

THE PIONEERS

Vol. 19

Family Development Plan

Contents

341. Family Powwow	2
342. Outed	18
343. Reign	35
344. Investments	51
345. Coronation	70
346. Woman's Proper Place	92
347. Sumilara Gas	109
348. Planning	126
349. Solidarity Group	141
350. Turn Around	160
351. Beginnings	179
352. New Five Year Plan	194
353. Competition	210
354. Krésone Tomi	226
355. Sabertooth	242
356. Gwerdema	270

341.

Family Powwow

Brénmènu 13/ Oct. 1, Yr 14/632

They were thrilled to see Melwika again. Thornton drove the steam car with his family; the Bahá'í youth team followed in the pickup truck. They drove up Route 2 from the south and as soon as the highway rose over the last rolling hill, the ridge behind the foundry hove into view, covered with red-tiled roofs, and they knew they were almost there. In the back seat, Jonkrisu began to jump up and down with excitement until Jalalu calmed his younger brother, so that Kalé wouldn't hit him.

Thornton called as they approached the Citadel Gate so that the house's front door would be open. He was able to drive straight into the courtyard, so they could unload all their stuff. As they did so, they waved goodbye to the Bahá'í youth, who were heading to various houses to unpack.

"You made it!" said Liz, walking up to the car from the great room as Thornton parked it. Lébé stepped out and they hugged, then Liz opened the back door and hugged her grandchildren as they came out.

"It was a pretty routine drive," replied Thornton. "I'm so glad we spent two days in Kostakhéma, though. Kerda's too far to drive with three kids in the back!"

"Not to mention the twelve-hour time difference. You must be partially adjusted," said Liz.

"We'll be fine until about suppertime," said Lébé. "Tomorrow morning will be rough; they'll be up about 4 a.m.!"

“Just keep them quiet so the rest of us can sleep,” commented Lua, walking over. She hugged her brother and sister in law as well.

Marié Keino came over to see Kalé; they were just four days apart in birth and very close cousins as a result. “I see Amos and May are here,” said Thornton.

“They’re not up yet,” replied Chris, coming over. “Jet lag from Pértatranisés. But they will be up in an hour or so, I suspect. Marié couldn’t wait for Kalé.”

“I’ve been up for an hour!” she added, with a smile.

“Jordan and Tiamaté got in last night,” added Lua. “So the whole family’s gathered.”

“Come have some breakfast—or lunch—before you unpack,” said Liz. “How are things at Kostakhéma?”

“We were able to be helpful,” replied Thornton. “The friends there had taught many people the Faith, but with our visit we were able to answer many questions and help them make a commitment.”

“Six declarations,” added Lébé.

“Wow; excellent,” said Liz. “No time for any classes, though.”

“Actually, the youth arranged a day-long Ruhi class and got ten people half way through Book One,” replied Lébé. “Thor and I both gave a two-hour class on general Bahá’í subjects, attended by fifteen others. So we made some progress.”

“You are tireless,” said Chris. “I wish I could say the same.” They all sat at the table in the great room. It was covered with baskets of bread, jars of jam, bowls of fruit, plates of cheese and cut up vegetables; it was prepared for an extended family of

seventeen to eat breakfast all morning. Just then, Jordan and Tiamaté came downstairs and greeted them as well.

“How did things end up in Kerda?” asked Chris.

“We spent the last two weeks in the northern end of the valley, since Khwanu and his team had promised to go there. It was quite a relief to get away from Albagras! People were generally friendlier in the north and there was less polarization about the Faith. We were able to give a dozen short courses on our skills: mechanics, agriculture, science, literacy, and Ruhi and general Bahá'í classes. Altogether we had about a hundred take the different development courses and maybe a hundred or so attended one Bahá'í class or another. There were three or four declarations.”

“And in the southern valley, over the entire summer, there were fifty,” added Lébé. “Kerda’s a difficult place to teach. I think Isurdhuna had another thirty declarations and the western valley around Frachvála, a dozen or so more.”

“So, altogether, about a hundred,” said Liz. “That’s not too bad. I heard yesterday that they finally got confessions from three men about the burning of the hymn hall.”

“Really?” said Lébé. “We couldn’t get any radio signals at Kostakhéma. Were they attendees of the hall?”

Liz nodded. “They burned their own hall to blame it on the Bahá'ís. That’s how desperate people got in Albagras. But the three of them say they acted independently.”

“Which many people won’t believe,” said Thornton. “Many won’t believe that I wasn’t involved in the arson, too, even if there were fifty eyewitnesses to my whereabouts that day.”

“People are funny; they believe what they want to,” agreed Chris.

“Any word about the murderers?” asked Thornton.

“The Central Spiritual Assembly sent a formal letter, asking for life imprisonment rather than execution, and we haven’t heard the result yet,” replied Chris. “But we should hear in a week or so. Khwanu’s parents, by the way, are really upset about the plea for clemency.”

“I can’t blame them, but this is what the Bahá’ís did a century ago in Russia,” said Liz.

“So, we had a hundred new believers in Kerda and a thousand Krésone,” said Jordan. “Our team had about two hundred declarations in northeast Sumilara, particularly in Sipadananga. Randu’s team brought in three hundred in Bilara, Anartu, and Anarbala. And I hear the team operating in and around Mëddwoglubas and southern Vésa brought in five hundred.”

“With the help of the local assemblies in the area,” added Chris. “The team in the southern South Shore had two hundred declarations in Snékhépéla and the nearby villages. Stauréstu visited his home village for two weeks and that helped a lot. The team working in Khërmdhuna helped five hundred fence sitters come into the Faith; that village now has just a few hundred Christians left. The team working northern Vésa, southern Rudhisér, and Pértatranisér brought in three hundred; about one hundred in each of those places. And the team in southern Arjakwés and Pénkakwés brought in 200. So altogether, the Faith grew by 3,300 this summer.”

“We still haven’t heard about the local programs of growth in Mëddoakwés and Ora,” said Liz. “Don’t forget we had fifty more declarations here in Mëlwika, even if all

the Bahá'í students were scattered around the world. We can't continue unless the local communities do a better job of follow-up."

"We need several more Auxiliaries, just as you have urged," agreed Chris. "And cluster committees; we have a lot more capable people now. We also need another House of Worship and more Bahá'í Centers. Communities that build them manage to maintain them and grow."

"Usually," agreed Liz.

Just then, Amos and May came downstairs. Behruz arrived at that time as well. Everyone stopped talking to greet them. "Summarizing how the Faith has expanded?" asked May, as she took some bread.

"Yes," said Liz. "Including the local programs of growth, it sounds like we gained 3,500 this summer."

"Good. In the rural areas, we really have one cycle of growth per year: the summer, when outside resources become available. But in the cities we can manage four on local resources."

"I think that's a good way of looking at it," agreed Liz. "The push this fall and winter, when the rural villagers have less agricultural work, is consolidation. We need to send teachers to help with Ruhi and literacy, with the focus on local people volunteering to continue the effort without outside resources. They can start their own two or three or four cycles of growth a year. There are a few places doing it."

"Bilara and Anartu," said Jordan, giving examples.

"So, dad, how much?" asked May.

“I think it’s time to review our finances as a family and make a plan for their use,” replied Chris. “I’ll go get my ledgers.”

“I’ll get mine, too,” said Amos, who maintained separate finances in Pértatranisé. Chris headed across the street to his office; Amos ran upstairs to the bedroom where he and May stayed. The other adults finished eating and encouraged the kids to go play in the courtyard.

It took Chris and Amos five minutes to return with their ledgers. They pulled out a big piece of paper with horizontal and vertical lines and began writing in numbers, usually an actual to-date income combined with an estimate for the rest of the year.

Item	Gross Income	Tax	Net Income	Expense
Melwika mortgages; farms	75	22	53	
S. Ménwika mortgages, farms	75	25	50	
Melwika tax income	55	---	55	
S. Ménwika tax income	40	---	40	
Melwika business leases & profits	50	12	38	
Grants to génadema				100
To hospital/medical school				50
To Women’s Géndha				25
To local Temples				10
To local Bahá’í Fund				15
Investment: Miller Motors				100
Plastics/Chemicals Company	40	11	29	

Gas Company				29
Investment: Biogas				50
Investment: Fischer-Tropsch				50
Melwika, totals			236	400
Melita mortgages	400	---	400	
Melita tax income	67.5	---	67.5	
Swadlendha mortgages	60	20	40	
Lower Arjakwés mortgages	80	---	80	
Business partnerships, Melita	25	7.5	17.5	
Business partnerships, ejnopéla	5	1.5	3.5	
Business partnerships, Tripola	5	1.5	3.5	
Business partnerships, Isurdhuna	5	1.5	3.5	
Pértatranisé: tropical plantation	60	12	48	
Pértatranisé: commercial center	15	5	10	
Radio Station and record comp.	15	5	10	
School of Agriculture				25
Engineering Lab				40
Women's Géndha				10
School of Deaf and Blind				25
Sugarcane plantation, Swadl.				30
Sugar mill				30
Investments, Tomis				100

Profits from other investments	15	5	10	
Grants to women's gabrulis				5
National Bahá'í Fund				100
Personal Incomes	30	10	20	
Household costs				20
Totals	1102.5	134	968.5	864

“It’s scandalous that we get to keep tax income,” commented May, skimming the table.

“Well, that’s the traditional arrangement,” replied Chris. “The Lord runs the village and thus keeps 1/9 of the village’s total production; Her Majesty keeps the other 2/9 and gives a tenth of the total tax collection, or 3.3% of production, to the Duke. Of course, we don’t keep the Lord’s ninth of Ménwika’s or South Ménwika’s or Mēlita’s production; in the first two, the city council gets 5/6 and we get 1/6, or a bit less than two percent of production. In Mēlita and surrounding townships, because of Her Majesty’s special arrangement, we pay no tax on the mortgage income, but we receive less mortgage per agri because some of it goes to the estate lords who purchased from us, and we get a 1% production tax rather than 2% because the other 1% goes to the estate lord. Look at the figures; you can see that we give more to the local fund, the various temples, and our charities than tax money we earn.”

“That can’t be said of most lords,” agreed Liz. “Mēlwika needs a much larger Bahá’í Center, or a second one. We’ve got 600 Bahá’ís in town now. We’ll need to remember that when budgeting next year.”

“Do we have to invest so much in Miller’s businesses? I gather they aren’t making a profit,” said May.

“The economic mess over the summer caused sales of trucks and cars to drop. But our investment in them has dropped a lot because Mitru has profits from the bus company and Ménu has big profits from cement production and road building. Modular building sales have fallen, too; the Jérdomais Tomi did not expand and just barely covered its expenses, which was a real hardship for the old houses counting on the income. But with the assassination, they were not in a position to approach the palace for more money, so they have suffered.”

“Serves them right,” commented May. “What about investments in the other tomis?”

“We sunk much less into them this year, but with the need to clean up the mess made by Mēmējékwn’s boards and the economic slowdown, none are making profits.”

“What’s ‘biogas’ and ‘Fisher-Tropsch’?” asked May.

“We have a pilot biogas plant here in Mēlwika that produces methane from a mix of manure and vegetable matter,” replied Chris. “After almost a year, it’s finally working pretty well. Once the carbon dioxide is scrubbed out, the rest can be compressed and sold in bottles. So that’ll get bottled gas to the villages lacking a pipeline connection.”

“The Fischer-Tropsch process takes hydrogen and carbon monoxide—the main products of our blue water gas process—and synthesizes longer chain hydrocarbons like

propane, butane, even gasoline and kerosene,” explained Behruz. “It’ll be several years before it’ll be profitable and will cost maybe 200,000 more dhanay to develop.”

“Gas to the villages will be an important development,” said Amos. “This fall and winter, the Pértatranisér engineering school is devoting most of its time to designing a new standard gas production unit, using the gas company’s high profits from last winter’s cold weather. It’ll be designed for towns of 2,000 to 4,000 people. A big place like Anartu can have two or three of them. If we mass produce them—in Melwika, with some parts from Ora—they’ll be cheaper than the existing plants, and the pieces can be moved by truck or water and assembled together quickly. Gordha, Sullendha, Sumiuperakwa, Kostekhéma, Réjéivika, and Mædhpéla are potential customers. If we make ten or twelve of them, the price won’t be too bad. We could put one in Ændraidha as well to feed gas northward to Melita, because the Nuarjora plant is already reaching capacity.”

“So, dad, we have about one hundred thousand left,” said May. “I think we should devote it to a program to start small businesses, especially to empower women. There’s so little of that happening. Loan two hundred dhanay to 500 men and women; that’s a hundred thousand, it’ll come back to us eventually, and five hundred families will be enriched.”

“I quite agree, dear, but it’s hard to arrange that many loans,” said Chris. “Some granges set up small loan programs, but some have also closed them.”

“It’s the same way with the women’s gabrulis,” said Liz. “There are now thirty of them, and we’ve loaned or given a few hundred to some of them. But that’s about all they can absorb.”

“What about a program to help local Spiritual Assemblies build Bahá’í Centers?” suggested Jordan. “Most have local labor to build the walls and roof, but they need help with the glass windows, electrical systems, and plumbing. That’s only a few hundred dhanay each, but it may be a crucial incentive.”

Chris nodded. “Especially if the Central Spiritual Assembly only granted half and the local Bahá’ís had to match the amount. That would encourage support for the local fund, which is a huge problem right now.”

“What about a matching grant program for local Spiritual Assemblies interested in opening local businesses?” asked Liz. “An LSA could sponsor a woman’s gabruli, a kindergarten, a day care facility, or even a tree planting program. The Central Spiritual Assembly could provide partial or full funding.”

“We could fund that,” said Chris. “We should suggest the idea to the Assembly.”

“Back to the gas, light, and phone companies,” said Behruz. “Duke Aryornu had promised to pay for the pipeline from Melita to Endraidha, but never paid a kentay toward it, then was assassinated. I think we should go after that money. And rather than shelling tens or hundreds of thousands a year to expand those companies, the crown should be paying more. They want to support infrastructure improvements.”

“Especially hydroelectric power,” added Amos. “The existing facilities will reach their capacity during the eclipse in about ten years. The next major sources to tap are the rivers flowing into the Long Valley and dropping 1,700 meters to the valley floor. Most of the waterfalls are invisible; they’re in inaccessible canyons. The rivers have no fish in them. There’s no ecology to disturb. Either we’ll start having brownouts and rotating

blackouts, or someone has to spend 350,000 dhanay on the waterpower and on the lines to get the power to the eastern and western shores.”

Chris whistled. “That much?”

“They’ll be expensive and will require long-term planning,” replied Amos.

“Dad, this is what I think we need to do,” said May. “This world has 60,000 families. About ten thousand are ‘middle class’ and have access to bank loans and education. Another ten thousand are on their way up. But forty thousand are still living on very little money; maybe a bit more than a decade ago, or maybe too little to live on well. Most of those forty thousand households have no literate adults. We need to help them acquire literacy and help loan each family a hundred dhanay to get ahead.”

“A hundred dhanay?” Chris was startled. “May, that’s four million dhanay!”

“I know. Let’s say we added four hundred thousand dhanay per year to the loan program. In ten years, it’d be four million; more if it earns interest. And how much more income would those families have?”

“Chris, I agree, we *do* have to do something like that,” said Liz. “It’ll work if you put a lot of your time and energy into it. The grange microcredit schemes don’t reach people who have no access to a grange. The women’s gabrulis can be expanded to help, too. We need a new kind of bank to supplement those two sources and replace them where they don’t exist.”

Chris stared at the table in front of him. Then he nodded. “Okay. I don’t think we can sink four hundred thousand into it even next year. This year we’d be hard pressed to devote one hundred thousand; remember, these numbers are estimates, and we always

have to keep some in reserve in case income is short. And the loan program you're talking about won't expand the family resources any."

"But we don't need more resources," replied Thornton. "The mortgages on the farm land will run out in a few years, it is true. But we have a lot of investments in companies and a lot of partnerships that are gradually bearing fruit."

"We don't need a million. We don't even need half a million," objected May.

Chris scowled at her. "If we didn't have this wealth, we wouldn't be in the position to devote a few hundred thousand to a microcredit bank. You need money to make money and to raise others up."

"How much are our investments in the electrical, telephone, and gas companies worth?" asked Jordan, uncertain whether he was sufficiently adult to contribute to the discussion.

Chris looked at Amos, who looked at Behruz, who looked back at Chris. "In a way, they aren't worth anything," said Chris. "Because no one will buy us out."

"That's because the companies aren't making profits," said Amos. "The telephone company has required a total investment of 750,000 dhanay from us and now generates revenues of half a million. The electrical company's revenues are three times that and the gas company twice again."

"That's about right," agreed Behruz. "And I'd say we own three quarters of them. A lot of the original partners have refused to put in more money, so we have had to support them ourselves."

“We’ve invested about three million,” said Chris. “John Miller has invested about a million because the industrial park needed it. But about four million in revenue has been plowed back into the companies, and that augments their value.”

“If we stopped expanding the companies using their surplus revenue, how much profit would they generate?” asked Jordan.

The three men looked at each other again. “I’d guess . . . fifty thousand profit from the telephone company, one hundred fifty thousand from the electric, and two hundred thousand from the gas company,” said Chris. “Four hundred thousand altogether.”

Behruz nodded. “They’re set up and run to generate ten percent profit. The gas company is the exception; we’re still building basic infrastructure, pipelines and gas plants.”

“Well, either raise revenues by ten percent or stop investing the profit,” said Jordan. “It’s not that the companies are badly run; they’re just consuming their profits and almost as much of our own money every year to grow.”

“He’s right,” said Amos. “If they started making real profits, people would invest in the companies and we could use *that* money to expand. We’d be making three hundred thousand dhanay a year of profits, and that amount would increase if others invested.”

“You *are* right,” said Chris. “Utilities are reliable investments because people always need their services. The companies still need to expand, but they’re pretty impressively large now. They should be making profits, and ordinary people should be investing in them.” Chris looked at May. “And considering how the poor are the ones

without electricity, gas, and telephone service, and stand to benefit from them, it isn't just a matter of pulling our investment money out to put it in a microcredit bank."

"No, I see what you mean," agreed May.

"We've actually done particularly well with electricity," said Amos. "Since anyone can wire their house and connect it to the grid—all they need to do is buy standardized electric lines that plug together, and light bulbs—half the households on this planet have electric lights, after fourteen years."

"Including the price of the electricity in the purchase of light bulbs and radios was clever," said Thornton. "But we'll have to switch to meters some time, and that's a big investment again."

"Almost half million dhanay," agreed Amos. "We've switched the commercial operations to meters, but the residential switchover has stalled. Chris, we need to launch all three of these companies as real joint stock companies, where anyone can buy or sell shares. But first we'll have to cut back on expansion, let the companies stay the same size for a year, and make sure they earn a proper ten percent profit, so they're attractive."

Chris nodded. "Or fund the expansion with loans. That's the way to free ourselves from sinking money into them forever. I think that's fairly easy, where the telephone company is concerned; the wires now reach just about everywhere. The electric company needs more dams and generators, but not for a few years, and the army will provide a lot of that for us. The gas company, though, needs to expand to a dozen more places. It needs a lot of infrastructure."

Amos shook his head. "They *all* need a lot more. The telephone company needs automated switching equipment. So far we've invested fifteen thousand and have not

been able to build something that works well enough. It needs all sorts of electronics, too, to improve sound quality. And some lines connecting six or eight villages to a central switchboard have as many as 50 phones sharing a single line! All three companies have to bite the bullet, Chris. But if this works, the ten percent profit will attract investment. I'm confident of that."

"So am I."

"But how can you stop investing in infrastructure?" asked Lua.

"There are a lot of towns that will want gas, once we have the small gas plant ready," said Chris. "If they want one, they'll have to invest. We can raise the price of bulk gas for industrial operations by five percent. The cost of light bulbs can increase five percent, as can the price of industrial electricity. I suspect we can cut operating costs a bit; we'll have to call in an outside auditor. And we can slow down expansion. Together, those things can create a ten percent profit."

"I'll have some time in the second winter quarter," said Jordan. "I can go to Sumilara with dad and grandpa to solicit investments in gas for the island."

"I'll talk to the army about developing Long Valley's hydro power," said Chris. "And about building the big chimney Kerda needs, so it can build a very large gas plant and expel the smoke high up."

"I'll get the gas plant design ready to go by next spring," pledged Amos.

"And I'll have the butane production cycle figured out by then," added Behruz.

"And how much will we pledge for microcredit?" asked May.

"We'll try to do one hundred thousand between now and next year's harvest," replied Chris. "After that, it depends on how this works."

“Sounds like we have a family development plan,” said Liz, pleased.

Reread and edited, 6/11/13, 8/24/17, 11/24/24

342.

Outed

Brénmènu 24-Génmènu 1/ Oct. 10-21, Yr 14/632

Chris Mennea got started immediately to implement the two big decisions of the family conference: developing microcredit and moving the utility companies toward making a profit. Almost two weeks later, suddenly, he and Liz were invited to meet with Princess Awster.

“I’m so grateful you were able to meet with me,” Awster said, coming into the reception room of her house as Chris and Liz rose. “Let’s have some tea. How are you doing?”

“We’re doing well,” replied Liz. “The fall term has settled down, the initial emergencies are over, and we’re all home and in a routine.”

“How large is the génadema this year?”

“Eight hundred full time students,” replied Chris. “Next year we’ll have a thousand. Our faculty has increased to sixty-six.”

“All the génademas have doubled in size in the last few years. And I heard, Chris, that you’re teaching a business course in Endraidha?”

Chris nodded. “The army academy asked me to do so. I’m teaching two business courses back to back on Dwodiu and Kwéterdiu afternoons; Dwodius I teach it in Melwika with the Endraidha class listening and asking questions by telephone, and on Kwéterdiu I deliver it in Endraidha with the Melwika class on the phone. And it works

fairly well; I have huge sheets of paper with all my notes on them in both classrooms, and if I write anything down, someone writes it for me in the other classroom as well.”

Awster laughed. “That’s amazing! I didn’t know that was possible.”

“It isn’t the best, but it works. Thornton’s teaching one geology course for Melwika, Tripola, and Belledha that way. Six of our faculty are trying it.”

“And education is enriched.” Awster looked at both of them. “I would greatly appreciate it if you could pray for my mother. Her body continues to grow stronger. She now gets around without a wheelchair; indeed, she walks with some vigor. But after four months, her spirit is still gravely injured.”

“What is the cause?” asked Liz. “Is it grief over the death of your brother? The realization of her mortality and physical weakness? The shock that royal relatives, old houses, and priests would plot against her?”

“Not her own mortality; sometimes she yearns for release from this world. The assassination did indeed shake her profoundly. My mother . . . was always closest to my brother. This is not to say she didn’t love me; she did. But she saw preparing my brother for the monarchy as her greatest royal duty, as possibly her greatest accomplishment as Queen. I was married off to Kandékwes at age sixteen, and after that I was an afterthought, an appendix to the family. My brother was the center of attention. To see him have so much potential, then go so badly astray and be killed . . . she blames it completely on herself. That he died and she survived makes it so much worse; she feels Esto has punished her. She feels she has no reason to live.”

“How terrible,” said Liz. “I can’t imagine how I would deal with such a situation.”

“Has Werétrakester tried to talk to her?”

“Several times. He has told her little stories about how women have overcome grief; I don’t know where he gets such amazing stories! She is unmoved. I have thought we should invite Dr. Lua to try. But I think mother does not want to be cured of her self-pity and guilt. She isn’t ready.”

“She’s not ready to reassume the throne, then,” said Chris.

Awster shook her head. “She said she wants me to continue for a while. Please don’t speak a word of this to anyone else, but I feel I can trust both of you. If I succeed, perhaps it will help my mother see she has another worthy successor and she will feel that Esto’s will was not what she had thought. Of course, it will also put her in a difficult position, because her healing will end my successful regency. That may prove to be a dilemma for her as well.”

“How do you feel about the situation?”

Awster looked at Liz with a terribly pained expression. “Frankly, I feel unbearable pressure. I have to do well because I am maintaining the future of the monarchy; because I am a woman who is not trusted; because I am inexperienced; and because the enemies of the monarchy and of all the changes will jump at any chance to create instability and weaken me, even destroy me.”

“If I may speak frankly, Your Majesty, I think you have been very effective and decisive,” said Chris. “You have a gift for speaking to the people, you know it, and you have used it well. Keep appearing on the radio. Deliver a short weekly radio address. The people love you and that will restrain your enemies. And continue calling for the abolition of poverty and want.”

“Thank you for your encouragement. I will continue those things. I may start a weekly radio address; we have considered the idea. But I yearn to do more, because material improvements are neither sufficient nor adequate. I want to help develop my kingdom spiritually. But I don’t dare say that I am a Bahá’í; not now. It would weaken me and set back my efforts to be a successful monarch in the eyes of the public.”

“We don’t want you to become a Bahá’í now, either,” said Liz. “What is in your heart need not be the business of the entire kingdom. That is your private decision. You should decide when the public should know. Furthermore, from a practical point of view, the Bahá’í community is not ready either for the scrutiny that would result, or for the possible flood of new believers.”

“You put my heart partially to rest. But it can never be completely at rest because I have been reading Bahá’u’lláh’s Tablet to Queen Victoria over and over again. I have made a checklist of things He says to her. He praises her for ending slavery: mother did that, so that praise applies to her as well. He praises her for consulting with the representatives of the people: mother did that as well, and I intend to be sure that exhortation is followed while I am regent. He warns against rulers who are drunk with pride: mother was not, but my brother became an embodiment of that warning, and I will guard myself against pride. He warns against constantly increasing military spending: mother perhaps slowed the growth of the army budget, and I intend, if I get the chance, to reduce its share of taxes. Then, in the tablet, Bahá’u’lláh calls on God to remember the Queen, so that she may turn with a pure heart to Him. He says that the sovereign remedy of all the world’s ills is union in one common Faith. And here my checklist is unmatched

by an accomplishment. This may be why Bahá'u'lláh has called me to him, but I don't know how I will unite my people in the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh."

"We must pray for your strength and wisdom," replied Liz. "Because the union of all of Éra under the banner of Bahá'u'lláh will not be peaceful or harmonious. No matter what you do, a gentle transition cannot be achieved."

"Of course; the martyrdom of the five Bahá'í youth a month and a half ago haunts me. I can persuade some, but I cannot dissuade fanatics. And right now I am neither persuading nor dissuading; I am silent. That haunts my dreams as well."

"Perhaps you should meet with the Central Spiritual Assembly about it," suggested Chris.

"Really?" Awster considered the idea. "I don't know how that can happen secretly, though."

"That would be difficult," agreed Chris. He thought. "But perhaps it can be arranged."

"A visit to a school or charity, for example," said Liz. "Maybe the génadema."

"Or maybe Soru's School for the Blind and Deaf," suggested Chris. "It's close, small, out of the way, and private."

"That might work," she agreed. "Perhaps the prayers and guidance of a divine institution are what I need."

"I think it would help," said Liz. "Even praying together can help. We have a good Central Spiritual Assembly."

"I know several members, and I have great confidence in them."

“You know, Liz, perhaps we should take the family’s decisions about money to the Central Spiritual Assembly,” suggested Chris.

Liz nodded. “That’s an excellent idea! I’m surprised we didn’t think of it.” She turned to Awster. “Two weeks ago when May and Amos were in Melwika, as well as Lua, Thornton, Behruz, Lébé, Jordan, and Tiamaté, we reviewed the family’s total income and where we have been putting it. We have decided to shift as much of it as possible toward efforts to help rural villagers.”

“Really? How? They are so isolated.”

“They aren’t as isolated as they think,” replied Chris. “They lack opportunity, but that’s partly because they are poor; the urban poor lack opportunity as well. We want to establish a bank which has as its purpose making small loans to the poor, so they can start small businesses and get ahead.”

“But how can they pay back the loans?”

“All borrowers must be members of a five-person group. The group meets occasionally, members contribute small amounts as dues to help each other in emergencies, and they all pledge to follow a set of principles in their daily lives. If someone defaults on a loan, the other four members are not obligated to pay the loan back, but we will not loan to any of them if the loan is not paid. Most loans will probably be 10 to 200 dhanay, payable back over 1-3 years at 1 dontay to 1 dhanay per week.”

“Those are small loans; but then, if one’s income is 600 dhanay per year, I suppose it isn’t small at all. Aren’t granges giving loans of that size?”

“Yes, but they don’t have the staff to make sure the loans are paid back, a lot haven’t been, and they can’t reach the entire kingdom. We have a second financial goal as

well: to set up the gas, telephone, and electrical companies so that they make a reasonable annual profit rather than drain our family fortune. That way individuals can invest in them, reasonably confident that they will get back a return every year. But to accomplish that we will have to raise rates some, increase efficiency, and slow their expansion. If the result is confidence that the companies are good investments, money will pour in and they'll be able to resume expansion."

"Interesting strategy. Possibly the palace can help with inexpensive development loans."

Chris nodded vigorously. "Indeed that would help, because the companies would not have to postpone urgent requests for service."

"Why don't you prepare a proposal, run it past Aryéstu, Kandékwes, Estoiyaju, and Weranolubu, then show it to me. I'm not sure we can offer a loan. As you know, tax revenues only grew five percent this year, adjusted for inflation. The slower expansion has meant that Jérdomais Tomi did not provide the Old Houses the income hoped for. In spite of their contumacy, I think I will offer them a modest bail-out; it may buy some support."

"I should point out, Your Majesty, that our family owns about three quarters of the three companies, so when they start to make a profit, a lot of it will go to us," said Liz.

"But we live quite frugally and spend 97% of our income on charities or development projects beneficial to the kingdom."

"Thank you for pointing that out to me. I have confidence in your intentions." She smiled modestly. "I apologize if this has been an imposition on you. I am very grateful you could come and offer me some advice. Indeed, Lord Kristobéru, Lady Liz, I feel that

the two of you are among the few I can count on to give me honest and fair advice. I would very much like to reward you. I would like to offer you, Lord Kristobéru, the title of Duke of Swadnoma.”

Chris was startled by that. “Your Majesty, I am speechless. I certainly have never sought such a position.”

“That’s very generous of you!” added Liz, equally shocked.

“Perhaps too generous.” Chris looked down at the floor and thought about it. He would be Duke over a province that included Endraidha; he had his doubts that that would work. And what would the old houses think . . . “Your Majesty, I am not so sure it would be wise to offer the title to me, nor for me to accept. A Bahá’í probably should not accept such a position of power and influence, one inevitably complicated by the presence of so many generals and soldiers. It would rub salt in old wounds for Mitruiluku and his brothers and inflame the anger of the old houses. Furthermore, while I am Lord of Melita, I rarely attend city council meetings, sending Jordan instead as my representative. The day may come when he will be Lord of Melita, not I.”

“I see. Perhaps I will leave the position unfilled for a time, lest you change your mind. Meanwhile, if you have recommendations on how the province should be governed, I would much appreciate it. It needs a powerful Duke who can deal with the powerful personalities of the generals and the brothers of the House of Kérékwes. It also needs a plan.”

“I’ll keep this in mind,” agreed Chris. “Perhaps I can offer you some ideas.”

“I’m sure you can.” Princess Awster rose and extended her hand. “I know I can count on you for ideas, Lord!”

A week and a half later, on Primdiu, the members of the Central Spiritual Assembly dropped normally urgent matters and arranged to come to Soru's house next to his school. The Assembly arrived just as the eclipse began; Princess Awster and the Lord Mayor, Kandékwes, arrived ten minutes later.

After brief greetings, they initiated a round of prayers. The Princess recited from memory the closing prayer in Bahá'u'lláh's Tablet to Queen Victoria:

O my Sovereign Lord! I am but a vassal of Thine, and Thou art, in truth, the King of kings. I have lifted my suppliant hands unto the heaven of Thy grace and Thy bounties. Send down, then, upon me from the clouds of Thy generosity that which will rid me of all save Thee, and draw me nigh unto Thyself. I beseech Thee, O my Lord, by Thy name, which Thou hast made the king of names and the manifestation of Thyself to all who are in heaven and on earth, to rend asunder the veils that have intervened between me and my recognition of the Dawning-Place of Thy signs and the Dayspring of Thy Revelation. Thou art, verily, the Almighty, the All-Powerful, the All-Bounteous. Deprive me not, O my Lord, of the fragrances of the Robe of Thy mercy in Thy days, and write down for me that which Thou hast written down for Thy handmaidens who have believed in Thee and in Thy signs, and have recognized Thee, and set their hearts towards the horizon of Thy Cause. Thou art truly the Lord of the worlds and of those who show mercy the Most Merciful. Assist me, then, O my God, to remember Thee amongst Thy handmaidens, and to aid Thy Cause in Thy lands. Accept, then, that which hath escaped me when the light of Thy countenance shone forth. Thou, indeed, hast power over all things. Glory be to Thee, O Thou in Whose hand is the kingdom of the heavens and of the earth.

Liz brought a brand new translation of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's prayer for America, which included the passage "this American nation is worthy of Thy favors and is deserving of Thy mercy. Make it precious and near to Thee by Thy bounty and bestowal." The two passages seemed to set the tone for the gathering.

"Your Majesty, I cannot begin to express to you our joy in meeting with you," began Lord Estodhéru, after the prayers ended. "We are your unworthy servants and pray

that our words will bring you solace, assistance, and strength. We have heard a little about your struggles and cannot imagine the stresses that you feel. You can be sure of our continued prayers for you and for the Queen, to assure divine bounties and bring you strength.”

“Thank you, your assurances mean a lot to me. The last four months have been a completely unexpected trial and I have often felt overwhelmed. I have a terrible feeling of unworthiness, which is made worse by my acceptance of Bahá'u'lláh. I feel a terrible burden of responsibility to Esto to help the kingdom progress as he wills it; not mere material progress either, but spiritual progress as well.”

“We have thought long and hard about what advice to offer you, and we find that Bahá'u'lláh's principles lay out the path. Whether you decide to tell the public that you accept Bahá'u'lláh or not, there is much you can do. People are morally elevated when they have good governance and when there is justice. An effective system of justice deters cheating and rewards trustworthiness, without which no society can function. Bahá'u'lláh says that the purpose of justice is the appearance of unity, and unity elevates people as well.”

And then there are many, many matters upon which you can speak and encourage reform,” added Stauréstu. “Many people still do not understand the importance of education, and arguments can be made that are both practical and spiritual. Literacy can be encouraged among adults as well as children; many parents still don't send their children to school. Even something as basic and simple as bathing regularly will improve health and should be encouraged through speeches and funding village baths. Thrift and hard work can be encouraged. Equality in education and development for women and

girls must be encouraged in a variety of ways. Providing safe drinking water to one's family, keeping houses and streets clean and sanitary—animal waste is a huge problem everywhere—and learning new skills to support one's household are all worthy of radio addresses and programs.”

“And efforts to encourage preservation of natural resources,” said Chris.

“Deforestation and the slaughter of wild animals are both proceeding at a breathtaking pace and must be moderated within a decade, or it will be too late.”

“I've thought about the need to say something about materialism, also,” said Awster. “People are getting caught up in the desire for more and more things and they measure their success by the acquisition of things. They need to be encouraged to think about the next life as well.”

“Definitely,” agreed Estodhéru. “In my experience, people aren't even told that honesty is important, that honoring one's family and parents must be maintained, that people should be respected, that service to others should be a goal of everyone. Moral education of the public is something you are uniquely able to do.”

“This is a very long list of possibilities,” said Awster. “But my main concern is whether to say I am a Bahá'í or not, and whether to proclaim it to the people.”

“It certainly would bring many people into the Bahá'í community, and raise the Faith's prestige,” commented Jonu Obisbu.

“We aren't ready,” replied Stauréstu.

“But that shouldn't be an issue,” said Randu. “We have to handle the flood of people as they become receptive.”

“And there are political implications to consider,” injected Chris.

“Definitely,” agreed the princess.

“I don’t think this is helpful,” said Liz, who was invited to attend the meeting as an Auxiliary. She raised her hand. “First of all, the Princess must do what she feels is right. Second, people should become Bahá’ís because they have investigated and are attracted, not because they hear a member of the royal family has accepted. The princess should tell people with whom she is in contact about the Faith *when she is ready to do so*. It is not timely right now, as regent, with her mother still recovering from an assassination attempt. But if, at some point, it does become timely, then she should share it as she feels best, and no one should feel they have the right or responsibility to correct her. That’s a basic principle of the Faith; individuals are free to teach as they see fit. She also has constitutional responsibilities as regent and possible heir to the throne that she must remember, and some are to the faith of Widumaj.”

“Just as lords have responsibilities to temples,” agreed Chris. “I contribute to the Temple of Light in Mēlwika every year, and it is only right that I do so because my income from taxes comes from people who use that temple.”

“Exactly,” agreed Estodhéru. “The people of Mēddwoglubas know I am a Bahá’í, but it would be wrong if I pushed the Faith on them. I mention the Faith in public sometimes and I extol its principles in public talks, but I do not push it.”

“This is what I needed to hear,” said Awstær. “For this is the issue that worries me. I cannot say I am a Bahá’í in public; not yet. It would undermine my authority as head of state—de facto queen—and would interfere with my mother’s recovery. I am not talking about denying my Faith, but keeping it secret, or at least private. If, at some point, I can

say what I believe, I would not feel comfortable pushing it on people. That seems contrary to the Bahá'í spirit.”

“Exactly,” agreed Liz.

“Then my mind is at rest on that point,” said Awster, relieved. “Is there any way I can help you, without announcing I am a Bahá'í?”

The members of the assembly looked at each other. “We will soon announce plans for a third Bahá'í temple, in Khermdhuna,” said Modolubu. “That village of 2,100 people is now 90% Bahá'í, which makes it the largest locality with a significant Bahá'í population. And we will soon appoint four more Auxiliary Board members, raising the total to six.”

“Literacy,” said Liz. “That’s something you can encourage. We have a goal of universal literacy among the Bahá'ís, but they are still not taking the goal seriously enough. If the entire society takes literacy more seriously, it will help.”

“That’s something I am delighted to encourage,” Awster said.

They continued to talk another hour, then Kandékwes and Awster left. When they got home, they found Estoiyaju was searching almost desperately for the princess; she was needed to make a statement of sympathy about a bus crash that had killed eight people on the north shore. The next morning, while Awster was visiting the Queen, he confronted her. “So, last night you went to Soru’s house,” he said. “Why?”

Awster was startled by the question. “How would you know something like that, and why do you ask?”

“I asked your driver where you went; I assume it wasn’t secret, after all. And I gather you met a group of Bahá’ís.”

The queen raised her eyebrows at that. Awster noticed her mother’s concern. “This is really no one’s affair.”

“Have you become a Bahá’í?” asked Estoiyaju, directly.

Awster was shocked and surprised by that direct comment. He looked at her eyes and could see it was true. “My dear, we must maintain our traditional piety, if we are to retain popular support,” said the Queen.

“Mother, I have every intention of supporting the traditional religion, the priests and temples, and promoting the hymns.”

“Still, it is not the same thing to do these things as a Bahá’í. The feeling is different. Look at Lord Kristoféru.”

“Lord Kristoféru is a gēdhému who knows about three hymns and chants them out of tune with a funny accent.”

“No, that’s not what I mean. He tries. But you can feel that his heart isn’t in it.”

“Well, mother, I can’t change what I believe.”

The queen shook her head. “Acting on what you believe is what got Mēmējékwu killed.”

“Mother, I’m sorry, but I will do my best to support the traditional religion.”

“Very well,” the Queen replied with a sigh. She was obviously unhappy, but saw little she could do. Estoiyaju shook his head in disgust.

Four days later, *Princess Awster Accepts Bahu* was the headline of the *New Times*, the former underground newspaper that was now the hottest and most popular paper in the kingdom. Awster read the article with growing anger, then passed it to Kandékwes, who paced and read.

“This is *not* acceptable! I understand your desire to encourage a free press, but this is not the way to do it!”

“What do you propose; close them down?”

“No, fine them! Look at this cartoonish portrait on the front page; the facial features are intentionally exaggerated! And where will your private life begin if something like this is tolerated? They’ll be publishing what we eat for lunch pretty soon!”

“I agree, but the question whether the royal princess is a Bahá’í seems legitimate. I am outraged that someone leaked it and would rather fire the leaker than fine the paper!”

“You have to do something, and something decisive. People are calling for your resignation as regent and your disqualification as heir. Disqualification as heir! How will we ever protect our children’s right of succession!”

“Kandékwes, you worry about that too much.”

“Well, your mother hasn’t said that Gésélékwes Tri *isn’t* her heir! Imagine, a thirteen year old beardless dyslexic running the kingdom, with his mother feuding with the other wife all along! I wish she’d override tradition, put those two women out of the heir’s palace, and resolve the situation.”

“Lord, have patience. I understand your concerns, but I think you’re focused too much on our children and the succession.”

“Well, you’re too busy to.”

Awster’s mouth dropped. “I happen to have a lot of duties! I know you wish you were the one in charge, but you aren’t.” She tapped the paper. “Let’s deal with this right now. A fine for the caricature: I think that would look petty. Closing the paper would look vindictive.”

“Doing nothing will look weak, so take your pick. I suppose you won’t deny the story and reject Bahá'u'lláh.”

“No, I won’t do that, my dear.”

“I was afraid you’d say that.”

“I’m sorry, but I happen to believe Bahá'u'lláh is a messenger of God with teachings for this world!”

“I know. People worry too much about religion, if you ask me. Not that I am advocating an immoral life or an unjust rule, but worrying about doing the right thing all the time can paralyze you or allow someone to sideline you.”

“I was thinking we’d issue a statement saying that I have not become a member of the Bahá’í community—which is true—and that I respect all prophets, Widumaj and Bahá'u'lláh included, and leave it at that. Short and simple. If anyone asks questions, we’ll say it’s no one’s business but mine.”

“That won’t quiet any rumors.”

“I’m not trying to quiet rumors, just draw the line.”

“Well, draw the line there and people will still demand your resignation.”

“Which I will ignore, and so will mother, so that will be the end of the matter.”

“This will weaken your authority, though.”

“And will any of your approaches solve that problem?” Awster shook her head.

“No, you are suggesting either that I lie—which may not convince many skeptics anyway—or that I exercise naked power to maintain my position, which will not preserve my popularity. Mother is the one who preserves my power and authority anyway.”

“I suppose you’ve decided, then.”

“I have, and thank you for arguing me into this position. Who do you think leaked the story to the New Times?”

Kandékwes considered. “Estoiyaju extracted the information from our driver, who could have told someone else as well. But I doubt it. Estoiyaju is faultlessly loyal to your mother, but not to you. If he weakens you, that may strengthen his influence over the Queen.”

“That’s possible.”

“And then there are at least ten Bahá’ís who know of the meeting. Any of them could have said something.”

Awster looked at the story. “There aren’t a lot of specifics here, and parts of it could have come from several different people. But some of this information came from an insider, not from a Bahá’í.”

“I agree. Shall we ask Estoiyaju?”

Awster considered. “Maybe I will. Let me draft a short statement and run it past you and the others. We still have time to release it before the *World Table* starts.”

Reread 11/24/24

343.

Reign

Génmému 2-14/ Oct. 22-Nov. 3, Yr 14/632

Soru parked the car he had borrowed from May in front of the house of Lord Viduféru of Albagras. He hesitated to get out, but he had felt he had no choice but to drive two hours from Pértatranisér—even though he was still “jet lagged” from his arrival the day before from the eastern shore—to pursue the promise Viduféru had not fulfilled. It was an awkward and delicate problem.

He took a deep breath, got out of the car, walked to the house, and knocked on the door. A moment later, a servant opened it. “Good morning; you’re Soru Dénujénése, right? Do you have an appointment with the lord?”

“No, I don’t, but I was in the area and thought I’d stop.”

“I see.” The servant looked suspicious; no one was “in the area” coincidentally. “Wait here.” He closed the door, but returned a minute later. “The lord can see you. This way.”

Soru nodded in thanks and followed the servant to the grand reception room. He sat, and he had to wait quite a while; perhaps half an hour. He said prayers silently so that he was patient and strong rather than angry when Lord Viduféru finally entered.

“Honored, what a surprise to see you,” he said. “I hope you are comfortable and well?”

“Yes, Lord, thank you.”

“And your family?”

“The children are growing very fast, Lord. And the children in both of my schools are doing well also. They are immensely grateful for your assistance.”

Viduféru smiled awkwardly, suspecting that was the reason for Soru’s visit. “I pray they are learning well in your school.”

“Indeed they are, Lord. The bus makes a trip here three days a week to pick up fifteen children, and it returns them home late at night. I’m hoping it can transport even more next year. It also brings thirty-five up from as far south as Tripola three days a week and thirty from as far north as Belledha two days a week. Without your gift, we never could have started this service.”

Viduféru smiled. “Thank you.”

“But we got the bus on the down payment you gave us, and we need to finish paying for it. We are already overdue on the payment and we’re becoming desperate to continue the service. We badly need the rest of the donation you promised.” Soru looked at Viduféru, hoping that pleading eyes would be more effective than an expression of the anger he felt for the unanswered letters he had sent.

“I see.” Viduféru looked at Soru, and his face hardened a bit. “When I pledged the money to you, honored, I assumed that you were a worshiper of Esto through the old religion. You never told me that was not the case.”

