is perhaps less of a pictorial portrait, and more of a presentation of great power and spiritual radiance. For me it is a really moving drawing, far beyond my capacities to produce.

Mmmm!” (she ponders over the drawing) Kahlil said of the Master that He was a very great man. He was complete. He added that there were worlds in His soul. He particularly commented on His remarkable face – a beautiful face – so real and

so sweet. I could only agree. And I feel that Kahlil has captured this in the drawing.”

“At the end of the sitting, those present shook Kahlil’s hand and said that he had seen the Soul of the Master. The Master then spoke to Kahlil in Arabic, which I later found out went something like this:

“Those who work with the Spirit work well. You have the power of Allah in you. ”

He then quoted the prophet Muhammad, saying :

“Prophets and poets see with the light of God.” ”

“Kahlil later said that in ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s smile there was the mystery of Syria and Arabia and Persia.”

“But more of that in a moment. Let me first mention some of the other things that have happened in the last few days.”

“The news of the Titanic turned out to be very bad. The ship sank after hitting a giant iceberg in the middle of the night, even though it was meant to be unsinkable. There was a dreadful loss of life in the icy seas, the reports suggest about one and a half thousand people. Apparently there were not nearly enough lifeboats to cater for all the passengers and crew. The ship went down fairly quickly, making things worse. Some people did manage to get off in lifeboats and were rescued, but it was still a major disaster. It has left a pall of gloom over the east coast. The Carpathia has just arrived in New York with the survivors. My, I am so glad the Beloved Master was not on board. It is as if the divine hand guided Him in not accepting a passage on that doomed ship.”

“The Master was deeply moved by the tragedy and said a prayer for the victims. He said that He had been asked to sail upon that Ship, but that His heart did not prompt Him to do so.”

“He has, notwithstanding this tragedy, maintained a very busy schedule through the week, constantly seeing visitors and giving talks. He has had considerable publicity in the newspapers as a result. There was a public meeting on Tuesday at Mr Dodge’s home which a large number of people attended, and at which the

Master spoke about the unity of the nations, to be brought about by the power of God. Then on Wednesday He spoke at Mr Kinney's home, again on a spiritual theme relating to the unity of the races. That evening He Himself prepared the dinner, at which he spoke most beautifully about love and unity. Yesterday He had two public meetings, one at the home of Mrs Emery, and the other at the Bowery Mission, where He spoke to the poor and destitute. The audience at the Mission numbered about 400 people, and He spoke in such terms that gave them great hope. The eyes of the audience followed His scintillating power and strange, unearthly majesty. He showered His love on them and gave coins to each of them at the end. It was very moving."

"Afterwards May Maxwell and I were together with the Master in His room. He again said that He loved my Percy but that He wanted me to be careful. I told Him that I believed my heart was severed from Percy, if that is what the Master wished. I said I would transfer my heart to Him. The Master said, no, not to Him, but to God. I said I would try. I could see He only wanted to protect me. He said that if Percy became a believer it would please him very much for us to marry. That gave me some renewed hope."

"And then early this morning, the Master sat for a portrait by Kahlil, at which this drawing was done. It didn't seem to take very long. And there it is. This is the drawing. I don't know what you think, but I love it. I especially wanted you all to see it so that you could judge it for yourself. 'Abdu'l-Bahá Himself seems to take no personal pleasure in the drawing, but says it is for the benefit of the friends, that they may remember Him as the centre of Baha'u'llah's Covenant so as to help maintain the unity of the friends. There is nothing more important, He said. He has kindly agreed to sit for me also, although I am sure I could never capture the spirit of 'Abdu'l-Bahá as well as Kahlil has done. We will arrange a sitting for a portrait later on when it is convenient to the Master. He will be back in New York in some weeks' time."

"In the meantime, this is the Beloved Master's last day in New York before He begins His travels around North America. He is already busy with many visitors coming to see Him this morning, and this evening I understand there is a meeting arranged at Columbia University at which He will speak. Tomorrow He is due to leave the Ansonia and go to the capital in Washington by train. He has a lot to do

and sets Himself a heavy burden. I will be going there also, to stay with Mrs Elkins.”

“So once again I must bid you my farewell. I must say you have been a great audience. I hope you have enjoyed our chats. For my part, I am totally dedicated to helping make the visit of the Beloved Master a success. I am putting aside my artistic endeavors for the time being to do this. At the same time I remain hopeful that things with dear Percy will sort themselves out and that we can get married. But as Kahlil says, we women are as a bird with broken wings in a cage. We sacrifice ourselves in the quest for love, and real love is the offspring of spiritual affinity. He is genuinely concerned about the plight of women, a view that is reflected in the Baha’i teachings. But then, I have told Kahlil about Percy, and Kahlil doesn’t have much time for male Christian clerics generally, or for the clerics of other religions for that matter. So Kahlil was not very sympathetic. For my part, I still see Percy as being somewhat different to most ministers of the Church, more spiritual and tolerant. Perhaps I am wrong, I am not really sure. I just have to put my trust in ‘Abdu’l-Bahá . He is my guide in life.”

“So there you are. I have tried to give you a little insight into the momentous events of the last few days, events that have been trying emotionally for me at the same time as being so spiritually uplifting. Oh, that life could be a little gentler on the heart and mind. But then, I wouldn’t have missed this time for anything. Life can be a roller coaster ride. I am left to contemplate this wonderful drawing, through which the spirit of the Master reaches out to me and envelops me, before thrusting myself headlong into the next chapter of my life.”

“So may I wish you all the very best in your own lives. Thanks for coming and au revoir for now.”

Epilogue

Narrator: “Thank you folks. Shakespeare says: “*Good plays prove the better by the help of good epilogues.*” So here are a few concluding comments that you may find of interest.”

“Following the events in this Play, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá went on to complete His historic journey around the northern Continent of America, leaving New York again by ship on 5 December 1912. He declared that City to be the City of the Covenant. After travelling around Europe, giving many addresses, He returned to the Holy Land where He remained active as head of the Baha’i Faith up until His passing there in 1921. He was knighted by the British for His works helping the local civilian population during World War I. He is entombed on Mount Carmel in the Shrine of the Bab, a place of pilgrimage for the Baha’is.”

“Percy Grant never did marry Juliet Thompson nor did he become a Baha’i. He went on to author a number of books, and never lost his independent spirit. He resigned his rectorship in 1924. Later on he became engaged to another woman but in the end remained unmarried and died in 1927.”

“Kahlil Gibran continued to write and draw notwithstanding much illness and depression until his early death in 1931. He became very famous and is buried in Lebanon. His books are still widely available for sale in bookshops. He remained deeply impressed by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, reportedly saying of Him that “*It wasn’t until I met ‘Abdu’l-Bahá that I was able to conceive how the Holy Spirit could inhabit the human temple.*” But he was unable to fully accept the Baha’i teachings, believing as he did in direct individual contact with God without the need for enlightened intermediaries. He was also committed to the cause of Lebanese independence. Gibran’s drawing of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá is one of the few ever undertaken, and remains as a cherished reminder of that unique person.”

“Juliet Thompson assisted ‘Abdu’l-Bahá until His departure from New York, and then corresponded with Him, but was greatly grieved after she could not visit Him again due to wartime conditions. She grieved deeply with His passing in 1921 but remained a strong supporter of the Baha’i Faith, living on in the USA until her passing in 1957. She also never married, but her close platonic friendship with

Gibran lasted until his very end. Perhaps she never really lost her love for her dear Percy. Perhaps it was just that she held the Master closer to her heart.”

“Thank you and farewell!”