“Lord, I don’t understand what relevance the way I pray to Esto has to a promise to pay for a bus for a school. The school is not Bahá’í or of any other sort; it is a public school, partially funded by the palace, the provinces, and the townships.”

“Well, it makes a great deal of difference, I would not want to see my donation used to support Bahá’í causes in any way.”

“Lord, the school bus is used to move pupils to the school, for that is the purpose of such buses.”

“And how do I know the bus won’t be used to move Bahá’ís on nights or Primdius?”

“I can give you my word on the matter. The bus is too busy to be of any help at night, because it is typically used until 10 p.m.; remember we have two bus runs every day and children are at the school in shifts from 6 a.m. to 6 p.m. Primdius are the only day we can maintain it.”

Viduféru was not to be dissuaded, and Soru could see that from the expression on his face. “I’m afraid that won’t be adequate, honored. I can’t do anything that will support Bahá’ís. I am not pleased with Lord Yusbéru proposing your charity.”

“Perhaps he realized that a bus donated from Kerda was the best way to provide an education to sixteen blind, deaf, or mentally ill students from this province, a number that will double or more soon enough. Do you feel compassion for these unfortunates, lord? You are one of the keys to their acquiring an education that can make them useful and capable members of society. Your gift not only assists them, but reflects merit on yourself and may prompt Esto’s grace and assistance. All of these things are great and beautiful gifts.”

“I agree, and fear I will have to risk Esto’s wrath, one way or another. My mind is made up, honored.”

“I greatly regret that you are unable to keep your word, then,” replied Soru, disappointed. He looked at Viduféru for a moment, knowing he should show gratitude for the 4 ledhay—576 dhanay—he had already received, but concentrated on showing pity

rather than anger, as that was the best he could manage. “Very well, Lord. I thank you for your time.” Soru rose from the pillow where he had sat and headed for the door.

He got back in May’s steam car and drove all the way to Pértatranisér, considering the alternatives. Buses were 3,500 dhanay and there was no way he could squeeze 3,000 from the school’s budget. Yet without the bus it would be worse, because he’d lose two thirds of his pupils and their tuition payments.

He drove the car into the Mennea household in Pértatranisér and went inside to thank May. She and Amos were sitting at the dining table finishing lunch. “How’d it go?” she asked.

Soru shook his head. “He refused to give me the other 3,000. He said I had not been completely honest with him by not telling him I was a Bahá’í, and he wouldn’t support something a Bahá’í is doing!”

“Really?” said Amos, surprised. “That’s hard core.”

“Five members of his hymn hall are in Bellédha Prison for life,” replied May. “Three more are there for three years for burning the hymn hall to pin the crime on the Bahá’í youth.”

“So, what are you going to do?” asked Amos.

“Any suggestions? It’d be hard to get a bank loan right now, with the credit crisis and the high interest rates. We’d be paying twelve to fifteen percent. Miller Motors is pressuring everyone to pay as fast as they can because of cash flow problems. The school’s already in the red because startup costs have been higher than expected, and because my manager is still green. If I could move here I could probably manage it carefully and turn it around, but the school in Mèddoakwés might start to lose money.”

Amos looked at May. “We don’t have three thousand,” said Amos. “The partnerships here have had slower business, so they’ve earned less profit, and the tropical plantation is selling less rubber because Miller Motors has cut pickup production ten percent. I’d have to call Chris, but I know he has similar problems. Now that the harvests are over in most places, demand for manufactured goods has dropped more than expected.”

“Aryéstu’s predicting that sector of the economy to contract for the next six months, in fact,” said May. “It’s in today’s *Néfa Yoros*.”

“Just what we all need,” said Soru. “The schools both depend on gifts from businessmen to cover part of their costs. But if I give up this bus, I’ll lose two thirds of my students and will have to lay off at least two thirds of the staff.”

“That many?” said May, surprised.

Soru nodded. “The buses of the local high schools have accommodated special needs students between Néfa and Ora, so they come every day at normal school hours. But our school’s own bus can bring them from over five time zones. It leaves here at 4 a.m. for Tripola and returns at 7:30 a.m. with a bunch of kids, then goes to Isurdhuna and returns at noon with more. It leaves here again at 2 p.m. for Tripola and returns at 6 p.m. to take kids back to Isurdhuna, getting back here at 10 p.m. But with the time zone changes, the kids are picked up and dropped off at reasonable times; Tripola kids leave at 8 a.m. and return at 5 p.m., Isurdhuna kids 8 a.m. and 6 p.m.”

“That bus gets a lot of use!”

Soru laughed. “Four to five hundred kilometers a day! I have to have two different drivers, one for each shift, and one assistant on the bus for each shift as well. The bus

requires maintenance on almost every Primdiu. I really need three buses, one for Tripola, one for Isurdhuna, and one for Belledha; then I could bring even more students, and every day. The school wouldn't have kids arriving and leaving at three different times, either."

"Clearly, you need the bus." May looked at Amos, who pondered a moment.

"One hundred fifty a month," he said. "We can guarantee that."

"Thank you." Soru considered the offer. "I'm not sure the salesman will be satisfied, since we had promised to pay it all by now."

"They're under pressure to keep the cash coming in. Then go to the bank and borrow the money. I'll cosign for it. At 150 dhanay a month, I suspect we can pay off 3,000 plus interest in two years."

Soru nodded. "Okay, that'll work. Thank you very much, Lord Amos. There are sixty children in your debt."

"I wish we could do more for them, but times are tight," replied Amos, and May nodded.

They all chatted for a few more minutes. They offered Soru some lunch, which he gratefully accepted. Then he left. "You've got to get to class and I have to get back to the lab," Amos said to May. "But we need to figure out where we'll get this."

"I'd rather not call on dad; he's putting every spare dhanay into the microcredit bank. The Women's Géndha has a small surplus, so I can probably cut back a bit on our scholarship contribution. Can you squeeze some from the lab?"

Amos nodded. "I think so. The new gas plant is over budget, of course, but the contingency fund is actually larger than the deficit, so far at least. But we have to be

careful because the stores are not making as much money as expected, so our income is not so reliable.”

“At least we aren’t putting anything into the light and phone companies!”

“I hope!” replied Amos, with a laugh.

Werétrakester sat patiently in the outer waiting area of the palace, observing everything around him carefully and wondering what he would see, both with his outer eye and his inner eye. He ran through hymns of the Great Prophet in his mind, almost meditatively, for it made him even more sensitive to the currents flowing in the space around him.

The door opened and Estoiyaju came in. “Honored Prophet, Her Majesty is very grateful for your visit. She is just about ready and apologizes for the delay.”

“Thank you, Estoiyaju.” Werétrakester extended both hands to the queen’s chief of staff, who shook hands with a trace of hesitation; guilt, perhaps. “Are you well?”

“Thank you, prophet; very well.”

“The last two weeks have been very difficult, I think.”

“A nightmare, prophet, and the pressure just continues. Her Majesty is not yet ready for it, either. Please be gentle and kind to her; her nerves can’t take much.”

“I understand. Of course. She was still frail three weeks ago when I last saw her, but I suppose this crisis over the crown princess has set her back.”

“Indeed, it has.”

“Honored secretary, speaking of nightmares, I have had a recurrent dream about this crisis. The symbols have been different; sometimes I see eagles, sometimes

buffaloes, sometimes a mixture of animals and people. But the message has been the same. The queen's trust has been betrayed by someone very, very close and dear to her."

"Really?" said Estoiyaju, a look of shock on his face that almost masked his guilt.

"Yes indeed," Werétrakester replied, looking at Estoiyaju very closely. The latter looked away. The prophet rose and Estoiyaju led him to the queen's private chamber.

Dukteréstó I was dressed elegantly, her jeweled crown precisely placed on her head, but her face was worn and tired. Werétrakester hurried to her, knelt before her seat, and kissed her hand. "Your Majesty, I am very pleased to see you again. I regret it has been so long."

"I regret it as well, Werétrakester, for you are one of my most trusted advisors."

"Thank you." He turned to Estoiyaju. "Thank you so much for conducting me here," he added, dismissing the secretary. Usually Estoiyaju stayed during audiences, though Werétrakester was one of the few privileged to have private ones. He bowed and scurried out.

"How is your health, Your Majesty?"

"Please sit with me." She gestured to the couch next to her. "I still feel profoundly weak. Perhaps this is how it feels to be eighty years old, in which case, I don't want to be eighty. And I feel paralyzed; unable to make decisions. Sometimes I try to focus my mind on a matter, but soon a sense of helplessness overwhelms me, accompanied with a fresh outpouring of grief. Then I return to my chair or my bed."

"After I was poisoned, Your Majesty, it took me six months to recover enough to feel normal again, and even then the weakness lingered. You need to be patient with yourself."

“My healing must be of the spirit as well as the body, prophet, because the purpose of my life has received a terrible setback. My son . . . my son—” She stopped and tears came to her eyes.

Werétrakester reached out and put a hand on her shoulder. “I have seen your son in my dreams. He is soaring through the stars with the prophet Gawéstu, and sometimes Widumaj Himself instructs the Crown Prince. Məməjékwu feels great remorse for leaving his children, his wives, and you. He feels sadness for letting you down and failing to unite the kingdom. But he is also learning the brilliance of the spiritual powers he has up there, among the stars. Like a baby bird first testing its wings, he is beginning to flutter about and fly. He wants you to resume your flight as well, for it is not time for you to join him.”

The Queen looked at Weretrakester, wondering whether he was relating a dream or not, for he often used dreams as metaphors. “Prophet, I can’t resume my duties yet; I don’t have the strength of body or mind. It is too soon for me to fly.”

“I can see that is true. The dream was not meant to be that literal, I believe. The prince knows you will recover soon. Perhaps if you gradually resume your duties, you will find strength.”

“Perhaps. But the problem goes beyond a weakness of mind and body. Werétrakester, I no longer *desire* to rule. The details simply do not interest me. When I try to concentrate on them, I find myself daydreaming. I don’t know how to solve that problem.”

“As your grief recedes, your resolve to serve the people will strengthen, and with it, a desire to know the details.”

“Perhaps.” Her Majesty looked at the wall and Werétrakester took the chance to study her face. “My daughter is the problem, in a way. After years of partly ignoring her, I feel guilty every time I see her. She is doing a good job as regent; even Estoiyaju grudgingly admits it. If I recover, I need to match her competence; a difficult task when one is not healthy and strong. If I declare her my successor, I will contradict the Hymn of the King and deny the throne to my grandson, who may yet prove worthy. Furthermore, if I resume my duties now, I will strengthen my enemies, who are calling for her resignation as regent. So I must continue this course, watching her rule and dealing with two angry and widowed daughters in law.”

“How are Sugé and Ninti?”

“Grief-struck, terrified they will lose their positions, fearful for their children, and constantly insulting each other directly to their faces, and behind their backs. I try to see them briefly after supper every evening, and no more!”

“I can understand.” Werétrakester considered the matter. “I have meditated and prayed on this problem many hours, and no dream or inspiration has come to me. But at one point, a thought came to me. Who knows; perhaps the thought itself was the inspiration I sought. You are the eighteenth monarch in the line of Mégékwes Éradékumaj, blessed with the authority to rule by Esto Himself through the revelations vouchsafed to Widumaj. Nine monarchs ago, Sumikester I conquered Sumilara and brought the entire world under his rule. Sumikester had three sons and ten daughters and all his sons died before him. He did not want his eldest daughter to assume the throne because of her personal weaknesses, nor did he wish the eldest daughters of his eldest son to rule.”

“Being a woman was probably the main weakness he had in mind.”

“Probably. So what did he do?”

She smiled. “He didn’t want to follow the line of succession laid out in the Hymn of the King, so two years before his death he appointed his grandson, the second son of his second son, to be Mégékwes IV, a co-monarch with him, and they ruled together until his death.” And she nodded. “You are a truly great prophet.”

“And Mégékwes IV proved a wise choice; he was capable, had good judgment, was courageous and decisive. The decision was controversial at the time, but when Sumikēster died, no one contested the sole rule of Mégékwes.”

“Of course not. The hymn governs succession upon the death of the living monarch, but does not govern decisions made during the monarch’s life. Thank you, Werétrakester. I must meditate and pray about this idea. I don’t know whether I want a co-monarch.”

“It will be your chance to work more closely with your daughter.”

“Indeed. I am appreciative of your advice, and your dreams have made me feel better.”

Melwika Stadium was packed with 20,000 people for the big soccer game between the Melwika Motors and the Tripola Tworkes. The “Motors” and the “Wild Boars” were the two best teams of the six that had battled all year for the championship; whoever won was probably going to be in the finals. Thornton, Lébé, Jordan, and Tiamaté sat in the front row near midfield, good seats for seeing the entire match. Tiamaté, however, was not feeling well, so when halftime began, she and Lébé headed to the bathroom.

“Oh, the line,” said Tiamaté, groaning. A lot of women had hurried ahead and there were already twenty ahead of them.

“This place doesn’t have enough bathrooms for a capacity crowd. Here, let’s sit. Do you want to wait for the line to dissipate?”

Tiamaté nodded. “I feel almost nauseous, but I don’t think I’ll lose anything waiting. Maybe I just need to sit inside out of the chilly wind for a while.”

“The smells here aren’t helping, though. I suggest we head closer to the doorway and sit where there’s some sun.”

“Good idea.” The two women headed around the stadium to the other side, where they would be in the sun but out of the wind. It was mid Génméné—the equivalent of November 1—and while Melwika usually had mild weather, that day was unusually chilly. “You don’t need to use the bathroom, do you?”

“Not urgently. When did you start feeling ill?”

“This morning I didn’t feel well when I woke up, and it got better after a while, but now I’m not feeling so well.”

“What about yesterday?”

Tiamaté thought about it. “Yesterday morning I didn’t feel well, either. You don’t think I’m pregnant, do you?”

“I’m not a doctor, but I know morning sickness when I see it.”

“Morning sickness.” Tiamaté digested that thought.

They found a good spot in the sun and near another bathroom, so they could watch the line, and sat. “I can’t get pregnant. I’m taking three courses! I was planning to

take two courses each during the next two short terms! How am I going to get through everything!”

Lébé took her hand. “Don’t jump to conclusions; talk to Dr. Lua or Aréjé when she’s here. But look at me, 31 years old, three kids, a Masters degree, author of two books, director of the Women’s Géndha, and faculty. You can do it. Remember, you’re not in the same situation as most women here. The household has cooks, maids, and nannies.”

“I’ve seen that over the last year, but I never thought I’d live that way. I’m just not used to the idea of someone else cooking and washing for me. And watching kids for me! That seems very strange.”

“Thor and I spend four or five hours a day with the kids plus most of Primdiu. That’s plenty for family life. When someone else does the cooking, you have time to play with the kids. If you are pregnant, you should be able to finish this term. You may not have to cut back much in the next two terms, either.”

“But after the baby comes . . .”

“Sure, after the baby comes you’ll need to devote most of six months to the baby, but even then you could take one course. Babies sleep almost all the time their first month or so. Don’t worry, you’ll manage.”

“I . . . wish I were a man, sometimes!”

“They have their advantages, but we get to be mothers, and they can’t do that.”

Lébé shrugged. “Jordan should be supportive, and if he isn’t, tell me and I’ll tell Thor!”

Tiamaté giggled. “Thanks. I won’t panic; I’ll wait and see.” They saw that the line was shrinking, so they got in it.

Jordan looked at the entrance into the seating near them. “I wonder where they went.”

“The women’s rooms have huge lines.”

“I guess that’s it. So, do you think the Motors can make up the deficit?”

“Two goals . . . hard to say, the Tworkes have dominated so far. The Motors are having an off day.”

“Maybe they’ll do better next year. The first World Cup; it’s generating a lot of excitement. Every radio in the kingdom has this game on it!”

“Except the radios in the houses that are empty, because everyone’s here! Mitru’s making a big profit on the bus tickets. Maybe next year, the teams will make a profit as well! On Gèdhéma, you know, professional sports was a rich business opportunity.”

“We may be too small for that. I read about that in grandpa’s business class.”

“How are your courses going, anyway?”

“Pretty well. All the development discussions on Sumilara over the summer made me appreciate business courses even more. I definitely want to help create a development program here.”

“Good. I think dad’s moving in that direction, too; the business program is well established now and doesn’t need him.”

“The tomi has about a dozen people with specialized experience in different business fields; they earn a good salary from the tomi and teach part time in the génadéma as well.”

“Then go into their own consulting business, or start a business!” Thornton laughed; it was hard to keep good people. He turned toward the entrance and saw Lébé and Tiamaté emerge. “Here they come. Tiamaté looks really tired.”

“I know. I hope she isn’t pregnant.”

“You can never be careful enough, unless she uses the pill.”

“She didn’t like how it made her feel. I didn’t sense a difference, but she did.”

“I think a lot of women are shocked by the idea that they can control their fertility.”

“Maybe so, but with almost no publicity—just word of mouth—it has become the most common pill prescribed on the planet. But she held out against it. A baby right now will make everything a lot more complicated.”

“Don’t worry, it’ll work out.”

Jordan didn’t answer; he was skeptical. They stood up to let Lébé and Tiamaté pass them to reach their seats. The Melwika High School band had been entertaining the crowd during halftime, and when they wrapped up their last song everyone applauded. The band headed off the field and the players came back out.

“Ladies and gentlemen, welcome to the second half of today’s game between the Melwika Motors and the Tripola Tworks. Before we resume the game, there is a bit of news we want to announce. Her Majesty, Queen Dukterésto I, has just announced that she will take as her co-monarch, Princess Awster, who will henceforth be known as Queen Estoibidhé. The kingdom will have two reigning queens, Dukterésto and Estoibidhé. The details will be on the radio after this game. Long live the queens!”

That call surprised the twenty thousand people in the auditorium. They looked up, and some responded ‘long live the queens!’ but most did not.

“That doesn’t seem to have gone over very well,” said Thornton.

“What does it mean?” asked Tiamaté. “How can we have two queens at once?”

“The kingdom once had two kings at once, I think,” said Jordan. “I think Skandu said that in history class.”

“And wasn’t a king and his wife, a first cousin and potential successor, co-monarchs once?” asked Lébé. “I think that’s a clever solution, actually.”

“What does it do to Sugu and Ninti, though?” asked Tiamaté.

Thornton shrugged. Lébé considered the question. “I think it means that when one monarch dies, the heirs of the other become the successors. So Princess Awster’s kids become the heirs, assuming she dies after her mother.”

“Interesting,” said Tiamaté. “Sounds like the two widows problem is solved as well, then.”

Reread and edited 6/12/13, 8/24/17, 11/24/24

344.

Investments

Late Génmènu / mid-Nov. Yr 14/632

Chris was surprised to note that Yimanu's reddish-brown hair was turning white. One of the oldest of the génadema's first crop of students, the eleven-year President of Prosperity Bank was only 39 years old.

Yimanu saw Chris in the doorway about to knock and rose from his chair. "Lord Chris, please come in." He stepped out from behind his large, impressive desk and they shook hands.

"Hail, Honored Yimanu." Chris said it sonorously, for he had particular respect for Yimanu's judgment, and besides, today he needed a favor. "How is your family?"

"They are all well. Did you know that my oldest starts génadema next year? It's hard to believe. How is your family?"

"Quite well, thank you." They both sat simultaneously at the table in front of Yimanu's desk.

"Any word on the coronation? Have you received an invitation?"

"No, I haven't heard anything, nor have I received an invitation. You?"

Yimanu shook his head. "I met with Migéstu yesterday and asked him if he had heard anything. He had not. He has his ear to the Old House grapevine and they're all convinced the princess forced her mother to agree to the co-monarchy."

"They must be furious. Any news from Migéstu about the credit situation?"

“A bit. Twenty-five Old Houses have begged the palace for money because they’re in debt and the profits of the modular building factories are so meager. The palace asked the Royal Bank to extend loans to them. Migéstu’s furious; he says all the families are bad credit risks and most will default, and then he won’t be able to collect. But of course he’s obeying the palace.”

“That’ll cut into the palace’s budget, but I bet the loans will be less than the old pensions.”

“That’s what he said.”

“How are we doing here?”

Yimanu shrugged. “Cash flow problems and credit problems have gotten a bit worse. The warm weather is allowing a lot of farmers to produce a few weeks more vegetables than expected, and that’s helping, but overall the industrial and commercial sectors of the economy are flat or shrinking a bit. Aryéstu is now estimating growth this year at a mere three percent, because of all the political uncertainty on top of a cold winter. Depositors are still withdrawing more than they’re depositing. But I don’t think we’ll need to raise the prime interest rate next month. Migéstu pressured me to lower it; the Royal Bank sets their rates based on ours! When Aryéstu and I poured over all his students’ surveys and the data they had gathered, we both felt that the situation is probably very close to the bottom, and should start to pick up in the spring. If we raise interest rates now, maybe people will keep more money in the bank, but fewer people will want to borrow it.”

“That’s the problem, and it’ll trigger more contraction, especially in construction.”

“Estanu is only selling houses to people who are paying all or most of the price in cash. Anyone who needs a mortgage on more than half the price is waiting for interest rates to come down. Miller can’t sell vehicles, either; demand is down twenty-five percent. And I gather modular building sales are down.”

Chris nodded. “About twenty percent. We’re scrambling to keep everyone employed.”

“So is Miller Motors. If they start to lay people off, we’ll have workers withdrawing pension savings and a further bleeding of deposits.”

Chris nodded. Miller Motors and the foundry had almost a million dhanay in pension funds tied up in Prosperity Bank, much of it loaned out to Miller Motors for expansions and other improvements. “I have a similar worry about the modular building factories, but the pension funds are a lot smaller; maybe 100,000.”

“The factory has been operating for only a year. So, what have you come by to talk about? The request for a 100,000 dhanay line of credit each for the gas, phone, and electric companies?”

“That’s one reason. We’re trying to wean the companies from dependence on our resources. The companies are large enough now so that further expansion should be funded through a combination of revenues and stock sales. All three utility companies are aiming at an annual return on investment of ten percent. All of them are aiming at a three percent cut in operating costs. We’ve been investing most of the money destined for profit in expansion, but we’re slowing expansion and will not invest any of the money going into the profit margin.”

“But doesn’t the gas company have big expansion plans?”

“I wouldn’t call them big. The standardized gas plant will be ready for production in the spring and will meet the demands of a large village of a thousand in a cold climate and two thousand in a warm climate. We have a one hundred thousand dhanay line of credit with the Royal Bank to fund them and so far local investors in Sumilara and Gordha are pledging 150,000, with more to follow. If we have a 100,000 dhanay line of credit here as well, we can anticipate installing four or five systems next year *and* holding the profit margin to ten percent.”

“That would be impressive, and your plans are sound. Those companies should have been earning regular profits years ago and I’m glad you’re making these changes. But with tight credit right now, we can’t give you 100,000 for each. Maybe 100,000 total.”

“That’s all?”

“I’m sorry, Chris. We have to be cautious. Maybe we can increase the credit line by springtime, if the economy improves. The prime rate’s nine percent, which is high.”

“I know, but that’s the best we can do. A hundred thousand, huh? You can’t do better for a founding member of the bank?”

“I’m sorry, but it’s my job to make the decisions that are the best for the bank. A wrong move right now, and we could collapse.”

“I understand. I helped found the bank and I respect your judgment very highly, Yimanu.”

“Surely your family still has cash on hand for some of these expansions. You always had it in the past. You are transferring so much money to the génadema, the

géndhas, the hospital, the Central Spiritual Assembly . . . some must be left for the utilities.”

“Yes, we have cash on hand and may need to reallocate some of it. But I’m trying to save as much as possible for the microcredit bank.”

“My assistant gives me reports after every seminar. Fascinating idea. It’ll fill a need, since we don’t make very many small loans. I’m more worried that it’ll compete with us for small depositors, though.”

“If a bank wants a lot of small depositors, it needs to make small loans.”

“The granges make small loans, though, and don’t take deposits.”

“Correct, but as I’ve looked into the granges, I’ve found that their programs are more like ‘small grants.’ Their own members repay, but only fifteen percent of all farmers are in granges, and less than half of the granges have a small loan program. When cousins of members in other villages borrow from a grange, they often don’t repay. Granges won’t loan at all to people who have no close relatives in a grange. They don’t reach many people.”

“But some successful village businesses were started by people borrowing from a grange.”

“True. The young man usually moved to Melwika or Melita, joined the grange, accumulated savings, acquired experience, borrowed from the grange, then went back to his home village and started a business. I wish more people would do that. Most young people who move here and join the grange stay here.”

Yimanu nodded. “Yes, you are right. But Chris, why couldn’t you share the business plan with this bank, so we can take on the effort?” There was a tone of resentment and hurt in his voice.

“Yimanu, I have very great respect for your leadership of this bank. I can’t begin to tell you how confident I am in you. But this effort needs to be the priority of whatever institution pursues it. For Prosperity Bank, it would be one loan program out of a half dozen. This new bank will be a nonprofit effort; it won’t make money. The ten percent of income that would have gone to profit is crucial to make it work.”

Yimanu was startled. “Chris, do you mean you are *giving* the bank the money, to use again and again?”

Chris nodded. “Correct, and I don’t expect it back. The goal is to build up a self-replenishing pot of money that can generate enough interest to pay the bank’s expenses. Once it has significant assets, it can offer a return to investors. If it received investments equal to ten percent of its assets and had to pay them a ten percent return annually, the bank would only need to generate a one percent surplus.”

“You could probably do that. What do the granges think of this? It seems to me the grange movement has stalled; it’s not expanding. And now you’re competing with a service they provide.”

“The grange movement is even shrinking a bit, because farmers can now rent equipment. Traditional villages have never taken to granges well. I have to work with the granges; there’s a grange conference next month and I hope they’ll support the plan. If we can get Wiki Bank set up, I assume we can talk about a reciprocal agreement?”

“Sure, depending on the bank’s set-up. ‘Wiki’ huh? Clever name.”

“Wiki Bank will be modeled on Grameen Bank on Gædhéma. ‘Grameen’ means ‘pertaining to the village.’ So we are taking ‘wika’ and changing the ending to the ideational.”

“Just like toma/tomi and gabrula/gabruli.”

“Exactly.” Chris glanced at the clock on Yimanu’s wall. “I need to get back to my office. It was good to talk to you, even if neither one of us could give the other what the other wanted!” He chuckled at that.

Yimanu chuckled as well. “That happens. It was good to talk to you Chris.”

“I think we’ll have a lot to talk about in the next six months or so!”

“I always feel guilty arriving at dad’s house in a steam car,” said Tiamaté as they parked outside her father’s house in Endraidha.

“I know what you mean,” said Jordan, shutting off the air to the firebox so the charcoal would go out. “But without a car it would take twice as long to get here and we’d come much less often. And it isn’t our car anyway. It’s the household’s third car, split among four families.”

“I know, and I’ve said that to them before, but I still feel guilty.” Tiamaté got out of the car a bit awkwardly; she was still feeling a little bit ill, though it was now early afternoon in Melwika, noontime in the army city.

“Are we going to tell them?”

She nodded. They walked to the door of the comfortable house; Aisendru was a recently promoted Major and had a nice salary, and therefore had a nice house in the officers’ neighborhood with electricity and running water, though it had no telephone or

gas. Jordan knocked and Sarédaté, Tiamaté's mother, was there in an instant. "Come in."
She kissed Jordan. "How are you?"

"Very well, mother Sarédaté."

She turned to Tiamaté. "It's so good to see you again, dear." They kissed.

"It's good to see you also, mother. Are you well?"

"Better now than I've been all day."

"Did you have a good trip?" asked Aisendru, offering both of his hands to Jordan.

"Yes; it was quick and routine," replied Jordan.

"Hey, Jordan," added Aisugu, Tiamaté's 15 year old brother, and they shook hands as well.

"Hey. How's school?" Aisugu was smart, but not strongly motivated.

"Alright."

"Come sit at our new *table*," said Aisendru proudly. He led them to the side of the house's main room—it didn't have a separate dining room—and proudly showed off a wooden dining table and six elegant chairs,

"We can make it longer, too," added Sarédaté, smiling. "We bought it at the Home Improvement Store in Melita last week."

"It's beautiful!" said Tiamaté. She sat at the table and admired it. Jordan started to sit, but Aisugu pointed him to another chair. "That one's mine."

"Aisugu, be generous!" exclaimed Aisendru.

"No, that's alright," said Jordan, smiling. "He has his place. This is very nice."

"Very *modern*," added Aisendru. "Please, have some bread and raisins." Sarédaté already had plates, food, and a pot of coffee on the table. They all sat to enjoy it; the

traditional Eryan way was to sit on pillows on the floor or on a low bench along the wall. The house had a low bench along two walls, which made it partially traditional. It also had a separate kitchen with a charcoal stove.

They all took bread and Sarédaté filled everyone's coffee cups. "How did your classes go?" asked Aisendru to Jordan.

Jordan nodded. "Pretty well, I think. Exams are over, but grades won't be submitted until next week; I know, I have to help grandpa grade his accounting exams! But I think I'll get two As and one B+."

"Good. Good." Aisendru was proud of his son in law but didn't ask about his daughter's grades. "You see, Aisugu? You can do this, too."

"I know, dad."

"If you want to get into the Officer's Academy, that's what you need to do."

"I know."

"How did you do?" Sarédaté asked her daughter.

"Three As," she replied, with a small smile.

"Excellent!" Sarédaté kissed her proudly; Aisendru nodded in congratulations as well. "I'm sure you'll have two more next term."

"I'm only taking one course next term," replied Tiamaté. The second fall term was half as long, so most students took half as many courses, since each one met twice as many hours per week.

"Oh? Why, will you be a teaching assistant?"

“No, not yet; I need to finish another year of courses at least. Jordan will finish his dwoyeri this spring, I’ll have just a uniyeri.” She paused. “No, I’m pregnant.” She smiled to look happy about it.

A huge smile spread across Aisendru’s face. “A baby! A grandson for us, Sarédaté! Congratulations, dear!” He rose and walked around the table to kiss her.

Sarédaté nodded to her husband’s comment, but her joy was not unalloyed. “I’m very happy for all of us, dear. But what about your education?”

“Never mind that now,” replied Aisendru, walking back to his chair. “Now you’ll discover your true self, your mother self! This is what women are meant to do, to be!”

“She can be a mother and have a vocation,” replied Jordan. “My mother did both; that’s why Dr. Lua’s just about as famous as my grandfather.”

“But Tiamaté isn’t Lua.”

“Aisendru, let her decide,” said Sarédaté. “She won’t be alone, Jordan will help, and the rest of the family.”

“And the nanny,” added Jordan. “My brother is now much older, as are Thornton and Lébé’s kids, so the nanny hasn’t had much to do lately. Our household has four couples and four children already, so it has a nanny, a cook, and a housecleaner. We can afford the help because there are so many of us.”

“Well, that’s one reason,” said Aisendru. “I don’t know that children should be raised by a nanny.”

“They aren’t; the nanny helps. I was raised partly by Korudé and partly by my mother and father. It works fine.”

“And the children are in school, once they are a few years old,” added Sarédaté.

“Lébé is my model,” said Tiamaté. “She has three children, ages 11 to 6, she got married when she was 19, and now she has a Masters, writes books, and teaches. And she’s right there in the house with me.”

“And their children are well behaved,” added Sarédaté. She looked at her husband. “Honey, leave this matter to them.”

“You really want her to go to genadema, don’t you?” he said accusatorially.

Sarédaté’s eyes narrowed. “What is your problem? I’m a traditional wife and do my duties, don’t I? I want more for my daughter!”

“Alright, alright,” said Aisendru, retreating from his wife’s anger. “Let’s drop this. At another time we can talk about planning for the little one; it’s still many months away.”

“Seven,” said Tiamaté.

“Good. Seven. Let us have dinner together and enjoy each other’s company.”

Kérékwés had developed quite a lot in six years, Chris reflected, as he drove into town. Lord Mitruiluku had gradually adjusted to the economic realities of the area. As a result, 600 farmers now farmed 15,000 agris—half the township—and Mitruiliku farmed 5,000 more using hired help. The resulting income—700,000 per year—allowed new factories to arise almost constantly. Kérékwés now employed 150 workers, had 400 houses, and a population of 1,700. Gramakwés, run by his brother Mitrulubu, and North Gramakwés, run by Mitrubbaru, had 1,900 and 1,000 respectively, and also had extensive fields and factories earning them similar amounts. The three brothers had been some of the biggest

investors in the Jérdomas and Miller Tomis. They had converted near bankruptcy into some of the kingdom's greatest wealth.

And that was the reason Chris was visiting; they were none too happy about the drop in tomi profits. He entered Lord Mitruiluku's house reluctantly; he hated to be a bearer of bad news, especially considering Mitruiluku's temper. At least he had a strategy: change the subject. He was surprised to be greeted not only by Mitruiluku and Mitrubbaru, his loyal younger brother, but by Lord Mitrulubu of Gramakwés as well; he hadn't visited with his brothers at all previously, as far as Chris knew. The reason was Princess Sugé, their sister and Meméjékwu's widow and first wife, who was also present. So was Meméjékwu's former loyal aide, Brébkordu, whom the palace had just appointed Governor of Swadnoma.

"What a pleasure to see you!" said Chris, once his eyes lit upon Sugé. "It has been some time, Princess; or perhaps 'Duchess'?"

Sugé smiled. She and Chris shook hands. "Thank you, Lord Kristobéru, it's good to see you again. I suppose 'Duchess' is the best title I have now. The palace told me point blank that 'Your Majesty' was no longer appropriate, though I guess I still have the title of princess."

"We were thrilled that she was appointed Duchess of Swadnoma," said Mitruiluku. "It is such an honor for our family, and unites us all here in this province."

Chris certainly wasn't going to note that the title of Duke had been first offered to him, and he had turned it down. "I was excited to hear it was offered to you as well. Do you plan to settle here?"

“I think I have little choice, even if the title confers absolutely no authority to me at all; just an annual stipend from the tax revenues,” replied Sugé. “The old and new queens both seem to want me out of my palace in Mèddoakwés, so that Awster can move into it. This is basically a fancy and comfortable exile.”

“I don’t know,” replied Mitrubbaru. “You have a nice car and a driver; Mèddoakwés is only an hour away; and the share of the taxes you have been awarded in perpetuity is quite comfortable.”

“And with the 5,000 agris I’m giving you as a personal estate, you can soon acquire several times that much in profit,” added Mitrubbaru.

“He’s giving me 5,000 agris northwest of here,” Sugé explained to Chris. “It’s the undeveloped corner of Kérékwes; no paved road or services! He tells me that with ten full time workers and an accountant, I can farm it quite efficiently.”

“That’s true,” agreed Chris. “And I’m sure the governor will arrange for a paved road and services soon enough. The easiest thing to do is raise cheap wheat and corn for sale as animal feed. The demand for feed for chickens, turkeys, and pigs in particular has expanded immensely in the last few years because people are buying a lot more meat and eggs. This area is exporting 500,000 chickens and 50,000 turkeys per year and the number keeps increasing.”

“I’ll be expanding my chicken processing plant in the spring,” added Mitrulubu.

“What about sugar cane?” asked Mitrubbaru.

“I’d wait,” replied Chris. “I’ve planted a thousand agris and other farmers in Swadlendha have planted a thousand more. We’ll start squeezing the juice this spring and some will be distilled into alcohol for steam cars, because liquid fuels are much more

convenient. But we still don't know what demand for alcohol fuel will be like. A lot of people will start their cars with quick-burning alcohol, then switch to slow-burning charcoal or wood because they're cheaper."

"I see," replied Sugé. "Thank you, Lord, for your explanation."

"So, Brébkordu, are you moving down here as well?"

Brébkordu nodded. "I have to, since I'll be administering the province. Aryornu started on a provincial palace, so I'll finish it, though it will certainly be smaller than he planned. I'll complete a provisional budget in a few weeks. It'll have a much smaller provincial police force and a lot more money for infrastructure and teachers."

"Excellent," replied Chris. "Aryornu promised to invest in a gas pipeline to Endraidha."

"Badly needed," added Mitruiluku.

"So I understand," said Brébkordu. "I think I can budget fifty thousand."

"We'll need more than that to complete it, though," said Chris. "Partly because demand in the province will be sufficiently high that we'll need a gas plant somewhere down here on the shoreline. By the way, the gas company is restructuring to generate a ten percent profit, starting this quarter, but to do so it must cease plowing so much of its own revenue into expansion. Consequently, we've secured a line of credit from the Royal Bank and another line of credit from Prosperity Bank. We're raising fees slightly and cutting back on staffing slightly as well." He looked at Mitruiluku and his brothers. "We welcome investment in the company by individuals such as yourselves. The demand for gas can only increase and the infrastructure for reaching customers is gradually being paid off. The gas company will make a steady profit in the future."

“Investment?” asked Mitruiluku. “How much?”

“The sky’s the limit. We’re looking for at least a hundred thousand this year, preferably more. Swadnoma will need it to complete the pipeline through all these towns and to build a gas plant.”

“What profit?” asked Mitrulubu.

“Like I said, ten percent.”

“That’s better than the factories right now!” quipped Mitrubbaru.

“There’s not a lot we can do about that,” said Chris. “The agricultural sector of the economy is still expanding; people have a basic confidence in it. But the manufacturing and retail sectors of the economy suffer from lack of confidence because of political instability and natural disasters. Once a lack of confidence starts to spread, it feeds on itself; people stop buying, this forces a layoff of workers, that shrinks salaries and causes buying to contract further, etc. House prices fall. People pull money out of bank accounts, so interest rates go up and credit contracts. This happened on gedhéma about every eight to ten years for half a year or so. The earliest contractions were large and painful, but they gradually became less extreme.”

“So, you are basically counseling patience?” asked Mitruiluku.

“Exactly, lord. The modular building industry has shrunk twenty percent since summer. Steam vehicle production is down twenty-five percent. But they seem to have hit bottom; demand has stayed steady for two months now. The public’s confidence in the economy and the government seem to be improving, so demand should start back up in a few months.”

“Yeah; after spring harvest, if you are right,” said Mitruiluku. “Or maybe we have exhausted demand and there isn’t the need for steam cars and modular buildings like there was before.”

Chris shook his head. “There’s no evidence of that. We may be able to solve the problems with sales and discounts, too. We’re going to try that.”

“You had better try something!” said Mitruiluku.

“The palace is upset, too; the Old Houses need the profits to cover their expenses,” added Sugé.

“Believe me, I know.”

“I’d hate to have to start pulling money out,” said Mitruiluku, though everyone knew that was impossible; no buyers could be found.

“Lord Chris, tell us more about the gas company and its plans,” said Mitrubbaru.

“Certainly. As you recall, last winter was quite cold, pushing up demand for gas twenty percent above what we expected and pushing up income as well. That was a great assistance to the gas company, which now serves Bellédha, the western shore from Néfa to Tripola, and the eastern shore from Melwika to Arjdhura and Melita. The main gas production occurs in Melwika and Ora in connection with the steel industry, which uses more than half of our gas, and in Arjdhura, Bellédha, and Bruagras, in connection with cement making. The gas company has three important initiatives. One is extending the pipeline network to Endraidha; Aryornu had promised to invest in the pipeline and factories along the potential route were built in anticipation that gas would be available. The pipeline extension will cost 135,000 dhanay, but the projected increase in demand for

gas will exceed supply in the winter months, so an additional gas plant is needed in this area.

“The second priority is to develop a standard blue water gas plant based on charcoal or coal. This effort is finished; we used a standard design at the Arjdhura plant and have subsequently modified it. The plant will produce enough hydrogen and carbon monoxide gas to heat about 25 houses during a temperate climate winter or provide cooking gas for five hundred. The plant will cost about 10,000 dhanay, including a sawmill. The idea is to sell one to Anartu, then when demand rises sell them a second one, etc. We think we can sell ten or twenty such plants to out-of-the-way towns like Sumiuparakwa, Gordha, and the major cities on Sumilara.

“The third initiative is to make biogas from manure and plant waste, such as corn and wheat stalks. Bacteria convert the material into methane—an excellent gas to add to our pipeline—and carbon dioxide, which can be scrubbed out. Villages or even houses can build their own units or they can buy cylinders of compressed gas from us. A useful byproduct is a rich fertilizer. We’re looking at a plant able to make thirty cubic meters of methane per day, about half the size of the blue water gas plant.

“In a way, there is also a fourth initiative: production of alcohol for powering vehicles from sugar cane. After the sugary juice is crushed from the cane, the cane is burned to boil off the excess water from the juice to concentrate it. There is extra energy produced from the process which can be converted into electricity or gas. We want to locate an alcohol plant with the gas plant so that the gas plant’s extra heat can be used in the alcohol production.”

“What would a gas plant in Swadnoma burn?” asked Mitrulubu.

“Sugar cane, agricultural waste like corn stalks, and wood hauled in by ship. The plant should be located on the sea coast for that reason.”

“I’ll be glad to provide a spot near Gramakwés village,” replied Mitrulubu. “And I’d be willing to invest in the facility as well.”

“Wait a minute!” objected Mitruiluku. “Kérékwés is also a perfectly good spot for such a plant, and I might be interested in investing in it instead!”

“Just what we need, another fight between brothers,” complained Sugé sarcastically. “Let’s fight to see who can give money away the most irrationally!”

“No, let’s not be irrational, please,” replied Chris, trying to calm everyone down. “I’m not here to take advantage of anyone. I can’t put the gas plant in Melita because it has no seashore. We don’t want to put it in or very close to a village because an explosion could devastate the village. I had planned to site it in Swadlendha where I am growing my sugar cane, but Lord Tritu is uninterested. When the pipeline didn’t materialize, I thought the alcohol plant would end up in Melita and would have no connection with a gas plant.”

“Lord Kristobéru, would it be possible to locate the gas plant on the border between Kérékwés and Gramakwés?” asked Mitrubbaru. “Then both could claim it and both could benefit from the taxes.”

Chris nodded. “It probably is possible. Route 3 passes close to the coast in that area. We’ll have to look at the land to be sure.”

“An excellent compromise, and one that might actually get my brothers working together again,” said Sugé. “I’ll invest in such a plant as well; I think I can even convince the palace to give me an extra pension for the purpose!”

Mitrubbaru looked at his older two brothers. “Obviously, we need a lot more details, but we know our three towns need gas; it will make it easier to open more factories. If it is close to us, the gas can flow both directions down the pipeline; we won’t be near the end.”

“If both townships gave 100 agris along their shorelines, the plant would have plenty of room for expansion,” suggested Chris. “The taxes could be split fifty-fifty.”

Mitruiluku eyed Mitrulubu uneasily. Neither had forgiven the other for the fight between them for control of Ora and the province around it, which had destroyed a fifth of the city some six years earlier. But they had managed to tolerate each other increasingly over the last two years, and now Sugé was there to mediate. “I could do that,” Mitruiluku grudgingly agreed.

“Fine. So can I,” agreed Mitrulubu.

“If I may suggest amounts, I would recommend fifty thousand dhanay from each of the four of you,” said Chris. “This is an investment in the gas company in general. The gas company can invest up to one hundred thousand. Three hundred thousand will cover the pipeline, gas plant, local distribution pipes and meters, and the alcohol plant.”

“How much are you personally investing?” asked Mitruiluku.

“The hundred thousand from the gas company basically is from me,” replied Chris. “My family invests in the gas company every year and it is spent on projects such as these. We’ve pumped almost three million dhanay into the gas company since the beginning. The Miller family has invested over a million dhanay in facilities that make gas and steel or make gas and cement. Other investments to date have been small because the company wasn’t making a profit.”

“And we want a profit, or there’s no reason to invest!” exclaimed Mitruiluku.

“I’ll be back next week,” replied Chris. “I’ll bring annual reports, annual income and expense reports, the new business plan; anything else you want. Two months ago we made a goal for all three utility companies to make a profit and we’ve already started to turn them around.”

“You had better,” warned Mitruiluku.

Reread and edited 6/12/13, 8/24/17, 11/24/24

345.

Coronation

Prusménu 14-17/Dec. 2-5, Yr 14/632

The old Central Square of Mëddowakwés was totally packed with the wealthy and commoners alike for the coronation. Chris, Liz, Thornton, Lébé, John Miller, and his three wives sat near the front of the VIP section in numbered folding chairs. The Royal Orchestra—only three years old—played a combination of traditional and imported tunes on traditional and gëdhémë instruments, including a piano. To the right of the elevated central podium sat the dukes and counts and their families, including Wëranolubu, who had the honorary title Count of Gëdhakwés. Notably absent from their ranks was Duchess Sugé of Swadnoma and Countess Ninti of Anar. To the left of the stage sat a block of grim-faced priests, primarily from Mëddoakwés and Isurdhuna, wrapped tightly in their blue robes against the chilly early December air.

The climax of the ceremony was when Queen Dukterésto, assisted by Wërétrakester—not by the two High Priests, Wëranodatu of Mëddoakwés and Isursunu of Isurdhuna—crowned her daughter Estoibidhé I. The crowd of commoners erupted in loud, spontaneous applause, followed by more restrained applause from the aristocracy. “My, this has made some uncomfortable,” said John, gloating.

“It’s a great day anyway,” responded Liz.

“A calamity for the kingdom,” snapped Lord Lukéstu Doma-Tribrébes, a very conservative Old House seated in the row behind them. That made John smile even more.

Estoibidhé I, formerly Princess Awster, waved to the crowd, and they applauded even more fiercely. She had been “the mother of the poor” in Mëddoakwés for the last decade and a half and was well loved by the city’s people. The aristocrats rose to their feet in response; some of them liked her as well, and they all wanted to look like they liked her. “I don’t know how this kingdom can have two monarchs,” continued Lukéstu to the lord next to him, ignoring the gëdhèmes in front of him. “And two women? They’ll gossip and bicker!” That made Lëbé turn red with anger; Liz shifted around uncomfortably on his feet; John chuckled; Awster, his oldest wife, poked him.

The new Queen, rather than walking to her throne, turned to the microphone on the podium. She took her mother by the arm and led her over as well. “We both want to thank all of you,” Estoibidhé said. “This is not the best time for a royal proclamation, and an official proclamation will soon be forthcoming. But I will say this: the time of mourning, confusion, and strife is over. We are back on the road to development and progress.” She paused for the audience to cheer. “We all know that roads are very seldom straight for very long; there are hills and swamps in the way, rivers to ford, and other obstacles to overcome. Our kingdom hit a major obstacle last spring. It almost knocked our wagon off the road. It knocked one driver out of the front seat. But we have the wagon back under our control and we are back on the road. No doubt, we will hit many other bumps in the future, but we will all stay on the wagon together and keep it moving forward.

“In the next few months, we will announce several new initiatives. One will be to help everyone who wants to learn how to read to have the chance within the next ten years. No adult will be required to learn, but I think we all will see how beneficial it is. I

have met 70 year olds who have learned how to read and write in the last few years. They are an example to us all. We particularly want women to learn to read, for they will raise healthier children if they understand medicine, nutrition, and many other aspects of this modern world.

“Another initiative will help villages to progress, particularly to acquire clean water and pipe away their waste. Most of our people are villagers and if their lives are improved, they won’t feel a need to move to the city.

“No doubt we will think of other initiatives as well. Éra is moving into a time of service and sacrifice for others. May we all begin our service to others today.”

Estoibidhé stepped away from the microphone to yet more applause. She and her mother walked to the pair of thrones and sat. Then Kεkanu came forward to chant a hymn of Widumaj.

“I don’t think I’ve ever heard him chant so powerfully,” said Liz, when he finished.

The two monarchs rose from their thrones and left the platform, processed to a gate in the wall behind them, and entered the palace compound. The ceremony over, everyone rose. “I never thought I’d see something like this,” exclaimed John, fairly loudly, in English. There were times he wanted to show off his gεdhéme background, and for some reason this was one of them. “I agree with our neighbor here; I don’t know how it’ll work out having two monarchs.”

“The younger one will defer to the older,” replied Liz, with a shrug, for that was the Eryan way.

“I suppose. I never thought I’d live to see *two* queens in a row.” John began to walk to the nearest aisle, so the rest of them followed. Chris decided not to reply, in English or otherwise.

As they started walking along the aisle, John added in English, “A very interesting choice of name: ‘God’s trusted.’ I wonder whether that’s intentional?”

“I think so,” replied Liz. “It’s a good counter to the rumors.”

“And a lot more modest than ‘daughter of God,’” added Thornton, referring to Estoibidhé’s mother, Dukterésto.

“When she was crowned, she was a scared and insecure 18-year old in a world of suspicious men,” said John. “I don’t think I’ve heard of anyone else with a name ending in ‘o’ except one or two kings. The new queen is in a much better place. So, is it true that ‘God’s trusted’ is a member of your religion?”

Chris looked down at the pavement, irritated. A moment later Liz replied in English, “No. She has never been enrolled as a member.”

“Ah. I see the distinction.” John dropped the matter, but a few seconds later he said “So, Chris, you really don’t think I should fire the hotheads?”

Chris kept his voice down. “Not as long as they are making reasonable requests and issuing criticisms that aren’t too extreme, and they aren’t encouraging vandalism. The workers are understandably upset to have their pay cut 15% but their hours left the same. If you react too strongly, you’ll further polarize the situation and you’ll end up with a strike on your hands. I’ve been to Mēlita twice in eight days to meet with all the workers of the Jérdomais Tomi or with small groups of them. They’re upset, too, but so far they’re dealing with the situation.”

“Interesting, that Mendhru and Mitrudatu couldn’t handle the situation.”

“They did, but I carry some added weight with the workers.”

“I see. And I’ve seen a few posters attacking you lately, not to mention the critical article in the *New Times*.”

“You can’t let things like that get to you.”

“But some of my workers are beginning to call me greedy and a *leech*. There are anonymous posters across the city to that effect!” John’s voice rose in anger.

“Look, they don’t understand how finance works. If you don’t return some profit, investors will start to pull out and the workers will be in an even worse situation. The alternative is a lot of layoffs, and in the winter no one can turn to farming.”

“I don’t want any men with skills to move to Ora or Tripola,” replied John.

“The workers prefer pay cuts to layoffs, too,” said Chris.

“But so far there’s no sign that a ten percent cut in prices has produced an increase in sales.”

“It’s a bad recession, but it has to bottom out. What about seeking more investment money and shifting workers to motorbike production?”

“Have you got half a million I can borrow? Because that’s how much I’m short. Motorbike production’s not starting this spring; the money’s not available to get the line set up. It’s not just a matter of shifting labor over. I’ve already done that. I wish I had your touch at attracting investors! I still can’t believe you got so much from the Mitru brothers!”

“It was the right product at the right place and the right time, and there was a sister involved. I can talk to them, if you’d like.”

“No, I don’t want to deal with *them*! They’re whiners and complainers. I want investment from others, maybe the bank.”

“It doesn’t have spare credit, either, unless you pay twelve percent interest.”

“You’ll get the investment in the spring, I bet, once we’re close to harvest,” said Liz hopefully. “After today, confidence will return.”

“Probably,” said John, though he sounded skeptical. “Any possibility you can make a tour of the factory with Yimu, or address meetings with the workers?”

“Sure, but it’ll have to wait a week. I’m busy for the next three days, then I have to go to Melita for a few days.”

“Okay, I’ll tell Yimu. I think he could use your help.”

The grand coronation was followed by three days of intense work in the Mennea Tomi. Chris struggled to keep everything going; he was constantly reviewing ledger books, advising business partnerships or customers how to cut costs, and watching the ledgers of the businesses he was involved in like a hawk, postponing payment of some bills and considering specials that might boost demand. He had to find a substitute for his business class because he had no time to prepare for it. Even the Home Improvement store chain was hurting; customers were saving money in their mattresses, rather than depositing it in the bank or spending it on goods.

It was a bit of a relief when, Penkudiu morning, he got into his rover with Jordan and drove to Melita. He dropped his grandson off in town where he could conduct some business and drove to the Triwika Industrial Park, where three hundred fifty workers toiled to make modular buildings, feather mattresses, rope, basketry, clothing, and pasta

products. He had another round of big meetings, followed by meetings with small groups of angry or financially desperate workers. He tried to explain the situation to the former and ask their advice. He extended a few loans or grants to the latter.

By noon he was able to drive back to Melita. When he parked in front of his house there—which had been rebuilt—he was surprised to see Thornton’s steam car. He and Jordan were eating sandwiches in the dining room. “What brings you here?” Chris said, surprised.

“Today’s the day Dwosunu and I are heading into triangle park. We rode around it last year and the year before about this time and we’re going back to see the progress from brushland to grassland to mixed forest.”

“How long will it take?” asked Jordan.

“I suppose two or three hours.”

“Because I’d love to go as well. I wonder whether I can get a horse? Grandpa, I could drive back to Melwika with Thornton, if that’s alright.”

“Sure,” said Chris. “Actually, I wouldn’t mind going on a ride like that as well! I’ve had a lot of stress and trouble in the last few days, and a ride in the country would be glorious. But I’ve got to go to the grange meeting this afternoon.”

“How long?” asked Thornton. “Because if it’s just an hour or so, we can wait. Dwosunu’s back at the grange stable right now because they had lost our request to rent horses, and there’s a party out with them. They’ll be back soon, and then the horses need to rest and graze a bit.”

Chris’s eyes sparkled. “This sounds like divine providence, then! I have to go to the grange for about an hour and a half; maybe two hours at the most.”

“Ninety minutes will do it,” replied Jordan. “I was there this morning. They’re expecting you to speak to the grange conference at 1:30 for no more than thirty minutes. The morning session was about the future of the grange movement and it was rather wild. There was a representative from the Dhébakwés Grange who said the granges will need to be abolished in another ten years. A representative of the Belledha Grange said the grange should acquire all the farmers’ land and lease it out to them for a living wage. He was laughed at. The Béranagrés Grange representative said that health care and education should be covered by the palace so the granges would be freed to invest in factories and businesses.”

“I’m in favor of that,” said Chris. He sat at the table with them and the cook brought him a sandwich as well. “These are the issues that come up every year. Did someone raise the issue of farmers owning their own tractors and equipment?”

“Oh, yes. Of course, the only ‘farmers’ who own steam tractors or attachments are ‘aristocratic,’ but everyone aspires to that state.”

“It’ll happen in the next ten years, and it’ll disrupt the granges. On the other hand, about tenth of the farmers own wagons and horses, and a third own a horse or ox, and the granges have survived that. I’ll have to deal with all these matters.”

How was the trip to Triwika?” asked Jordan.

Chris shrugged. “The usual difficult scenes of anger and desperation. This recession is a terrible burden for everyone. I hope it ends soon. I have to do the same thing in Melwika next week, too.”

“When will we go to Sumilara?” asked Jordan.

“Probably in three weeks. What news from city hall?”

“I talked to Werétranu for an hour. The city’s squeezed, but so far Werétranu’s been able to shepherd the finances very carefully.”

“Good, that’s one institution I don’t have to worry about; not yet.” Chris turned to Thornton. “What’s new with the Krésone?”

“Last night I had a good talk with Lord Patékwu. People expected that by becoming Bahá’ís, their lives would immediately improve, and they’re getting disillusioned that they’re no more prosperous than before.”

“We warned them. People can’t accept Bahá’u’lláh because they expect to become richer. The tribe needs education, skills, training, knowledge, and investment. I can help with the last in particular, but ultimately they have to raise themselves up. The revelation will help, but not overnight.”

“That’s basically what I said to him, and he has been saying that to everyone who complains.”

“I wish we could do more, but we have only so much money.”

“And if we gave them too much, they would sit back and ask for more, instead of raising themselves up.”

“Are they planting winter vegetables?”

“Yes, grudgingly, and that was part of Patékwu’s complaint. The Melwika Grange wants a contract for a regular and predictable amount of vegetables every week. That’s the only way they can give the Krésone a good price. But the Krésone aren’t used to planting a winter crop or working together to fulfill a contract. For that matter, renting farm equipment from the Melwika Grange has been difficult. Sértroba’s so far east, they can’t get the equipment easily or often, but the western hamlets are much closer to

Melwika and can rent more easily and often. So they're planting more fields, making more money, they don't want to work with Sértroba, and the Sértrobans are jealous.

Sértroba is complaining that they're damaging the marshlands, too."

"The dawn of ecological consciousness; your ecology course has had an impact."

"Definitely."

They finished their sandwiches, then walked to the grange. Thornton and Jordan went to check on the horses and reserve one for Chris as well, then came back to enjoy the free lunch the grange was providing to sixty-eight representatives of thirty-one granges or village committees from all around the world. Finally, Wérétranu Melitani, who was head of the grange as well as mayor, introduced Chris.

"I am very honored to be here and grateful to speak to all of you today," he began.

"This year, once again, our conference has been attended by more granges than ever before; last year's conference had thirty. Ten thousand farmers now receive grange services, representing about an eighth of the workers on this world. The granges' total income from dues totals a million dhanay. They employ over 200 tractors. Several hundred of their members have tried their hand at business opportunities ranging from raising a few dozen chickens to opening a factory.

"We have much to be proud of; in fourteen years, the grange movement has accomplished a lot. It has much work to do and many new obstacles to face. Can we—should we—aim to provide services to all the world's farmers? Can the movement even continue forward and grow? We debate these issues every year, but I think the answers are actually very simple. Yes, we can and must grow; and yes, we must aim at providing services to all farmers. Perhaps the palace will begin to pick up the costs of

healthcare, but meanwhile, that is something the granges do very well; we can't drop it until someone else takes it up. We help rebuild each other's houses and barns if there is a fire; we help the widows if there is a death. We help our own to acquire the equipment to go into businesses. The basic element of granges is cooperation: we store our grain together rather than pay more to someone else to store it for us; we buy fertilizer and seed in bulk, together, to save money; we plan our need for harvesting labor together so that we can help each other and work steadily over the summer, rather than in brief periods when we are overworked. These aspects of granges will never go away, even if every farmer owns his own tractor, a point we may reach in a few years. All farmers need services and always will. They all benefit from mutual cooperation and support. Ideally, granges embracing virtually everyone in every village should be set up to meet the needs of all.

“One problem granges are discovering is that they can't provide all the complex services they'd like. Mɛlwika, Mɛlita, Pértatranisér, Brébatroba, Mɛddwoglubas: these granges are large enough to build grain storage silos, for their own grain and that from other granges and villages. But most small granges find it cheaper to ship their grain to the big ones than build their own silos. Most granges have tried projects to extend credit to their members or relatives of their members. This has been complex; loan repayments must be monitored and tracked, which is very time consuming. Larger loans tend to be monitored and repaid, but small loans receive less attention, slip between the cracks, and are not always repaid, especially if nonmembers borrow the money. In smaller granges, even larger loans are hard to monitor because of lack of experienced personnel. Last term, a business class of mine at Mɛlwika Génadema examined the problem in detail and

put together a plan to set up Wiki Bank. Wiki Bank will serve villagers; it will be an instrument for their financial security and advancement. Villagers wishing to borrow from Wiki Bank will have two options; put up something for collateral, or band together in groups of five to eight people from at least five different households. Each group will meet monthly—probably very briefly—to repeat a pledge to each other. In the pledge they will agree to follow the four principles of discipline, unity, courage, and hard work; to work toward prosperity for their families; to keep their houses clean and neat; to provide their families with clean water and a balanced diet that includes vegetables; to maintain the health of everyone in their family; to dispose of their household waste properly; to strive for justice and not overlook injustice; to help each other in difficulty; and to work together collectively for the good of all. Each group will appoint a treasurer who will collect at least two kentay of dues from each member each month, and every year or so the group will decide how to spend their dues.

“Members of the group are not responsible for paying off the loans of the other group members, but if someone in the group fails to repay the loan, the other group members become ineligible to borrow from Wiki Bank. The bank will loan to group members as little as one dhanay or as much as one hundred, for terms from half a year to four years. The interest rate will be a few percent higher than Prosperity Bank’s because of the greater costs of monitoring the small loans.

“Our goal is to start Wiki Bank with one hundred thousand dhanay and increase the assets every year. We want to serve every province, either through its own branch or a nearby branch. If we have one million dhanay in assets, we can offer a one-hundred dhanay loan to every rural household every six years. The bank will accept deposits as

well; if farmers deposit their surplus in the bank, which will offer the same interest rate as Prosperity Bank, we will reach the million-dhanay level even sooner.

“We want to work with the granges to set up this bank. For some granges, Wiki Bank will provide a convenient way to provide small loans to members. Larger granges, such as Melita and Brébatroba that serve farmers in the north and south shores, can publicize the new program and encourage participation in it. Granges could give the bank five-year grants, which it will pay back, to increase its assets. Granges can also recommend people to us; we need local people who are reliable, friendly, know many of the local people, and who have a good head for money.”

Chris spread his hands. “So, that’s the plan. It will take time to start Wiki Bank, with one or two branches at most, then expand it to other provinces. But it will provide another resource for prosperity, and the prosperity of everyone on this world is its goal. The villages need not be left behind. The villages must not lag behind the towns; they can be as wealthy, person for person, as any other part of this world. We seek your help to make this new instrument for prosperity successful and effective.”

Chris bowed slightly to the audience, which began to applaud enthusiastically. After a few seconds, Werétranu stepped forward. “Do you have time to accept a few questions?”

“Yes, of course.”

Hands shot up; Chris pointed to a cantankerous member of the Béranta Grange Council. “Honored Estoiyustu.” He was always careful to call everyone “honored”; his family practice had spread and the term no longer was used only for aristocrats.

“Will the Wiki Bank deposits be guaranteed by the palace?”

“I have been assured by the palace that if Wiki Bank follows the banking laws—which it will—its deposits will be guaranteed by the palace.” He pointed to the number two in the Pértatranisér Grange. “Honored Léféstu.”

“Who will select the Bank’s Board of Trustees?”

“Good question. They will be chosen by anyone who maintains a deposit in the bank for a year. I have pledged one hundred thousand dhanay of permanent start-up deposit. Any investor—including granges—who make an initial deposit for one year will be charter members, able to participate in the approval of the charter and able to vote for the Board. Even a rural village woman with one dhanay of deposit in the bank for a year will have a vote, though it will be a small one.” He pointed to the head of the Nénaslua Grange. “Honored Dengéstu.”

“Lord, will you be making any profit off your one hundred thousand?”

“No. I am donating it to the bank and will donate more in future years. I want the surplus to grow the bank.” He pointed to the head of the lower Arjakwés Grange.

“Honored Wëranogénu.”

“Will the bank have full time employees or part time ones? Will they be volunteers, or paid?”

“The principal employees will be loan officers. They’ll have a territory, set up the borrowing groups, make sure they meet, make loans, and collect repayments. They’ll probably travel village to village on a bicycle or on the buses. They’ll be paid a good salary, starting at 1,500 and going up with experience.”

Many nodded; it was a solid salary. There were several more questions, then Chris stepped off the stage to applause again. As he headed to the back of the hall, several rose

to talk to him privately. “Lord, may I express interest?” asked a young man, whose accent indicated he was from the south shore.

“Yes, certainly. You’re . . . you took a business course from me a few years ago.”

“Yes, Lord Kristobéru. I am Wéroimigu Wesénakwénu from Kentudha, a village near Tripola.”

They shook hands. “I remember you now: you took my course because you wanted to open a tailor’s shop and wanted to be a good businessman.” “Wesénakwénu” meant “tailor.”

“You have a good memory. Three years ago I was at Melwika Génadema for the long fall term and took four courses. As a result I drew up a business plan for a tailor’s shop, and with a loan from my uncle, my brother and I rented a shop in Tripola, bought sewing machines, and started the tailor’s shop. But after a year I got bored and after two years I gave the business to my brother and moved back to Kentudha. The Dhébakwés Grange was looking for a business manager, so I got that job. Now I’m on the grange council.”

“And how’s the tailor’s business?”

“My brother is doing very well; he enjoys sewing. But I did not enjoy pedaling a sewing machine all day, every day! The business plan didn’t include that!”

Chris chuckled. “That’s often what happens. So, what interests you?”

“Working for Wiki Bank! I know everyone in the grange and many who are not; all the villages along the Dhébakwés, even Wéranopéla, where they have their own grange. As you know, we have been growing, and in the spring we’re starting a Glaktakwés Grange for the other half of the province.”

“Yours is one of the most successful granges. I would like to talk to you further, Wéroimigu. This is not a good time, but perhaps next week I can call you at the grange?”

“I’m there all day, every day except Primdius, and sometimes Primdius as well. My wife is not pleased by that.”

“I’ll give you a call, then.” Chris extended his hands and they shook. Then he turned to a few others, who had questions, suggestions, recommendations, offers to invest, or requests. Finally, Werétranu hurried over.

“Lord Chris, could you give the keynote talk tonight to the public session about Wiki Bank?”

“Me? Aren’t you giving the keynote?”

“I’d rather that you do it! This is an exciting development.”

“I could stay around this evening. Could Liz speak briefly about Women’s Gabrulis? Several are sponsored by granges.”

“Certainly, if she is brief.”

“Then I can do it.”

“Excellent. You need to provide us with written information about the Bank’s business plan. I’m sure the Melita Grange will invest in it. We might even want to transfer our small loan program to it! It’s a huge headache.”

“Then we’ll talk further, Werétranu. Thank you,” said Chris.

Werétranu walked away and Chris turned to Jordan, Dwosunu, and Thornton, who had been waiting patiently. “Dad, this was an incredible success,” said Thornton.

“I know, I’m surprised and pleased! The proposal has taken months and months, so I guess it’s now bearing fruit.”

They started walking to the horses, which were tied up nearby. “I’m not surprised, grandpa,” said Jordan. “You have a reputation for planning carefully and starting up things that succeed. People trust you; they know you aren’t trying to steal from them. And you’ve put your money where your mouth is. Of course, people will be supportive.”

“Exactly, Lord,” said Dwosunu.

Thornton pointed to a spotted horse on the far right. “That one’s yours, dad. They say it’s gentle.”

“Gentle? I need a gentle horse?”

“Well, you haven’t ridden as much as the three of us!”

Chris nodded at that, patted the horse a moment to get to know her, then mounted. They all rode to a farmer’s lane heading west from behind the grange building and trotted along it. The fields on both sides were planted in peas, cabbages, carrots, broccoli, and other frost-resistant crops, and crews were busily picking. “Dwosunu, do you happen to know Wéroimigu?”

He nodded. “He’s the son of my third cousin. He took a geology course from me at the Tripola Génadema, maybe four years ago. He’s pretty bright, and the family seems to trust him. He’s honest.”

“How was his tailor shop?”

“His brother still runs it; I’ve been there. It has done fine. Are you thinking of hiring him?”

“I don’t know. I had hoped that one or two of the dozen students in the course on banking would show interest, but none did. Hiring the right person is essential.”

“Definitely. The Dhébakwés Grange really struggled until they hired him. No one on the Board knew accounting or even simple office management.”

“That’s the biggest problem faced by most of the granges. Melwika, Melita, and Pértatranisér handle most of those tasks for a ring of granges around them for that reason.”

“You were able to train their personnel. But now people like Wéroimigu are arising.”

Chris nodded. “You’re right.”

They continued down the farmer’s lane for a kilometer and a half before the fields ended abruptly in prairieland dotted with saplings. Thornton led the way, plunging straight onto the grasslands at a trot.

“Wow, this has grown up a lot,” said Chris. “I remember when I first visited the site of Melita five years ago. It had become prairie, but now it’s shifting into forest.”

“Give it ten or fifteen years,” agreed Dwosunu. “I’m curious, lord; why did you decide to leave this area undeveloped? It is quite close to Melita village.”

“It’s not clear this triangular piece of land belongs to me; I asked the Queen for the land between Mitrubbaru’s township and General Roktekester’s and she agreed. Then I looked at the map and realized this little sliver technically was unassigned, though everyone now considers it part of Melita. I wanted to leave part of the town undeveloped, anyway. Do we have a good idea of this area’s climate, now?”

“We have almost six years of data and it shows a consistent pattern,” replied Thornton. “This area gets about eighty centimeters of rainfall in the winter rainy season and twenty in the summer dry season. The winter usually includes several weeks where

the nighttime temperature falls close to freezing; some years there is no frost, other years there is a lot. The winter rainfall makes well irrigation possible in the summer because it maintains an ample water table.”

“On the Köppen Climate Classification, the climate is CSa,” commented Dwosunu. “Farther north it’s CSb, meaning cooler summers and winters, but still rainy in the winter and drier in the summer. That’s Melwika’s climate. Farther east the rainfall steadily decreases and it becomes BSh, which is steppe, then BWh, which is desert.”

“So, if we leave this area undisturbed, what will the vegetation look like in a decade or two?” asked Chris.

Dwosunu considered for a moment. “It’ll be a mix. Areas with bedrock close to the surface will be drier and covered with brush and grass. Some areas will remain grassland because of fires or animal grazing. Other areas will be open forest land, with oaks and other deciduous trees scattered about and grass in between.”

“There’s no reason we can’t use this land in some low-impact ways,” said Thornton. “Most of these oaks are cork oaks. Their bark can be harvested to make corks every decade or two, but not until they’re about 25 years old.”

“That’s a long term commitment!” said Chris. “But there aren’t many cork oaks right now and cork is expensive. What about grazing?”

“I wouldn’t use it that way,” said Dwosunu. “This has become a wildlife refuge; it has giraffes, elephants, deer, antelope, lions, and hyenas.”

“And I think we saw rhinoceros,” added Thornton. “The animals are causing some damage to the farms, but their populations aren’t too large.”

“Hunting?” asked Chris.

“Definitely,” replied Dwosunu. “Watch; you’ll see signs of hunters. No one in these towns dare to venture eastward into the Kwolone lands, so hunters come here instead.”

“Is this large enough to support herds, though?”

“Sure. The Triangle has 34 square kilometers; almost ten thousand agris. I’d worry about the animals being wiped out. In fact, I think they are being wiped out.”

“I wonder how much it would cost to plant a heavy hedge all the way around it,” speculated Chris. “Farmers have complained to me that they don’t dare grow corn, vegetables, or anything else that has to be harvested by hand because they’re afraid of lions. That’s why the park is surrounded by a belt of wheat fields.”

“An electric fence would keep most of the animals in and would be cheaper,” suggested Thornton. “As for hunters, if you hired a warden to watch the place and set a few short hunting seasons every year, we might keep the animal populations under control.”

“We should do that,” agreed Chris. “Are the bordering areas of Kérékwes and the northern townships farmed or wild?”

“A mix,” said Thornton. “But most of the land is wild. It’d be good to convince them to add land to the Triangle to make the park bigger.”

“I’ll talk to the lords about that,” agreed Chris.

They continued westward across the triangle, which was twelve kilometers long and a maximum of five kilometers wide, north-south. They stopped to examine some trees broken by elephants and others that had had branches torn off by giraffes. They circled a winter waterhole that dried up to grassland in the summer; Dwosunu noted the

elephants had dug down in the center so that there was water available all summer. They crossed over two small creeks that dried up in the summer and discussed a small project to build a few permanent ponds on the watercourses. They detoured around a large patch of prairie because it was occupied by a half dozen elephants and a group of antelope.

When they reached the western edge of the Triangle, they turned east-northeastward to return to Melita via another route. They stopped to look at the remnants of an antelope killed by lions, who watched them warily from a hundred meters away. For several minutes they rode through an area filled with cork oak saplings. “Considering there wasn’t a cork oak within dozens of kilometers of here, ten years ago, you have to wonder whether the *aliénés* are dropping seeds from the air,” commented Chris.

“I wouldn’t be surprised. They have been repopulating the sea with all sorts of species that had died out, like whales and seals,” noted Thornton.

Jordan’s cell phone—his new one, obtained after the old one burned up a year ago in the Melita house fire—rang. He reached into his pocket and pulled it out. Dwosunu was familiar with cell phones and didn’t even seem to notice.

“Khélo?”

“Jor, please come home right away.” It was his mother, Lua. “Tiamaté . . . has just come to the hospital. She’s bleeding.”

“What? What happened?”

“Jor, she has lost the baby.”

Jordan stared at the space around him oblivious, shocked. “Are . . . you sure?”

“Yes. You need to come home immediately.”

“Will she be alright?”

“Almost certainly.”

“Almost?” He raised his voice in pain.

“Come home right away.”

“Alright. We’re riding horses, so it’ll take maybe 90 minutes or two hours. I’m on my way.”

“Good. I’ve got to go, bye.” Lua closed the circuit.

Jordan closed the phone and put it back in his pocket. “What is it?” asked Thornton.

“Tiamaté’s in the hospital. She’s lost the baby. I’ve got to get back.”

“That’s terrible!” said Thornton.

“Then let’s get back to Melita,” urged Chris. He urged his horse forward and they all galloped back to the village.

Reread and edited 6/12/13, 8/24/17, 11/25/24

Woman's Proper Place

Prusménu 17-20/Dec. 5-9, Yr 14/632

They rode back to Melita as fast as they could, where Jordan jumped into the rover—he didn't have to wait for the engine to develop a head of steam—and drove to Endraidha to pick up his mother and father in law. Thornton and Dwosunu agreed to take a bus back to Melwika; Chris decided to stay the night so he could attend the Grange Conference.

It took two hours to go from Melita to Endraidha and then to Melwika. Jordan dropped off Sarédaté at the hospital entrance and parked the rover in the family garage, then he and Aisendru hurried over. Meanwhile, Lua let Sarédaté into her daughter's room. Tiamaté was hooked up with an intravenous tube—much to her mother's shock, for she had never seen anything like that before—and was laying on her bed asleep. But as soon as her mother entered, her eyes opened. "Mom . . ."

"Don't speak, just rest. The doctors say you're pretty weak, but you'll recover." They hadn't said that; she had said those words to reassure herself, more than her daughter.

"I'm so sorry—"

"No, don't talk! Don't worry, you can try again."

"I hope so. Is Jordan upset?"

"He's worrying about you, dear." She took her daughter's hand, looked into her eyes, then kissed her forehead. "You're young and strong. Don't worry yourself."

“Thanks, mother.” Tiamaté smiled weakly. Sarédaté said nothing else; she held her daughter’s hand a long time and looked at her face, and Tiamaté looked at her mother, and they expressed love in looks that ached, the love was so strong.

Finally, Sarédaté saw her daughter was tiring and nodded in goodbye. She kissed her again and stepped out. Jordan and Aisendru were seated on chairs in the hall with Behruz, who had been keeping a vigil for three hours and had filled them in on all the details. Aisendru immediately leaped to his feet. “How is she?”

“Tired and weak. I didn’t even have a chance to ask the doctors how she’s doing.”

“Dr. Aréjé came by and said she lost a lot of blood, but they stopped the bleeding and gave her blood. They’re now giving her medications to prevent infection and she should be fine,” said Aisendru.

“Really? What a relief. She looks so weak, and they have *things* in her!”

“Tubes?” asked Jordan.

“Yes. A tube.”

“That’s supplying medicine and maybe even blood straight into her veins. I think I should go see her, quickly.”

“Quickly,” advised Behruz. “She needs to rest.”

“But she needs to know I’m here.” Jordan walked to the door, opened it, and entered. Tiamaté was asleep again. He walked close to her and took her hand. That caused her eyes to open.

“Jordanu,” she said with a smile on her face.

“I’m here, honey. I’m sorry I wasn’t here sooner.”

“Thank you for getting mom and dad. I’m . . . I’m sorry, Jordan. We both wanted this baby.”

“Don’t worry about it, it wasn’t your fault.” He kissed her on the forehead and stroked her hair; she began to cry. Tears came to his eyes as well. “Just get well, honey. Dr. Aréjé says you’ll recover fine, so concentrate on your health.”

“Alright, I will,” she whispered, nodding. She was relieved he didn’t blame her. Many Eryan husbands would.

He held her hand several minutes, then kissed her goodbye and stepped back out. Aisendru rose. “I guess I’ll go give her a kiss, too.”

“Don’t you dare say anything about her studying being the reason for this,” Sarédaté sternly warned him.

“I won’t, but Jordan, you must talk to her. Women aren’t suited for study like this; it damages their health. Getting a génadema degree—”

“No, father Aisendru, this miscarriage had nothing to do with too much studying. If so, then the women studying to be doctors should have very bad health records, and they don’t. She was doing fine.”

“The baby was genetically deformed,” added Behruz, quietly. “Dr. Aréjé saw it and she said so.”

“This education can’t be good for her.”

“Father Aisendru, she loves it, and that’s good for her.”

Aisendru shook his head. “Please be careful, both of you. I fear for her. I fear for her.”

“Thank you, father Aisendru,” said Jordan, putting his hand on his father in law’s shoulder. “So do I. But the problem wasn’t too much studying, in this case.”

“Go inside and give her a kiss,” urged Behruz. “Then we can stay here as long as we want, or walk to the house; it’s across the way. We have plenty of room and you are welcome to stay as long as you wish.”

Aisendru did not sleep well that night. He awoke very early—the light coming in through the window was as much from the full Skanda as from predawn twilight—and looked around the room, which was Jordan and Tiamaté’s bedroom. A wedding picture graced a night stand nearby and he looked at her for a moment.

Sarédaté was still asleep in the bed next to him. He looked at her a moment and thought of the comfort they had given each other, earlier that night. Then he rose, pulled on his clothes, grabbed a house key, and headed out of the house, to walk around the city. It was a bit below freezing but there was no wind, so he was comfortable enough without a coat. He walked to the top of the hill east of Citadel and Foundry Squares where he entered the Sumi Temple and prayed an old soldier’s prayer to Endro, god of war: *Oh Endro, give my daughter your strength and courage, heal her, and bless her with long life and valor.*

That made him feel a bit better, though he would have preferred an Endrodema—a temple to the god of war—for the prayer to be more effective. He walked down the hill, past the Bahá’í temple, through the génadema, past the temple to Esto, God of Light, then back to the Mennea house. Sarédaté was up by then, as was the sun. “Where did you go?”

“For a walk. I couldn’t sleep any longer.”

“I didn’t sleep well, either. I’m going to take a shower. People wash a lot here.”

“Alright, I’ll wash as well,” he said, taking the hint. Aisendru sighed. “I wish I understood this place.”

“It is different.”

“I wish she’d be . . . traditional. Take up her place in the world, be a mother . . . everything would be fine.”

“Honey, the miscarriage had nothing to do with studying.”

“The doctors don’t know that. When women step out of their proper place all sorts of consequences follow.”

Sarédaté wasn’t going to argue with him and headed to the bathroom to wash. He sat and contemplated the situation. Then once she was out of the bathroom, he went in and took a shower as well—a cold one because he turned on the cold water and didn’t realize the other faucet was for hot. They went downstairs to the great room where piles of food were already out. Jordan was there, looking bleary-eyed; he had moved in with his 13-year old brother for the night.

Visiting hours started at 8 a.m. and they were there not a minute later. Tiamaté was looking much stronger and more alert; they sat in her room with her and talked while she ate breakfast. “We’ll be taking out the intravenous later today,” said Aréjé, when she came through.

“Are you sure?” asked Aisendru. He didn’t like to see the thing in his daughter, but he knew it was helping.

Aréjé nodded. “Yes, don’t worry. There’s no sign of infection or bleeding. She needs to stay here another night to be on the safe side, then she should go home and sleep for a few days.”

“When can I go back to class?” asked Tiamaté.

“Whenever you feel ready, but don’t push yourself too hard. You’ll be healing for three to six weeks.”

“Don’t worry about your classes.”

“Dad, I’m only taking one this term, and I don’t want to fall too far behind.”

Sarédaté turned to Aréjé. “Thank you so much, doctor. We’re very appreciative of your kindness.”

“Thank you. You have a beautiful and strong daughter. She’ll be fine. I may not see you again, I’m afraid, because after I teach my classes this afternoon I’m heading home. Best wishes.” Aréjé offered her hand to Tiamaté and her parents.

“Where’s home?” asked Aisendru.

“Mæddwoglubas. My kids miss me; I’m here two days a week this term.”

“How many do you have?” asked Sarédaté.

“A boy and a girl, ages 10 and 7.”

“Who’s taking care of them now?” asked Aisendru, a bit alarmed.

“My husband, Stauréstu, and my mother, and a nanny. I talked to them on the phone last night and they’re doing quite well. I’ll be home for two days, then Stauréstu heads to Ora for two days for classes and some scheduled surgery.” Aisendru nodded, uncertain whether he was reassured.

“You have a busy schedule!” commented Sarédaté.

“Well, we don’t have enough doctors, and even fewer with experience. Stauréstu is the best surgeon around, so he practices at Tripola, Mëddwoglubas, Ora, Isurdhuna, and Néfa at different times. But we have a car, so he can get to all those places from our house in Mëddwoglubas. Next term he’ll be here two days a week and I’ll be driving to Tripola two days a week to practice in the hospital and give two classes to nurses.” She smiled and waved goodbye, then headed out of the room.

“She’s one of the most amazing doctors,” said Tiamaté. “Stauréstu’s amazing, too.”

“You know him?” asked Aisendru.

“They’re both Bahá’ís.”

“Ah.” Aisendru watched two nurses walk by in the corridor; one was chatting about her son’s day care. The Melwika city government, he recalled, subsidized day care to make it easier to afford. It was a different place.

They sat and chatted a bit more, about the winter, Aisugu’s high school classes—he wanted to become an army engineer—and living in Endraidha. Then there was a knock at the door. It was Nina Maradar, wife of Randu. “Nina, thank you for coming, what brings you to Melwika!” said Tiamaté.

“I’m here every Tridiu and Penkudiu for a public health class; I’m going to teach it at Arjdhura next term, so I can’t miss any! How are *you*?”

“I’m feeling better today. Aréjé said I can go home tomorrow.”

“Oh, good.” Nina came over to the bed. She greeted Sarédaté, Aisendru, and Jordan, then took Tiamaté’s hand. “I’m so sorry, Tiamaté. Randu and I heard about the

miscarriage last night by phone and we were very, very saddened. He told me to bring his love and promise his prayers.”

“Oh, you’re very kind. Thank you.”

“If there’s anything we can do, let us know. And don’t worry; you can try again. A lot of women have miscarriages; it happens. When the time comes, you and Jordan will have a family, I’m sure.”

“Thank you. We’re confident.” She looked at Jordan, who nodded.

“So get well, and get back to classes *when you’re ready*! I need help from young women like you at the Arjdhura Génadema! We have so few women who can teach génadema classes in Sumi. It’s a crisis situation.”

“I’ll do my best.”

“I’m sure.” She turned to Aisendru and Sarédaté. “You should be so proud. She’s such a good teacher! A few more courses and she’ll have a dwoyeri and can start teaching. You, too, Jordan; I want to hear you teaching development in Sumi!”

“I’ll be able to do it, but I need a lot more courses to be qualified.”

“But you’ll get there.”

“How are you? How is your family?” asked Tiamaté.

“We’re all fine. My father—he’s in Bilara—got a bad infection as a result of a severe cut. He was chopping firewood and the ax head flew off and hit him! But he’s recovering fine. Alima’s in third grade and doing pretty well, but it’s hard for him to take some classes in Eryan and some in Sumi.”

“But it’ll make him more bilingual.”

“Exactly, but he hates it right now! He just wants to study in Eryan, but we won’t permit that. He needs to know Sumi well.”

“Aisugu, my son, went through that as well,” said Aisendru. “But he didn’t have both at once. He went to an Eryan school, then a Sumi school in Anartu, and now he’s in an Eryan high school.”

“Where?”

“Endraidha. We moved there from Anartu about a year ago.”

“I see. I’m glad he went to a few years of schooling in Sumi; he’ll never forget the language. Arjdhura Génadema is committed to bilingualism.”

“Yes. Randu does very impressive work.”

“Thank you. Well, I’ve got to run to class.” Nina looked at the doorway, where two others had appeared. “And it looks like you have more guests. Bye bye, dear.” Nina kissed Tiamaté, shook hands with Aisendru, Sarédaté, and Jordan, then headed out. Meanwhile, in came Migélu Khermdhunai and Damkiané Ebabbar carrying a bouquet of flowers on a vase.

“Thank you for visiting me,” said Tiamaté. “Mom, dad, do you remember Migélu and Damkiané? They were with Jordan and the Bahá’í youth team on Sumilara two years ago.”

“And at the wedding,” said Aisendru. “He extended his hands to Migélu. “Pleased to see you again.”

“Thank you, sir.” They shook. “We heard about Tiamaté’s situation last night and wanted to come by before we went to class.”

“We were so surprised and saddened,” added Damkiané, handing the flowers to Tiamaté. “We were just at the House of Worship to say prayers for you; I think they’re more helpful to you than this bouquet! Gramé and Swadé went last night to pray for you as well.”

“Thank you, that’s very kind. I’m going home tomorrow and should be able to go back to classes in a few days.”

“I’ll take good notes and will tell Skandu about your situation. I’m sure he’ll accommodate you.”

“I sent him a note last night,” added Jordan.

“He’s pretty understanding,” agreed Tiamaté. “I have the textbook, so I should be able to catch up.”

“He’s following his textbook pretty closely, so that’ll help!” said Damkiané. “I hope you’ll be able to go on the field trip to the Morituora ruins next week.”

“I hope so, too! Otherwise, let’s hope it snows and the trip’s postponed!”

They all laughed. “That could happen,” agreed Damkiané.

“How’s your father?” Sarédaté asked. Damkiané’s father was one of Dumuzi’s chief assistants and a figure of some importance in Melwika’s “Sumiwika” or Sumi neighborhood.

“Thank you for asking. He’s fine, as is my mother, my two brothers, and my sister. They’re all in génadema, you know! All four of us at once! My sister and I are even taking some courses together!”

“And you live at home?” asked Aisendru.

“No; Migélu and I got married at the beginning of the summer. In fact, it was the day Prince Méméjékwu was shot.”

“We’ll never forget that,” added Migélu. “In the middle of the reception we heard about the assassination, and then I got called to the hospital to help care for the wounded; I was 2 ½ years through my medical school at that point. I never got back to the reception.”

“For that matter, he missed the first night of the honeymoon. But I forgave him.”

They all chuckled at that. “Where will the two of you live?” asked Aisendru.

“Khermdhuna’s paying part of my tuition, so I have to go back there to practice,” replied Migélu. “But there are two other Khermdhuna kids here, and one wants to go to medical school. So in five or six years—I have to practice at least five years in Khermdhuna—we may move elsewhere, maybe Sumilara, maybe back here, or maybe somewhere else; who knows.”

“Wherever Esto wants us,” added Damkiané.

“Will you be welcome in Khermdhuna?” asked Sarédaté.

Damkiané nodded. “We were there for a month last summer and people were very kind and welcoming. They’re isolated and have a sense of being a distinctive people, but most of them are now Bahá’ís and they know about unity in diversity.”

“Of course, they’re not sure what it means in practice,” added Migélu. “But we’re helping them learn.”

“Good luck,” said Aisendru, a note of respect in his voice.

Migélu glanced at the clock. “We had better go, and we don’t want to keep you from your family. We’ll try to stop by tomorrow as well.” He leaned over and kissed

Tiamaté—a gesture that startled Aisendru—and Damkiané did the same. Then they shook hands with Aisendru and Sarédaté, hugged Jordan, and left.

“They are very kind,” said Sarédaté.

“Good friends,” added Tiamaté. “Damkiané and I study together a lot. She’s strong in things I’m not, and vice-versa.”

“That’s a good arrangement,” said Aisendru. “You have a lot of supportive and encouraging friends.”

“And ones following the same path,” added Sarédaté, looking at her husband. He saw the glance and nodded reluctantly. “So, my dear, what is the proper place of women, nowadays?” she added.

Aisendru pondered the question for a moment. “Well, it isn’t the same place they used to occupy, that’s for sure,” he conceded.

Yimu Miller looked out over the thousand angry faces crowded into Melwika High School’s auditorium and wondered what else he could say. The meeting between the Board of Directors of Miller Motors and their employees obviously had not produced the meeting of the minds that had been intended. “I’m not sure what else to say to summarize this meeting,” he began. “Tonight, in great detail, we’ve laid out for you the plight of your company. We have no control over demand for our product; sometimes it goes down. A temporary suspension of our contribution to the pension program has not proved enough to balance the budget, nor has an end of investing in expansion plans. Additional credit is not available to us. Our choices are two: cut staff or cut salaries. We favor the latter and dearly hope it will be temporary. Please don’t think we feel no loyalty to you;

on the contrary, we feel an acute obligation. But our first obligation is to avoid bankruptcy so that your jobs will still be here when demand recovers, which is almost certain to happen this spring. We are very grateful that you came tonight, listened to the explanation, and asked your questions. Thank you very much.”

“Leech!” exclaimed someone in the back, angrily. The others turned to look at the offender, but no one else said anything. The workers rose from their seats to head home.

Up on stage, the seven members of the Board—John Miller, Yimu Miller, Andru Miller, Rostu Miller, Chris Mennea, Lord Kandékwes, and Belékwu Kwénu—rose from their chairs. “You did a good job, Yimu,” said Chris. “Your best.”

“Thanks. It was a tough message and a tough audience.”

“They’ll get over it,” replied John. “You made the case.”

“If we had sacrificed as well, we would have been more persuasive,” said Yimu.

“Never mind,” hissed John. He and Yimu both earned 25,000 a year, running Miller Motors and Foundry; Rostu and Andru got 15,000 each.

“I’m willing,” said Rostu.

“So am I,” replied Belékwu, though it was not clear whether he was serious, since he was the worker’s representative on the Board and thus would get the same pay cut as the other workers. “Seriously; I’ll take a twenty percent cut in my stipend as a member of the Board.”

“Give it to charity,” replied John.

A woman in worker’s overalls, her hair tucked into a bun behind her head, approached the stage, and Belékwu approached her. “Perhaps not now, Dhugané.”

“Why not, they’re all here? Honoreds, can I have a minute of your time?”

John saw Dhugané Kélagrasi, who was known for her strong opinions—but, often, good ideas—and looked toward the door. But Yimu replied, “What is it, Dhugané?”

She hopped up onto the stage and came over. “Fair pay for reasonable work: that should be the principle on which the company is run, right? It seems to me that’s how this place has been run heretofore. Well, based on that, you can’t cut pay and demand the same amount of work! It especially makes no sense when there are fewer sales; what’s the point in making us stay at work when we can’t be efficient at making things?”

Chris nodded a small concession to that point. “So, if you cut pay, cut hours as well,” she concluded.

“But we need the time,” replied Yimu. “We want to get ahead in inventory, clean the factory, catch up on maintenance, and devote some labor to the motorbike assembly line, even if we don’t have the money to build the equipment.”

Dhugané shook her head. “Not really. When we were going full speed, the factory didn’t get so dirty that everything broke down. We worked hard *and* we cleaned the place.”

“Well, Dhugané, that’s the decision,” replied Yimu.

“Why?” she persisted. “Switch from a ten-hour shift to an eight-hour shift. It’s more convenient for everyone, including you; when you have the demand for vehicles again, you can switch to three shifts and run constantly. On Gèdhéma, workers work forty hours per week.”

“On Gèdhéma, weeks have seven days, not six,” pointed out John.

“You think I don’t know that? I take evening classes; I had to skip my class tonight to come to this meeting! Look, right now we’re working ten hours a day, five days a week. If you want to cut our wages twenty percent, cut us back to five days a week, *eight* hours a day. That’ll give all of us more time with our families every day.”

“You know, there’s research that suggests workers will do almost as much work in eight hours as ten,” added Chris to Yimu. “People get tired after eight or nine hours and their attention lags. They slow down. You may get more than eighty percent of the work for eighty percent of the wages.”

“It’s a bad precedent,” replied Kandékwes.

“Precedent?” asked Dhugané. “Lord, why don’t you worry about what’s best for people, rather than what was done back in the days when we didn’t have clocks, steam power, or hope? The workers here work hard; *very* hard. They need to be rewarded properly for their work, and that means not changing the amount you pay them per hour. Do you want us to work eighty percent as hard for ten hours?”

“Alright, you’ve made your point, Dhugané!” said John, irritated.

“Very well, Lord. Good night,” She nodded to all seven of them and hopped off the stage.

“She has a good point,” commented Chris. “You should keep the hourly salary constant, not cut it twenty percent. Cutting hours twenty percent; that’s reasonable.”

“Precedent,” repeated Kandékwes. “Pretty soon everyone will have to switch to eight hour work days.”

“If you’d prefer, the modular building factory can switch first,” replied Chris, irritated. “Then Miller Motors would be following rather than leading.”

“Chris, you can’t do that.”

“You’re right, I don’t have the authorization, but I can approach the Board about the matter. We have the same problem; a decline in demand of twenty percent. Another thing we could try is closing on Suksdius as well, and run the facility for ten hour shifts four days a week. Then the workers would be free two days a week.”

“Chris, please don’t make this more complicated,” asked John.

“John, let’s be experimental. A seven day week has 168 hours; 40 hours of work is a bit less than a quarter of the total. A six day week has 144 hours; a quarter of that is 36 hours. That’s four nine-hour days. What’s wrong with that? You may have less absenteeism, less alcoholism, and more productivity. If you’re going to cut the workers’ wages, give them something.”

“Dad, he’s right about that,” agreed Yimu, and Andru nodded as well.

John could see it was a losing battle. “Okay, okay. Let’s think about this over night, then meet tomorrow afternoon and discuss it. This is not a subject for a hasty decision.”

Reread and edited 6/12/13, 8/24/17, 11/25/24

347.

Sumilara Gas

Belménu 14/Jan 2, Yr 14/632

Anartu's warmth was a welcome change from Melwika's blizzards. Jordan drove the rover through the city's east gate and took Main Street—the old Royal Road, now Route 31—straight across the city. Traffic forced them to chug slowly along the road. It did not bother most of the car's occupants; in the back seat, Chris dictated a letter to Luktréstu, while Behruz, seated in the front, handled a business call on his cell phone.

Finally, Jordan was able to turn into the narrow alley that led to the rear of the Anartu Palace Hotel, which was part of Awsé's chain. There were parking spaces there, as he had been assured; he parked the rover and they all headed inside to register. They had arrived in plenty of time for their afternoon business meeting.

At 12 noon, they went down stairs from their rooms to have lunch in the business center. Everyone was there, and more: Governor Modobéru; Duke Lamuno; Dingiramarru, Mayor of Amurueqluma; Ninazu Engurra, eldest son of Dumuzi and representative of a very wealthy family; Dumugal Marenki, editor of the island's main newspaper, the *Sumi Herald*, and a business expert; and, much to Chris's surprise, Princess Ninti, Countess of Anar, the former wife of Prince Méméjékwu. Nérgalu Ekur, a local Bahá'í who was a professional translator, was there as well. Chris, Behruz, Jordan, and Luktréstu went down the line and shook hands with everyone.

"I'm pleased to see you, Lady Ninti," Chris said as he shook her hand.

“I’m sure you are,” she replied, a reference to the fact that if she invested in the gas company, she could probably get more money from the palace, as the Crown Prince’s widow. “How is your family? You have a Sumi granddaughter-in-law, right?”

“Indeed I do; the wife of my grandson, Jordan.” Chris pointed to Jordan, who was coming down the line behind himself and Behruz, chatting happily with people in Sumi. “She is well now, but about a month ago she had a miscarriage.”

Ninti cringed. “I’m so sorry! Thank God for our hospitals. And she is healthy now?”

“She is young and strong, and she should be able to have children.”

“Excellent, I will make a sacrifice for her.”

“I was pleased to hear you were made Countess of Anar. It gives you a place and a substantial title.”

“Thank you. It is a silver lining to the cloud we live in, at least. My children and I miss His Majesty terribly, and Anarbala feels like an exile. But we have our dignity and we have influence.”

“And a better living situation as well, I’m sure. The ways of providence are mysterious, and we make the best of them.”

“Indeed, Lord.” She nodded to him and Chris moved on down the line, shaking hands with Duke Lamuno next. Queen Estoibidhé had restored some of his authority over the island; his arrangement was not much different than that of the dukes of the Northern and Southern Shores, who shared their authority with a governor. Governor Modobéru, who had been a student of Chris and, briefly, an employee, was happy to see him.

They all completed their greetings and sat around the table; the Gas Company's representatives were given one end of the long rectangular table, while Modobéru sat at the head of the other end. "Welcome to Sumilara, and thank you so much for coming," he began, speaking in Eryan. "We are delighted you can offer gas service to the island. We have spent considerable time putting together a plan, and we would like to start by presenting it to you." He picked up a large sheet of paper and held it up, showing a map of the island. "The purple lines represent pipelines; they serve every single village on the island. This is important: we want everyone to have gas. This purple square near Gadauru, on the southeast coast, is the proposed site of the gas plant, which will also produce lime; there is an excellent limestone bed there. The eastern end of the island has the most extensive forests and ready access to the drowned forests along the eastern and northern shores, and Gadauru is a priority for development. We figure with a strong investment—half a million a year—this system could be built in three years."

"That's about right," said Behruz, nodding. "You realize you are proposing a pipeline system that alone will cost as much as half a million dhanay."

"As I said, we want every village to have gas. It represents progress, it's healthier than burning firewood and especially animal dung—which is common in villages with no firewood nearby—and provides a foundation for industry."

Behruz looked at Chris, wondering what to do with the grandiose proposal. "There may be cheaper ways to achieve your goals," suggested Chris. "Rather than build one gas plant to serve the entire island and placing it in a remote location where pipelines are essential for distribution, we propose starting with several city gas plants." Chris pointed at the map. "The gas company has developed a simple gas production unit that

produces 2,400 megajoules of gas a day. That's enough to serve about 500 households if they use gas for cooking; maybe 50 or 100 households on a cool winter day when they need a bit of heating. It also can serve plants producing industrial and agricultural products. Rather than wait a year for a centralized gas plant that can't produce at full capacity until the entire pipeline system is built, we suggest starting with several city gas plants that can serve larger places, like Anartu, immediately. This system will provide gas to larger population centers right away, which means it starts earning revenue sooner; revenue that can be plowed into expansion of the system. The pipeline workers will need to start laying them under city streets where people live, rather than stretching the pipes for many kilometers across rice paddies."

"But Lord, what about inland locations like Anarbala?" asked Lady Ninti.

"Countess, any place can have gas right away if it gets a gas production plant. Remoter villages are never first; they are small and poor, and even if they get a gas supply, most of the people can't or won't buy it. Even in Melwika, a third of the households still don't use gas. These gas production units cost 10,000 dhanay; 20 dhanay per household served. A typical household consumes 32 dhanay of gas per year for cooking; half a dhanay per week. The plant and distribution network typically takes five years to pay for itself."

"So, we would have no pipelines? What about villages with less than 500 houses?" asked Modobéru.

"The distribution system would be built slowly rather than all at once, and would pay for itself as it goes," replied Chris. "Anarbala has 3,000 people; 600 households, large enough for one gas production unit. But units need to be shut down periodically for

maintenance. Halfway between Anarbala and Anartu is Bilara, with 400 or so households; too few for a gas plant. Build a pipeline from Anartu to Bilara to Anarbala and feed gas to Bilara from either city. But start with the gas plants in Anartu and Anarbala.”

“You said 500 households?” asked Lamuno. “Sumilara has 9,000 households, so we would need sites for eighteen gas plants!”

“Anartu has almost a third of the households, so it would need six gas production units,” replied Behruz. “You’d place all six at one site. And not everyone in Anartu will want gas at once; it may take time for demand to exceed the production of one plant, then two, then three, etc. Why spend a million dhanay on a single plant for the entire island that won’t produce at full capacity for five or ten years?”

“And they don’t all have to be on the shoreline?” asked Ninti.

Behruz shook his head. “The drowned forests won’t last forever; the wood will rot away in less than ten years. At that point, the wood will have to come from the volcanic ridge, and the south slope has heavier rainfall, so it has thicker forests. Furthermore, we are now making gas two different ways, and the other way uses manure and plant waste. That’s more widely available inland.”

“You can make gas from manure?” asked Lamuno, with a laugh.

Chris nodded. “It uses animal manure and plant waste. They are mixed at a certain ratio, water is added, and the mix is placed in an air-tight digester that must be maintained at a certain temperature; this can be done by routing some of the spare heat from the blue water gas unit. Bacteria eat the plant waste and manure, converting most of it into methane over several weeks. This is called biogas. A 120 megajoule biogas plant is

much larger than a blue water gas plant and is usually more expensive to run per cubic meter of gas produced, but the gas has about twice as much heat value per cubic meter. The biogas plant also produces a residue that is excellent fertilizer, which can be sold.”

“Our standard 240 megajoule gas production units use wood or coal—about a ton a day—to make blue water gas, which is a mixture of hydrogen and carbon monoxide with a little methane,” added Behruz. “First air is blasted over the bed of burning wood or charcoal to heat it white hot, then the air supply is closed off and steam, superheated by passing through the brickwork of the chimney, is blasted over it instead. The steam reacts with the carbon, making carbon monoxide, hydrogen, and methane, which is routed to a storage tank.”

“So can you use human waste to make gas as well?” quipped Lamuno.

“Only if the humans eat a lot of grass,” replied Behruz, with a smile.

They all chuckled. “Actually, sewage does generate a similar kind of gas,” added Chris. “But it’s smelly and the quantity is small. Eventually we may use sewage gas for specialized purposes because this world’s energy demand will keep increasing. Right now, the world’s forests grow several times faster than we can use them, but in a few decades demand will rise beyond what the forests can now produce for us. That’s one reason we’re beginning to use manure and plant waste. Furthermore, the drowned forests will soon run out and we’ll have to cut trees on land, which is more expensive.”

“Now, what about the cement plant,” asked Modobéru. “We want to pave all the major roads in the next few years.”

“Site the cement and gas plants next to each other,” said Behruz. “That way they can share a common dock, wood storage lot, and a wood chipper. The production of

cement requires higher temperatures than gas production, and demands a lot of energy. The brickwork in the exhaust chimney gets hotter. We can route steam through part of the chimney of the cement plant to produce more gas from the charcoal bed. A cement plant the size of Nuarjora's would work with six or eight of our gas production units. I'd site such a plant outside Anartu so that its gas production is immediately available to a market, without use of pipelines."

"But we do want a pipeline network," said Ninti.

"Later," said Behruz.

"One way to save money is to build the pipeline between cities at the same time the roads are paved," suggested Modobéru. "The road builders will have to do a lot of digging and moving of earth, rock, and gravel. If the paving and pipe laying is done at the same time, will it save money?"

Behruz nodded. "Probably ten percent or so. Pipelines cost 3,000 dhanay per kilometer. The difficulty is coordinating the two efforts. But again, the idea reinforces the proposal that you start with a cement plant and a cluster of gas units outside a very large city like Anartu, because you will have strong demand for gas before you build a long pipe."

"I think your counter proposal has thrown all of us off," exclaimed Ninazu. "It requires a lot of revision in our thinking. But it has much merit. How much will it cost to provide gas to the entire island?"

"Did you make an estimate?" asked Behruz. "And if so, how many kilometers of pipes did you assume?"

“We made a rough estimate,” replied Modobéru. “The island needs 140 kilometers of pipes to reach every village. The minimum distribution network—which we’d like to reach after two years—requires a 104-kilometer pipeline from Amurueqluma, across the southern shore of the island, then up the eastern side to the Galulia Industrial Park.”

“Okay,” said Behruz, pulling out a piece of paper. “At three thousand per kilometer, the pipeline alone will cost 420,000 for 140 kilometers. You can subtract ten percent if it’s laid when the road is paved. Eighteen gas production units add 180,000 more. Add one hundred kilometers of pipes in the towns; we need about 10 meters of local pipe per customer, and you’re talking about 9,000 households. That’s 300,000 dhanay more. Add ten gas storage tanks at 20,000 each; we need to store gas because use is not constant. Then add about 100,000 to set up offices and train personnel. What’s that total? About 1.2 million dhanay. And half the customers you hope for won’t sign up for over ten years.”

“So what would you do?” asked Modobéru.

“Start with Anartu, which has 3,000 households, and site a cement plant nearby with four gas production units. That costs 40,000 for the gas production units—maybe a bit less, 35,000, considering the cement plant will generate some savings—plus 100,000 for the distribution system in the city, plus 20,000 for a gas storage tank, plus 50,000 for a headquarters office and training. That’s 205,000. We can set that up in less than a year. Then pave a road and build a pipeline.”

“North, to Anarbala, sixteen kilometers,” injected Ninti.

“That’s another fifty thousand, plus storage tanks at Bilara and Anarbala for 40,000 more. At that point you’re already serving 4,000 households; almost half the population. And you’ve spent a quarter as much money.”

“Okay,” said Modobéru, tentatively. “We need to pave the coastal highway early, so you’d run a pipeline along it as we go? Gadauru’s our third largest city, with 4,500 people or 900 households; it’s twenty-four kilometers away. Guzizu and Hegalatira are halfway in between and have a thousand households between them.”

“Then put a gas production unit in Gadauru and another one in Anartu—20,000 more—and spend 132,000 on the pipeline and 40,000 more on storage tanks. Another 192,000, and you’re serving almost two thirds of the island’s population.”

“At that rate, it’ll be a long time before a pipeline gets to Amurueqluma on the extreme west!” complained Ninazu. “That’s where my father wants to put his money.”

“He can fund a gas production unit for that city any time he wishes; we’ll set it up,” replied Behruz. “The second largest city is Kalageduru, with about a thousand households if I recall, and it should have its own plant and distribution system as well. Add those two places to the ones we’ve discussed, and three quarters of the island’s households have access to gas, and we’ve still spent half as much as you wanted to spend.”

Ninti was not convinced. “So, why did you build all these pipelines on the eastern and western shores, if Sumilara doesn’t need them?”

“Because we had to deal with huge demand for gas in the winter. Houses use one hundred times more gas for heating than for cooking. In the winter we cut way back on

steel and concrete production and make a lot more gas. Sumilara is tropical and doesn't have a huge winter demand."

"I've been adding all this up," exclaimed Dumugal, the journalist. "Let's round it off to an even half million dhanay. If that's a two-year phase one, who will put up the money, and how much?"

"I'm willing to back this plan, even though it isn't what we intended," agreed Modobéru. "I can waive the 3% provincial tax for five years, and we can request the local lords to waive their 10% share."

"Amurueqluma will waive its tax collection for five years," promised Dingiramarru.

"I think we should ask the palace to waive its share as well for five years," added Lamuno, and Ninti nodded in agreement. "Since taxes consume a third of the company's income, that will help it reach profitability quickly."

"Excellent," said Chris. "We were never able to arrange that with previous systems, and that slowed them down."

"This is something that will increase tax revenues in the long run, so it needs encouragement," said Modobéru. "I can put up 50,000 per year, primarily toward the construction of the pipeline. The province is working with the army to get the road paving started this year, and we're putting money toward it to make that happen faster."

"I can put in 50,000 a year," pledged Ninti.

"My father has authorized me to pledge 25,000 per year," added Ninazu.

"I can pledge 25,000 a year," said Lamuno.

That was 300,000, leaving about 200,000 to go. “I’m not authorized to pledge any city revenues,” noted Dingiramarru.

All eyes turned toward Chris and Behruz, who had held out. “The gas company can put in one hundred thousand total,” said Behruz.

Chris had been trying to avoid making any commitment at all, but now everyone looked at him. “Surely, Lord, with all your mortgages, taxes, and business profits, you can close the gap,” said Ninti.

“My Lady, my family has been devoting its resources to a new bank to assist the poor.”

“Providing the poor with gas for cooking; is that not assistance?” she persisted. “Because we do want the poor to get gas as well.”

“Once one has the stove, gas is actually cheaper than firewood,” noted Behruz. “One usually burns more wood to cook than necessary.”

Chris nodded. “Alright, I can pledge the rest; 50,000 in the next year and 50,000 the year after. We may have cost overruns, though. To cover those, we should accept other investors.”

“Then the Sumilara Gas Company is born,” said Modobéru, with a smile.

Behruz shook his head. “No, this is the Sumilara division of the World Gas Company. You all are buying shares into the world gas company; one share for every ten dhanay, so a 50,000 dhanay investment yields 5,000 shares. The company currently has 600,000 shares.”

“That many? You’ve invested six million?” said Lamuno, shocked.

Behruz shook his head. “No, much less. But the company’s profits have been plowed into making it grow, rather than going to the owners, and when the company’s net worth increases the owners get additional shares. The more you invest, the more you’ll get in the long run.”

“In the next year the company will stop recycling its profits into expansion and start paying dividends to investors,” added Chris. “And you’ll start to make money; probably five to ten percent the first year.”

“Still, we’ll be rather small fish in a big pond,” complained Ninti. “That’s why we want a Sumilara Gas Company; so that the island has the pride of its own company.”

“There may be ways we can do that,” said Chris. “For example, there could be a company here owned by the World Gas Company plus local investors. Our principal concern is that all the gas operations function according to the same basic policies; that none of them charge outrageous fees or starve their workers.”

“Uniform and fair policies,” summarized Behruz.

“So, a fairly toothless board of directors,” said Dingiramarru.

“I wouldn’t put it that way,” replied Chris. “Let’s just say the World Gas Company’s Board of Directors is the place to have arguments over rates and salaries. We’d rather not have to have the arguments twice. But the Sumilara division will be reasonably large and should always have one or two members on the nine-member board of directors. You won’t be voiceless or toothless.”

“One thing we all don’t want is endless meetings,” added Behruz.

Modobéru looked at Ninti, Lamuno, and Ninazu. All of them nodded. “Alright, then let’s draw up the paperwork,” he concluded.

They spent the entire afternoon settling details: the nature of the subsidiary, the joint ownership, the range of decision making the Board would have, when everyone would invest their shares, and the details of each phase, including budget. They agreed to go to the bank the next morning, after a second round of discussions, to open an account and deposit preliminary amounts. Then they went to the hotel's restaurant for a big, expensive, celebratory dinner. Afterward, Chris, Behruz, and Jordan went to Chris's room—a corner room with the other two adjoining, so they were sure of privacy—to review.

“It's too late to call Liz,” said Chris. “But let's call Amos, he'll be home awaiting supper. He has good judgment.”

“I'd feel better with an outside opinion,” agreed Behruz. He pulled out his cell phone, turned it on—it had been off all day—and called Amos's number. Then he set the phone on speakerphone, so all three could participate.

“Hey, Behruz,” said Amos, when he answered. “How did the negotiations go?”

“Well enough,” he replied.

“No one got everything they wanted,” added Chris. “But that's to be expected. They wanted one big gas plant that was connected to a cement plant in a remote location and a pipeline that would distribute the gas everywhere on the island. And I'm guessing they were willing to put up about half a million of the 1.2 million it would cost. They got a gas plant associated with a cement plant outside Anartu with a pipeline to Lady Ninti's city as a phase one, and gas production units in a few other bigger places as a phase two.

They're investing 300,000, the gas company 100,000, and I'm investing 100,000, all over two years."

There was a pause. "That's a lot more practical. I would have avoided the pipeline and kept the investment down."

"We compromised on some things. We can afford this."

"Watch out, dad," said May, who was sitting close enough to Amos to hear. "We made a commitment to develop microcredit, and we need money for that."

"I'm watching the ledger carefully, dear."

"The bigger problem is implementation," said Amos. "The telephone and electric lines on Sumilara have cost thirty percent more than expected and the revenues are consistently low. I can't figure out why; there aren't enough reliable accountants who can read Sumi. I smell fraud."

"That is an issue. We have never been able to open a tomi office here," said Chris. "Governor Modobéru has pledged army assistance with laying the pipeline; they have to pave the main routes on the island, and if the pipeline is laid at the same time by the same crew, we'll save money."

"That will help a lot, and I'd trust the army. But there's still construction of the gas plants, hiring, and training."

"The gas plants are standardized and that will help," said Behruz. "But I'm not coming to the island every week or two to supervise, like I did on the eastern and western shores. The Swadnoma pipeline will keep me very busy, and the language barrier here is just too much." Behruz said it with a tone of definitiveness.

"I can help with the Swadnoma work," said Chris.

“I’m counting on it; the personalities will drive me crazy.” He turned to his son.
“Jordan, you’re the one for Sumilara.”

“What? Dad, I can’t supervise a project like this! I’m nineteen!”

“Almost twenty.” Behruz smiled.

“You just about could do it, Jor,” said Chris. “I think the partnership you and I have had with the Melita City Council is a good model. We need someone here who can keep an eye on things; who knows the language and can ask questions.”

“I sure could use it, too!” added Amos. “I am baffled by the explanations I get about the electric and telephone operations.”

“Maybe we should open an Anartu branch of the Ménnea Tomi,” said Chris. “I’ve had several capable accounting and business students in my classes here, but I’ve never felt I could trust any of them to run a branch office. But if you were here overseeing and calling me, I could set up a tomi branch.”

“You can have the phone and electric company business,” said Amos. “The current arrangement is really not adequate.”

“Look, I’m in college! Let me finish!”

“You’re three quarters of the way to a dwoyeri,” said Chris. “That’s pretty good, and you can keep it moving forward.”

“I still think Randu should give you a test in Sumi,” said May. “My guess is that you have the equivalent of at least one year of study.”

“More; he’s fluent!” replied Behruz.

“When I speak I can speak pretty easily, but don’t ask me what the past stem of a verb is! I don’t know Sumi grammar, I just use it!”

“Never mind, it’s still equal to a year,” said Chris.

“I still need courses for my concentration in development.”

“Why not a business seminar, dad?” suggested May. “You oversee his work setting up the tomi branch, assign some background reading, he writes a series of reports and you grade them . . . and I’ll go over the whole thing to make sure it meets standards.”

May was known for that, and was fastidious in being certain that family members did substantial work for the credit. “How will I set up a tomi and have time to read about it?” pleaded Jordan.

“He could teach a course at the Ninurta Génadema, too; that’d give him another course,” suggested May, for if someone taught a course for the first time while in a degree program they got credit for it, even if they had taken it before and gotten an A.

Jordan shook his head. “Now you’re going too far! I’m not like Thornton that way, I can’t tackle a big task—for credit—*and* teach!”

“Okay, okay,” said Behruz. “What would Tiamaté think about going back to Anartu for six months?”

“She’d love it,” Jordan conceded, feeling increasingly hemmed in. “Look, you’re asking an awful lot of me. I want to get a kwétéryeri, and if not in four years, NOT in ten. I’d like to enjoy génadema too. And how can I lead a youth team if I’m busy working all the time?”

“You can’t,” said Chris. “But you’re young and you have time to do it later. You don’t have to do a youth team every summer. On Sumilara we could run the teams in the winter, if we want. And you’d be in a much better position to understand and advocate for Sumilara if you worked there.”

“That’s true.”

“It’d be really, really helpful to have someone in the family who understands Sumilara,” agreed Amos.

“Alright, alright,” said Jordan. “I’ll give it a try. But I had better talk to Tiamaté before we finalize this plan.”

Reread and edited, 6/12/13, 8/24/17, 11/25/24

Planning

Late Belménu/Early Plowménu/mid-late Jan, Yr 14/632

Lord Mitruiluku eyed the umbrella suspiciously. “What do you call this thing?”

“*Tomtro*,” replied Chris.

“Why? I don’t need shade right now, I need a *plowsértro*, a rainshield.”

“It’s a *plowsértro* as well. Come on, let’s get out of the car.” Chris opened his car door, opened the umbrella, and stepped out, beneath it. On the other side of the front seat, Jordan did the same. Werétranu, head of the Mēlita Grange, did the same from the rear driver’s side door. But Mitruiluku couldn’t figure it out, so he stepped out, fiddled with the thing, then tossed the umbrella back into the car.

“Here, Lord,” said Jordan, handing Mitruiluku his umbrella. He grunted a thanks and Jordan grabbed the other umbrella off the seat. It was hard to open. “These aren’t all made the same.”

“They just came on the market last month,” replied Chris. He pointed to the work site and they started to walk to it.

“When will this infernal rain stop?” commented Mitruiluku. “It’s been nonstop almost two weeks, now!”

“The meteorologists say this winter the marine gyre has gotten going with unusual vigor,” said Chris. “As a result, the western shore is cool and dry all the way to the equator, the mountains are getting very little snow, and all the precipitation crosses the

sea to hit the eastern shore. Melwika has had a centimeter of snow every day for two weeks.”

“At least it hasn’t been really cold,” said Werétranu. “I hear Melwika’s snow melts almost every day. The winter vegetables are doing well in Melita and the farmers are getting more confident.”

“That’s true,” agreed Chris. “The weather is making the entire economy pick up; people feel more confident about the next year.”

“I saw the article in last week’s *Melwika Nues* that the sum of bank deposits is climbing again,” said Mitruiluku.

“There is more consumer confidence,” agreed Chris. “Vehicle sales are showing a very small increase. But a mild winter is bad for the gas company; heating gas sales are way down!”

“Just what we need,” said Mitruiluku.

They reached the edge of the first large excavation, sixty meters by fifteen, where a steam shovel was biting into the prairie sod and piling the dirt in a heap. Ménu Miller and Moléstu Dénujénese, who were supervising different aspects of the project, were both waiting under umbrellas of their own.

“Greetings, Lords,” said Ménu. “We can’t control the weather, I’m afraid, but we work, regardless.”

“Greetings,” said Chris, and they all went around and shook hands. “So, this will be the gas plant?”

“All four units will be here, side by side,” replied Ménu. He pointed toward the shoreline, just fifty meters to the west. “Moléstu’s building the dock right there. A crane

will unload timber and place it in a metal container sitting on a rail. Once full, it can be rolled to the processing plant, there.” He pointed to a twenty by forty meter hole in the ground that twenty men were digging by hand. “That’s where the timber will be sliced into chunks no more than ten centimeters across. The chunks will go by conveyor belt to the hoppers that feed them into the blue water gas units. The gas scrubber unit will be there.” He pointed to a square ten meters across marked by stakes with red flags, just east of the gas production units. “After the gas is cleaned of carbon dioxide, it’ll go to a storage tank there.” He pointed to a circle of stakes thirty meters across, farther east.

“And where will the alcohol plant go?” asked Mitruiluku.

“Right here, attached to the blue water gas units.” Moléstu pointed to a site south of the gas plant. “They generate a lot of waste heat and the alcohol plant needs heat to distill the alcohol. The resulting steam will run several steam engines which make electricity to power the sawmill, the sugar cane mill, and the other machinery. Any extra will be sold to the electric company. The crushed sugar cane will be dried in a drier heated by waste heat and fed into the water gas units.”

“The contractor who will build the sugar cane press and alcohol plant—Estanu—gets started next week,” noted Chris. “We’ll have three contractors on site at once!”

“Four, when we get started on the biogas digesters,” said Werétranu. “The Mélite Grange will build them later in the spring. Where do they go?”

“South and east of the gas storage tank,” said Ménu. “We haven’t marked the spots for the digesters, yet. I understand the surveyor will be here tomorrow to do it.”

“Good. We’ve got a team of four in Melwika right now, touring the prototype and reviewing the blueprints.”

“How much biogas can they make?” asked Mitruiluku.

“Swadnoma has huge potential; it raises 200,000 chickens and turkeys per year, and they produce 100,000 tonnes of waste,” replied Werétranu. “The 5,000 pigs produce 25,000 tonnes more; the 3,000 dairy cows produce 50,000 tonnes. Every agri produces between ten and one hundred tonnes of plant waste per year, and the province now has 60,000 agris under cultivation. If we could build enough digesters, we could power several stoves in every household in the world!”

Mitruiluku was surprised by that. “Really? How many will you start with?”

“Two in the next six months, able to make 120 kilojoules per day each.”

“The Melwika Grange will start building biogas digesters next month,” added Chris. “Every grange, every village could make their own; we’ve designed a standardized kit. This facility will be able to fill cylinders with compressed biogas for sale to households, also.”

“That’s a very clever part of the plan,” said Mitruiluku.

“How’s the cash flow so far?” asked Chris.

“Fine; everything’s under control,” replied Ménu.

“Because of the economic slowdown, construction materials are plentiful and slightly cheaper,” added Moléstu.

“If it’s alright with you, Moléstu, I’d like to show your ledgers for this project to Jordan,” said Chris. “This is not to audit you; I trust you, and we already have a standard arrangement to review costs. But in two weeks—the beginning of next month—Jordan’s

going to Anartu to help oversee the construction of a gas facility there. Ménu, he, and I would like a chance to review the ledgers for the construction of the gas and cement plant in Nuarjora also, so he knows what to expect in Anartu. Will that be possible?”

“Yes, of course,” replied Moléstu. “My ledgers are not as neat as when I let your tomi maintain them, but Melitané and I have learned accounting pretty well, I think. I’ll be in this afternoon after the eclipse; say, 4 p.m.?”

“That will work,” replied Chris.

“If you send me a memo about reviewing the Nuarjora ledgers, I’ll authorize it,” added Ménu. “Do you have a contractor for the Anartu plant, yet?”

Chris shook his head. “I’m not sure you’d want the job, either, because of the language barrier. We have investors there who will select the contractor.”

“How will you maintain oversight?”

“I speak Sumi,” replied Jordan.

“Ah!” said Moléstu.

“I have a long-time employee in the tomi office in Melwika who is part Sumi and knows some of the language,” added Chris. “He’s an excellent accountant. He’s going as well; he and Jordan are opening a Ménnéa Tomi office in Anartu. I have a long list of accounting and business students in Anartu we can interview.”

“This conversation is interesting, but I’m getting wet in spite of this umbrella,” exclaimed Mitruiluku. “Let’s finish up our visit and leave.”

The four of them walked around the land for a few minutes in the drizzle, then Chris drove Mitruiluku back to his house and Werétranu back to Melita grange. Then

Chris and Jordan headed for the Melita house to get some work done. “I really don’t want to screw this up, grandpa,” said Jordan.

“Don’t worry about that; call me every day at 3 p.m. and we’ll talk half an hour about the day. You’ll make mistakes, but everyone does, so don’t worry about it.”

“Alright. It’s strange to think I’ll be earning a salary.”

“A big one. You’ll have a safe place to stay, if I can finish the negotiations for half the top floor of the Anartu Palace Hotel. Tiamaté will have space for her studying, too. You have good instincts; it’ll work out.”

“I hope so.”

“I’m counting on you. I turn 69 in a few months. Next year I’ll be seventy. I won’t be able to keep up this pace of work much more; maybe five years, but pretty soon I’ll have to slow down. You’re the person to take over the business side of the family operation.”

“Me? I want to do development work!”

“So do I, and I am. But it’s much easier to do development work if you have a chest full of money. That’s why these utilities are so important; they guarantee a long-term income for the family. So let’s get them set up right in the next few years.” Chris sighed. “Thornton’s a great scientist and scholar, but he’s not a businessman. He’ll be my heir as Lord of Melwika and he’ll do the job fine, though it won’t be where his heart is. Melita will need someone else. Get this project right, and I’ll have confidence that I can approach Her Majesty about making you Lord of Melita.”

“Me? But I don’t know that I want to live here!”

“Maybe you won’t; maybe you’ll end up somewhere else. But I need you, Jordan; the family needs you. All these projects, all this money, all this influence, didn’t just fall into our laps. We earned it in different ways. But development of farms and utilities have been key.”

Liz said prayers as she sat in Queen Estoibidhé’s private meeting area, wondering whether her old friend—for over the years, they had become friends—was snubbing her or perhaps had mixed feelings. Out the window, snow was lazily falling; it was cold, though it would probably rise above freezing some time in the afternoon. She watched the flakes follow the eddies and said another prayer silently to herself.

The door suddenly opened and Estoibidhé rushed in. “I’m so sorry, Lady Liz! I had no idea my earlier meeting would go so long. Her Majesty and I meet with Wëranolubu, Wëranu, and Estoiyaju once a week for a routine review of the kingdom’s situation. Today’s meeting focused on preparations for the election and went quite long.”

“That’s an important subject, so it’s understandable it would need more time.”

Estoibidhé extended her right hand and they shook just their fingers, as aristocratic women often did. “You are very kind and patient. Mother and I often will spend half a day, before the meeting, talking about the issues and the policies we will support. I am amazed that so far, we have achieved a very high level of agreement. This empowers me to move forward and empowers her to support the action. We had not talked things through on the elections, though, and found several matters we were not unanimous on. It is all cleared up now, however, and in a very pleasing way. The palace will enforce the law about electioneering actively, but will not use it as an excuse to

disqualify people, as happened two years ago. We will publish lists of possible people to elect, but only for places with more than 5,000 people. The lists will be drawn up according to strict criteria—they'll include all prominent civil servants, like the chief of police and school principals, the heads of the dozen largest businesses, the secretary and chairperson of the Women's Gabruli, members of any grange board, etc. The lists must have at least five times as many names as the positions to be filled. The lists, in other words, will be much less likely to influence the election."

"That's better," said Liz. "The important thing is for voters to think very carefully, prayerfully, and at length about their choices, casting the net as widely as possible. If they want to vote for the sons or daughters of lords, they should feel free to do so."

"We will include the lords, ladies, and their adult children on the list. We're also urging cities to create fewer electoral districts, because a voter may want to vote for a certain person, but usually has no way of knowing whether that person resides in the same district. Melwika just voted to abolish its districts."

"We'll see how that works," agreed Liz.

"I haven't been very hospitable, have I? Let me get you some tea." Estoibidhé walked to a tea set that a servant had wheeled in just after she entered and carried the tray over. She prepared Liz's tea and handed it to her. "So, how have you dealt with this gray winter?"

"I've stayed inside as much as possible. Last week I drove to Médhela for the day because a woman's gabruli is forming in the village. That helped some; it's only thirty kilometers away, but it's on the edge of the subtropical zone, so it was warmer."

"But just as gray?"

Liz laughed. “Yes, just as gray. I’m going to the western shore next week though, for the entire month of Plowménu, and that will get me into some sunshine. I’ll start at Tripola and work my way all the way north to Bellédha, with a side trip to Isurdhuna. As you probably heard, the Central Spiritual Assembly has just appointed four new Auxiliaries and reappointed the two we had; I am an ‘Auxiliary without territory’ unlike the other five, who have been assigned to specific provinces. We’re having a meeting of all six of us with the Central Spiritual Assembly next week at Mëddwoglubas, followed by a meeting of just us six. Then I’ll embark on my tour, meeting with Bahá’í communities, introducing their Auxiliary, encouraging them, reminding them of the goals, etc.”

“What will the Auxiliaries do?”

“The same thing as Auxiliary Board members on Gëdhéma. On Gëdhéma, the Universal House of Justice appoints Counselors, who in turn appoint a larger number of Auxiliary Board members, who in turn appoint Assistants. We have no Universal House of Justice here, just a Central Spiritual Assembly, so we decided to create a parallel institution. Auxiliaries encourage individuals and communities, answer their questions, remind them of the Central Spiritual Assembly’s goals, help them find ways to reach the goals, and report back to the Central Spiritual Assembly with information about the different communities and provinces. It’s a job that requires a lot of sacrifice, a lot of traveling, and a lot of meeting people.”

“The palace could use something like that; we’re constantly struggling to find out what really is going on somewhere. Will that take all your time, or will you visit women’s gabrulis as well?”

“I’ll visit every women’s gabruli in the world, I hope! The Bahá’í work mostly occurs in the evening and on Primdius. I will also encourage local Spiritual Assemblies to help organize women’s gabrulis for all women in their villages. There are six women’s gabrulis that meet at local Bahá’í centers during the day when they are otherwise unused. The gabrulis need to know about the Wiki Bank and microcredit; the gabrulis are perfect places to form five to ten person ‘solidarity groups.’”

“I’d like to give a weekly radio address about the women’s gabrulis. The next few weeks, all my addresses will focus on the election, but in the spring I’d like to turn to the gabrulis and encourage them.”

“When I return from my trip I’ll give you a detailed report. You can draw off the stories. We’ll probably obtain several newspaper articles as well.”

“Excellent. There is a matter I need your advice about, Liz. In a bit over a month it’ll be ʻĠnaménu, and the Bahá’í fast will begin. As you know, I fasted the last few days of the fast, last year, and many people know I did it. If I fast this year, it will be a proclamation of my acceptance of Bahá'u'lláh.”

“You are not a declared believer in Bahá'u'lláh, so it’s up to you what you will do. Non-Bahá’ís are under no obligation to keep the fast.”

“I know that. I am in the strange and awkward position of being a lover of Bahá'u'lláh but not an enrolled member of the Bahá’í community.” She paused. “Perhaps, putting it that way, I have settled the matter, though. How can one love Bahá'u'lláh and not follow His laws?”

“I agree, Your Majesty. And non-Bahá’ís do fast during the Bahá’í fasting period. I’ve had friends do it. You did it last year.”

“Indeed true. I’m glad I had a chance to ask you about it.”

“Perhaps you could talk about sacrifice during the month of Eḡnaménu and include a reference to fasting.”

“As a way of acknowledging the Bahá’í way of commemorating the month, as well as the ways of Widumaj.” She nodded. “I spoke about literacy last week and I’ll talk about veterans and supporting the army this week. Next week the theme is poverty and prosperity.”

“Strange to say, it may be worth considering an address about the utility companies. Most people still assume they can’t afford them and they are not aware of the advantages of electric lights at night and clean gas stoves to keep the air in their house healthy.”

“Can you give me a list of points you think should be included? I may do that topic in a month or two. All these little talks take a lot of time and planning! But they seem to be having an impact on the public.”

“Indeed, people love them, and now that your mother has done one or two of them, it has raised their appreciation of her as well. The address you gave about the development plan a few weeks ago was very good.”

“Thank you. These addresses have raised the public’s appreciation of the palace and have proved to be an excellent way to promote Bahá’í principles. Our society has changed fast and the culture hasn’t caught up. The Bahá’í principles fill the vacuum.”

“And I think they’re working. I sense that attitudes toward women are changing. Certainly, school enrollment of girls has been going up. When I return from this trip, I’ll let you know what I observed.”

“Please do! Like I said, the palace could use Auxiliaries of the sort the Faith has. I will be very appreciative of any observations you have.”

The parking lot behind the Anartu Palace Hotel was familiar to Jordan from his visit the month before. He pulled the steam car into one of the two parking spaces—the other one was for the hotel’s own new steam car—and he and Tiamaté stepped out.

“So, we’re finally here,” she said.

“We are. We can leave all our stuff here; the hotel staff can get it.”

“Lock the car.”

“I will.” Jordan pulled out a key and locked the driver’s side door. They entered the hotel’s rear entrance and walked to the lobby.

“Honored Jordan,” said the hotel manager, Ninugal Gisnu, who was standing at the front desk. “We expected you earlier and were worried you had had trouble.”

“No, no trouble. After we got off the ferry at Sipadananga, we stopped to visit with people we know there, then made another stop in Galulia. We made the last part of our trip in the light of an almost-full Skanda!”

“You must be quite tired, then. You have luggage, right?”

“Yes, and three large boxes of supplies for the office.”

“I’ll get the bellhop. Just a moment.” Ninugal retreated into the back office for a moment, then out came two sons, one about eighteen, the other about twelve. Jordan handed the car key to the older boy while Ninugal searched for room keys. The young boy would run the front desk while he was away. “Here they are; the keys to rooms 401 through 405. Follow me, please.” Ninugal led them up the stairs.

“I’m amazed this hotel has four floors,” said Jordan, as they puffed their way up to the third floor.

“We need to install an elevator. The building was built with an elevator shaft and we use it to move furniture and luggage up and down, but you have to pull on a rope to move yourself and it’s almost as tiring as walking! I hope someone will build an elevator we can use, some time. It’ll be the first one in Anartu and will attract a lot of business.”

“Meanwhile, the top floor guarantees us privacy.”

“At a price; a lot of climbing!” said Tiamaté.

They stepped off the stairs and onto the fourth floor. Ninugal flipped on the lights and pointed out another switch at the end of the hall. They walked to the end first.

“Four-oh-one is your private room.” He opened the door and they entered. It was a fairly standard sized hotel room, about three meters by four, with windows overlooking the main street. The windows were open, but mosquito netting covered them to keep the insects out. Ninugal flipped a second switch. “This is your ceiling fan; we have them in every room up here. And as you can see, you have a telephone.”

“In all five rooms?”

“Indeed. The hotel switchboard now has three incoming lines and we have devoted Anartu number 1228 to your business.”

“Good, I have it printed on the business cards.”

“You also have a private bathroom; that’s not true of the other rooms. This is a larger room, as you can see.” He turned to a door leading to 403. He unlocked it and they entered. “Your parlor. I hope it is comfortable.”

“Thank you, it looks perfect.”

“Very nice furniture,” added Tiamaté. “We can keep a sterno in here to make tea?”

Ninugal hesitated; no doubt it was against the rules. “Yes, certainly. But you can order anything you want from the restaurant.”

“We’ll just make our own tea,” promised Jordan.

They stepped back into the hall and Ninugal unlocked 402, across the hall. “An office, one of three.”

“I think I’ll use this one,” said Jordan, nodding. It had a fine desk and chair, a meeting table, and a bookcase.

“That’s what I thought. The other two rooms are equipped with two desks each, so that they can hold two workers. If you need additional space, let me know. We can reserve 406 for you as well, though we might need a week’s notice to empty it of any guests and move in any furniture that you need.”

“Thank you very much, Honored. This is perfect; really perfect. And we already have a signed contract, so are there any additional matters to discuss?”

“No, I think everything’s in order. The price—three dhanay per day per room—is really the lowest we can afford to give you.”

“I’ll come downstairs tomorrow and write you a check for the first month,” promised Jordan.

“Very well,” said Ningal. “I hope you have a comfortable night. Your breakfasts are included, though not any breakfasts for workers in the offices. Please phone us if you have any questions at all.”

“Thank you.” Jordan extended his hands and they shook, then Ningal headed downstairs.

“Three dhanay per day,” said Tiamaté, shocked. “That’s almost six thousand a year for all five rooms! That’s outrageous!”

“It sounds it, I agree. But consider we are getting a place to live—two rooms—telephone service, someone to take messages at night or when we’re out, security—no one can get here without passing the front desk—and maid service. It’s a prestigious address and if we need another room or two we can rent them. If we were to buy a building on this street we’d have to spend fifty thousand, and we’d have to hire a night watchman to watch the place.”

“True. And we do have our own place, though I still have no kitchen, so I can’t cook.”

“And if grandpa or anyone from the mainland visits, they can get a room down the hall. Can you do any cooking if you use two or three sternos at once?”

She laughed. “I’m not going to try that!”

“Alright. I think we could get an icebox; they won’t complain about that. And we have a company steam car; we can use it on Primdius to visit the friends around the island. Not to mention a good salary for me; three thousand a year.”

“Though nothing for me to do but answer the phone and make tea for visitors.”

“Do you want something?”

“No. I just want some time with you in the evenings. My days will be busy enough at Ninurta Génadema, helping Nina with her course. I wish she hadn’t talked me into that.”

“You’ll do fine.”

“I suppose. And when I’m here and the phone rings, what do I say? ‘Sumilara Gasa?’”

“No, we’ll answer the phone in Sumi; any Eryan speaker can figure it out.”

“Most businesses here in Anartu use Eryan on the phone.”

“Doesn’t matter. It’s discourteous. This operation will work in Sumi.”

“Sounds like you’ll need more help from me than I thought!”

The bellhop arrived with the luggage and boxes of supplies. Jordan helped him move everything from the elevator-sized dumbwaiter to their room, then gave him a tip.

“Alright, let’s unpack and get to bed,” he said. “Tomorrow’s a busy day; I have to examine the construction site and interview about a half dozen possible workers, plus interview the probable construction manager and hope he won’t treat me like a boy.”

“No more talk of business tonight,” she replied. “There’s always another day.”

Reread and edited, 6/12/13, 8/24/17, 11/25/24

349.

Solidarity Groups

Mid Plowménu/early Feb., Yr 14/632

Weranopéla was so dry, even the fir trees looked wilted. Or so it seemed to Liz as she approached the village from the west-northwest. All of the South Shore was in a state of severe drought that winter, and no relief was in sight on that clear, cold day.

Liz drove up to the Bahá'í Center as the store's new clock tower was striking twelve. It surprised her, as well as a few other changes. The store had faced the two-classroom school across a wide expanse of muddy dirt; the expanse was now graveled and the school now had three classrooms. Separated from the store by a picnic area was the Bahá'í Center, which served the entire village in various ways, not just the third of Weranopélans who had accepted Bahá'u'lláh. The graveled expanse—she thought of it as Weranopéla Square—was on the south side of Route 2, with the original village covering a hill beyond it. On the north side of Route 2 facing the square was the Weranopéla Grange, consisting of a garage holding a tractor and a pickup truck, and storage facilities for corn, wheat, hay, and potatoes. Next to it was a new dairy barn. Completing the village's industries, south and east of the square—on the river that flowed around Weranopéla hill—were a sawmill and a barrel manufactory.

She parked the car and walked to the door of the Bahá'í Center. Sajéké, secretary of the village's Women's Gabruli or salon—who was also a member of the Spiritual Assembly—opened it to greet her. “Honored Liz, it's so good to see you!”

“Thank you, it’s nice to be back. It’s been a long time; almost a year.” They hugged warmly.

“Come in out of the cold. We’re gathered and waiting eagerly to see you!”

Liz stepped into the Bahá’í Center—much warmer than the subfreezing air outside, but still chilly—to a circle of fifteen women, old and young, and she went around the circle, hugging or shaking hands with each. She recognized two of them from previous visits: Brébé, the other woman on the Spiritual Assembly and fairly outspoken; and Sodomigé, a farmer’s wife and a devoted Bahá’í, whose homespun clothes and leather moccasins spoke of her modest means. Two others immediately stood out: Gramané, a tall woman of about thirty with a persistent cough, whose husband owned the new dairy barn; and Golbé, wife of the manager of the barrel manufactory. The latter wore mass-produced clothing and shoes; the former had the first but not the second. Completing the crowd in the Bahá’í Center that day were ten preschool children being managed by a teenager, with occasional help by Sodomigé.

“Come, let’s sit and have some tea,” said Sajéké. They walked to a circle of chairs pulled close around the Center’s blazing wood stove. “Tell us about the Women’s Gabrulis you have visited.”

“Yours is the first on this trip,” replied Liz. “Though I did manage a quick visit to the Mëddwoglubas Gabruli two days ago. I have a few gifts for you from other gabrulis.” Liz reached into the bag she had been carrying and pulled out a jar. “Here’s some mango jelly from the Women’s Gabruli in Pértatranisér. It’s one of their more popular items and very good tasting.” She handed it to Sajéké ceremonially and reached back in. “And here’s an embroidered children’s smock from the Women’s Gabruli in Klënvika; that’s on

the north shore, west of Belledha. Isn't it beautiful? The design is traditional, but the materials are new."

"They make this as part of the gabruli?" asked Sodomigé.

"I think two or three women work together on these smocks. One cuts and sews the fabric while another one does the embroidery by hand. You can do something like this on a sewing machine, though. One more item." She reached into the bag one more time. "This candle was made by the gabruli at Tritějna; that's in western Arjakwés near the seashore."

"What a lovely purple color!" said Golbé. She took it and sniffed. "And it smells of lavender! How do they do it?"

"They take lavender buds and boil them to extract the oil. I don't know the entire process. You can write to them and ask."

"Let's light it," suggested Gramané, and they all paused to light it and place it nearby, where it perfumed the air. "What can we give to the other gabrulis?"

"I think we have some jam left." Sajéké walked over to a box in a corner—many corners of the Bahá'í Center were storing different things, and one corner was the gabruli's—and rummaged for a moment, then pulled out two jars. "We still have blueberry preserves!"

"Perfect," said Liz. "Anything sewn I can take along, especially with a design?"

"No; the sewing machine's broken," replied Sajéké. "Lately we've been working on a series of quilts, but they're all spoken for."

"What about one of the baskets?" suggested Brébé.

“Good idea.” Sajéké picked up a nicely woven basket and moved the yarn it was storing on top of the contents of another basket. “How’s this?”

“That’ll be excellent. The weaving pattern is interesting. That’s what we want; items that will give ideas.” Liz accepted the basket happily and put her bag into it. “What happened to your sewing machine?”

“It broke a month ago, and no one will agree who broke it or how,” replied Sajéké. “It has caused a rift; two women have stopped coming because they were accused of breaking it, and each said the other one was using the machine at the time. It is a messy situation, I’m afraid.”

“Everyone’s rather tense,” added Gramané. She paused to cough. “It’s the blasted weather. We haven’t seen a single snowflake all winter; every day we have a steady, cold, bone-dry breeze blowing from the south. We’ve had to haul a lot of hay in from Brébatroba for the animals and there’s never enough firewood because it’s been so cold.”

“A lot of the men have been in Brébatroba working their farms there,” added Sodomigé.

“And drinking!” injected Brébé.

“The cold and monotony have driven them away, leaving us behind with the children,” said Sodomigé.

“Well, a lot of women and children have gone to Brébatroba, too,” noted Brébé. “I was there all last week, and it was nice to feel a bit of warmth, though it’s constantly raining up there! And there are a few dozen men here working at the sawmill, the barrel-making manufactory, and the dairy, plus a dozen who ride the bus to Tripola every day.”

“I saw the dairy barn,” said Liz. “Very nice. And the clock tower!”

“At least Lord Ekwiséru’s plowing some profits back into the village,” replied Gramané. “My husband had to borrow the money from Ekwiséru to build the barn and buy twenty milk cows, but the lord gets half the profits, and we don’t have much left over to buy him out. It’s very frustrating; we feel like we’re working for him, even though it’s our business!”

“Of course,” said Liz. “That’s a common story. And the square is graveled; that’s nice.”

“A bit of progress,” agreed Sajéké. “The Lord has improved the place. The water and sewer system the Bahá’í youth helped set up two summers ago is working pretty well, in spite of the cold. A lot of houses have electric lights now. The store sells more items and all the kids aged 6-10 are in school.”

“Good,” said Liz. “I’ll take your gifts to other women’s gabrulis, as I visit them. The gift exchange helps bind us together, remember each other, and learn a bit from each other. In Tritejna, the gabruli is moving into candle making; there’s a good supply of beeswax and candleberry trees, and they’re working on various fragrances. Quite a few gabrulis, like yours and Pértatraniser’s, focus a lot of their effort on making jams and jellies; they’re popular and sell well. In Penkakwés, the Sullendha Gabruli is moving into wood carving. The gabruli in Lewéspadéma weaves reed mats together; they sell well and are popular. What have you focused on here, lately?”

“As you suggested, in the summer and fall we concentrate on fruit and berry preserves and canning,” replied Sajéké. “We would like to acquire more sewing machines for work the rest of the year, but this incident has slowed us down. This winter we

concentrated on knitting. Wool yarn is not hard to obtain, knitting's easy to learn, and there is a lot of demand. We've had trouble selling sweaters, though, and we'd prefer to switch to sewing because there's probably more we can do with it."

"How can we sell our products?" asked Bréb . "No one takes us seriously. They won't give us contracts ahead of time and they try to pay us as little as possible."

"This is a problem everywhere," said Liz. "I know the owners of the Home Improvement stores. They don't want to buy single items; they want to buy thousands at a time, because they want people to know they can go to a store and find something they want. But no single gabruli can produce such a volume of items. There are two things that can be done to solve the problem, but it will take some time. First, we will need a kingdom-wide center to coordinate all the gabrulis, and it can have someone who buys items from gabrulis, collects them together in large lots, and sells them to a store like Home Improvement. Second, the coordinating center needs to select a few designs and ask everyone who wants to participate in a particular sale to produce those products. Would that interest you?"

"Who would pay for the central office and its staff?" asked Br  b .

"I don't know. Some of it would have to be a separate grant from my family, but it would also have to pay for itself partially by selling items to stores at a higher price than it pays the gabrulis. That can't be avoided."

"I suppose," said Br  b . "What if women's gabrulis in larger towns opened their own stores and sold products from the village gabrulis as well?"

"That's a good idea," replied Liz. "Some gabrulis do sell items already and they'd do better with a wider variety of items."

“I think we need to solve the sewing machine problem,” said Sodomigé.

“Whoever broke it, it needs to be fixed, and maybe we all need to chip in a little and pay for it together.”

“Does your gabruli maintain a fund for things like that?” asked Liz.

“We tried, but we didn’t have access to enough money,” replied Sajéké.

“But that was two years ago,” exclaimed Golbé. “We have a bit more money in the village now. Maybe we should start basic dues, like a kentay per week. With fifteen of us, that’s 15 kentay per week, which would total almost ten dhanay per year. We could do a lot with that much.”

“It’s not enough to buy another sewing machine, though,” noted Sajéké.

“The gabruli could borrow money,” suggested Liz. “You may have heard the plans for Wiki Bank. Its main intended audience is villagers in need of loans ranging from 1 to 100 dhanay. Five of you could pool your resources and jointly borrow the twenty-five dhanay needed to buy a sewing machine. It’d have to be paid back at the rate of about a dhanay per month, but with the machine, it would easily earn enough.”

“So, how will this new bank work?” asked Brébé.

“It will make small loans to villagers, especially women. Every borrower must be a member of a solidarity group of five to ten persons from at least five different families that meets regularly and saves money together. If one person wants to borrow money, the group must approve the loan, the group leader receives the loan from Wiki Bank, and the leader collects the repayment to remit to a visiting bank officer. The other members of the group are not responsible for the loan, but if someone fails to pay, the others can’t borrow from the bank. That way, people have an incentive to pay their loan or help others in

emergencies. Groups that repay on time are eligible for larger loans and lower interest rates. Groups can borrow money together as well. It's a perfect arrangement for the members of this gabruli."

"But . . . can't we get a grant from you?" asked Sajéké.

"We're putting money into the Wiki Bank, which is a nonprofit. We'll still offer larger grants to gabrulis, but the smaller ones for sewing machines should be done through Wiki Bank. In a few months there will be an agent to help set up solidarity groups and make loans." She looked around and saw their disappointment. "Sometimes, giving money is a good thing to do, but it doesn't always help people make decisions for themselves and work to accomplish them. A balance between loans and grants seems better, so we're giving it a try."

"And you're not making money on the loans?" asked Brébé.

Liz shook her head. "Not a kentay. The Wiki Bank will cover its expenses and any extra can be loaned out the next year. Eventually, the people who deposit money in the bank will also be the owners, one vote per person regardless of the amount deposited."

"Really?" said Sodomigé. She leaned back on her pillow, shocked by the idea.

"So, you make fruit and berry preserves in the warm season and knit in the cold season," summarized Liz. "What else? Has the gabruli set goals?"

"We also run a day care cooperative for children here at the Bahá'í Center."

Sajéké indicated the children on the other side of the room. "We rotate who watches the kids if we're not meeting here, which we can't if we're cooking. A lot of women have their own arrangements with sisters and cousins, of course. We'd also like to get a kitchen with gas stoves, since right now we're cooking over charcoal stoves or fireplaces."

“Gas stoves would be *very* nice,” added Golbé. I’ve been to Lord Ekwiséru’s house in Tripola. So convenient, easy to use, and safe!”

“And it wouldn’t make me cough!” added Gramané, who coughed a bit.

“Why are you coughing so much; have you seen a doctor?” asked Liz.

“Not yet, but a clinic will be here next week and I guess I’ll go then. It’s been a cold winter. My husband was so busy getting the dairy business set up he didn’t have time in the summer and fall to accumulate winter firewood. You can’t pick any up around here; the woods are picked clean. We don’t have a lot of money to buy firewood, though we do buy a load of coal occasionally. So we’re keeping the house warm with cow patties.”

“You have plenty of them, too,” quipped Golbé.

“But the smoke and smell; that’s why you’re coughing,” said Liz. Gramané nodded. “There may be a solution to that, now,” continued Liz. “It’s new; we just developed it in Melwika. And it’s surprisingly simple; my son in law is kicking himself that he didn’t work on it sooner. One can make gas for stoves and for heat from animal manure and straw.”

“*Really?*” Sodomigé was surprised again.

“Yes. I can’t explain it, but the Melwika Grange is building digesters to do it; they’re basically big underground concrete pots. The dairy farm or the grange could build them. But even if no one here builds the digesters, in two months one will be able to buy a big metal bottle filled with compressed gas; two dhanay, and it’ll run a stove a week.”

“That’s a lot of money,” said Sajéké, shaking her head.

“Even so, Lady Liz, we love having you visit us, because you are always full of ideas!” said Brébé. “It is very encouraging. It makes me think in new ways.”

“Me too, and my husband is not always pleased!” added Sodomigé.

Several women chuckled at that. “It’s a new day,” replied Sajéké. “A day when women are equal to men.” She was happy for the chance to remind her friends of the Bahá’í principle.

“Well, I have another idea for you. The store lets people make telephone calls, right?”

“But he’s a robber!” said Brébé, referring to Tumékwu, the village headman and owner of the store.

“Then someone should get a loan, use it to get a telephone, and charge reasonable rates per call,” said Liz. “That’s a perfect project for a women’s gabruli or for a woman who needs an income.”

“What a great idea!” exclaimed Sodomigé.

“So, what will you talk about tonight?” asked Sajéké.

“It’s a talk for the Bahá’í community, but of course anyone can come. I’m planning to talk about sacrifice. We all sacrifice for our children; we’d give our lives for them. We sacrifice for our parents, our cousins, our uncles and aunts. But we still need to learn how to sacrifice for bigger groups of people: for the Bahá’í community, which needs our devoted sacrifice to grow; for granges and gabrulis, so we can become more prosperous together; for the village and the kingdom, so that we all can progress together. Bahá’u’lláh says so much about sacrifice; I plan to quote Him extensively. `Abdu'l-Bahá means ‘servant of Bahá’ and he sacrificed His entire life for the Faith and for all

humanity. Widumaj and the other Manifestations sacrifice their all for others, and that is what attracts us to them; their love and care. We can become centers of attraction as well by sacrificing self and treasure for others. That's my message, basically."

"That's so true," agreed Gramané. "And there is more we can do for each other and for the gabruli. This gabruli can be much stronger."

"We should at least fix the sewing machine," repeated Sodomigé. "It's been a month and we still don't know who broke it. It's time to fix it and drop the matter."

"I've wanted us to wait, but perhaps we should just fix it," agreed Gramané, with a sigh.

"It should cost two or three dhanay; where will we get it?" asked Sajéké. "The gabruli only has a dhanay and a half right now."

"If we all pitched in two dontay—maybe over a few months, a kentay at a time—we'd have it," said Sodomigé. "This is a bad time to find cash, but we could do it."

"Here, I'll contribute a dhanay," said Liz. She reached into a pocket and pulled out a coin. "That helps. A dontay each and you'll have it for sure."

"Then we'll get it fixed," agreed Sajéké. "Thank you, you are very kind. And you must tell the men about the gas makers!"

Chris had driven his rover to Tripola from Meddwoglubas right behind Liz, who had been driving Thornton's steam car. He spent two hours meeting with the Deksawsakela Tomi, the tomi developing industry for the province on behalf of investors, including most of the absentee lords. Then about noontime he drove to Kentudha, the first village east of the

city, to visit the Dhébakwés grange, which served Tripola and the surrounding villages. Wéroimigu Wesénakwénu, the manager, was waiting.

“I am overwhelmed by your offer to visit me, rather than my coming to visit you!” he said, rising from behind his desk. “Thank you so much!” He offered his hands and they shook.

“It’s really very convenient for me, Honored. I was in Mëddwoglubas for three days and I spent this morning visiting with the Board of the Deksawsakëla Tomi. This is literally thirty meters from the road home.”

“I suppose it is. Would you like some nice, hot potato and vegetable soup? My wife Kalané made me an extra large pot today, in case you would be hungry.”

“Thank you, you are very kind. You’re sure you have enough?”

“Of course!” He rose and walked to a table nearby where a sterno kept a big pot of soup boiling hot. He ladled out two bowls full and sat across the table from Chris.

“What took you to Mëddwoglubas?”

“Two and a half days of Bahá’í business, followed by a round of meetings with factory managers, and last night I drove up to Ora to a meeting with provincial planners. I have a consultant’s role in many projects to achieve the Seven Year economic plan. Today the meeting with the local tomi was on those matters as well; the need for shoe manufactories, dairies, cheese making operations, chicken and turkey raising, textile manufacturing . . . the various elements in the regional development plan.”

“I see. We could certainly use some development around here. It’s been a quiet, slow winter.”

“So I gather. The grange certainly looks quiet. Do you see any economic recovery?”

“Recovery? No, I’d say nothing at all. They say things are picking up on the eastern shore because of the mild winter, but we’re having a colder one because you’re having a warmer one! And the grange is very quiet; four of its six tractors are on loan to Brébatroba right now, where planting is about to commence. We’ve kept two, mostly for hauling firewood, because demand is through the roof.”

“I can imagine. So, grange members go out in teams, cut down trees together, haul them back here, and distribute the wood?”

“They use the tractors and we count the work toward their time allocation. We have two widows we have to supply with wood, the workers take half for their own houses, and the grange sells the rest at a cut rate to members. We’ve also loaned money to a few members to buy coal. Once the ground thaws we plan to put everyone to work on irrigation ditches because the land is extremely dry. When the wind really blows, we get a small dust storm!”

“That’s not good for the land or the people.” Chris sipped some of the soup. “This is excellent soup; my compliments to your wife. So, have you had time to read the plans for Wiki Bank? What do you think?”

“I’m fascinated by the idea of establishing groups of people who will watch over each other, essentially, and make sure the loan is paid back. And the groups promise to improve their houses and send their children to school; that’s rather coercive, but if they want to borrow money and improve their lives, there probably needs to be a structure of expectations. It’s not that different from granges in some ways. We try to encourage clean

houses, clean drinking water, disposal of sewage, sending kids to school, etc. And granges have tried to loan money to their members, but it hasn't worked very well. I think we'd be better off giving our loan business to Wiki Bank!"

"That's what the Mēlita and Mēlwika Granges plan to do. It makes sense to give the work to professionals who apply a uniform set of rules to everyone."

"I have some experience working with groups of people here at the grange, and my tailor shop involved a lot of collaboration. I take it, the President of Wiki Bank wouldn't be going out and setting up the solidarity groups; he'd be administering."

"No, at first, he'd be doing everything. We need a president who understands the solidarity groups and makes sure the bank agents are nurturing and encouraging them. The president should go out a day or two a month; it'd help him remember where the customers are coming from."

"Have you thought about part time agents in each village? It seems to me that would be the easiest way to spread out across the kingdom. A typical village probably would not have enough business otherwise."

"Each solidarity group will have a leader who will disburse loans and collect payments. We may use the post offices to collect loan payments and send them to us by check. But we'll still want an agent to visit each village at least monthly for a few hours to meet with the groups and collect the payments."

"I know a lot of the people in Tripola and the four villages near it. Obviously, I don't know many people elsewhere in the province or beyond. It seems to me that the granges would be a good source of agents, and the owners of local stores."

“And the women’s gabrulis. I would approach members of local Spiritual Assemblies as well because they should be trustworthy. There are plenty of networks we can use to find agents. We just need someone with the drive to recruit them. Do you think you’re the one?”

It was a direct question and startled Wéroimigu. Eryan culture discouraged boastfulness and putting oneself forward. “I . . . think I could do it. I’d enjoy it. I like to talk to people, both to individuals and to groups. I like to travel, too. And I understand the need for skills and some capital; I’m a village kid myself. It seems to me we’ll need to give people a lot of ideas, so they have reasons for small loans. A lot of villagers simply don’t dream or plan.”

“You are right, that’s something we want to start. We need stories, and the small loans the granges have already been making should provide some. What do you think of Sumis?”

“Think of them? What do you mean?”

That answer was a relief to Chris. “I think you’ve answered my question. You need to be able to work with Sumi and Eryan farmers alike, equally.”

“I see. I don’t think I’m prejudiced against them. I haven’t met very many, except through the grange movement.”

“What about loaning money to women? We think women will be a large portion of our customers.”

“Really? I am happy to work with women; we have several women farmers in this grange and they’re active members. But I am not sure how easily I can meet and explain the bank to them. It’s hard for strange men to meet women in the villages.”

“Of course. The women’s gabrulis are one way to do that. Is there any possibility your wife could come along with you?”

Wéroimigu smiled. “She’d love that! She hates being stuck in the house and is a member of the Tripola Gabruli. She’s worried about our move and whether she’ll be stuck at home with the kids all the time.”

“How many kids do you have?”

“Two, aged six months and 2 years.”

“Bring them along, and she can meet with the women at the same time.”

“He laughed. “I think she’d enjoy that. She’s already excited about this possible job, though naturally she wants to know where the bank will be located and what the salary will be.”

“Of course. I think the first bank branch will be in Mēlita; north shore villagers farm there and thus are easy to reach, Brébatroba and its supply of south shore villagers will be very close, the north and south shores are also pretty close—two hours—so a branch in Mēlita can serve a very large number of people. Pēnkakwés and Mēlwika will be just an hour away; Jērnstisér and Lēwēspa three hours away. The branch will have a steam car so that its agents can move around quickly, which the manager can use on Primdius. The manager will start at 3,000 dhanay a year, to go up after six months if performance is good. We’ll need a president once we have two or three branches. That’ll take six to nine months because the first branch will be a chance to test the concept.”

“I see. And the various branch managers will be considered for the position of president?”

“Exactly. The bank has to grow organically; it won’t spring into existence all at once.”

“That makes sense. You know how to do this, Lord.”

Chris smiled. “I’ve learned. The first grange consumed much of my time for a year; the second grange took less because I had experienced people I could hire. Prosperity Bank was exhausting, but now it runs itself and I do fairly little. Melwika and Melita’s city governments were very demanding in the first years. Wiki Bank will probably be the same. It will be part of the Mennea Tomi of companies; the tomi will pay salaries and audit income and expenses. I’m aiming for a thousand loans in the first year. So, are you interested in being considered for the position of Melita branch manager?”

“Yes, Lord, definitely. It would be an exciting opportunity.”

“Excellent. I have to interview a few others and I’ll make a decision next week.” Chris pointed to the grange. “Can you show me around? I’m always interested in seeing how granges work.”

“You’re always collecting ideas.”

“Of course.”

They finished their soup, then Wéroimigu showed Chris around the grange. He introduced Chris to several farmers and they chatted together, which gave Chris a chance to see how Wéroimigu interacted with grange members. He even introduced Chris to one of the women farmers.

Chris got in his car to drive to Melwika a half hour later. It was 1:30 in Tripola, which meant it was 7:30 p.m. in Melwika. With a concrete road all the way to Endraidha,

Melita, and Melwika, he could be home before 9:30 p.m. Then the cell phone in his pocket began to vibrate. It was Liz. He opened it and said “Hello, honey.”

“Any possibility you can stop in Weranopéla on your way home. My meeting with the gabruli ended about fifteen minutes ago and one of the women—Gramané—took me home to meet her husband, Weranoiysu, who operates the big new dairy farm here. I happened to mention the biogas project and she was determined to bring it to Weranopéla, using the manure of her husband’s cows! I just gave a basic explanation and he’s asking all sorts of technical questions I can’t answer.”

He laughed. “I just left Kentudha and will be driving through in half an hour! Sure, I can stop. It’s probably better I get home later, anyway, because I won’t be sleepy until well after midnight. But we haven’t released the technology. The pilot gas plant is still refining its operations. The standardized blueprint is still being refined. We haven’t started mass producing the necessary parts.”

“I didn’t make any commitments. I’m just lining up customers for you when you’re ready.”

“Okay, I’ll stop and explain it to him. I have a few copies of the prospectus in the car; I distributed a few in Meddwoglubas, where no one was interested because they already have gas.”

“How much gas can they make?”

“All they need! The field waste—corn stalks—don’t have enough nitrogen for the digesters, but you can add guano, and the result is fertilizer of essentially the same quality as spreading the guano on the fields. How was your meeting?”

“It went pretty well. I think I have two solidarity groups ready to form and several small loans for Wiki Bank when it opens its doors. This gabruli needs a building of its own with a really big kitchen, so we need to keep that in mind for next year. How was your meeting with Wéroimigu?”

“It started slowly, but my impression of him improved. I would prefer a Bahá’í; he’d understand the equality of men and women. But there are no Bahá’ís available. And his wife is a member of the Tripola Gabruli; Kalané Wesénakwénu.”

“Kalané . . . oh yes, I’ve met her! Very smart and articulate.”

“Can you interview her if you see her? Informally, of course. Weroimigu would have a lot of trouble meeting women by himself, but if she went along it would work.”

“Yes, of course! Brilliant idea! I bet she’d enjoy that. They have a kid or two, I think.”

“Two, but they could come along as well.”

“I suppose. I probably will see her two days from now, so sure, I could talk to her about the bank. She might have questions by then.”

“Great. We can talk more when I stop at Wëranopéla.”

Reread and edited, 6/12/13, 8/25/17, 11/25/24

350.

Turn Around

Ėjnamėnu/March yr 14/632

Jordan walked around the newly poured foundations of the Anartu gas plant, wondering why things didn't look quite right. The contractor, Amėlatu, a proud man of about forty, followed along and seemed irritated by his scrutiny, which made him even more suspicious.

"The color of this concrete; it seems rather white to me," Jordan said. "How much sand did you use?"

"The correct ratio, I assure you, Honored." Amėlatu said the last word in a rather forced manner, as if Jordan didn't deserve the title.

"What ratio is that?"

A pause. "I'd have to check the contract, because the ratio varies. You can have more sand in a foundation slab than in the walls. But remember the sand around here is lime sand, not quartz, and that changes the color."

"I see." Jordan stopped at the end of the foundation and looked across the fifteen-meter width. He wondered whether it was right. "Do you have a measuring tape?"

"What do you need that for? I assure you, you do not need to check a detail like that!" He sounded insulted.

"Do you have a measuring tape? It's a simple question, please."

"Who ever heard of a construction site without measuring tapes? Very well.

Libbanu! Bring a measuring tape!"

The foreman nodded nervously and ran to the equipment storage hut. He reappeared a minute later with a battered old measuring tape and ran over with it. Jordan nodded in thanks, anchored one end with a rock, and stretched it across the foundation. Fourteen meters, ninety-seven point 5 centimeters. “This is short by 2.5 centimeters. The foundation is supposed to be fifteen meters long.”

Amélatu inspected the tape closely. “That’s. . . within tolerances.”

“What? I’ll be the judge of that! The other side of the foundation was 15.007 meters when I measured it last week. This plant has to have room for pipes, the thickness of walls must be exact, the thickness of the floor; everything. I think your men can read a tape measure better than this. I’ll tolerate 2 or 3 millimeters, perhaps, but this is 25!”

“Well, honored, this is what we’ve prepared, and this is what you have gotten.” Amélatu spoke with an air of finality.

“I beg your pardon? This is not acceptable, simple as that. You must fix this to within three millimeters.”

“At how much additional?”

“Nothing! We are paying for fifteen meters and that’s what I want.”

“Well, honored, that’s too bad; take it or leave it.”

Jordan glared at the older man. “Then you are fired, Amélatu. Simple as that. You may take your tools and equipment and leave this site. You will be paid for 14.975 meters of foundation, and nothing more.”

Amélatu stared at Jordan, unbelieving. “Look, if you want this plant done, I’m the only contractor who can do it. That’s the reality.”

“I don’t agree. Amurueqluma has some pretty sophisticated buildings. The palaces here are big. And there are contractors on the mainland as well. I told you: you are fired. Please take your men and equipment and leave.”

Amélatu waved a finger at Jordan. “You’re going to pay for this!”

Jordan said nothing at all. He picked up a loose piece of concrete and examined it. The pebbles were too large. He looked at the rebar sticking out of the concrete and measured the separation. It was consistently ten percent too large; Amélatu was charging for the correct amount and providing ninety percent as much rebar.

Amélatu was swearing profusely, using Sumi Jordan hadn’t heard before, and the workers were slowly moving to pick up equipment and toss it on a horse-drawn wagon. Jordan retreated to his steam car and drove back to the office. As soon as he was away from the site, he telephoned Ninazu Engurra, who was in the gas company office at the Palace Hotel. “Ninazu, the contractor has been cheating us,” he began. “The foundation is 2.5 centimeters too narrow, the aggregate in the concrete is too coarse, and the rebar has been installed too far apart. He refused to fix the defects, so I fired him.”

“What! Amélatu has always been reliable in the past, Jordan.”

“Are you sure? This plant has to be built to very exact specifications; otherwise, it could blow up. This isn’t like a villa, where the rooms can be 2 centimeters narrower than the blueprints call for. I told him that two weeks ago when he started.”

“He probably didn’t take the warning seriously. There are other contractors on the island, but they may be busy. This will delay the project.”

“I’d rather delay it than see it blow up. We have to take quality very seriously, Ninazu. None of us want a disaster. That’s not what we’re paying hundreds of thousands of dhanay for.”

“I agree, Jordan. Alright, I’ll go talk to him. Is the firing final?”

“I would reconsider it if he agrees to fix all defects free of additional charges and supplies us with all contracts for materials. I want to check the concrete quality. If it is inadequate, forget it. We’ll have to start over anyway, so we might as well start over with someone new.”

“The partners won’t be happy with the delay.”

“They can complain to me, but you already know what I’ll say.”

“Okay, I’ll see what I can do. Right away.”

“Thanks, Ninazu. Bye.”

“Bye.” Jordan hung up the phone and wondered whether he had done the right thing. He was pretty sure he had, but he was less sure about the previous two weeks; he should have caught these problems earlier, when less damage was done. Clearly, from now on he had to go to the building site every day with the blueprints, to check everything he could. Assuming, of course, he could get construction started again.

Chris pushed through the crowd as well as he could. The “Future of Melwika” forums were generally fairly popular and the city, with over 18,500 people, now had 10,000 voters, 1,000 of whom had moved in since the city voted two years earlier. It was a warm, partly cloudy day in mid εjnaménu—the beginning of nice weather—and a pleasant opportunity to be outside.

He was two hours late, so it was hard to get to the front where he was supposed to sit. As he worked his way forward he saw Liz was sitting in his seat, as he had suggested to her over the phone about an hour earlier. The bowl was full; it looked like every adult in the city was there, though he knew that was not true. When he looked more closely, the fact that men outnumbered women two to one told him who was most likely to be at home with the kids. But two thousand Melwika houses owned radios, so they were probably tuned in.

He was finally able to reach a point where he could walk to the VIP section, where Miller and his family, the Mennea family, the members of the City Council, and the five priests serving in the city's two temples were already seated. He strode to his seat and Liz moved over. He turned to greet her, but she shook her head and pointed to the new speaker. It was Dhugané Kélagrasi, a very capable and articulate female worker at Miller Motors.

"I want to commend Miller Motors for making a courageous and difficult decision last month," she began. "Faced with the problem of a shortage of orders for vehicles, they had three choices: lay off workers, cut the pay per hour, or cut the hours and keep the rate the same. The first and third choices would have entailed either hardship or injustice, for families would have been shorn of their income or workers would have gotten less compensation for their work. By cutting hours, workers were given something they have had precious little of, heretofore: time at home. Workers have gone from five ten-hour shifts per week, and one day off, to four nine-hour shifts and two days off. Yes, we are being paid less—a quarter less—and that will be difficult. But having two days a week guarantees us more time to go to school, to work farms, or to open part-time businesses.

And we are told that when demand rises, we will switch to eight hour shifts, working eight and a half hours a day, with the option of being paid time and a half to work an extra shift. When that happens we will be able to choose between money and time.

“Why do I mention this arrangement here? Because all Melwika’s businesses need to take the arrangement seriously. This is the new, humane work week. I think we will find that workers work more productively when they aren’t working two extra tired hours every day. Their family lives will be happier. Their children will see them more. Furthermore, if extra work *is* necessary, both husband and wife can work different eight-hour shifts. That’s not as easy with ten hour shifts.

“Consequently, I call on the City Council to pass a law establishing a thirty-six hour work week. Melwika has always led the way in promoting prosperity and comfort in the lives of the people. Let us lead again and give everyone who collects a salary a better life.”

She walked back to her seat to thunderous applause; it was so loud John Miller was startled. “She’s very good,” said Liz. “Could she have some aristocratic background?”

Chris shook his head. “Listen to her accent; it’s not aristocratic. Dhugané has a very good ear for speeches and is getting better and better all the time. She’s bright, too.”

“She seems to be! I have to get to know her. Oh, here comes Lasu. Aryéstu’s been encouraging debate by offering people a chance to comment on each other.”

Chris nodded. Aryéstu Wëranopélai, economist and resident of Mëddoakwés—therefore ineligible to be elected to anything in Melwika—was chairing the town meeting, and had added a style of his own to it.

Lasu Turbulu, prominent businessman, former member of the city council, and curmudgeon, strode to one of the two microphones. “Bad idea,” he began, definitively. “Businessmen don’t need more regulations or more paperwork. If workers want to work thirty-six hours, they should negotiate it individually with their employers. I can’t imagine business owners working just thirty-six hours a week! They live in their businesses! And they need workers they can count on to be there! You won’t have prosperity if you don’t have businesses, and a law like this will drive some out of business and the rest out of the city!”

He departed from the microphone accompanied by some applause and more boos. Dhugané was not to be refuted so easily; she headed straight to the other microphone, which was closest to her. Without waiting for Aryéstu’s assent, she said “If a business is your life, by all means live there! But *your* business will never be *my* life. Workers need compensation, and obviously they can’t negotiate individually; they can be fired. Of course, they can also go on strike and picket the business, and I bet a lot of customers will be repelled by that! If you want to count on workers, pay them fairly and ask for a reasonable number of hours!”

That generated a lot of loud applause; eighty-five percent of Mēlwika’s workers worked in factories or businesses rather than running their own farms. Lasu turned back to the microphone near him. “Alright, let’s have strikes and destroy our city that way instead! So far, all I’ve heard are ways to destroy our prosperity, and no sure path to a better life or a better future.”

“Then perhaps you should study how well it works in Miller Motors,” replied Dhugané. “And maybe read a book about the Industrial Revolution on Gēdhéma, all the

unrest and strikes that resulted, and how they ended when a reasonable work week was adopted. What I have called for works here and on Gædhéma. And I haven't heard any reasonable argument to the contrary."

More applause. Lasu shook his head. "I'm confident we'll resolve this matter quickly in the City Council." He turned from the microphone and walked back to his place, accompanied by more boos.

"Thank you for ending the debate quickly," said Aryéstu. "Because otherwise I would have had to end it. I think some debate is useful, as long as it highlights principles rather than emotions. As voters, we need to vote based on who we think will be honest, trustworthy, and experienced, not whether we like their positions on things. Let's see, who's next. . ." He looked at the line of people patiently waiting at the right-hand microphone and pointed. "Saréidukter."

The first woman to serve on the City Council stepped to a microphone near her. "Saréidukter, first district, and I still don't have a family name. I had planned to speak about beautifying this city. It really ain't bad, but with more flowers, more shade trees, better sidewalks, and marked parking spaces—oh, we need them badly now—the place would be much better. It really won't cost much, either. We can afford it.

"But now I want to talk about this matter of respecting workers by paying a decent wage *and* offering reasonable hours. For thousands of years we had neither. We worked hard, struggled to feed our families, and prayed the money would be enough. At times of famine or other hardship it never was, and *people died*. Now, for the first time ever, we might actually have a *real life*. Most lords and businessmen simply can't imagine the change. So I thank Dhugané for championing this issue; it makes her a

champion in my book. I'm right behind you, Dhugané!" Saréidukter bowed slightly to Dhugané as she left the microphone, generating another round of intense applause.

Liz and Chris joined in the clapping; John shifted around in his chair. Aryéstu, who was keeping the discussion moving, nodded to a white-haired man waiting at the left-hand microphone. "Arktanu from Yimuaidha, second district."

The speaker looked at the crowd. "Wow, there are a lot of people here! I apologize, I've never spoken in front of so many people before. I . . . ah, my concern is the city wall. It looks to me that we are not maintaining a proper space around it. We just had an attack last year that we had to repulse, and I am very proud that in an hour we were able to do it. Mæddoakwés has erased the space around its wall in some places, and I suppose the wall itself will go next. I think we need to preserve the wall."

The man walked back to his place amid scattered applause and Aryéstu turned to Kérdu. "Comments, Mr. Mayor?"

Kérdu hurried to the microphone near him. "The City Council has decided to maintain a 150-meter wide open space around the wall. It probably looks narrower because of roads cutting it up. Until a few years ago the open space was a meadow where cows and sheep were pastured, but now parts of the open space have houses all around it and those areas we plan to convert to park, with flower beds, little walks, and rock gardens. There will be no trees or other obstacles more than 75 centimeters high behind which someone could hide; the greenbelt will be an attractive, pleasant space for strolling. If we feel the city is secure, at some point in the future, we'll plant trees at the far end, preferably ones that grow tall and straight. The green space around the northern and eastern walls is still undeveloped pasture and will remain open."

The clock at Foundry Square began to ring out four bells. “Aryéstu looked over the crowd. “We’ve been going for three hours, and I am sure all of you are tired. The crowd has even thinned out a bit. So I suggest we adjourn at this point. Next Primdiu, we’ll have another of these forums, and I hope you all can return then. It is a vital part of our democracy that we all come together every two years and listen to each other’s views. Remember, we vote for people based on their knowledge, experience, and character, not based on speaking ability or what they stand for, and we choose the membership of the Council with diversity and a balance of skills in mind. We need people on the city council who can make wise decisions, not people whose hands are tied because they promised they would vote for or against something. Mēlwika is the example to the world of democracy, and our example is spreading. Go to your home village and explain to them how we vote here. Call someone on the phone or write a letter. Let them know that this new way of choosing leaders, which is not perfect, is better than the old way. The palace is more supportive of this new way than ever *because it works*. But it is our obligation to elect people who will make it work. Thank you for doing your part today.”

Aryéstu walked off the stage in front of the crowd to applause and ten thousand people rose from the grass to walk home. Liz cast an eye on Dhugané, who wasn’t too far away. Two women had stopped to talk to her. “I want to meet Dhugané; we can talk more later,” she said to Chris. “How are the Krésone friends?”

“Talkative; that’s why I was so late. Everyone had a complaint about something. Regardless of what we said over and over, many hoped that becoming a Bahá’í would end their poverty, or would give the village guidance so it could make swift progress.

Patékwu feels besieged by his people, who feel a bit betrayed. The Spiritual Assembly doesn't know what to do and the investments have yielded nothing, so far."

"The economy's the problem."

"I told them and that helped. I ate supper with Patékwu last night and it was clear that he was not fasting; he was put out to delay his supper until after sunset. He criticizes Bahá'í teachings. But he invited his cousin, Lord Endranu of the Werone, to come to Sértroba to meet me, constantly mentioned the Bahá'í teachings, and Endranu is interested."

"So, he's still a Bahá'í, at least. I'll get there next month. What else can you do?"

"Throw money at the problem. But that won't help, really, so I won't do that. I think I can find a business student to go there and give some classes."

"That's a small help. Did you hear the news?"

"About both queens keeping the fast? Yes. That was a clever way to prevent controversy."

I was impressed that Queen Dukterésto was willing. I've got to go before Dhugané leaves. See you at home."

Chris nodded and watched Liz hurry over to Dhugané. He rose and walked to Aryéstu, who was on stage talking to Kérdu. "You did a good job," he said to Aryéstu.

"Thanks, Lord." They shook hands. "I was quite nervous."

"I apologize I missed most of it, but I wasn't able to get back to town fast enough. I was a two hour drive away and got delayed."

“I saw you arrive. I kept the discussion moving and limited people to three minutes with this hourglass.” He pointed. “I think we had 55 speakers in three hours as a result. Next week we can have 55 more. There was quite a range of subjects, but the 36-hour work week came up the most. You heard only the tail end of that discussion; it was discussed by five speakers before I allowed that mini-debate.”

“A lot of people want an active city government,” added Kérdu. “That’s what I took from this meeting. Fewer and fewer people have the old peasant attitude that they can, will, and must let others run things. More and more people here have opinions, ideas, and complaints.”

“Miller was the butt of several of those,” agreed Aryéstu. “It was not comfortable for him once or twice.”

“That’s to be expected when people can speak their minds,” said Chris. “So, Aryéstu, any news on the economic front?”

“I think so. I’ve been sending students out to village and city stores to survey the owners every two weeks since early fall. Prices had been slowly falling in response to slack demand and sales were lagging. But in the last three weeks prices have firmed up and sales have started to increase. Melita, Swadlendha, and Brébatroba in particular have seen increases.”

“The winter harvests have come in,” agreed Chris. “Corn has been poor because of the cool, rainy weather, but rye and millet have done well and winter vegetables have been strong. The north and south shore farmers seem pleased with their harvests and I suspect they’re now beginning to buy consumer goods and field supplies for their next planting.”

“They are. Sales are slightly up in the north and south shore provinces as well. They’re up in Pértatranisér and Mèlwika also.”

“John told me vehicle sales have picked up slightly,” added Kérdu. “I think we are seeing a turning around.”

“I agree. Modular building sales may be up slightly. Well, gentlemen, would you like to come to my house for some refreshment? And stay as long as you like. Channel 1 will broadcast the Mèlita town meeting until the eclipse, then after *The World Table* there’s the Bèlledha, Tripola, Pértatranisér, Ora, and Isurdhuna town meetings.”

“You’re going to listen to them all?” said Aryéstu, startled.

“Yes. I may get some work done as well, but I do want to listen and get a sense of what the kingdom’s debating.”

“I’ll read the summaries in the newspapers,” replied Kérdu. “But I will come over for something for a while. My wife’s expecting me for supper.”

“Call her and invite her; the kids as well, if you’d like.”

“I’ll come listen to debates with you,” said Aryéstu. “You’re right, there’s some valuable information in all the pontificating.”

Jordan trudged up the stairs to his fourth floor office, wondering how long the container of rebar and other construction supplies could sit at the docks before he had to worry about theft or vandalism. The construction site had already experienced that problem; he couldn’t keep watchmen there all the time.

He stepped into his office and saw a man of about thirty sitting in a chair waiting. He was wearing manufactured working clothes, which were stained and torn. He looked familiar; Jordan frowned.

“Libbanu, honored.” The man rose. “I was Amélatu’s foreman.”

“Oh, yes, of course, now I recognize you. You were very kind and helpful whenever I visited the construction site.”

“Thank you, honored. I gather you still haven’t found a new contractor?”

“Not yet, but I have some possibilities to pursue.” That wasn’t true; after a week, the three contractors he had talked to had all said they would have no crews available for two to three months. Sumilara was seeing a lot of construction, especially schools.

“Well, honored, I am extensively familiar with the blueprints, I know how to build reinforced concrete walls, and I have access to people who know pipes and electrical work, just like Amélatu. In fact, Amélatu was basically a businessman; I handled most of the construction.”

“Considering the problems I saw, that’s not encouraging.”

“I apologize, honored, but we were following orders. Amélatu ordered that we make the foundation a bit smaller, space the rebar out farther, and he purchased cheaper sand and aggregate. He has done this with schools before; school construction’s his main expertise. They didn’t care, so I didn’t worry about it. I didn’t realize this was very different.”

“I see. I take it you’re no longer working for him?”

“I would be, if he had work, but he doesn’t. I’ve come here to offer my services as a contractor. I believe I could do it. I can hire most of the same crew, but I know plenty of

men who could do construction. You know a few of them as well. You see, I have many cousins in Bilara, where you have many contacts and friends. I suspect the two of us could recruit quite a few workers from Bilara, and since you will know some of them, you probably will have more confidence in them.”

“I would. This is a very interesting idea. But can you handle purchasing?”

“I can read and write, honored. Not really well, but I can do it. I do not know math or accounting. I was thinking that I can accompany you to the various men who sell sand, aggregate, cement, and other supplies. I know them; I know their prices. You now have an accountant here; you and he can handle the purchasing.”

Jordan nodded. “I’d prefer that, actually, because I’d have better control over the expenses. How many men do you have?”

“Four or five, so we’d need more.”

“Who can I talk to in Bilara who knows you?”

“My second cousin, Nérgalu.”

“You’re a cousin of Nérgalu?” Jordan smiled; he knew Nérgalu very well.

“And Randu. Everyone’s related in Bilara.”

“They are. Alright, I’ll call them to verify your character, and assuming that goes well, we’ll get started tomorrow.”

Libbanu smiled. “Excellent. I want to learn how to be a contractor and I want to work hard and accurately. If you want something of a certain size, it will be that size within a millimeter! I guarantee it.”

“Excellent. This could work out well for both of us, then.”

“Do you mind if I visit the work site this afternoon to review our progress to date?”

“Not at all, that’s fine. There’s no one there. If you can hire someone to watch it until sunset, I’ll pay the person then. I have someone coming at sunset.”

“I’ll stay there until sunset, then.”

“Here, take this.” Jordan handed him a copy of the blueprints from his desk. “This is a spare. You can walk the site and review everything. I’ll pay you three dhanay between now and sunset. In fact, if I’ve been able to talk to everyone by then, I can bring the modifications that have been suggested. The engineer who helped design the plant has also recommended how we fix the problems.”

“Alright, honored, I’m on my way right now. This evening I can find the workers I know here in town.”

“I’m curious; why now, after a week, are you coming to me?”

“I’m sorry it wasn’t sooner, honored. Yesterday I attended the ‘Future of Anartu’ Forum where all citizens in Anartu—all voters—discussed the future of the city and the island. Several people mentioned the gas project. I knew it was important already, but their comments drove it home.”

“I was very impressed by the frank discussion. The subject of independence or autonomy came up and ran through the entire three-hour meeting, but no one demanded it, and many people advocated integration. The result of the meeting was good, I think.”

“I thought so, too. It’ll be exciting to see who the people elect to the city council. Even if Lamuno will appoint half the members, it’s an historic development. Honored, I

want to see the island advance and become prosperous. I want to see us treated as equals on this world. This project is important for that future, and I want to contribute to it.”

Jordan nodded. “I’m glad to see it, Libbanu. Alright, I’ll see you tonight about sunset at the construction site.”

Primdiu, 25 Eɟnaménu—the first day of the last week of the last month of the year—was the date of the kingdom-wide election, coming two weeks after the first round of town meetings and a week after the second round. It was a quiet election day, except for lines at Melwika’s five polling places. They had to keep them open an extra hour to give everyone a chance to vote.

It was the wee hours of the morning before the count was complete. John Miller had already gone home, so Chris had to visit him the next morning to discuss and finalize the results. “Here is the decision of the people,” Chris said, handing John a list of the top fifty vote getters.

“Voter turnout 86 percent! That’s just about as high as it’s ever been!”

“Two years ago it was 75%. Kérdu has what one can only call a vote of confidence: 7,200 votes out of 8,910 cast.”

“Then we have Ornéstu, Belékwu, Mitru, Génésé, Dumuzi, and Lasu; so, we’ll have Lasu on again.”

“Assuming you and I accept the results and don’t nullify anything. I would not recommend the nullification of Lasu.”

“I agree. He didn’t electioneer this time and was elected fair and square, albeit with only 2,248 votes. Yes, I’ll accept the results. How many representatives in the provincial assembly?”

“Thirty-nine, and I suppose we’ll end up with three or four in the House of Commons when the provincial assembly votes.”

“I suppose.” John cast his eye down the list of provincial assembly members. Every voter voted for up to ten names, so the thirty-ninth person only had 321 votes, but that didn’t matter; they were elected. “I count . . . six women among the members of the provincial assembly! That’s up!”

“Yes, and note Dhugané came in fourteenth and Saréidukter, eleventh. I’m proud to note that Thornton came in thirtieth and will be on the provincial assembly as well.”

“Yes, I’ll have to congratulate him! What have you heard about the elections elsewhere?”

“Aryéstu’s on the City Council for Mèddoakwés, Mitrubbaru Kanéstoi’s on Néfa’s, Kekanu’s on Pértatranisér’s—that’ll be a shock for him!—and both Stauréstu and Aréjé are on the city council of Mèddwoglubas. The men elected for Isurdhuna seem good; I know three of the five. Mélite’s are good in that they’re mostly on the grange council. Even εjnopéla elected a city council this time; they’re grange members, merchants, and the high school principal.”

“How many elected city councils, now?”

“Eighteen, if you include some villages; Bilara on Sumilara, three villages in Lèwésipa, Snékhpéla in the south shore, and Khèrmdhuna in the north shore. Even Gordha has an elected council! The Kwolone asked each clan to elect three to five

representatives, depending on its size, and they're convening a tribal assembly. Among the Krésone, the spiritual assembly will serve as a tribal council, since theoretically the entire tribe converted."

"That's amazing, Chris. I never thought something like this was possible. But here we are at the end of fourteen years since your family arrived."

"And forty-seven since you arrived, John, and you laid the groundwork for a lot of this. If it weren't for your many conversations with Werétrakester, I'm not sure any of this would have been possible."

John considered, then nodded. "Thank you, Chris, you are kind. Our two families have really brought about a lot of change; my wives and kids played a big role, too. And now we live in a monarchical republic."

"And there's more to come, John, believe me."

Reread and edited 6/13/13, 8/25/17, 11/25/24

351.

Beginnings

Bolerenménu and early Dhébelménu, yr 15/633

Thornton came out of the old palace in Mæddoakwés and stood by the door looking for his father. “Are you sure you have room to give me a ride?” asked Dhugané. “The buses run very regularly.”

“I’m sure,” replied Thornton. “So, one more day of provincial assembly.”

“One more,” she said, nodding. “Very strange experience. I’m looking forward to getting back to work.”

“Strange? How?”

“Well . . . I never expected a village girl from Penkakwés would end up in such a place! My husband’s jealous, my kids feel neglected, my colleagues in the provincial assembly mostly treat me as an inferior, and my coworkers at Miller Motors don’t know how to speak to me.”

“I never thought of that. I was excited to attend. It’s been quite a learning experience for me.”

“For me, too, but it’s been really difficult.”

Just then Chris appeared from around the side of the building, walking with John Miller. Both wore the red-edged robes of lords; John looked uncomfortable in his. Chris waved to his son. “So, the assembly’s out.”

“We just adjourned,” said Thornton. “We finished debating the budget and passed it.”

“Good. We passed it yesterday and chose our representatives for the House of Lords.”

“Including your father,” said John.

“Who’s the third one?” asked Thornton. Kandékwes was automatically a member, as Duke.

“Lord Aryékwes of Ejnopéla,” replied Chris. “A good choice: an old house but firmly behind development. No priests and no conservatives.”

“Did you all approve the entire budget?” asked John.

“We proposed some changes to the development plan,” replied Thornton. “We asked for Route 4 to be concreted all the way across Pēnkakwés, so the Arjakwés villages on it would have a better connection to the world. Old Route 1 beyond Nuarjora needs concreting as well.”

“Those are good ideas, if there’s money,” agreed Chris. “Her Majesty met with our chamber this afternoon and said she would devote more money to roads and dams, rather than palaces, so maybe that’s possible.”

“The Route 4 villages want a gas pipeline, too,” added Thornton. “But I got the floor and pointed out that the gas company rarely has been given subsidies to build pipelines, such a line would not pay for itself for a long time, but now the company is creating systems whereby villages can make their own biogas. That seemed to end the debate.”

“Biogas technology really is very clever,” added John.

“We also asked for 10,000 dhanay more to strengthen fire protection in the western end of the valley,” said Thornton. “But the total provincial budget is 520,000 and we couldn’t agree where to take the money from other programs.”

“Quite a few representatives complained that the lower valley wasn’t getting enough ambulance service as well,” said Dhugané, who had remained quiet through the entire discussion with the city’s two dukes, one of whom was her boss.

“Did you enjoy today’s meeting?” Chris asked.

“Indeed, I’ve learned quite a lot,” she replied. “As I explained to Honored Dhoru, I never could have imagined I would be one of the people serving on the provincial assembly. But I was also surprised how often representatives assumed I was a visitor, or made jokes about women. I’m afraid we have a long road to travel.”

“Equality is still far away,” agreed Chris. “But progress is being made. Girls as well as boys are going to school, women are starting small businesses, and women are marrying at an older age when they are more mature and can speak up better.”

“This is all true,” she agreed. “My other concern, Lords, is the welfare of workers. Yesterday I stood and spoke about the thirty-six hour work week. Some representatives were interested, some were incredulous, and some were hostile. I was particularly amazed by the last group, merchants who seem to want slaves rather than loyal workers.”

“It takes time,” replied Chris. “So far, Miller Motors and the modular building company of Jérdomais Tomi are the only ones who have adopted it. The Gas Company will adopt it next month. It’ll spread, but not immediately.”

“The Gas Company’s adopting it?” asked John, surprised.

Chris nodded. “We’re giving it a try with our salaried employees, that is, office workers and repairmen. We’re cutting salaries only five percent. My guess is that in a few months the dust will settle and we’ll have figured out how to do about the same amount of work in less time.”

“Still, that’s a risk,” said John.

“We’re hiring new people at a fifteen percent lower salary,” replied Chris.

“They’re working about twenty-five percent fewer hours.”

“What about the city?” asked Dhugané. “It has how many employees; 200, 250? If it switched to a nine-hour, four-day work week, that would be noticed.”

John scowled. Chris said, noncommittally. “True. It would.”

“Of course, most of our employees are teachers, and they don’t work fifty-hour weeks already.”

“Firemen and police have to be available all the time, so they need to be on eight or twelve hour shifts,” said Dhugané. “But even they could work thirty-six hour weeks if they did four eight-hour shifts and four extra hours at a time of peak need. The office staff, street cleaners, park maintenance workers, sewer and water workers; all of them could work nine-hours, four days per week.”

“We should take this matter to the City Council,” said Chris.

“Alright,” replied John, reluctantly.

Mitru Miller came out of the assembly hall; he and John waved goodbye and headed to their vehicle. Chris, Thornton, and Dhugané walked to the rover, which was parked in the army’s main square. The drive back to Melwika was quick and pleasant; they dropped Dhugané off outside her house on north hill. They drove to the Tomi

Building and parked the rover in its parking space in the basement, then headed for their house across the street. Chris put his arm on Thornton's shoulder. "I'm proud of you," he said in English.

"Thanks, dad."

"Is there any way, starting this summer, you could start attending City Council meetings in my place? I could use your help. I can't continue to participate in them forever, and you're the heir of my title."

"I know, and I was afraid you'd ask me! But yes, I can start attending and give you a report. I'll have to learn from Jordan what he tells you after a meeting of the Melita City Council."

"We go over the minutes. But I have to go to Melita myself while he's in Anartu."

"He seems to be doing a pretty good job, too."

"I think so! Construction on the gas plant is almost back on schedule, the first gas production unit arrives next week with a crew to help install it, and he's got the pipeline laying crew almost ready so that Behruz can come supervise it. He dropped everything and took over, and Tiamaté arose to handle purchasing. Behruz can be very proud."

"I'm proud of him, too. Anyway, I can start to do more with the City Council. The Geological Survey has become fairly routine; we have an excellent staff and the map making is moving on schedule. The geology department, also, is quite well set up. I can make time."

Wiki Bank's first branch wasn't very large, but its location in Melita's *Greja*, as the commercial marketplace was called, was prestigious. It was directly across the plaza from

the Home Improvement Store, the anchor of Melita's business. And Melita Days—a week-long period of sales and specials in mid Bolérenménu designed to attract consumers from the north and south shores whose equatorial harvests were in and temperate planting was about to begin—was the perfect time to launch the bank.

As a result, the bank was filled with the curious. Wéroimigu and Chris were there to answer questions, assisted by a secretary and by Kalané, Wéroimigu's wife, who was on salary as well. Their two small children played behind the counter, watched by a babysitter.

At noontime they moved out of the bank and into the plaza. Wéroimigu introduced a musical group, which performed for thirty minutes to an ever-growing crowd. People were used to commercially sponsored performances at noon in the plaza; it was a common way to attract a crowd, and it was successful that day. When the group finished their first miniconcert, Wéroimigu returned to the stage, a card listing his points in hand. "We are thrilled to see all of you," he began. "This concert, broadcast live over radio channel 1, is sponsored by the new Wiki Bank. Wiki Bank is located right there." He pointed to the office. "We are a bank for *villagers*. Our purpose is to make small loans, not large ones; loans for sewing machines, stoves, telephones, farming tools, water pumps, farm windmills, the purchase of an animal, essential clothing. We have a booklet that shows what sorts of things we'll provide loans for. Whether you can read or not, take one; there are a lot of pictures. Our goal is to replace these drawings of things with drawings of people who borrowed from us with the things they bought.

"How does it work? To borrow, you have to be a member of a five- to ten-person solidarity group. Solidarity groups meet once a month to encourage each other to save

money, put their children through school, maintain a safe and clean home, aim for prosperity, and improve their villages. Groups will receive a newsletter with pictures, ideas, and information. Groups can create their own collective savings accounts to save up for joint purchases. They can also request joint loans. If someone in the group borrows from Wiki Bank, the other members are not required to pay off the loan if the borrower can't, but they can't borrow from the bank if any member of the group fails to pay. That's what makes the bank work.

“How much can you borrow? Between one and one hundred dhanay, payable over as much as two years. What's the interest rate? Because these loans are expensive to manage, the rate is higher than Prosperity Bank's base rate; currently our loans are nine percent. Can you deposit money in Wiki Bank? Yes. Our savings interest rate is the same as Prosperity Bank's, currently 5.5%. Why should you deposit with us? Because then *you own the bank*. Wiki Bank has a nine-member Board of Directors, which I will introduce later. Every two years—starting in two years—everyone who is a depositor will have one vote to choose three members of the Board. A rich man who puts 10,000 dhanay in the bank will have one vote. A woman in a small village with two dhanay in the bank will also have one vote. That's how it'll work! Members of the board will serve six-year terms and three of them will be up for reelection every two years.

“Who will make a profit off the bank? No one. The bank will make no profit; any income over expenses will go into growing the bank. This is not a bank started by rich investors to make money for themselves by loaning it to others. This is a bank for the people, run by the people, benefitting our communities by making everyone more prosperous. So come deposit with us, earn reasonable interest, have the comfort of

knowing your money is going to help others such as yourself, and earn yourself a vote to determine the bank's future! Lord Kristobéru, will you speak briefly?"

Chris had not expected to speak; in fact, he had told Wéroimigu he wanted the manager to do all the talking. But he saw the logic; people admired and trusted him as a rich man who sought to help the people. So he headed for the stage while the crowd applauded for the first speaker.

"I think Wéroimigu has been quite eloquent in describing this new institution," he said. "This world's growing prosperity has benefitted about a third of the families, or 20,000 of 60,000 households. The other two thirds are more or less where they were ten years ago, and some of them are poorer or even much poorer. Growth and development does not distribute the new wealth evenly. The idea of this bank is to empower the 40,000 poorer families to raise themselves up; to give them a new start. We hope this bank will be of service to them. But the bank needs to reach into the villages, and that will take time. We need your ideas, suggestions, and assistance to be successful."

Chris stepped down and the crowd applauded again. He had noticed that Yimanu, president of Prosperity Bank, was sitting in the crowd, and did not look particularly happy. He thought about it as Wéroimigu headed back to the stage and introduced a new musical group. When Wéroimigu came back down, Chris said, "That was an excellent introduction to the bank; thanks. But if there's one thing I'd be careful about: criticizing other banks."

"Did I criticize them?"

"You referred to investors making profit and said people should deposit in our bank so that investors wouldn't make a profit off them. I understand what you are saying,

but there's a place for both sorts of institutions. In my ethics, we don't criticize how others do things; we do things the way we think is right and leave it at that."

"Alright, I see what you are saying. But I really think we should stress that aspect of Wiki Bank. Prosperity Bank does not have a good reputation in the villages; we can be popular with villagers if we point out the lack of profit. I suppose I shouldn't criticize Prosperity Bank in public, though."

"Especially when the president is in the audience. We need Prosperity Bank's cooperation."

"He's here? I'm sorry about that."

"Don't worry, I'll patch things up." Chris turned to see where Yimanu was. He was standing on the side of the plaza with the manager of Prosperity's Melita branch office. He started walking in his direction and Yimanu began to walk toward him as well.

"Honored Yimanu, thank you so much for coming!"

"Lord Chris, thank you for your welcome. I think this is a bigger crowd than when we opened Prosperity's branch office two years ago."

"We didn't have Melita Days, back then. That attracts large crowds. I want to apologize for Wéroimigu's reference to banks that make profits for investors. Wiki Bank is a different kind of bank with a different purpose and a different marketing formula. We will not market our bank as ethically better because it doesn't have investors and doesn't make a profit."

"I hope not; you're a big investor who makes a big profit! I was very disturbed by that comment. But the apology is accepted, Chris. I saw you talking to him."

“I was admonishing him. Wéroimigu’s a villager himself, Yimanu. He’s a good manager of money; he helped turn around the Tripola Grange. I think he’ll be a good manager of people, too.”

“Good. Maybe I should offer him a better job.” Yimanu smiled; he was joking.

“Very funny! Don’t you dare, my friend.”

“Don’t worry, I won’t.” Yimanu shook his head. “I don’t know how you’ll make money off this bank, Chris.”

“I’m not making any money, honored friend, it’s a non-profit.”

“I’m sorry, that’s not what I meant. I don’t know how this bank will cover its expenses. It’s going to need constant infusion from your family.”

“Perhaps. I hope it’ll cover its expenses, but we’ll see. I’ve donated a hundred thousand; it should yield nine thousand for the bank from interest payments. Seven granges have deposited a total of sixty thousand and they’re expecting interest, so we’ll earn 3.5 percent profit on their money after paying them 5.5 percent interest; that gives us another two thousand. The eleven thousand will just about cover the salaries, the rent of this office, and the bank’s pickup truck.”

“Assuming all the loans pay! I’m tempted to start a pool to predict your loan default rate. I’d put my money on fifty percent.”

Chris shook his head. “You’d lose that bet, my friend.”

“All you need is a ten percent default rate, and your bank’s losing money.”

“I agree. We’ll see.”

“So, the bank has a pickup?” Yimanu smiled at that thought.

“Yes, with an enclosed back; room for Wéroimigu and his family to sleep at night, plus a tent that can be extended from the back so they can set up a little office! All he needs to do is park next to a utility pole and climb up to get a phone connection and power, and he’s in business!”

“Really?” Yimanu laughed. “We’ll have to try that, assuming we can find someone willing to do it!”

“I’m not sure how long he and Kalané will be willing!”

“Then maybe you can pull this off, after all. But I don’t know how you’ll find that many small loans to make. You’ll need a lot of solidarity groups! That’ll take a long time to set up.”

“I agree. We may not manage to loan out a hundred thousand dhanay the first year. But any surplus cash we’ll deposit in Prosperity Bank and the Royal Bank and draw 5.5% interest, at least.”

“Hah! So, we’ll be helping you in ways I didn’t anticipate.”

“It’s called social responsibility, friend.”

“Good point. And a monthly newsletter for solidarity groups? That’ll cost you, too.”

“I just made a two thousand dhanay grant to Melwika Génadema. A summer course in education for development will develop the educational materials for fourteen newsletters; they’ll even set up the newsletters, so all we’ll have to do is add some bank news and print them.”

“Clever. You’re benefiting from the diversity of your investments, Chris.”

“Of course! If you want Prosperity Bank to reach into the villages more, we’ll be glad to help. There’s money to be made and people to help in them, friend Yimanu.”

“You’re right, Lord Chris. Alright, let’s talk further. You always have ideas. We have had a lot of success with loans for tractors and pickups and we have good relations with granges. But individuals can’t afford such big items. It sounds like Wiki Bank has no plans for loans over 100 dhanay and we haven’t made loans of less than 500, so there’s a gap. Maybe we can figure out a way to close that gap.”

“That’s a good plan, Yimanu. Let’s meet on Tridiu morning.”

“Good.” He extended his hands and they shook. Then Chris turned away and walked back to the bank office. Most of the way there, Nina Maradar walked over to him. “Alláh-u-Abhá, Chris,” she said. “Any possibility we can get a branch on Sumilara?”

“Alláh-u-Abhá. Sure, I’d love to see it happen. If we can find a Bahá’í to run the branch there, so much the better. Wiki Bank’s values are Bahá’í principles, basically, especially equality of men and women. We want women to feel comfortable borrowing and feel empowered to set up small businesses.”

“Excellent. Randu and I will think about it and make some recommendations. Jordan might be able to help, too. He and Tiamaté are very active with the Bahá’ís on Primdius.”

“I’ve heard and I’ll ask him as well. Sumilara’s well positioned to benefit from small loans; the population’s very entrepreneurial.”

“Exactly, and sewing machines still have not penetrated very far. Thanks, I’ll try to get back to you at the national convention in three weeks.”

“Thank you, Nina.” Chris gave her a hug, as Bahá’ís were wont to do. He headed into the bank, while Nina walked over to a conversation between two women nearby.

“But what could I get with a loan?” asked one.

“You were the one who came to me asking about a loan,” replied the other, who was Kalané. “But take a look at our booklet.” She picked one up and opened to the inside spread. “Sewing machines, wood and gas stoves, ice boxes, knitting equipment, telephones—you can sell calls to people—kitchen equipment, bottles that seal tight for canning, farm tools, farm animals . . . the number under each one is the usual price.”

“But I have to be part of a solidarity group, and I’m sure there isn’t one in my village.”

“We’ll come and help start one.”

She laughed. “To *my* village? No one comes to my village.”

“We will. We have a pickup truck. It’s really a portable bank branch! What’s your village?”

“Dentastéa. I’m sure you haven’t heard of it.” She pointed to the picture of the ice box. “We don’t need ice boxes because there’s snow on the ground somewhere near us all summer.”

“So, you’re in the north polar basin.”

“Exactly! Drive to Bellédha and when you get to the intersection just east of the city walls you’ll see a sign pointing north and saying “21.” Take that to the end. It’s not much of a road, either; a little gravel in the ruts. But you can get a pickup through.”

“Then we’ll come! We plan to visit the north polar basin next month.”

“Really?” That surprised her.

“Really. What’s your name?”

“Dontané, wife of Weranu.”

“Do you have a family name?”

“We don’t have those in the basin.”

“We want particularly to encourage women to take loans so they can improve the lives of their families.”

“Really? Amazing idea; or maybe it’s a strange idea.”

“Well, times have changed. Women need money, too; with sewing machines they can clothe their kids better and make extra clothing for sale, with iron stoves they can heat their houses better without all the smoke, with ice boxes they can keep food cool enough so that it doesn’t go bad. We want to make everyone’s lives better, and the key to success is making the lives of women better.”

Dontané chuckled. “That’s true, the men will spend the extra on booze!”

“Wiki Bank represents an effort to foster the advancement of women,” added Kalané.

“Advancement? What does that mean?”

“Well; it means we can work too. We can learn to read and write, too.”

“It’s a new day,” added Nina. “In the past women had to give birth to many babies, nurse them, nurture them, and watch many of them die in their own short lives. But now we can bear and raise fewer children, watch them all grow up, and live longer, so we will have more time to do other things than housework. In this new day, women need to develop themselves. That’s part of what equality of men and women means. And it’s one reason why Wiki Bank was created.”

“I’m sorry, I don’t know who you are,” said Kalané.

“Nina Maradar. I teach nursing and health at Arjdhura Génadema, in both Sumi and Eryan.”

“Pleased to meet you.” Kalané extended her right hand and they touched hands. Dontané offered her hand as well, reluctantly.

“Pleased to meet you as well. You and your husband run the bank?” asked Nina.

“He’s the manager and I’m a loan officer. How are you connected to the bank?”

“I’m not, but Lord Kristoféru was telling a group of us about it over dinner a few weeks ago, so I know something about his thinking.”

“I need to know more about this idea of equality of men and women,” said Kalané.

“I’ll be glad to tell you what I know about it, some time,” said Nina. “I’m not sure anyone really understands it, of course; we’re still figuring it out. It’s a teaching of Bahá’u’lláh, not Widumaj, though Widumaj never said men had to be the boss all the time.”

“I see. Interesting.”

“I still don’t know what I’d borrow money for,” said Dontané.

“You’ve got a few weeks to think about it,” replied Kalané. “It’s not our job to tell people what to borrow money for! You decide what you want to do and we’ll make the loan. But you have to pay the loan back with interest, so it’s a serious decision.”

“Oh, I see,” said Dontané, suddenly understanding what they were talking about. Kalané was surprised; she and Nina gave each other knowing looks.

Reread and edited, 6/13/13, 8/25/17, 11/25/24

A New Five Year Plan

The devotional program in the Mæddwoglubas House of Worship was glorious, with a series of excellent chanters chanting Bahá'í prayers, a few hymns of Widumaj, and a passage or two from the Bible and Qur'án. Once it concluded, the thousand people gathered inside headed in two directions: the six hundred with Convention badges went downstairs to the newly completed basement auditorium and the rest went outside, some to their homes and others to the old fort, where they could listen to the convention in several large rooms.

The new basement auditorium was impressively decorated with molded plaster designs and brightly illuminated by hundreds of lights. Once everyone had filed in and sat in their seats, Modolubu walked to the platform in front. "Alláh-u-Abhá, dear friends," he began. "The Central Spiritual Assembly asked me to open this eleventh annual convention with a report about our progress. We have just successfully completed our first Five Year Plan. Its success can be measured in various ways, but the growth of the Faith is an obvious one; from about 3,000 believers, we increased to about 15,000. But let us review our various goals. First: complete and dedicate this House of Worship. As you can see, that has been accomplished." He pointed to the building around him while everyone applauded. "Second: start the House of Worship in Melwika and complete it in six years. It is basically finished now, in five years, and will be dedicated this summer." He had to stop for more clapping. "Third: Embark on a major literacy project using Bahá'í materials and train ten thousand people how to read and write. This

has been accomplished as a result of the youth teams, which have gone out for three summers, and through local study groups sponsored by Bahá'í communities. We do not have an exact count of how many people now can read and write as a result of our efforts. Some started their effort with us and completed it with an evening class at a school; others started with an evening class and really learned through study of the Ruhi books and the Bahá'í scriptures. Overall, we helped close to ten thousand people to learn to read.”

Again there was applause; Modolubu could see there would be applause after each point. “Fourth: double the number of local spiritual assemblies. We more than accomplished this, raising the total beyond the goal of 75 to 79. This means that almost one third of all villages and towns in the world have a spiritual assembly. The number of local Bahá'í Centers was to increase to eighteen and it grew to fifteen; very close. There are plans to build six or seven more, so we think the goal will be accomplished by the end of the summer. We set a goal of purchasing a permanent Bahá'í conference center and ultimately decided not to pursue that goal at this time; instead, we built this auditorium so that the temple itself could host large gatherings.

“Fifth: ‘Greatly increase the number of regular devotional gatherings, children’s and youth classes, and institute classes, and ensure that Feasts and Holy Days are observed in every Bahá'í community.’ Our rough statistics suggest that devotional meetings have increased from twenty-five to about one hundred ten per month, children’s classes from about twenty to about eighty per month, and institute classes from about fifteen to about fifty per month. So this has been accomplished. The number of communities holding Feasts and Holy Days have increased from thirty to seventy, so we

remain below the goal of holding them everywhere, but that's because the number of communities has increased so fast.

“Sixth: ‘Strengthen our relationship with the governments in order to serve the world more effectively.’ This clearly has been accomplished through the Development Corps, the youth teams, and general knowledge of the Faith among lords.

“That, my friends, is what we have accomplished in the past five years. Could you have imagined that we would have achieved so many victories? I am amazed when I think about everything we have done! What can we do in the next five years?” He paused for applause and to let the audience consider the question.

“The CSA has deliberated long and carefully about the next Five Year Plan. Our six Auxiliaries, led by Lady Liz, have been instrumental in giving us a sense of what is going on locally and regionally and advising us what strengths need to be developed further. Many of you have proposed ideas as well, and we are very grateful. We have arrived at the following goals:

“First: We will initiate construction on two Houses of Worship, one in Khermdhuna and one on Sumilara, location to be determined. The temples may take six or eight years to complete; we do not anticipate they will be finished before this plan runs its course. In subsequent plans we will look to build one temple in every province.

“Second: We will aim to increase participation in the Bahá'í Fund significantly. Currently, we have only a few hundred contributions per Bahá'í month. The friends, used to aristocrats and the wealthy telling them what to do and patronizing joint projects, are not accustomed to viewing the Fund as a universal spiritual obligation. A farmer giving a dontay every Bahá'í month may be making a greater sacrifice than a merchant giving a

hundred dhanay. The amount is not as important as the commitment to the Fund and the sacrifice we all must make to help our beloved Faith grow. The Faith belongs to all of us, and it is common sacrifice and effort that strengthens it. This is a world that understands the idea of sacrifice. Accomplishing this goal is essential for all the other goals to be efficacious.

“Third—though it really should be listed first—we will continue to expand the core activities. We have community sponsored devotional programs, classes for children and youth, and Ruhi classes for adults, but we still have very, very few such programs and classes conducted by individuals. This is a Faith with no priests; that means all of us individually have the obligations that priests usually carry. All of you who are here at this convention are active, understand the basics of the Faith, and are committed to it. Just in this room, we have the capability to create hundreds and hundreds of classes and devotionals. Let us all make an individual commitment to carry out at least one of these core activities on a regular basis. Those of us in this room could win the goals of the new plan overnight if we made that commitment. Furthermore, those here can serve as coordinators to encourage more individual activity; indeed, you may be appointed in the next few months.

“Fourth: We must continue the processes leading to entry by troops. There is no guarantee that the population of this world will remain receptive. We have been picking the low-hanging fruit. People in the cities are much less receptive than the population of the villages, even though they should be more attracted. There is a window of time when the new knowledge raises receptivity; then people adjust to it and cease to be as interested. The window of receptivity for most of this world’s population is gradually

closing and teaching will get harder. The solution is to use the core activities to attract people, the Ruhi books to consolidate them, and to initiate intensive programs of growth every three or four months to attract seekers to these activities. We have been gradually learning how to do this; now we need to begin using it effectively and spread the model to more and more places.

“Fifth: To accomplish all this, the Central Spiritual Assembly plans to consult with the Auxiliaries to appoint cluster committees and coordinators of training institutes, children’s classes, youth activities, and devotions. In the past, lack of transportation and communication, and lack of trained people, made it difficult to create functioning clusters. The friends live in villages and are not used to traveling to other villages. A committee consisting of members in several villages had trouble meeting; a committee based in one village tended to function for that village only and was not very effective beyond it. But in the last few years, we have had a notable increase in experienced Bahá’ís. More and more people have gotten used to traveling. Buses have gotten cheap enough to rent for the day. Pickups, bikes, and wagons are more common. As a result, cluster reflection meetings and committees are now possible.

“Sixth: we must continue our commitment to social and economic development. The Bahá’í Faith represents a path to creating an ever-advancing civilization, and that is not purely a spiritual process, though it is primarily spiritual. Adult literacy, encouraging women’s activities, educating our children, and small business projects are all valid means for accomplishing this goal. More and more resources are available, through women’s gabrulis, Wiki Bank loans, granges, and local business groups. Bahá’ís as individuals, groups, and Assemblies can encourage use of all these means; they can help

create granges, gabrulis, chambers of commerce, and village development plans with their non-Bahá'í neighbors. Social and economic development projects will be a powerful source of attraction, demonstrating our love for all human beings in very concrete and practical terms, and in ways that will encourage people to attend core activities, thus learning more about the Faith.

“That’s the Plan! The social and economic development projects, devotionals, and classes will attract people and bring the revelation of Bahá'u'lláh to them in a coherent fashion. Assemblies will naturally and organically form. As people dedicate themselves to Bahá'u'lláh, they will sacrifice time and treasure to His Faith, providing the resources for temples, local centers, and group businesses. The Bahá'í community will grow in size, capacities, and spiritual strength, attracting others. Such is our vision. But you are the ones who will accomplish the vision. We pray to Bahá'u'lláh continuously that every Bahá'í on Éra will arise and win great victories.”

The audience rose to its feet to applaud. Jordan, sitting behind the delegates in the section for registered guests, felt a thrill when he heard the plan and leapt to his feet to cheer. Several people turned around to see who had made the noise; he was surprised by the depth of his response.

Applause gradually diminished and the audience sat again. Lord Estodhéru, chair of the Central Spiritual Assembly, rose and invited comments from the delegates. “I like this plan,” Jordan whispered to Tiamaté, seated to his right. “It’s more . . . coherent than the last.”

Tiamaté nodded, but the young woman seated to Jordan’s left shook her head. “I don’t agree. If you want a coherent plan, you just do core activities and teach people to do

intensive programs of growth. Add anything to that and you dilute the focus and attention and slow down the Faith's growth."

Jordan turned to her, a bit surprised by her comment. He realized she was Moniké Tokter, a Khermdhunan and the former fiancé of Khwanu Khermdhunai, the bright young doctor martyred by several anti-Bahá'í murderers last summer. She was known as a fiercely zealous Bahá'í, partly because of his death.

"Honored lady, you saw the work of the youth team last summer in Khermdhuna. They were instrumental in bringing most of the remaining Kristanes into the Faith. That was done through a combination of things; Ruhi classes, devotionals, children's classes, but also all sorts of mechanical classes and efforts to provide water from hot springs to the houses for winter warmth. They were a practical combination."

She shook her head. "Even though they helped to persuade a few people through their service, we don't have the time to raise the villagers economically. Bring them into the Faith! Then they'll raise themselves up. Otherwise we're splitting up our resources, diverting some people into indirect efforts when direct ones are more effective, and slowing down the conversion of the masses. We can bring everyone into the Faith in a lifetime! What you're proposing will take a century instead."

"I do not agree. First of all, while some people are good at Ruhi, others prefer to do other things. If you shut down the social and economic development projects, you won't necessarily get more Ruhi classes; what you may get is more inactive Bahá'ís who could contribute to the Faith in other ways. Not everyone is suited to do one thing. Some are happy to do some Ruhi as long as they can do other kinds of classes."

“Then they are not fully loyal to the Universal House of Justice, which has emphasized the core activities and Ruhi in particular for some time. That’s our priority and our path, and we know it works. When I teach the Ruhi books to my friends, they invariably respond positively. And if I deviate from the text of the books even by one word, their minds start to wander! Believe me, Honored Jordan, this is the way and the life. If we bring the people in, once they start to connect their hearts to Bahá’u’lláh and say the obligatory prayers, once they look forward to an afterlife with Him forever, this transforms them. *That’s* what we have to do, not teach literacy or equality of women, let alone how to do plumbing and fix steam engines. Studying the word: literacy and equality will come anyway, and eventually they—or the palace—will teach mechanics.”

“Moniké, the Universal House of Justice never said that the focus had to be exclusively on Ruhi. In fact, it even said that the ‘institutions of the Faith will continue to respect the wishes of those who, for whatever reason, do not feel inclined to study the books of the Ruhi Institute.’ So this is not obligatory. They have been building temples and encouraging social and economic development projects on Gædhéma, too. Let’s encourage people to find their talents and serve the Faith through them. That’s the way to create an active, vibrant, exciting community.”

“Jordan, perhaps building temples and carrying out social and economic development projects should continue at some low level, but they are not the priority. Our Five Year Plan needs to focus on the priority—core activities, Ruhi, bringing people in. We are helpless without members; the more Bahá’ís, the more the revelation will be taken seriously. These other things can wait until we have a lot more members. Right now, *we need Bahá’ís.*”

“But we don’t just need a big number, that’s what I’m trying to explain. People can complete Ruhi without being able to read and write, but they have to be able to read in order to study the revelation. Reading the Iqan, studying the word daily, having your own prayer book and being able to read the prayers—these nurture the soul. Ruhi can be finished in a year, and then what? People need to study the Word as well as teach. They need to demonstrate the teachings in their lives, not just mouth the words to others. And when they become well rounded human beings, able to do many different things, they can explain the Faith to people so much more effectively.”

“Eventually, sure, but right now, if they want to explain the Faith, they can memorize Anna’s Presentation. If they want to demonstrate the teachings, gather youth and teach them virtues; they can work some literacy in, sure, to make it attractive. We want people to be able to read so they can study the Word of God; the House of Justice has said so. But they never said people should be able to write, just that they should be able to read!”

Jordan was startled by that observation. He was about to quote `Abdu’l-Bahá’s words about how people had to be articulate in order to explain their grievances, when Tiamaté poked him in the ribs. He looked at her; she shook her head. She was right; Moniké was not going to be convinced. “Perhaps we should continue this another time, Moniké, because we should be listening to the delegates.”

Moniké nodded. “Suit yourself, Jordan.”

He turned toward the front of the room to listen to a delegate, who was talking about how well the Néfa community was implementing the core activities and bringing people in through monthly dinners at the Bahá’í Center. He was so agitated by Moniké’s

comments that he found himself unable to pay attention to the consultations. Finally he rose, squeezed past a dozen people, and headed out of the auditorium to get some fresh air. Tiamaté was right behind him.

“Don’t let her get you all upset. She has her opinion.”

“I know, but she’s a . . . Ruhi fanatic! You can’t convince her that maybe a few people occasionally should do a few other things for the Faith, and if they do, they aren’t being disloyal to Bahá’u’lláh.”

“I know. There are other Ruhi zealots, though not too many, fortunately. I was surprised she was so rigid about following it exactly; the instructions clearly call for creativity and flexibility. But never mind. Your decision to go into development really isn’t neutralized by her. We know it’s important, too, and the Central Spiritual Assembly said so in its plan.”

“I know. It’s a shame religion attracts a certain amount of fanaticism!”

“At least we aren’t going to kill anyone.”

“True.” He smiled at that comment. “Thanks, you’re good at calming me down.”

“I’m becoming an expert, I guess!”

He laughed at that. They turned to walk back in, but just as they did, Tomasu Miller came out the door as well. “Hey, Jor,” he said.

“Tomasu! Abhá!”

“Abhá. I can only listen to so much consultation; after a while, it gets a bit boring.”

“It’s the process that’s important,” agreed Jordan, repeating a common explanation for the slow, often disjointed discussions that occurred at the Convention.

“So, how’s Anartu?”

“Pretty interesting. It’s taken quite a while to get a work crew that knows how to follow the blueprints and produce quality construction, and quite a while to get the financial side working efficiently. That’s been really hard and frustrating. But now we’re moving along pretty well—about three weeks behind schedule, but I think we might catch up some. The first biogas unit arrived last week and we’re experimenting with it. The first blue water gas production units arrive in a month or so, followed by the parts for the lime kilns, the sawmill, and the wood chipper. My dad arrives next week to start training the pipeline crew.”

“That’s moving along pretty fast, then. I envy you; that’s such a big project.”

“Well, it sort of fell into my lap because I spoke Sumi! I have two experienced accountants helping, and now there’s a Sumi who worked on the Nuarjora and Gramakwés plants who’s construction supervisor, along with a very capable foreman who is serving as contractor. The key’s the team, I guess.”

“And making it work!”

“That’s the tricky part. I call my grandfather daily for advice about that!”

Just then, Chris Mennea came out the door to the temple’s basement and stopped to join their circle. “I’ve got to stretch my legs; they get stiff and tired really quickly, at age 69,” he said. “How are you doing, Tomasu?”

“Pretty well. I’m still tired from the time zone shift.”

“You’ll be mostly adjusted about the time the convention’s over! So, you’ve got two weeks left to your spring term.”

“Yeah, and I have three final exams to prepare for, plus two long papers to write! It’s going to be really bad. And I plan to do two more courses during short spring term 1. But then I’ll have a dwoyeri and I’ll be done for a while. I’m not planning to become a doctor or teacher, after all.”

“Marriage?”

Tomasu shrugged. “I don’t have anyone in mind, yet.”

“Are you going to participate in a youth team this summer?”

“I really want to, but dad wants me to get some work experience, either in Miller Motors, or one of its subsidiaries, or somewhere else.” He sighed. “So I guess I have to enter the real world.”

“Do you want a suggestion?”

Tomasu’s eyes lit up. “Sure!”

“The other day we approved the production of biogas units for sale to anyone; granges, groups of houses, villages, anyone. The basic design can be made in a variety of sizes to serve from one or two houses up to about twenty. We have staff, but we’re looking for a company president and investors. With the help of my tomi or your father’s to keep track of income and expenses, I think you could run such a company, especially since you know people in about fifty of the two hundred fifty villages across the world.”

“Really? So, I’d run it, or do sales for it?”

“Both. The main thing this company will do is sell and install the biogas units; a grange or village would own and operate them as their own miniature gas company. Your main tasks would be sales—that’s where all your contacts come in—installation, which

draws on your mechanical and engineering skills, and training people how to maintain the units. You could do that just fine.”

“So; we’re not talking about building units that will be part of a separate biogas company, or that will be part of the World Gas Company?”

“Correct; the Biogas Company will produce, sell, and install units. It may sell and install some for the World Gas Company, but that’s a separate contract.”

“So are we talking about setting up competition for World Gas? How will that work?”

“Good question. If World Gas extended a pipeline through an area where there’s biogas, the biogas producer would have three options. One is to abandon biogas for World Gas’s product, but that’s unlikely because biogas is actually higher quality and may be cheaper; the twenty-household unit will cost about a thousand dhanay. World Gas has to spend more than twice as much per customer on infrastructure to make and distribute gas, though operating costs are lower. The second option is to ignore World Gas, though that might not be wise because biogas production can’t handle peak winter heating needs. The third option is to use both. Biogas can easily be cleaned enough to be added to pipelines; all one adds is a unit filled with lime water. The raw gas is bubbled through the lime water, the lime binds to the carbon dioxide and removes it, and the gas exiting the unit is nearly pure methane. Biogas can also be compressed reasonably easily. The digesters are cylinders of concrete set underground, and they are enclosed by a cylindrical iron cap that fits snugly inside the concrete cylinder. When the bacteria produce gas, it accumulates under the domed top of the iron cylinder and once the pressure builds up, it starts to lift the iron cap out of the concrete container. The iron

cylinder is heavy and it can be weighed down with sand bags to make it heavier, so the gas gets compressed to half an atmosphere or more as it accumulates. The idea is to accumulate enough gas every day to run gas stoves. A big digester can make enough to heat a house, but then you have to run it with a very small load of manure and plant waste in the summer, so you aren't using it very efficiently."

"The one we've just installed in Anartu has proved tricky to run effectively," said Jordan. "It takes some skill to keep the temperature right and balance the carbon to nitrogen ratio in the feedstock. But once the operator gets pretty good, I gather they run pretty well."

"The operator's the big cost," agreed Chris. "The ideal situation is a village of, say, 150 houses employing one person full time to keep five or ten units charged up and functioning. If there's a grange that's even better, since granges already process and distribute manure as fertilizer."

"Interesting," said Tomasu. "How long will each job take?"

"The idea is to train local people to do most of the work pouring the concrete and laying the pipe; that minimizes installation costs and biogas company staffing. The twenty-household unit can be constructed by five or six people over five or six weeks; that includes one outside supervisor and one or two part-time specialists to complete some difficult aspects of the work. They might be able to drive back and forth and handle two or three installations at once, spending a few hours a day at each site. We're still working on a plan to make installation as simple and error-free as possible. Gas pipes, for example, will be threaded so they can be screwed together, eliminating the need for welds."

“That will make the installation of water systems easier as well. This is a very interesting idea, but I can’t do anything for almost two months, since I’m still in school.”

“I can make this offer to you, like the offer I made Jordan. During spring term 2, one of your two courses can be setting up the company. We have staff who know how to build and run the units; they’ve been accumulating experience since last summer. But none of them are managers; they’re mechanics and engineers. We’ve already sunk sixty thousand dhanay into development and we’ve installed prototypes in Melwika, Gramakwés, and Anartu. The design has gone through four rounds of revision and experimentation, so it’s ready.”

“I have one elective course I can take, so sure, that would work. What, exactly, is left to do that we’d include in the course?”

“We need to do some preliminary marketing to get a sense of demand, which will give us an idea how big the initial order of parts should be. That’s where your contacts come in, and mine with the granges. The Foundry and the other suppliers will then give us a price bid, which in some cases we’ll negotiate. From the prices we’ll be able to finalize the unit costs and that will allow us to refine our marketing. That process will take about two months; the next term is a month long, so we’ll do most of it then. Then you’ll graduate and can start traveling around to install the units.”

Tomasu nodded. “Okay. You also said you’re seeking investment, which I suppose will cover the purchase of the parts for the units and the initial salaries. How much is that, and where is it coming from?”

Chris smiled. “You ask the right questions, Tomasu. Let’s say we order 25 complete units; the wholesale cost will be about 600 dhanay each. Setting up an office,

purchasing a pickup or two and other equipment, printing stationery, and paying employees for maybe as much as a year—because many purchasers will have to pay in installments—will cost maybe 25,000. I'll invest it myself unless I have another source.”

“I bet I can get that from dad. What would I get, then, in terms of profits?”

“Like I said, we've spent 60,000. Another 25,000 is thirty percent of the total investment, so an investment of that size would get thirty percent of the profits. As investor and as company president, you'd have 50% of the votes; Behruz and I, the other 50%.”

“And if there are 20,000 households that could get gas this way, that's 1,000 units, at about a thousand dhanay each. At the usual ten percent profit margin, that's 100,000 in profits altogether.”

Chris nodded. “That's one scenario. It's unlikely we'd sell that many, and the initial costs will be high because of lack of training and experience. I wouldn't be surprised if the first units cost 1,200 to install, before profit. There's the issue of how much profit is ethical, also. We're helping poorer people. But we have to make some profit, and ten percent is not unreasonable.”

“It's strange, looking at this from the other side. I'm used to going to the villages and hearing their complaints about how expensive things are and how much the city manufacturers are exploiting them, but once you see the actual costs and needs, you see why.”

“Exactly. You want to get back to me about this tomorrow?”

Tomasu nodded. “Sure, let me sleep on it.”

Reread and edited 6/13/13, 8/26/17, 11/25/24

353.

Competition

20 Dhébalménu/9 May, yr. 15/633

A week later, finished with his final exams for spring term one, Tomasu Miller found himself going to Anartu with Behruz to see the gas company's efforts there. It was a humid spring afternoon when Jordan brought them to the gas plant.

"Wow, a lot has been completed in two months!" exclaimed Behruz, as they stopped by the plant. The fifteen by ten meter foundation—which had been 2.5 centimeters short, but that had been fixed when an extra layer of concrete had been added to the base—was now one quarter covered by a gas furnace built of firebrick and standing eight meters tall.

"The men had put a lot of work into it and have done an excellent job," agreed Jordan, gesturing at Libbanu, who was not far away. He pointed out the various features for Tomasu's benefit. "That square opening will have a metal door on it and is for removing ash. It opens straight into the bottom of the furnace. Wood, charcoal, or coal will be fed in from the top; about 20 kilograms per hour. It'll land on metal grates with progressively smaller openings; as the material burns, it falls toward the bottom.

"On both the right and left sides are chimneys filled with a latticework of bricks. Initially, air will flow into the furnace through the latticework of bricks on the right side. The air enters the furnace at the bottom and is blasted up through the fuel; then it exits into the left-hand chimney, travels up and down down through the latticework of bricks to heat them to a high temperature, then back up another passage partially blocked by a

lattice of bricks, then finally out into the sky. Once the bricks in the left-hand chimney are at maximum temperature, the air supply is cut off and steam is injected into the left hand chimney. It passes backward through the chimney and picks up considerable heat, enters the furnace at the bottom, and passes up through the fuel mixture, producing carbon monoxide and hydrogen. At the top of the furnace, certain doors having been closed mechanically, the blue water gas is exited into another chamber behind us, from which it is pumped into a pipeline. Once the production cycle ends because the temperature has dropped too low, the water gas outlet closes, the chimney outlet opens again, and air is fed back into the furnace to fire it up again, but this time from the left side, in order to heat up the entering air. The exhaust goes out the right-hand chimney, heating those bricks to a high temperature. Then they're used to superheat the steam, etc. Production involves four cycles, with the exhaust exiting and the steam entering alternately between the left and right sides."

"Clever," said Tomasu. "It's big and involves fans; I can see why it costs so much. It doesn't make gas constantly, right?"

"Correct, it alternates every five or ten seconds," said Behruz. "The production of water gas is an endothermic reaction, so it cools off the carbon source. If you do a single-cycle production, the water gas is full of carbon dioxide and it has to be scrubbed out, which adds cost. If you use two gas furnaces, one can be making gas while the other is burning fuel to make heat."

"How will you get the fuel into the top?"

"A conveyor belt, which will be able to feed fuel to four different units. The saw mill and chipper will be very close, so the wood doesn't have to travel very far."

Tomasu nodded. “Chemistry never interested me very much, but here, it’s fascinating! Are you going to do biogas here, too?”

“The digesters will go in the field over there,” replied Jordan, pointing. “But we still don’t have a source of animal manure. Bilara’s forming a grange, but it’s nine kilometers away. Anartu has plenty of animals, but each farmer has one, which makes manure collection complicated. We could try a donate-and-swap; the farmer would arrive with manure and leave with the equivalent amount of fertilizer.”

“Tricky; the residue is better fertilizer, but takes up half as much volume, and it’s hard to explain that,” said Tomasu. “You’d need to give them extra to make it worthwhile to them, or pay for the manure.”

“Bilara’s opening a dairy, so they’re the easier source.”

“Then put the digesters there,” suggested Tomasu. “Bilara needs gas, too.”

“Two problems,” replied Behruz. “The Sumi investors want a big central gas plant; the Anartu plant is the compromise. And they’re sensitive about the fact that Bilara is about one third Bahá’í.”

“And they want pipelines everywhere,” added Jordan.

Tomasu scowled. “Why? Biogas can be made where it’s needed, it’s cheap, and this island has virtually no winter so gas demand is pretty even.”

“We told them. We need to make biogas in a lot of places, but they will need water gas in the bigger cities and the Galulia industrial plant. It may make sense to connect them together by pipeline, so they can back each other up in case there are production problems.”

“I see,” said Tomasu. “So, where should I go to pursue biogas?”

“Sipadananga,” replied Jordan. “Tiamaté can go with you to translate. The village was very remote until the ferry began to arrive there. It’ll be one of the last places to get a pipeline. But it has a Bahá’í community and they’re interested in development. They’d support gas.”

“Alright,” said Tomasu. “Tomorrow, then?”

Jordan nodded. “So, shall we talk to the staff, then?” said Behruz. “The pipeline technicians arrive tomorrow. We have the route planned, right?”

“Yes, and the city lord has approved it. The first pipe goes from here straight across the center of the city past all the major businesses and the larger houses. They all want gas, and the sooner the better.”

“We’ll get it to them by the end of the summer,” said Behruz. “Is the pipeline crew here, too?”

“Yes, they’re working on the saw mill foundation. I’ll gather everyone together.”

Jordan collected together the workers. Behruz—translated by Jordan—thanked them for the high quality of their work, assured them of a lot more work for the next year or two, and said that the pipeline technicians would be arriving tomorrow. Then he spent time with the pipeline crew, meeting each one, asking each one what he brings to the project and what he thinks of it, and briefing them generally about the type of work they’d be doing and the problems they’d encounter. Tomasu was impressed; Behruz was usually shy and quiet, but he was a clear, articulate, and stern boss.

The three of them walked the site further, then headed back to the Anartu Palace Hotel. Tomasu was up at dawn and anxious to get going to Sipadananga. Tiamaté hurried

to get ready. “You drive,” she said as they walked downstairs. “I can drive, but I’m still not comfortable with it.”

“Can we go via Bilara and Anarbala? I’d like to see the Bahá’í village, the dairy, and the site of the water gas plant in Anarbala.”

“Yes, we can go that way.” It wasn’t the usual route, but the network of gravel roads was now pretty good.

They got in, lit the furnace, waited for the steam engine to warm up, then headed north. As soon as they exited the city gate and started up the wide, graveled surface of Route 36, Tomasu said, “So, what are the chances of a revolt?”

Tiamaté shook her head. “Right now, zero. The palace has made it clear that if the island tries to revolt, it’ll be completely cut off from everything; light bulbs, telephones, steam engines, even medicines. And they don’t rule out bombing the island with airplanes, either. The wealthy would never tolerate an embargo and the lords don’t want to see destruction of infrastructure, so they’re keeping the hotheads under control.”

“That makes sense. And the army’s leaving?”

“Mostly. They’re reducing the garrison to five hundred older soldiers who are absolutely loyal to the crown and who are very professional. No young hothead recruits to make trouble with the Sumis.”

Tomasu nodded, digesting the information. It was good to hear that financial investments were likely safe, even though his business was selling things for payment within a year or so. He saw a wagon coming down the road loaded with firewood. “So, where’s that coming from? Where do people get their firewood?”

“The cities get it from the forests on the island. The south shore doesn’t have much drowned forest because most of the nearby seabottom is former farmland. Most of the wood used to come down the river from the highland edge, which is heavily forested. Now it comes down the road, increasingly in trucks. Farmers usually own woodlots; a typical family has about fifteen agris, and two or three are forested. The farmer takes his ox and two-wheeled cart out to one of his farm plots for a day’s work, and swings past his woodlot on the way home to collect several days’ firewood.”

“What’s the price of firewood in the cities?”

“It has come down as a result of the roads, but it’s still about a dhanay a week.”

“Twice the price of gas,” said Tomasu, nodding.

Bilara was only ten minutes away, though a decade ago it would have been half a morning’s walk. They drove at forty-five kilometers per hour, the speed limit, past rice paddies greenening with their second crop, vegetable gardens, fallow fields of hay, and scattered wood lots. When they came to Bilara’s central plaza, Tiamaté pointed. “Turn right if you want to see the dairy.”

Tomasu nodded and turned right. In a minute they reached the eastern edge of the village. The Bahá’í Center was on the south side of the road; on the north side was the dairy, then the grange. They stopped in front of the Bahá’í Center and Tiamaté pointed things out to Tomasu, who nodded with interest. Then she saw someone come out of the Bahá’í Center. “There’s Buzur, Secretary of the Spiritual Assembly. He’s Randu’s first cousin.”

“We should say hello.” Tomasu closed the steam car’s firebox and they got out.

“Alláh-u-Abhá!” exclaimed Tiamaté. “How are you, honored Buzur.”

“Very well, honored Tiamaté. Are you visiting us?”

“No, I’m driving Tomasu Miller to Sipadananga and he wanted to see the dairy farm, grange, and Bahá’í Center.”

“Alláh-u-Abhá. Tomasu Miller,” said Tomasu offering his hands.

“Alláh-u-Abhá. Pleased to meet you. Buzur Kanpa.”

Buzur spoke in Eryan; he knew a little. “What brings you to the island?”

Tiamaté translated the last part. “I’m here to find customers for our new biogas company.”

“Biogas?” said Buzur, without waiting for the translation.

Tiamaté translated. “How do you say ‘biogas’ in Sumi?” she added.

Buzur shrugged. “We just say ‘biogas!’ So, he’s selling them? How much?”

Tomasu was surprised when he heard the translation. “They know about biogas here? Most of the Eryan speaking villages have never heard of it!”

Buzur laughed when he heard the translation. He pointed to the Bahá’í Center.

“We have a big dinner every Suksdiu evening. Everyone in the village is invited, most people bring food, and then we have entertainment, which includes reading from the newspapers. We have a couple of people who can translate the articles into Sumi as they read, so we always read from the Melwika Nues. There was a good article about biogas a few weeks ago.”

Tomasu nodded once he understood. “That was a good article; I have copies of it with me, in fact. Bilara would need two or three digesters, fueled by the manure of 100 or 150 animals plus three or four bales of straw or equivalent every day. It’d make enough gas for 200 or 300 stoves.”

“How much?” asked Buzur, a twinkle in his eye.

“Each digester will be 1,000 to 1,500; we’re still not sure. The pipes along the village streets will add maybe 2,000. But it’ll have to be run by one or two persons full time, so there’s the salary.”

“And the cost of getting the fuel; but who wants manure?” said Buzur, after translation. “Everyone who wants the gas will have to buy a stove, but that’ll cost more. This is a perfect project for the grange. We’ve been trying to get it going, but since everyone owns their own land and has their own farm animals, there’s not a lot of interest in sharing a tractor or even pooling doctor’s costs. We have agreed to get a pickup truck to move produce and tools, and we have a common granary, and we have started coordinating labor needs. This is a business we could initiate quite well.”

“Are you head of the grange?” asked Tomasu.

Buzur shook his head. “No, but I am on the Board. We talked about biogas already. Providence has sent you here, I think. Bilara has lots of animal and plant waste and we were wondering whether we could convert it into gas and sell it through a pipeline to Anartu. We have people working on the gas plant and they said there’s a plan to build a pipeline through here.”

Tomasu laughed when he heard the translation. “Bilara knows what’s going on! The company is planning to make biogas and I think they’re planning to buy it.”

“Excellent! Can you arrange it?”

That request startled Tomasu. “I’ll try, but Tiamaté knows everyone involved better than I do. I’ll have to come back in a month or so to finalize everything. We are still not sure how expensive the equipment will be, and there are issues of financing.”

“Of course. Be sure to come back and meet with the Grange Board. Would you like a fast tour?”

Tomasu didn't feel he could refuse a tour, so they walked around the grange and the dairy barn; the latter was owned by the second son of the village priest, who was also on the grange board and very interested in biogas. When they left Bilara half an hour later, Tomasu was in a state of amazement.

“I think Esto *did* want me to stop here!”

“”I guess so. Jordan has talked about buying biogas from villages; he might have even said something to Libannu, the foreman, who has cousins here. Maybe that set the stage for this conversation.”

“A pipeline to Bilara will prove necessary, then.”

“I guess so.”

They returned to Bilara's central square and turned right, or north. In a few minutes the road rose steeply up a very long slope; the edge of the central plateau, which was a hundred meters higher than the coastal plain. A side road pointed to “Anartu Hydro,” a hydroelectric plant recently completed to power the area by the Anar River's cascading waters. Numerous narrow dirt tracks snaked into the rainforest to various wood lots; in places the road passed through clearings. Once the road reached the plateau, the forest was once again replaced by paddies and fields. In ten minutes they had reached Anarbala, “the queen of the plateau,” a bustling town of 3,000 people.

“This place looks in better shape than Bilara!”

“Much of it has been rebuilt since the volcanic eruption,” agreed Tiamaté. “Bilara didn't get enough ash to suffer serious damage. Anarbala doubled in size when farmers

from the drowned shorelands moved here. This is the center of culture on the plateau; before the highway, it had a road down the slope to the place where the Anar became navigable to small boats. So it had pretty good transportation to Anartu.”

“What’s that?” Tomasu pointed to an old palace, next to a temple to the god Enlil.

“That’s the génadema; it’s reasonably good but very traditional, as it’s primarily for sons of the aristocracy. We’re going behind it. Turn there.”

Tomasu nodded and turned right from Route 35, a north-south route, onto Route 36, which headed east to Galulia. But as soon as he passed the génadema he turned left onto a lane that passed the side of the old palace. Behind it was a big field, part of which was used as a soccer field. At the far end was a new palace, half built, and past it was a field.

“Stop! This is it.”

Tomasu stopped the car. “So, nothing to see, yet.” He turned off the firebox and opened the door.

“You’re getting out?” Tiamaté was surprised.

“Sure, I’ll take a look.” He stepped out, so she did as well, and he walked onto the field to view it. “What are they getting here?”

“A water gas plant, probably in mid summer, with pipe laying to start immediately if we can get the workers.”

“No biogas?”

“There are no plans, but Anarbala has good agriculture, so it could support one.”

“Good. There’s plenty of room for one.”

“The water gas plant will have a hard time getting wood here, unless we cut the plateau edge forest.”

Just then, two men stepped out of the half-built palace nearby. Tiamaté eyed them nervously. “Oh, they are coming this way. We’re trespassing.”

“Should we explain to them?”

“Yes, I think so.”

So they turned and walked down the dirt road toward the building. The men saw them coming and waited, rather than walk all the way. As Tiamaté and Tomasu drew close, one man recognized her. “Oh, honored Tiamaté. What brings you here?”

“I am driving Honored Tomasu Miller around. He’s president of the new Biogas Company.”

“Miller?” said the man. “Son of John Miller?”

“I am,” said Tomasu, for the man was speaking Eryan rather than Sumi.

“He’s on the island for a week to see the gas company’s plans and arrange the purchase of biogas digesters.”

“Then he should speak to the Countess, don’t you think? Come back to the palace.”

“Countess?” said Tomasu, puzzled.

“Lady Ninti, former Princess, widow of Prince Meméjékwu, now Countess of Anar,” replied Tiamaté. Tomasu’s eyes grew large with surprise.

“Come,” said the man in a welcoming manner.

They turned and walked back to the palace. Most of it was unfinished, but one wing was complete. As soon as they entered the sitting room, Lady Ninti rose. “What a

surprise, Honored Tiamaté! My servants were most concerned to see strangers walking in the field.”

“Honored Lady, this is Tomasu Miller, son of John Miller and president of the Biogas Company. He is on the island with my father in law for almost a week, and one reason he is here is to find customers interested in buying biogas digesters.”

“I’m very pleased to meet you,” replied Ninti, extending her hand.

“Thank you, honored Lady. We had no intention of disturbing you.” Tomasu shook her hand. “I asked Tiamaté to show me the site of the future gas plant.”

“It’ll be in my backyard; I’m the principal investor. Please sit and make yourselves comfortable.” She pointed to pillows on the floor and they all sat. “So, what is biogas? Is this the plant to make gas from cow manure?”

“Yes, exactly right, honored lady. The manure from one cow or ox can produce enough gas to cook one family’s meals.”

“So I’ve heard; I am intrigued. Do you want to site a digester here at the plant?”

“That’s up to you. I sell digesters and help set them up, but the Biogas Company doesn’t own them. They’re owned by villages, granges, wealthy individuals . . . anyone who wants to buy one.”

“Really? You mean there’s no single Biogas company, like World Gas Company?”

“Correct. Biogas is a local thing, dependent on local manure and plant waste. Every village would have its own production facility and its own pipes.”

“No pipeline between villages?”

“Perhaps, if a village produces extra gas. Bilara has a grange and therefore can organize use of its manure and green waste to export gas.”

“I see. Intriguing. How much?”

“A typical village needs 1 or 2 digesters, at maybe 1,500 dhanay each, and about a kilometer of distribution pipes, costing 3,000 more, plus a full-time worker to feed and maintain the digester.”

She laughed. “That’s all? That’s a lot less than the water gas plant!”

“It produces less gas and is more labor intensive than water gas, and there’s the problem of supply; the system has to use a fair amount of manure to add nitrogen. The prototype in Melwika has worked well all winter and we’re about to build another one.”

“Collecting scattered manure is expensive.” Ninti glanced at Tiamaté. “How much would it cost to build biogas units for every village on the island?”

“I don’t know. How many villages? You need one plant per hundred houses, roughly, and a kilometer or two of pipes per village.”

“We have 18 towns and villages on the island, and they all have at least two hundred houses.” She laughed. “This is cheaper than both our original plan and the revised plan.”

“That depends on how you figure the labor,” replied Tiamaté. “My impression is that they’re pretty equal. Water gas has advantages in the larger places because they tend to have less manure and may have large industrial needs for gas.”

“Fair enough. But the two-phase plan we approved a few months ago had no provision for reaching the remote places. This is phase three.” She smiled. “So, for the ten smaller villages, we’re talking about forty or fifty thousand?”

“Something like that. We’d have to examine every village, figure the length of the streets, find local sources of manure, and build community support for the project.”

“Yes, yes. Many details to resolve. So when can we resolve them? Because I can supply half the cash. The villages can—should—come up with the other half.”

“I need another month,” he replied. “We’re still finishing the plan. But I can come back in late Blorménu or early Kaiménu and finalize everything.”

“Excellent.” She pointed at him. “You must!”

It was two hours after sunset before Tomasu and Tiamaté returned to Anartu. They had felt worried all day about their conversation with Countess Ninti, but one look at Behruz’s face, once they entered the room they were using as a living room, told them that she had called.

“How did you manage to talk to Princess Ninti, and what did you say to her?” asked Behruz, as soon as they walked in.

Tomasu didn’t know what to say to that; he looked helplessly at Tiamaté. “It was an accident,” she said. “Tomasu wanted to see Bilara and Anarbala on the way to Sipadananga. We stopped at Bilara, ran into Buzur at the Bahá’í Center, and talked about biogas for half an hour. They already knew about it and were already interested. Then we stopped at the field where the gas plant will go in Anarbala. It’s just a field, but we got out to look. It’s her land and her new palace is a hundred meters away, so her servants came out to chase us away. When they recognized me and heard he was a Miller, they invited us in to meet the Countess.”

“And she asked very good questions,” added Tomasu.

“And apparently you gave very good answers,” retorted Behruz.

“Well, it’s my job to give good answers.” Tomasu raised his voice a bit.

“We never should have developed two ways to provide one product,” said Behruz, either to himself or to Jordan; it wasn’t clear which. “It was Chris’s idea and it’s going to cause all sorts of complications.”

“What did she want?” asked Tiamaté. “She was talking about biogas for remote villages as a phase three.”

“Well, she wants phase three to run at the same time as phases one and two, and she wants to withhold 20,000 a year of her pledge of 50,000 per year to help fund it,” said Behruz. “We just got off the phone with her fifteen minutes ago.”

“A loss of forty thousand we can handle, but when the word gets out, it could be viewed as a loss of confidence by Ninti, causing others to pull out as well,” said Jordan. “That’s the problem.”

“I’m sorry,” said Tomasu. “We never planned to stop to see her, I swear. It was an accident. I didn’t make any promises, either, except to come back once we’re more certain of the prices.”

“I was there; that’s what happened,” confirmed Tiamaté.

I am amazed and impressed by her concern for the rural villages,” said Jordan. “She said she wanted to offer a grant that villages would match, which is very wise of her. She won’t make any money on this deal.”

“But she will build a lot of good will and popularity,” said Behruz. “That’s the political side. She sees what Estoibidhé is doing with her weekly radio addresses. She’s first cousin of Duke Lamuno, titular head of the island. She can outrank him if she has

stronger popularity and as mother of potential heirs to the throne, the palace can't muzzle her the way they can muzzle the Duke. She can become the voice of Sumilara."

"That's why she's pushing gas," agreed Jordan. "She has repeatedly said she wants every village on the island to have service."

"And they will," said Behruz. "I suppose as Bahá'ís we should look at that aspect and be thankful."

"What about the forty thousand?" asked Tomasu.

"Can we contribute something to it, also?" asked Jordan. "Even ten thousand. That shows we have confidence in both processes."

"That's smart," agreed Behruz. "The World Gas Company is willing to buy gas from villages with surpluses and is already investing in biogas technology. We already plan to set up biogas at the Anartu plant. So let's get that started as soon as possible and emphasize it."

"People can't withdraw much investment from World Gas to build their own biogas, can they?" asked Tiamaté. "The villages need to invest in the plants as well, and they only need so many."

"Yes, we need to emphasize that we won't buy gas from someone if our own facility can meet demand," said Behruz. "We don't want someone to build a biogas plant on the other side of Anartu and expect us to buy the product when we can supply it ourselves." He sighed. "We can ask Ninti to issue a carefully worded statement emphasizing her continued financial commitment to the World Gas project on Sumilara. I'm sure she'll do that. The fallout from this change can be handled."

Reread and edited 6/13/13, 8/26/17, 11/25/24

354.

Krésone Tomi

mid Blorménu/early June, yr. 15/633

As Chris drove the rover into Sértroba, they saw that the village was thronged with a huge crowd. “I think every Krésone tribesman is here,” he said, as he parked in front of the Bahá’í Center.

“And maybe some Wurone and Kwolone as well,” commented Thornton. He saw several men with eagle feathers in their hair—a Kwolone custom—and several wearing heavy leather clothes typical of the Wurones’ cool, forested habitat.

“Could be,” agreed Budhéstu Klénvikai, who was seated in the backseat with his wife, Blorkawé, and with Liz Mennea. He pointed to a line of vendors who had set up their wares on grass mats along the edge of the road nearby. “Let’s take a look.”

Thornton and Chris nodded and they walked over to the vendors. Nicely woven baskets. Dried swamp fish. Furs trapped in the mountains. Pottery. Wool carpets. Jewelry made from local jade. Carved wooden spoons and bowls. Leatherwork. Ivory objets d’art. Liz and Blorakwé looked at the wares with particular care.

“Please buy some, honored lady,” implored an older peasant woman seated in front of a pile of baskets she had wove from reeds.

“Perhaps I will,” said Liz, noncommittally.

“These are well made,” said Blorakwé. “Very strong; you have reeds here we don’t have in the lower Arjamwés Valley.”

“These are very strong baskets. They are for collecting harvest, so they must be strong.”

“They must, indeed. You know, that’s something the granges have a shortage of; bushel baskets for picking fruits and vegetables.”

“Really? How do you know?” asked Liz.

“I was in Tritejna recently and someone complained.”

“Then I’ll buy one and see whether there’s a market.” Liz turned to the lady and began to bargain. After two minutes the deal was consummated; Liz gave the woman $\frac{3}{4}$ of a dhanay and took the basket. “This is good; I’ll show it to the Məlwika grange.”

They walked down the line of vendors, most local or from the Krésone hamlets west of Sértroba. Then a man hurried over to Chris. “Lord, welcome to Sertroba! Lord Patékwu already has collected together the elders and other representatives of the tribe and welcomes your arrival at his house.”

“Thank you,” said Chris. “He looked at the others. “We’ve been summoned early.”

“They’ve probably been meeting since early morning,” said Thornton. “There’s usually one bus a day connecting the Krésone hamlets.”

“On the harvest festival?” asked Chris.

“Well, perhaps not today; it looks like almost everyone’s here. But the elders and representatives had to come at the same time as everyone else.”

They walked along a crowded road to the village center, built on an island rising above the marshlands, and entered Lord Patékwu’s compound. His great room or gabrula—a large stone room dominated by a huge fireplace on one side and a side open

to a lushly tropical courtyard on the other—was full. After six months of sometimes difficult deliberations, the Krésone had decided to elect three spiritual assemblies, for Sértroba, the central settlements, and the western settlements respectively; they had decided that their sixty kilometer ribbon of wetlands was too long for one spiritual assembly jurisdiction. The assemblies had been elected on the first day of Ridván, almost two months earlier. This was a blow to Patékwu, who would have preferred only one consultative body for the entire tribe; he was sure to be elected to it, and it would have been a vehicle for shaping, checking, and projecting his authority and influence. In turn, the six traditional elders had more influence, since all of them were members of one or another of the three coordinating bodies. Neither Chris nor Liz, who had visited the Krésone often in the fall and winter, were comfortable with the superimposition of traditional power struggles and rivalries onto the three new spiritual assemblies. Several Central Spiritual Assembly members had come through to lecture the Krésone about the matter, including Lord Estodhéru himself, and that had helped somewhat, but old patterns of behavior could not be changed in a few months.

In spite of their reservations about the results of the elections, Liz felt an energy in the air when she entered the room. Twenty-seven people were present; all nine members of all three Spiritual Assemblies. Impressively, the number included two women, both older and presumably influential in their own right. She knew most of them and was generally impressed by their personal qualities, though she was uncertain how deep the faith in Bahá'u'lláh was for three or four of them. This was one of the difficulties that arose when everyone in a tribe declared at once; there was no chance for the spiritually minded to be differentiated from the religiously indifferent.

Lord Patékwu rose to greet the five guests and a reception line immediately formed, where everyone shook hands and introduced themselves. Cups of hot, strong coffee were served; the Krésoné hills were one of the natural habitats of the coffee tree, so the tribe members had adopted the habit of coffee drinking several years ago when Məlwika began to buy the beans. Ten minutes of informal chit-chat followed before Lord Patékwu signaled one of the two women to rise and chant a prayer. Everyone sat on big pillows on the floor to participate in the devotions.

The intensity of feeling in the devotions was evident right away. The Krésoné knew few hymns of Widumaj and had their own chanting style, which they used for Bahá'í prayers as well. They also chanted several of Widumaj's hymns, but most surprising was their recitation of three old hymns to the war god Endro, whose worship had persisted among the Tutané, as well as among the ranks of the army. Normally, hymns to Endro were considered improper and were never chanted in public; but here they were delivered without embarrassment. The Bahá'í principle of honoring ancient sacred traditions had produced an unexpected result.

After the round of prayers ended—almost everyone offered something—Patékwu rose. “I am honored to have so many worthy servants of humanity in my house today. The three Spiritual Assemblies have been meeting for several hours to deliberate on the letter from the Central Spiritual Assembly calling on us to assemble a spiritual and practical plan for the tribe in consultation with its representatives. We have collected a very large number of ideas, but have been unable to shape or rank them without greater

awareness of the resources you can contribute. We are confident that we can utilize every person, idea, and dhanay available to us, so what can you bring to us?”

“Thank you, my lord, for your warm and generous greeting,” replied Chris. He had feared the meeting would immediately turn to them, because he wanted to hear what the tribe had decided independently of them. “It is not our desire to impose a set of ideas and priorities on the Krésone, because it would divert the tribe from the needs it has identified. Growth is always most effective when it follows an internal logic and meets local needs. I can say this: Budhéstu and Blorakwé Klenvikai have pledged to stay with the Krésone the entire summer. Both are trained in public health and can carry out basic medical treatment. Both can teach literacy. Both have spent three summers with the Bahá’í Youth Service Corps in villages all around the world and therefore have immense experience with dozens of subjects: sewing, jam making, knitting, agriculture, mechanics, accounting, basic science, nutrition, planning, and public health, in particular. They are the best we can offer you this summer. They will be accompanied by anywhere between three and seven youth who are younger and less experienced, but eager and trained in various specialized subjects.

“In terms of monetary support, everything the tribe wishes to accomplish must include some financial and human resources committed by the tribe. The Central Spiritual Assembly is willing to invest one thousand dhanay in spiritual development, such as Bahá’í Centers. The Development Corps will commit some thousands of dhanay to projects it finds worthy. I will personally offer several thousand as well. Bank loans need to be considered, and there is a new bank you may have heard about, Wiki Bank, which offers loans to individuals of one to one hundred dhanay. Budhéstu and Blorakwé

will soon be trained to help the Wiki Bank with its loan program. So financial resources are flexible and diverse.”

Patékwu seemed uncomfortable, presumably because he wanted a specific amount of money to consider. “If I may speak, friends,” exclaimed Budhéstu. “I come from a village that is not very different from this one. Klénvika is very poor. At least you can grow food all year long; we live in a cold climate with a bitter winter. So I hope I bring some experience that will be of use.”

“Is your village still poor?” asked Patékwu.

Budhéstu nodded. “Indeed it is, though not quite as extremely poor as before. Many Klénvikans are focusing on dairy farming, sales of maple syrup, and farming during the winter in equatorial areas.”

“None of which we can do,” noted Mégékwu, oldest son of Patékwu.

“My village, Terskua, has made considerable progress in the last five years,” added Blorakwé. “We have a grange, the average farmer is farming three times as much land and earning fifty percent more money, and we have five new businesses.”

“Businesses: that’s what we need,” commented Ekwesdamu, an elder from the west. “I was in Məlwika a few weeks ago and shopped in the Home Improvement store. We need a Home Improvement store!”

“Home Improvement Stores are all located in cities of at least five thousand people and typically have sales of half a million dhanay per year,” said Chris. “They are *big* operations. But Home Improvement has started to sell items wholesale to village stores. There’s no reason your store can’t buy items for resale. The bigger issue is that the Krésone people are too poor to buy very much.”

“We could expand our farmland quite a bit,” said Mənegékwəs, an elder from Sértroba. “But we are now aware that we only have so much marshland, we are already using half of it for farming, and the wild animals need access to the water.”

“We can also expand our herds,” said Dhrébékwəs, a local teacher and member of the Spiritual Assembly.

“In a way, we are dealing with the same problem, though,” said Mənegékwəs. “Because the land here is dry; just as dry as it was ten years ago! The weather here has not changed at all.”

“It’s a little rainer, I think,” replied Dhrébékwəs.

“Be that as it may, we are using our land pretty heavily,” said Patékwu. “And we can’t take land from our neighbors; rather, they have taken it from us!”

“But the Ornakwés is bigger; it now flows all the way to the Arjakwés all year round,” said Chris. “You have more water. A small dam can divert water out of the canyon and onto arid land, which can be irrigated for farming or pasture.”

“That may help Sértroba, but what about the rest of us farther west?” asked ɛndroilubu, an Assembly member from the western settlements. “We need more land, too!”

“There is an electrical line all the way along all your villages,” replied Chris. “An electric pump can pump water up out of the valley and onto the land above anywhere you wish. The pump and pipes will cost a few hundred dhanay and the electricity, maybe a hundred dhanay a year. That can get you water almost anywhere.”

“Who can help us plan a dam and ditches? The Məlwika grange? The army?” asked Patékwu.

“The Geological Survey,” replied Thornton. “We have maps and surveyors. We can send a crew here in about a month to identify areas that could be irrigated. The Ornakwés has enough water in it to allow you to irrigate several thousand agris without reducing its flow to the lower Arjakwés much.”

“But soon we will need to think about water rights,” noted Chris. “My other town, Melita, is on the lower Ornakwés and uses some of its water. I am not asserting rights to the water right now and I don’t want to start a debate about the subject, just to remind us that we need to consider that question later.”

“The world is getting so complicated,” complained Patékwu. “Let us say we can add several thousand agris of farm and pasture land. Who will own it?”

“The Krésone assign farmland ownership to families and consider pasture to be held in common,” said Thornton. “You can continue that arrangement or modify it. Irrigated pasture land probably will need to be assigned because it is a limited resource. The assignment would be done by the lord, by a committee he appoints, or by a grange.”

“Not by the Spiritual Assemblies?” asked Arjékwu, a farmer and member of the Spiritual Assembly for the central settlements.

“The land belongs to the tribe, not the Assemblies, so the tribe has to decide,” replied Thornton. “And the tribe means the lord, in Eryan law. If the lord assigned the task to the spiritual assemblies, then it would be their responsibility.”

“The spiritual assemblies are for spiritual matters, not material matters,” replied Patékwu. “I think we should establish a grange. Granges have been very successful ways to bring wealth.”

“Especially when there is new land,” added Chris. “If there is no new land, the old ways continue to seem sufficient.”

“But granges need tractors and steel plows,” observed Məṇəgékwe. “How can we possibly purchase them?”

“Granges help each other that way,” replied Chris. “You can rent equipment from the Melwika Grange, including crew, and pay them back after the harvest comes in, then use some of the profits to buy your own equipment. If equipment use is planned carefully, a tractor is needed for about every 700 agris of plowed land.”

“You can arrange that?” asked Patékwu.

Chris nodded. “Once you have a grange board and a grange manager, send two or three of them to Melwika and I’ll arrange a meeting with the Melwika grange board.”

“What about industry?” asked Mégékwu. “For example, a slaughterhouse, like they have in Gordha, or horse breeding like the Kwolone.”

“I would not advise trying to compete with either of them,” replied Chris. “The slaughterhouse is now very well established and efficient; you can’t learn how to run a similar business quickly enough to make money. But selling cattle to them; that’s different. Horse breeding is easier because there’s still a big market for horses, but it will shrink in the next decade because of steam power. Miller Motors is now selling 1,400 vehicles a year.”

“Gordha is giving us a terrible price,” replied Patékwu.

“Maybe that can be improved,” said Chris. “Go negotiate. Maybe a commitment to a larger sale or higher quality will help. Or sell them grain or hay. They need more of it every year; the demand for beef is growing fast.”

“What about manufactories?” asked Budhéstu. “The Seven Year Development Plan projects the sale of manufactured shoes to go from 25,000 pairs per year to 300,000. You have leather. The equipment for making shoes isn’t hard to purchase or learn how to use.”

“Or a dairy,” said Thornton. “You have cattle, sheep, and goats. Milk can be shipped to Məlwika and Məddoakwés easily.”

“Those ideas are both on our list,” said Əndroilubu. He stood and picked up two sheets of newsprint on which he had scribbled ideas. There was no way to attach them to Patékwi’s stone walls. He held up the sheets and someone read the dozen ideas aloud; they included textile weaving, clothing manufacturing, shoe making, a brewery, slaughterhouse, dairy, grange, horse breeding, and a Home Improvement store.

“You need to add a women’s gabruli to the list,” suggested Liz. She looked at Blorakwé, who nodded vigorously. Her mother was the manager of the Tərskua Gabruli.

“But these are very controversial,” said Məngékwe, pointing to the newsprint sheets. “We’ve heard about the long hours, boring work, and low wages of manufacturing. We worry about dividing the tribe into owners and workers, like Gordha with its big houses and small houses. We are a free people; a very independent people; we see some of these changes as creating a kind of slavery and other evils.”

“I understand,” agreed Chris. “But there are different kinds of work for people at different stages of their lives. Some manufacturing is highly skilled; other tasks are simpler and are done by younger workers. If all Kresone do the same work, you will all be dependent on the sales price of one thing, and that price will go up and down. You

need different kinds of jobs and different kinds of products, so the tribe's work and income are both diverse."

"But what of this issue of owners and workers?" asked Patékwu. "We wonder whether the spiritual assemblies should own the manufactories, to ensure that they are humane and fair."

"Perhaps," said Chris. "But there is also danger to the Spiritual Assemblies in becoming owners and managers of businesses. If they become more concerned with making money than serving people, then you have neither a good business nor a good spiritual assembly."

"A Krésone Tomi," replied Liz. "A company owned by all Krésone and serving them all. That's what you need. It can start new factories, invest some of its own profits, return other profits to the owners, and expand as the tribe's needs expand."

"A Krésone Tomi!" Mégékwu exclaimed. "That would be grand!"

"Where will we get the money, though?" asked the ever-practical and cynical Məngékwes.

"The Development Corps and the palace will both provide start-up money if you develop a business plan," said Chris. "I'll invest in the tomi as well without profit; in other words, it will be an interest-free loan."

"You are very kind, Lord," said Patékwu.

"The Spiritual Assemblies are then free to watch the tomi and advise it," said Liz.

"What about the health of our people?" asked Krésoneðukter, one of the two women present. "Right now, the tribe does not have enough money to pay for regular

care, so we are constantly dealing with emergencies, and some people die because they can't get to a doctor."

"Blorakwé and I will run a clinic all summer," replied Budhéstu. "We will not charge; it will be part of our service. We have no money to provide eyeglasses or medicines, but Mēlwika Hospital will pay for some of them, and so will the Health Ministry."

"But after that, can the Tomi pay for medical care?" she asked.

"If you want my suggestion, it is this," said Chris. "If you spend too much of the Tomi's budget on doctors, it won't be able to compete against other tomis; its costs will be too high. You can devote some of the budget to health, yes. But there is a tax on the Tomi's revenue; a ninth to the tribe and two ninths to the palace. The palace has been returning to the tribes a tenth of its share as well. If part of the taxes is devoted to health, it is better for the tribe and the tomi."

"That is wise," agreed Mēnégékwēs, glancing at his first cousin, Lord Patékwu, who did not seem pleased that his money was being spent by others. "So, what do we start with?"

"Something we already understand," replied Krésonēdukter. "Milk and cheese. That would be my suggestion."

"Should we start a grange and a tomi at the same time?" asked Méguékwu.

"One thing can do both. Granges often start and run businesses," replied Budhéstu.

"Then perhaps we have a plan," said Patékwu. "We'll start a Krésonē Tomi that will also irrigate and sell land to farmers and cattlemen."

It was after sunset when the five of them left Sértroba for the two-hour, two-time zone drive home. Thornton drove so Chris could rest. “I think you will find your work cut out for you,” he said to Budhéstu and Blorakwé, as they drove out of the village.

“Their unity will be hard to maintain,” agreed Budhéstu. “But a dairy in Sértroba and pump-irrigated land in the western settlements will give everyone something from the start.”

“And will allow two different groups to organize efforts for the tomi,” said Blorakwé. “What’s Mənegékwes’ problem with Patékwu, anyway? Jealousy?”

“I think so,” said Thornton. “If I remember right, the elders selected Patékwu’s father as lord over Mənegékwes’ father, even though the latter was the older son, so Mənegékwes is always wondering what would have happened if his father ended up being lord. He needs to be given a big job in the tomi to satisfy his ambition, and Estodhéru needs to come back and urge them to work together.”

“I doubt that’ll work, and Patékwu will block Mənegékwes from getting a big job anyway,” said Chris, yawning. “I think Mənegékwes needs to be encouraged to take up a private business of his own in Sértroba, like cattle raising. He already has a lot of head. I’ll see whether I can get him a market for cattle in Gordha.”

“I’ll definitely work on a gabruli,” said Blorakwé. “I’m glad we got to see the wares the villagers make.”

“The baskets are good and will sell,” said Liz. “When you get to know people well, ask about marsh herbs. I bet they have herbs they can sell, also.”

“The Ornakwés marshlands are unique,” agreed Thornton. “They remind me of Okavango.”

“I’m glad the two of you will visit every other Primdiu,” said Budhéstu. “The situation’s pretty complicated and fluid.”

“It has been since last summer,” agreed Thornton.

“We’ll do our best,” said Chris. “I just hope they get their act together enough to produce something worth investing in. Because if I lose money, my reputation suffers and the Development Corps will be less willing to invest in business like this in the future.”

“Have the four Krésone at Melwika Génadema taken any accounting and business classes?” asked Thornton.

Chris nodded. “All four of them. The problem is that they don’t want to go back to their village. But if I can arrange some credit for summertime business work in Sértroba and provide them some pay, and I’m sure their families are already providing some pressure, we can get them to return. Their skills are limited, but I can give a class when I’m there to fill some of the gaps.”

“Good. I’ll be providing Bahá’í deepenings on subjects Budhéstu and Blorakwé can’t cover,” said Liz. “We need to find Bahá’í youth who can provide literacy, math, accounting, and maybe agriculture.”

“And women’s skills,” reminded Blorakwé. “They have some pretty impressive leatherwork and I think we need to find a market for it.”

“I need to find someone to coordinate a world-wide gabruli headquarters,” said Liz. “I guess that’ll be a priority for the summer.”

They all stopped talking at that point. Thornton concentrated on staying awake while everyone else took a nap. He drove north to Gordha, then caught the Royal Road—Route 1—back to Melwika, getting there just before sunset local time. Tomasu Miller must have been watching for the rover; within five minutes he was at the door, and the butler escorted him upstairs to Thornton's flat.

"Hail, honored," Thornton said. "What brings you here?"

"I think I need your help," replied Tomasu. "I really don't know what to do, frankly."

"What's the problem?"

"I'm . . . thinking of resigning as director of Biogas."

"What? Are you crazy? It's an incredible opportunity!"

"I know, but it's also a problem. Behruz has never told this to your father, but he isn't very enthusiastic about biogas. He developed the system for the blue water gas and has improved it quite a lot over the years, and now is working on the Fisher-Tropsch process to convert it into longer chain hydrocarbons. It's valuable and important work. But now I'm running around selling biogas plants and undercutting some of his market, not to mention creating local competition for the World Gas Company. He has never complained to me, but ever since we returned from Sumilara he has not talked to me, unless I ask him a question."

"Really?" Thornton thought about it a moment. "Behruz is pretty quiet to everyone most of the time, and doesn't complain about practically anything. Are you sure you haven't misread him?"

“I’m sure. I’ve known him a long time; not well, of course, but my dad has advised me about talking to him. He’s definitely unhappy. But I haven’t wanted to talk to your father because biogas is his baby.”

“Or the grange’s; he got the basic information from the web and from Behruz, and Behruz helped set it up.”

“But as a secondary gas source, not as a competitor.”

“That could be. I think dad’s attitudes toward biogas have evolved a lot in the last year. He even mentioned it briefly today at a big meeting today in Sértroba. I think both he and Behruz see it as a useful supplement.”

“And it is, but there will be fewer pipelines built if it becomes the main gas source for villages.”

“That’s a good thing, isn’t it? Villages in cold climates will need bottled gas to supplement their local production in the winter.”

“That’s true. But on Sumilara, biogas and blue water gas are two sources feeding the same pipelines, and competition is a problem.”

“Alright.” Thornton thought. “Shall we arrange a time when you and I can meet dad and Behruz? I think this problem can be put in a positive way; that you are concerned about being a competitor, rather than having the needs of this world uppermost.”

“Okay, that’s a good way to put it. Yes, I’d appreciate your help with this one.”

“You’ve got it, Tomasu,” promised Thornton.

Reread and edited 6/13/13, 8/26/17, 11/25/24

355.

Sabertooth

Early Kaiménu/late June, yr. 15/633

Aryéstu's talk at the All-Génadema Conference about the state of Éra's economy in the year 632—the year just ended—drew a packed crowd. Looking around the hall, Chris was particularly impressed by the number of former business students in the audience; heads of many of the world's successful business operations, they knew when a particular talk was of use to them. In Aryéstu, the world finally had found a genius who understood economic forces.

When he finished his talk, he received a vigorous standing ovation. Hands immediately shot up and the first question asked about some sentences in his talk that were similar to some in a talk Queen Estoibidhé had given two weeks before. Aryéstu evaded the question, but Chris knew that Aryéstu was a frequent advisor of the palace, so similar wording did not surprise him. The second question, from Mëndhru Dwobrébesi, was the one on everyone's mind. "Honored, do you think the economy has finally pulled out of the recession? I can speak as director of Jérdomais Tomi that sales of modular buildings started to climb a month ago, as the harvest began in Rudhisér, Lewésipa, and the lower Arjakwés, and the sales are now surging as the rest of the Arjakwés and the northern and southern shores have started or are starting with the harvest. Since the end of summer, we have accumulated a supply of almost two hundred unsold modular buildings. We've sold half of them in the last month. I hear the sale of pickups has increased as well."

All eyes turned to Aryéstu, who was nodding throughout Mēdhru's comments. "No question, the recession is now over," he replied. "Miller Motors has sold a similar number of pickups, tractors, trucks, and cars in the last month; that's 400,000 dhanay in extra sales between the two tomis. Prosperity Bank has received a half million dhanay in extra deposits in the last month and has lowered interest rates 1.5% as a result, and the greater amount of credit has been part of the stimulus. Tax collections last month went up by ten percent compared to the same time period last year, and that was before the assassination. I suspect this coming month—the month everything dropped ten percent because of the assassination—will show a twenty percent increase over last year's tax revenues. We won't get back all the money that was never made over the last year, but I suspect we'll see considerable consumer confidence, a surge in sales all summer, and good economic growth in 633; say, between ten and fifteen percent."

That caused applause and considerable comment. "So, can we avoid another recession in the future?" asked the next questioner.

"Avoid it? You can never guarantee anything in economics. But what you can say is that over time, the economic system can become better able to weather natural variations in supply and demand. And I think there is more the palace can do next time, such as extending more credit as soon as a downturn starts. This did not occur to anyone; I am not saying it as a criticism. We have all learned from this recession. The economy, overall, shrank 1% last year, and we could have managed a few percent of growth instead."

At that point, the chair rose. “I’m afraid time is up,” he said. “We now have a ten-minute break, and then we will have a panel discussion about the development of Wiki Bank. Everyone must come back for that.”

Everyone applauded again, then stood to stretch their legs or leave the room. Thornton turned to Chris. “So, how are taxes and mortgages?” he asked in English, for privacy.

Chris nodded. “Twelve percent up, compared to the same harvest last year, because crop prices are a bit stronger. Jérdomais Tomi’s sales recovered just in time; it made 50,000 in profits just this month! So it’ll have a dividend to pay to the owners after all. Miller Motors has made a similar profit.”

“So, we’ll be able to afford more microcredit investments?”

“And in biogas. As you’ll hear, Wiki Bank’s off to a terribly slow start; in fact, we won’t even admit that we’ve only made a thousand dhanay in loans so far. Setting up solidarity groups is a very difficult and slow process. But training all the youth development teams will help immensely. Wéroimigu and Kalané can only do so much.”

“I think people will understand that.”

“I hope so. I’m not looking forward to being on this panel. Let me get up and stretch my legs; sitting makes them hurt.” Thornton nodded and let his father pass him to reach the aisle. He walked down it and stopped at Estodatu, their crack translator, who was head of the Translation Department of Gésélékwés Maj Génadema in Mèddoakwés.

“What brings you to an economics lecture?” asked Chris.

“Well, he is the boss,” replied Estodatu, nodding his head toward Aryéstu, who was génadema president. “It’s always interesting to hear him, too; he’s a good speaker. And I’m always gathering new information for my novel.”

“Yes, congratulations! I hear the first one is selling well!”

Estodatu smiled. “Over two thousand copies at 1 dhanay each, which makes it a best seller. But I got even more royalties when it was serialized in the *Melwika Review*, and the second novel is selling a lot of copies of the *Review* as well.”

“Good. Congratulations for that as well!” The *Review* was a broadsheet—four pages—published by the *Melwika Nues* every week that contained stories, poetry, and articles about a variety of subjects. It had become quite popular, and anything published in it was already typeset and thus quick to reprint in another form.

“Thank you. It appears we finally have a literary publication, and with it, we have a successful medium for publishing novels.” Estodatu pointed to a young man seated with him. “By the way, I should introduce my cousin, Estoblasu, from Sullendha. He’s a student in the génadema studying ecology, biology, and earth science.”

“I’m pleased to meet you, honored; I am Kristobéru Mennea.”

“Yes, I know who you are, Lord!” replied Estoblasu, taking Chris’s hands and shaking them. “It’s a great honor to meet you. You haven’t been to Penkakwés in a while, I think.”

“You are correct; it’s been over a year. How’s the development plan going for the province?”

“It stalled last year; I think we just heard why. But this coming year should be good. What worries me, as a future ecologist, is the huge areas we have clear cut. The

forest will take decades, maybe a century, to recover. We've cleared 15 square kilometers of pine forest in order to feed Mëddoakwës's appetite for timber and firewood!"

"I suppose some of the cleared areas are being used for agriculture and pasture."

"The areas near the villages, yes, but there's a huge clear-cut area east of Sullendha along Route 4. There are a few scattered squatters there, but Lord Kapanu wants to discourage settlement of the area. He doesn't want to see outsiders there and there isn't enough surplus population locally to settle the area yet."

"I've driven through that clear cut area; there's a lot of gullying. I proposed a nursery in Gwërkaita to grow seedlings, and a program to replant the cleared areas. But they haven't found any money for it, yet."

"Oh, Lord, it's terrible. There *is* a lot of gullying, even where weeds and grass have gotten established. I wrote a paper about it during the winter term and since then I've hiked some of the big clear-cut areas. The damage done is quite serious. In spite of the increased rainfall, the forests are being cut faster than they can recover."

"What do you think can be done to get resources dedicated to the problem?"

"I don't know. If you can talk to Lord Kapanu, it might help. He won't listen to me; my father and he had a big dispute two years ago."

"I see. I have no plans to travel there any time soon, but I should visit sometime this summer or fall, so I will raise the issue with him then."

"Thank you, Lord."

Chris looked at the stage; it was ready for the panel. "I need to get onto the stage now. It's good to meet you, Honored Estoblasu." They shook hands again, then Chris walked to the stage, trying to remember who had been for or against a tree nursery.

A few days later, Thornton, Lébé, and the kids headed east in a steam car. Accompanying them was a pickup truck with five Bahá'í youth, pulling a house trailer. They made good time as far as Gordha, then crept up Gordhamonta's switchbacks to the astronomy observatory at the crest, then down the other side past Gordha reservoir, full from the spring melt. Past the reservoir and its surrounding prairie covered by grazing cows, the gravel highway gradually rose again, then passed through a gorge where the Majakwés forced itself through the Kaitamonta. Not far past that long, high ridge, the Kaitakwés tumbled into the Majakwés from the south and they turned right to parallel its banks. They stopped for an hour to rest and swim in the bubbling waters of a warm spring, then resumed their southward drive. When the Kaitakwés entered a canyon they rode up over an old crater rim, then entered a big grassy basin with forested slopes twenty kilometers in diameter: Kaitadhuba, the center of the realm of the Kaitere tribe. Houses of stone and adobe were scattered along the road, each with a stone animal pen. Cattle herds grazed on the verdure as far as the eye could see.

Thornton pointed to an abandoned building built next to a quarry in the crater rim. "That's the Kaitere steel forge. When we visited here ten years ago to explore for nickel-iron, they insisted that we teach them how to make high quality steel, so they could export it instead. But they didn't have the expertise to make it profitably, and their traditional steel wasn't high enough quality to compete."

"So they sell twenty or thirty tonnes of nickel-iron ore per week to the Foundry instead," said Lébé.

“Exactly, and import bars of high quality steel to work into swords, knives, and farm implements. They have some very skilled blacksmiths here; they always have, because of the nickel-iron deposits.”

Lébé looked around. “This is a very pretty place.”

“Yes, they have a lovely dhuba. The Kaitakwés enters from the south, and beyond the southern rim it flows through a beautiful valley, then turns eastward and drains the slopes of Kostamonta. It’s a big river, so they have plenty of water. They’ve got several spots with hydroelectric potential, too.”

“I see they have power and telephone lines.” Lébé pointed at the line of poles along the graveled road.

“Yes, they’ve had both for nine years; the army graveled the road and installed the poles as part of the deal to export nickel-iron. This is a fairly advanced tribe. They have 2,000 people, a good-sized school, a very active and profitable black smithy, they export coal as well as nickel-iron, they’re a major source of coffee beans, and they drive several thousand head of cattle to Gordha’s slaughterhouse every year.”

“How many génadema graduates?”

“I think a dozen with uniyeris or dwoyeris. The new Lord, Magékeru, was at the génadema quite early for a year.”

“An impressive number. That should help a lot.”

“I hope so. There are only two Bahá’ís, and they report a lot of resistance to the teachings.”

In about ten minutes they slowed and turned left onto a graveled side road that ran to Gimutroba village. It wasn’t very large; a large school building, a store, a blacksmithy,

the residence of Lord Magékeru, and two dozen houses. A pickup was parked nearby; a bus was departing. They parked the steam car and pickup next to the school, which they would be using for the next month, and got out.

“Shall I climb up the telephone pole and plug in the house trailer?” asked Déodatu. He was the oldest of the five Bahá’í youth and had driven the pickup. He was a Kwétékwone who had just completed a dwoyeri in agriculture and animal husbandry.

“Let’s wait and make sure we have permission. People here may not realize it won’t cost them anything.” Thornton turned toward the residence of Magékeru; Lébé and Déodatu followed. As they approached the door, Magékeru came out.

“Honored Dhoru, it’s so good to see you again!”

“Lord Magékeru, it’s so good to see you. I was very sorry to hear about your father’s passing last winter.”

“It was very sad. He had cancer and there was nothing the doctors could do, even in Melwika. But he died surrounded by his family, and he is now with Ermater, Earth Mother.”

“Indeed, and she must be pleased with him. He gave your tribe excellent leadership.”

“His shoes are very large and hard to fill. Please, come inside.”

“Allow me to introduce Lébé, my wife. My children are over at the steam car. And this is Déodatu Ekwesmani, a génadema student and expert in cattle raising.”

“Cattle raising? I don’t think we need any help with that!”

“I will offer anything I can, Lord,” said Déodatu, bowing.

“Well, we’ll test you, then. Your accent is interesting; are you Tutane?”

“Indeed, Lord, I am Kwétékwone.”

“Ah, excellent! Then you are doubly welcome!” He turned back to Thornton. “So, there are seven of you and you’re here for a month. What courses can you offer?”

“Cattle raising ideas, cooking, use of sewing machines, literacy, accounting, chemistry, ecology, and basic science, plus the Bahá’í Ruhi books and basic Bahá’í information.”

“An impressive list. But I must make one thing clear: you are not to mention the Bahá’í Faith in your classes, and you are not to offer any Bahá’í classes. I am impressed by the morality and virtue of the Bahá’ís I’ve met, but the Kaitere are dedicated to the Earth Mother. She feeds us, she provided the coal and nickel-iron and water and rich grass that make up this valley, and when we die our bodies and our souls return to her. The Eryan worship her under the name of Saré or Kié. Here we call her Érmater, but she is the same great one. Our dedication to her does not allow us to dedicate ourselves to another, however great He is. That is why you will hear no hymns of Widumaj here.”

“I see. Lord, we are Bahá’ís offering service to people, and naturally, to us, talking about Bahá'u'lláh is part of our service. He inspires us to go out and serve others; we pray His hymns.”

“I understand that. You may pray your hymns here, of course; Érmater will not be offended when others serve her people. But your letter made it very clear that your service to the Kaitere had nothing to do with teaching your Faith to others. It is a gift to them. We welcome your gift to us and we are grateful for it, but we must protect our dedication to Érmater.”

Thornton bowed his head slightly. “Very well, my Lord, we will accept your terms. We are the servants of your people for the next month.”

“Then let me show you around our school. We have twelve classrooms! Almost all Kaitere children aged six through twelve attend, plus perhaps half the thirteen to fifteen year olds and a tenth of the sixteen and seventeen year olds. We also have evening and Primdiu classes for adults; they are part of the duty of the same teachers. The school is out for the summer right now, so you can spread out and use as many classrooms as you wish.”

“We’ll use one as a lounge, one for men to sleep in, and one for the women to sleep in. My family and I will sleep in the trailer we brought. Can we plug our trailer into the electric and telephone lines? It won’t cost the tribe anything.”

“Of course. I suppose you have a way to charge the phone calls?”

“We’ll explain it to the switchboard operator.”

“Excellent. He’s in the store; my little brother. We have only two lines in the valley and eight phones altogether, four on each line. I suppose that means your phone will have to ring five times to tell you the call is for you.”

“I suppose.”

Déodatu hung back and turned to Lébé. “This is crazy; we’re here for a month and we can’t teach the Faith?”

“Thor gave his word that we wouldn’t. I guess this is a real test: we have to prove we are true servants!”

“I guess so, but it will be very difficult!”

“Bahá'u'lláh will provide somehow. Maybe our silent service will open hearts later.”

“I hope so.”

They walked to the school. By then, an older man had ridden up on a horse and was talking to the other Bahá'í youth. Thornton and Magékeru approached. “Honored, perhaps you remember Stéldamu? He is the elder of the Stélu clan, our biggest.”

“I think I remember meeting you ten years earlier. It is an honor to see you again.”

“Thank you, honored, it is my honor as well.” He offered his hands and they shook; he had a steel grip. “So, you are here for a month?”

“Indeed, and we hope in that time we can be of some assistance to the Kaitæ. Though I must say that what I see in the valley is very impressive.”

“We’ve done alright. I’m not sure we need anything from you. We certainly don’t need your religion. I mean no offense, but the Bahá'í teachings are *unmanly*. They strip a man of his courage, his strength, in return for talking and compromising. We do not need anything like that here.”

“Honored, I greatly respect your opinion, but I assure you that Bahá'í men are just as brave as any others. Perhaps they manifest their courage in other ways.”

“Perhaps, but I see no need for those ways. Can you wield a sword? Shoot arrows? Ride a horse?”

“I can ride, honored. Perhaps not as well as you, but then you cannot do geology. I can wield a sword; I learned on the army’s Sumilara campaign. I am not very good with one because I have not needed to practice. And I can shoot a bow.”

“Of course, I can do all those things, honored, and I am a Bahá’í,” exclaimed Déodatu. “I am a Bahá’í and a Tutanε; a Kwétékwonε.”

Stéldamu looked at him, surprised. “You’re a Kwétékwonε? How very interesting. How long have you been a Bahá’í?”

“Three years, honored, and I have been attending génadema for two.”

“Excellent! I’m glad to hear not all Bahá’í men are dirt farmers, teachers, merchants, or factory workers! Tell you what? Let’s start your visit here with a little hunt?”

“A hunt? That would be great!” said Déodatu.

“Excellent idea,” echoed Thornton.

Stéldamu turned to him. “You’ll come as well?”

“If I’m welcome.”

“Yes, of course you are,” he replied, a bit ominously.

Thornton borrowed a bow and quiver of arrows from Lord Magékεru and, right after dawn the next morning, he practiced. He was a miserable archer and even nicked a finger when he let fly an arrow.

He was a much better rider; on geology expeditions he often rode horses and was comfortable on horseback. So the next morning, bow and arrows over his back and scabbard on his belt (although he did not anticipate needing to use the sword at all), Thornton set out with Déodatu, Stéldamu, one other Bahá’í youth, and two other Kaitεrε. Stéldamu set off at a gallop eastward for a kilometer or two and saw that Thornton could handle a horse, at least.

They ascended the rim of Kaiterēdhuba and set out across the rolling foothills of Kostamonta, the wide ridge that culminated in a line of snow-capped, glaciated peaks and a pass through them on which Kostēkhéma was located. They followed a creek uphill through green meadows and groves of pines and aspens, searching for signs of deer and antelope. They ignored elephant, giraffe, and bison signs; those animals were too large to gut and bring back, even though they had brought an extra horse along to haul the meat. By midday, Stéldamu was getting frustrated. “Perhaps the Earth Mother is not pleased with us,” he commented when they stopped to rest at midday.

“But is she displeased because we have Bahá’is along, or because we aren’t allowing them to teach their Faith?” teased Déodatu. He sensed that Stéldamu had warmed up more to him than to Thornton; not only could he ride a horse, but he showed an intimacy with horses, and he also had helped actively to interpret animal signs.

“We won’t question her reasons,” responded Stéldamu, but at least he was amused by the comment.

Thornton looked down and, much to his surprise, he saw a fragment of a fresh deer track in the moss on the edge of a flat rock. He looked in the direction the animal was going and sure enough, spotted another track a meter away. He pointed down. “Let’s follow this one.”

“What?” Stéldamu glanced down, nodded, and smiled. “Hey, the city teacher has found us a deer!”

“I was lucky.” And Thornton knew he was, too.

“It’s not very big,” commented Arjékwinu, one of the other Kaiterē present.

“Maybe the Earth Mother is giving us a sign,” teased Déodatu.

“Only one way to find out.” Stéldamu rose; their break was over. They mounted their horses and headed out along the fresh track.

As they ascended the slope, it became very hard to follow the trail; the animal was moving more and more onto bare rock where no footprints could be seen. After forty-five minutes they traced it onto a large outcrop almost a hundred meters across.

“How will we ever find it here?” asked Déodatu, frustrated.

“We’ll try,” replied Stéldamu. “But it’s after midday now. If we don’t make a kill in the next hour, we have to head back.”

“We Kwétékwone would and could continue,” said Déodatu. “But we have Skanda in our sky; here it’s dark at night.”

“Totally dark,” confirmed Arjékwinu.

They dismounted and walked round and round the edge of the outcrop, searching for tracks. But there were scattered flat outcrops all around the main outcrop, and an animal could easily leap from one to another; that multiplied their area of search even more. “It may be small, but it’s smart. I bet it smelled us,” said Stéldamu.

“Shall we quit?”

“I’m afraid this one has gotten away,” he agreed. He pointed northwest. “We can head back that way and complete a circle.”

“At least we got to see some good geology,” commented Déodatu.

“Yes. Geologist, you never said a thing about the geology we’ve been crossing,” said Stéldamu to Thornton.

“You don’t talk on a hunt, do you?”

“True. So, what have we seen?”

“The Kostamonta is a big crumbled fold of *anorthosita*. It’s a kind of rock; it makes up much of Éra’s crust. Gordhamonta, Kaitamonta, and Kostamonta are three parallel north-south folds, each progressively wider and higher. We’ve hiked this one in several directions, including a north-south line about fifteen or twenty kilometers farther east of here. There’s a very pretty peak just east of here. The estimated age of the ridges is six million years.”

“Six million? How do you know that?”

“Complicated. Basically, the *aliénés* told us.” Thornton looked toward the northwest. “So, that way?”

“No, I don’t think so,” replied Arjékwinu. “There’s a cave about a kilometer in that direction and downhill from us. Last year a sabertooth lived there. I was hunting in this area last month and I saw the she-sabertooth again and she looked very jumpy and protective.”

“Cubs,” said Stéldamu.

“I’m sure. In the cave.”

“Really?” asked Thornton. “They’re really hard to see. I’ve seen only one.”

“You’re lucky,” said Stéldamu. “They usually run away. But when a mother has babies in a cave she’s easier to see, though she’s twice as dangerous.”

“Can we go look?” asked Thornton. “We’re heading back anyway.”

Ajrékwinu looked at Stéldamu, who nodded. “This way,” he said.

They headed due north, horizontally along the ridge’s side for about half a kilometer, then they turned west and descended for half a kilometer. The wind was out of the west, as it often was in the afternoon, so their scent was blown away from the cave.

They stopped about three hundred meters away; as close as the nervous horses wanted to go. Thornton pulled out his binoculars—he had done so several times that day—and they all took a look. A minute later two sabertooths came out of the cave and stared at them.

“Magnificent!” said Stéldamu, who was looking through the binoculars at the time. He passed them to the others and they all looked.

“We could surround them and shoot them with arrows when they come out,” suggested Arjékwinu.

“Rather risky,” said Stéldamu. “What say you, teacher?”

“I’m more worried about the cubs. There aren’t many sabertooths left in this world. If we kill the mother and father, the babies will die.”

“So, we can come back in a month, then?” teased Stéldamu. By then, the cubs would be weaned and learning to hunt.

Thornton took the binoculars and looked at the cave closely. “If we could get on top of the cave, we could throw a big, heavy net across the entrance and capture the cubs, maybe the parents as well.”

Stéldamu turned to look at Thornton, sure the man was teasing him.

“What in The Mother’s name would anyone do with a sabertooth family?”

“Put them in a very big cage, feed them fresh meat, and charge people a dhanay to take a look.”

Stéldamu looked at Thornton, then laughed heartily. “I dare you. I challenge you!”

“Alright,” replied Thornton, responding to the dare. “Let’s do it.”

“We don’t have nets!”

“I’ll get the nets.”

“How would you get them anywhere? You can’t walk them on leashes!”

“Wrap them in nets, then wrap the nets in dark blankets so they can’t see, then tie them up with ropes, then suspend them between two horses and haul them to Gimutroba.”

Stéldamu just laughed again. “Alright, get the nets and we’ll give it a try,” he replied.

Chris had never thought he’d be on his way to Penkakwés just a week and a half after talking to Estoblasu about deforestation. But various errands required a loop through the area, so one morning he headed west on Route 4 and stopped to visit Lord Kapanu in Sullendha. Even though the visit was arranged, Kapanu was nervous about it.

“Please, tea,” he said, as they finished their pleasantries and his wife was offering cups of tea. “This is the kind you gave me, once. I hope you enjoy it.”

“You are very kind, my Lord.”

“Any news from my cousin, General Roktekestær? I hope he is well. He must come soon; the mastodons are now in the northern mountains.”

“I spoke to him almost two weeks ago at the all-génadema conference and he looked very well. Ornakwés has opened a big pig-raising farm; I’m afraid you can smell them from several kilometers away when the wind is right! We’re opening a pig slaughtering plant in Melita this summer and will be selling 300 tonnes of pork a month in refrigerated trailers.”

“Amazing. We’d like to open a cattle and goat slaughtering plant as well; the province now has a lot of cattle. But we’re not sure we can compete against Gordha.”

“In a way, you can’t. But you don’t have to because your cattlemen can’t walk their cattle to Gordha for slaughter. Instead, they’ll have to receive a bit less per kilogram when they sell cattle to you, and that lower price will allow you to sell meat at the same price as Gordha. The cattlemen will still make a living.”

“I see. Lord, I apologize that we have been unable to pay you back for the loans you made to us two and three years ago. Twenty thousand dhanay is a lot of money and we should have given you four thousand last year. All we managed was a thousand; the economy, as you know, was very bad last year and we just couldn’t make a profit. We hope you aren’t here to demand last year’s debt. I do have a thousand dhanay ready to give you toward the debt, however.”

“No, I am not here to collect my debt, although I will certainly welcome the thousand.”

“Then here; take it.” Kapanu rose and walked to his desk. He wrote out a check for a thousand dhanay on the city’s checkbook and handed it to Chris. “This year has been very good, so far, and I am sure we can afford to repay all four thousand we owe you for this year.”

“Excellent. How is the development plan going?”

“We didn’t develop practically at all last year. Two years ago, as promised, the army graveled the last two roads, connecting our last two villages to the rest of the world. They erected poles and the telephone and electrical companies laid their wires last spring. We did add four more classrooms to the high school last year, and one was made the temporary home of the clinic. We are now getting a doctor three days a week. The evening génadema classes are going well and we thank you for arranging them. The

sawmill has started its expansion now that people are buying lumber again, and the icebox factory plans to expand this fall. So we are moving once more. What can you tell me about ‘gas’? We have heard a lot about it in the last year.”

“You have severe winters here, so you’ll need a lot of gas for heating. Cooking requires much less. We have a gas plant that is about the right size for Sullendha, considering your severe winters. It’d cost 40,000 dhanay to purchase and set up, plus maybe 5,000 more for the pipes. There’s also biogas, which costs only a thousand or two to set up, but can only meet cooking needs unless you build dozens of them.”

“And then the cost will be close to 40,000 again. No, we can’t afford that; not yet.”

“Wait a few years; the costs will come down. Have you heard about Wiki Bank and microcredit?”

“Indeed; I read an excellent article about it in *Melwika Nues* when the bank opened. So last month I wrote and asked for more information. They sent me the same article by mail and promised that a Bahá’í youth team would come this summer with the details. They’re here now, they’re teaching their faith to people, some are complaining to me about their zealotry, and we haven’t heard anything more about microcredit.”

“Give them time; they have been trained to offer several classes this year and they can’t do all of them at once. I apologize if they’ve been pushy about the Faith.”

Kapanu shrugged. “They haven’t been pushy as much as their love for it has been pushy. I understand where they’re coming from. They’ll attract some people to their faith, of course, but they’ll also repel others by their fanaticism. I’m less inclined toward it now, if anything.”

“I understand and am sorry. I apologize again. Our goal is not to offend, but to offer spiritual uplift and divine guidance.”

“Your religion combines prayer and practical teachings and it is hard to separate the two. I understand that.”

Chris decided to change the subject. “Any news about the tree nursery in Gwerkaita? I ask because driving through the area east of here, I was amazed by the extent of the damage done by clear cutting. The sawmill should cut the forest in strips or blocks and leave the rest to reseed the cleared areas and to stop gullyng.”

“We’ve told them, but they ignore the advice. As for the nursery, I don’t think Lord Stélanu really understood the idea. People plant wheat; they cut trees. We have such large areas of forest that it seems unnecessary to replant them.”

You do have large areas, but you’ve already cut 15 square kilometers. At this rate, if you keep expanding, it’ll all be cut in thirty years. It’s simple math. And this world’s need for wood is not going to slow; it will keep increasing.”

“I see no reason to doubt you, since all we have seen is expansion. But right now, we want to complete our development plan, and that costs money. Diverting money to a tree nursery seems like a waste.”

“I understand. Would you object if I invested in a tree nursery, then?”

Kapanu paused, then shook his head. “No, why should we?”

“Well, I’ll also need authorization to plant the trees in the clear cut areas. That gives me an economic interest in those areas, too. So what I’d like to do is purchase the timber rights from you for one dhanay per agri.”

“The timber rights? The timber would be yours?”

“If I plant it, I get a share of the harvest.”

“The sawmill won’t like that!”

“At this rate they’ll cut everything in thirty years and will have nothing left but my tree plantation.”

“Lord, you won’t be around in thirty years.”

“True, but my son will be in his early sixties and will know the forests very well. He’s an ecologist, after all.”

“We don’t want any villages built there without our permission and involvement, so we will not give permission to set up villages. We don’t want strangers in the land of the Lepawsonε.”

“Of course. But timber rights mean that nothing can be built there by me, because I won’t have the rights to build, just raise timber. If anyone else wants to build there they will need my permission, because they will be cutting my trees.”

“So development would have to be planned by us and you jointly? I can live with that because so far, whenever you have started a village, it developed fast and everyone benefited. But the sawmill; Lord, they will not be happy. They must have the timber.”

“I’ll contract with them to cut the timber. If they want the timber rights instead, they should replant the clear cut areas. They can even buy trees from my nursery, it’s fine with me!”

Kapanu laughed at that. “I bet they’ll start cutting strips of forest and preventing gullies after that!”

“Of course. I have no desire to take timber from them. I wouldn’t have the trees cut and hauled to a sawmill elsewhere, unless they were unreasonable. You know me; I offer reasonable business deals.”

“That is true. That is your reputation. So . . . only one dhanay per agri.”

“I am assuming the risk and I’ll have to hire men to replant the land and do a little maintenance every year, such as thinning and pruning trees periodically. If you want high quality timber, you have to manage your forests.”

“That will be news to the sawmill, too.”

“I hope they learn a lot in the next few years.”

“Where would you put the nursery?”

“Just east of here at the edge of the clear-cut area. It’ll be in Sullendha and it’ll bring the town five jobs, maybe ten eventually. How many agris is the clear-cut area east of here?”

“I’d say, about eight thousand. We’ve cleared maybe two or three thousand more along the rivers, but people are using it for pastureland and sometimes for crops.”

“Alright. Eight thousand. That’s eight thousand dhanay you owe me from last year and this year that you won’t have to pay back. Plus you’ll get five new jobs by the end of the summer.”

Kapanu laughed. “You are very persuasive, Lord!”

“I’ll want to buy more timber rights every month or so, as the saw mill clears more land. And I’ve already promised to invest in Penkakwés, as I did two years ago and last year. The tree plantation is over and above that commitment.”

“Very well, very well. You’ve convinced me. But let’s walk to the sawmill and talk to the owner. I want him to be persuaded as well. That won’t be easy.”

“It may be easier than you think. I’ll ask for a share of the harvest but will guarantee a forest with more timber than they find now, and higher quality. I can do that because higher rainfall and proper management allows more trees per agri.”

“Good; tell him that. I assume you have time?”

“I do; I have another hour or so. Then I have to go to Nuarjora and negotiate the purchase of some very large, very strong fish nets.”

“Fish nets? Are you going into the timber and fishing businesses on the same day?”

Chris laughed. “No, my son has made a very bold and possibly foolish plan. I’ll tell you about it if it succeeds!”

The more Thornton thought about his proposal, the less he liked it. He had felt pressured to prove his courage to the Kaitere and they had every intention of making him stick to his word, which included doing the most dangerous parts of the capture. Lébé was furious. Chris was very unhappy but eventually agreed to obtain nets. The Bahá’í youth were very unhappy; only Déodatu and one other, Estonkordu, agreed to help. Amos agreed to spend several days to design a proper steel cage that could be split in half with a row of metal bars down the middle; that way they could use it to capture more than one sabertooth, if that proved possible.

When the cage and nets arrived at Gimutroba two weeks later, all the talk suddenly became very real. Even the Kaitere had second thoughts, though Stéldamu felt

his reputation was on the line and had to encourage everyone. They practiced throwing nets off the roof of a house and subduing two unruly goats with them. But everyone felt the need to prepare spiritually, which for the Kaitere meant a lengthy sweat ceremony and chanting of hymns to the Earth Mother. It was the ceremony they used before hunting elephants, bears, and lions; they never hunted sabertooths, so they could only hope it would apply. Thornton, Déodatu, and Estonkordu joined them, an awkward event since they were naked and ignorant of the rituals and hymns. At least, Thornton mused, the rarely bathing Kaitere were less likely to be detected by the sabertooths' incredibly capable noses.

They donned special leather "immortality shirts" at the end and set out, fifteen men, twenty-five horses, and one pickup. The latter had to stop ten kilometers short of the cave, but it was better than a thirty-kilometer hike with snarling, angry sabertooths. They headed up the slope about two kilometers north of the cave, then moved in until they were half a kilometer away.

"It is very, very important to get the big net completely across the mouth of the cave and along the slope on both sides," said Thornton, repeating a plan everyone had already rehearsed in their minds and as a group many times. "The brush on the right side will be a real problem; the cats may escape through them. If possible, we should capture the cubs; let the mother and father escape if necessary."

"They may attack even five armed men," noted Stéldamu. "We must be very careful and be quick with the swords."

"I'll be quick with mine," agreed Thornton.

“The men on top can come down to help very quickly,” added Ekeru, the young Kaitere cattleman who would lead the men above the cave. “Once the big net is in place, we’ll need the other nets and the ropes down below anyway.”

“There’s no reason to talk,” said Stéldamu. “We all know the plan. Let’s go.”

Thornton nodded. He and Stéldamu had to lead three other men toward the cave mouth, but with a stealth that would keep them undetected by the big cats, who were constantly alert. The other twelve—experienced hunters—had to be equally quiet and position themselves six meters above the cave mouth. It was a high-risk plan that would require a lot of courage and improvisation.

They moved with great care and complete silence up the slope, then toward the cave. Unfortunately, the male sabertooth came out to sun itself on the flat rock two meters in front of the cave. Stéldamu watched Ekeru and exchanged hand signals as the two parties closed in, in sight of each other but not of the sabertooths.

Ekeru stopped well short of the top of the cave; he and his men could not proceed further without the male seeing them. No one was sure what to do. From their hiding place fifty meters from the cave mouth, Stéldamu and Thornton watched Ekeru patiently; they had to await his signal, and none was forthcoming. An hour passed. Then from their silent hiding places, they saw the male head back inside. He had gotten too hot. The feeble west wind had provided too little relief from the sun.

Ekeru and three other men rose from their places, very carefully moved the rolled up net in place, then began forward. Ready, they dropped the net over the front of the cave. That was the signal; Stéldamu pulled out his sword and the five of them dashed toward the cave mouth, swords in the right hands and spears in their left hands.

The cave didn't amount to much; a two meter recession in the cliff face, more of an overhang, but the ten by ten meter net completely cut off escape as long as the animals didn't try too aggressively. The four men on top moved closer to the edge and held onto the top of the net with all their strength while the others dashed down the slope with other nets in hand and with long, forked poles they had cut several kilometers back. With the poles, several men pressed the net against the rock face to keep the sabertooths from escaping from the side. The two adults stood in front of their young, snarling defiantly, trapped in the small space. Stéldamu looked at them and began to laugh deeply and heartily, a huge release of tension.

"Now what?" exclaimed a man, who didn't laugh at all.

"We get them in the net," replied Stéldamu. He sheathed his sword and approached the cave carefully with his spear. "Here, kitty, kitty, kitty." He kept the spear menacingly in front of him. Reaching the net with it, he poked it in.

That was all it took; the two cats, six hundred kilograms of muscle and teeth, lunged at him simultaneously. He had to drop the spear; it was caught in the mesh. But so were the cats. The other men came forward with poles and spears and pushed the bottom edge of the net to the ground, retreating when a cat lunged at them. But each lunge entangled them more in the ten by ten meter net. Meanwhile, the four men on top held on for dear life, not wanting to be pulled off the cliff and fall on a pair of angry beasts.

There was a minute of confusion as brave men and angry cats performed a kind of dance. Then Thornton grabbed another, smaller net and threw it on top of the female. Déodatu threw another one over the male. Heavy canvas sheets followed, which caused quite a lot of thrashing, growling, and shouting. When the cats moved they thumped them

with the spear butts, then tried to push the canvas under the animals as well. Two of the cubs charged out and got caught in the net as well; a canvas sheet was thrown over them.

“Let me get the last one,” growled Stéldamu. He grabbed a small net, pushed the big one aside, and entered the cave. The cub cowered before him; he threw a net over it, then a canvas sheet someone handed him.

Everyone began to cheer. “We did it!” shouted Ekeru, scrambling down the side of the cliff. The other men on top dropped their end of the net—no longer needed—and hurried down as well.

Stéldamu came to Thornton and slapped on the back. “You were a brave man!”

“Thank you; so were you! So were all of us!”

“We’re not done, remember,” said Déodatu.

“That’s right,” agreed Stéldamu. “Let’s tie them up and haul them to the pickup truck. Then we can haul them back to Gimutroba and you can tell us about Bahu!”

356.

Gwærdema

Last half Kaimému/mid July, yr 15/633

Chris stood looking at the caged animals in the back of the pickup truck and shaking his head. “Never in all my life could I have imagined that I would see a sabertooth. Never.”

“It is amazing, isn’t it, Lord,” agreed Stéldamu, who had ridden in the pickup truck that morning all the way to Mēlwika. “I think I’ve seen them three or four times in my life, and never close up.”

“And here are five of them!” Chris said, smiling and pointing.

They both shared a laugh.

“So; they’re going to Mēlita?” asked Thornton.

Chris nodded. “I think that’s the best place for the Gwærdema.”

“They’ll have a ‘dema’?” asked Stéldamu, puzzled. The word referred to a structure or building of some sort.

“They’ll have a ‘treba,’” replied Chris, using the Eryan word for an animal’s lair, though it also meant ‘barn’ and could refer to a poor person’s hut. “It’ll be a big area maybe fifteen meters square enclosed by iron bars, with a place where they can get out of the rain, tree trunks for them to claw, etc. There will be a roof of iron bars as well; they won’t be able to escape. We’ll set up trébas for other animals nearby. People will pay to bring their children and see the animals. The money will be enough to feed the animals. We’ll want to study the sabertooths, too, so it’ll pay for studying them.”

“Why Mēlita and not Mēlwika?” asked Thornton.

“It’s closer to the western shore. I think we’ll put it near the stores, and provide a big playground for kids. It’ll attract a lot of people and make a lot of money, for us and for the animals.”

Thornton nodded. “So, that’s how it works,” said Stéldamu. He wasn’t condemning or complaining, just observing.

“The stores will make us money, not the gwerdema; it’ll probably lose money.”

“So, what do we do with them now?” asked Thornton. “We need to get back to Gimutroba later today.”

“Oh.” Chris looked at the five cats; they were now his problem. “Let’s drive them to Mēlita, then. I’ll get Luktréstu; he can drive and I’ll start making arrangements. You aren’t done in Gimutroba? Not only could I use your help with the sabertooths; I’ve mostly negotiated a deal with Lord Kapanu of Sullendha, who is also Duke of the Pēnkakwés, for timber rights on most of their clear cut land. We’ll replant it and manage it, then sell the timber rights to the local sawmill. I need help planning the tree nursery and replanting.”

Thornton shook his head. “We’re establishing good relations with the Kaitere and I think we can be of some concrete assistance, so I need to stay there the remaining three weeks. We may even extend our visit, since we’re going to the Késtone and Mēménegone next, and they’re close by.”

“It would be good if he could stay,” agreed Stéldamu. “Déodatu, here, has some good ideas about cattle and horse raising.”

“Then I’ll manage,” replied Chris. “I’ll get Luktréstu.” He took another look at the sabertooths, then went into the Tomi building to get his secretary.

Soon they were on their way, Chris and Luktréstu in the rover, with Thornton, Déodatu, and Stéldamu following. Chris took his cell phone and asked the operator to connect him with Moléstu Dénujénése, his reliable and efficient construction contractor. Fortunately it was before dawn in Terskua, so he was still home.

“Khélo?” Moléstu sounded extremely tired when he answered the phone.

“Moléstu, this is Lord Kristoféru. I have a small construction job for you that’s an extreme emergency. Remember the 2 by 1.5 by 1.5 meter cage your welder built last week? I need a five by five by three meter cage of the exact same sort.”

A pause. “Thornton got the sabertooths?”

“He and half of a Kaitere clan! Mom, dad, and three cubs! I’m on my way to Mēlita right now in my rover, and Thornton’s following with a pickup truck and a cage in the back!”

“Wow! That’s incredible! Alright, I’ll organize a group of welders and send them to get the rebar. Where do we meet you?”

“On the vacant lot just south of Mēlita’s marketplace. It’s being used for hay right now. I guess future expansion may have to go somewhere else.”

“I’m coming personally; I want to see these creatures! Are you sure five meters is big enough for them?”

“It’s temporary. We need a permanent enclosure for them about fifteen meters square. We’ll dig a hole in the ground five meters deep, cover the bottom and sides with stone to look as much like a natural rock surface as possible, create a little cave for them, add bars upward another five meters, add some bushes and a running water supply, and let people stand on top and look down at them. They’ll have more of a home, that way.”

“Clever. Give me the specifications and I’ll build it.”

“I’m sure you can. See you in Melita, then.”

Kalageduru, Sumilara’s second largest city, had 5,000 people. It lay sixteen kilometers west of Anartu on the island’s southern coast. Jordan passed a crew at the edge of town concreting Route 31 and was impressed that the work was starting at both ends of the highway at once. A ditch along the south side of the road, unusually wide and deep, was for more than just drainage; the gas pipeline was supposed to go in it.

He slowed the steam car as he passed through the city gate and crept along, entrained in the pedestrians, horses, wagons, and bicycles making their way across the city. The architecture closely resembled Anartu’s, though none of the buildings appeared to have been built or repaired in the last century. The central square was lined by impressive but ancient stone buildings, including the city’s palace and temple; wooden booths covered the east side of the plaza, in front of the cavernous stone market. The western side of the plaza in front of the palace and temple served as parking, so Jordan found a spot and parked the steam car. He locked the firebox and the vehicle itself, then walked into the palace.

“Honored Jordan, welcome to Kalageduru,” said Lord Ansharu, as a servant escorted Jordan into his meeting room. He was a young man of about thirty, having succeeded his father as lord just a year and a half earlier.

“Thank you, Lord. I’m very pleased to be here. I’m sorry I couldn’t get here sooner, but expanding the gas works is moving more slowly than we hoped.”

“You know Sisugal?”

“Indeed.” Jordan extended his hands and shook with his fellow Bahá’í, who was a member of the Kalageduru Spiritual Assembly.

“And Dumugal Marenki?”

“Yes, we’ve spoken several times.” Jordan shook hands with him as well; editor of the *Sumi Herald*, he was a native of the city, though he lived in Anartu. “You have a lovely meeting room. The wood paneling is of very high quality and I can feel the cooling of air conditioning.”

“We just installed the ice cooler last month,” replied Ansharu. “Kalageduru now receives one ferry boat a week from Luktrudema, mostly to carry ice. It’s progress. Would you like some iced tea?” The Lord pointed to a tray of glasses.

“Thank you, that will be very refreshing.” Jordan walked to the tray and took a glass; it gave him time to wonder what exactly the purpose of the meeting was. The slowness of the gas company would not require Sisugal. “How can I help you, Lord?” he asked. “I assume the issue of the gas company is central. I think we will be able to start work on a blue water gas unit and two biogas digesters in about a month. Gas just started to flow down the main street of Anartu the other day.”

“I heard from Dumugal.”

“The article appears in the *Herald* tomorrow,” added Dumugal. “Bilara’s biogas digesters start to produce in a month and Anarbala’s blue water gas unit in a month and a half.”

“We’re moving along quite quickly, now,” agreed Jordan. “We now have a critical mass of trained workers for installing equipment and laying pipe. Amurueqluma and

Galulia will have gas by the end of the summer. Production will start small, but as demand increases, so will production.”

“What about the pipeline? Concreting of Route 31 has begun without it. I thought that was part of the plan,” said Ansharu.

“We’ve postponed pipelines for now because biogas digesters provide a quick and easy way to increase gas production. A pipeline isn’t necessary if everyone makes enough gas.”

“What will that do to development?” asked Ansharu. “Because that’s a major reason I invited you here. Kalageduru used to be close to Anartu in size and wealth, but we’re now half as large and probably a third or a quarter as wealthy. The pipeline was a symbol that we had attained equality, but now that’s gone. The Bahá’í youth have asked to come here and contribute classes and ideas; that’s why I’ve invited Sisugal here. I understand they’re in Gireduru right now.”

“I understand they plan to continue giving classes there, but want to add Kalageduru to their plans. There are seven of them there,” explained Jordan.

“Sisugal told me. They can have a useful impact in Gireduru; it has only a thousand people and is poor. Only a few of the children there go to school. But I am not impressed by their possible contributions to this city. Plumbing? We have a dozen plumbers; Gireduru probably has none. We have public water; it does not. We have a high school, so people learn about public health. We have a clinic, so people have access to a doctor; Gireduru peasants have to come here for that. We have an evening literacy program.”

“Nevertheless, the youth can make some useful contributions,” said Jordan. “They can set up a Women’s Gabruli, where women come together to learn and work together. The gabrulis often set up solidarity groups so that members can borrow small amounts of money; Wiki Bank has trained the youth how to set up solidarity groups. There is the potential that several hundred people in this city could borrow one to one hundred dhanay in the next few years to improve their lives. Many women buy sewing machines, for example.”

“Sewing machines? They are useful where people make a lot of clothing, but in our hot and humid climate, we rarely wear very much!”

“That’s one example. Farmers can use the loans to buy animals, carts, tools, plows, or carpentry equipment. Women can use loans to buy sewing and cooking items. There are many possibilities. Some widows have bought telephones so they can sell phone calls and message services to their neighbors.”

“These may be useful, then. But the youth are really here to teach their religion, and we don’t need that.”

“Lord, they are not ‘really here to teach their religion.’ They are here to be of service. We do not distinguish between spiritual and material forms of service; we offer both.”

“It is impressive to meet them because four of the youth are Eryan, but speak some Sumi,” added Sisugal. “Where have you ever seen that before?”

“It is not *that* unusual,” responded Ansharu. “At any rate, they are here to offer both and it is not clear to me that Kalageduru needs either. Look, if they want to operate

out of a private house, the police will leave them alone. But they can't use schools or public places."

"We'll accept those terms, Lord," said Sisugal.

"That's fine with me," said Ansharu. He turned to Jordan. "We've tried to implement a development plan, honored. The factories we've sought to attract have gone elsewhere, and now they're going only to the three industrial parks on the island. We are a city with impressive handicrafts, but weaving, leatherwork, and shoe making are being replaced by factories. We need to develop the other handicrafts and obtain other sources of employment. The concreted road and the weekly ferry are reasons to hope, but what we need is not classes about sewing machines and Ruhi books."

"I have a question, Lord," said Jordan. "West of here, toward Vermillion Cliffs, there is extensive forest. Expansion of your agricultural land in that direction would greatly benefit the city. Furthermore, the additional agris would provide a reason to set up grange. Granges, once established, tend to benefit existing farmers as well."

"That area is part of an ancient and abandoned village—abandoned after a volcanic eruption five hundred years ago—and the hereditary lordship still exists. He has not given permission and no one has overridden his decision yet. But Kalageduru has a reputation for handicrafts. We really would like to develop those resources."

"I can't help you with that; nor can the Bahá'í youth. But I'll talk to my grandfather, Lord Kristoféru. If he comes, he'll have ideas for you, I am sure. The development plan identifies certain needs in every province: dairy, eggs, chicken production, food processing, shoes, and clothing manufactures, for example. Once you have gas, cooking and drying on a large scale will be easier. There is no reason to site all

factories in only three places; every place can have them, indeed, every large place *should* have industry. And credit is not difficult to obtain.”

“Part of the problem here is the province-wide plan,” said Dumugal. “Sumilara likes central planning. The idea of one gas plant and a pipeline network is one example. The three industrial parks for the entire island is another. The governor, the banks, even the palace need pto realize that Kalageduru must be developed for its own sake.”

“It sounds like something the *Sumi Herald* should write about,” said Jordan.

“Perhaps you are right,” agreed Dumugal.

“My grandfather would also say the city needs to be ‘sold’ to people,” added Jordan. “You need a plan to attract business, incentives—like several years of tax breaks—and publicity materials. If you have a plan and it isn’t working, modify it or replace it and try the new plan.”

“And don’t assume Bahá’ís are irrelevant to it,” added Sisugal. “They strive to be educated and improve themselves, which means they start businesses and make other efforts to develop their community.”

“We’ll see about that,” replied Ansharu. “The youth can come here and operate out of houses or a Bahá’í Center if you get one. Let me know if they set up a gabruli or solidarity groups. If they can help set up a grange, that would be good, also. Don’t just send us kids who can offer simple classes. If you want to provide *real* services, send people with special training.”

“Point well taken, Lord,” replied Jordan.

“And please do try to invite Lord Kristoféru if you can. As for gas: I want a weekly report about your progress, or else the company’s tax breaks are in jeopardy.”

“Very well, Lord,” replied Jordan.

Reread and edited, July 3-5, 2011; this chapter reread and edited, 6/13/13,
8/26/17, 11/26/24

Liz (66): Splitting her time between ABM work and Women's Gabrulis.

Chris (68-69): Chris talks to army about hydro in Long Valley and chimney in Kerda (or pipeline).

May (41); Amos (43); Lua (46); Behruz (50); Thornton (31); Lébé (31)

The children: Rostamu Shirazi (13, summer); Skandé Keino (12, spring); Jalalu Mennea (11, spring); Kalé Mennea (9, June); Marié Keino (same); Jonkrisu (6, Aug.)

Tiamaté (19-20) Jordan (19-20)

Started April 26, 2008; finished June 12, 2008 (48 days, 279 pages; 5.8 pp/day). Reread and edited Dec. 27-28, 2023 and November 25-26, 20254,