

# *THE PIONEERS*

*Vol. 9*

*Prosperity*

## Contents

|                                    |     |
|------------------------------------|-----|
| 171. Dreams                        | 2   |
| 172. Radio                         | 19  |
| 173. The Truth                     | 33  |
| 174. Audience                      | 51  |
| 175. Controversies                 | 60  |
| 176. Health                        | 84  |
| 177. Commemoration                 | 103 |
| 178. Endings and Beginnings        | 124 |
| 179. Profits and Plans             | 145 |
| 180. Glacier Burst                 | 165 |
| 181. Kostakhéma                    | 181 |
| 182. In the Land of the Ghéslonges | 195 |
| 183. Land Rush                     | 219 |
| 184. Storm                         | 238 |
| 185. Construction                  | 257 |
| 186. Oktoberfest                   | 275 |
| 187. New Home                      | 295 |

171.

## Dreams

Soru tossed and turned in his bed, his dreams haunted by Lujékwu. Sometimes the young, blondish thief had a sword in hand and was menacing, sometimes he was in chains and fetters and angry. And then there was the image of a line of decapitated heads on pikes on the city wall . . . several faces Soru recognized from his prison days, then Lujékwu's, then his own. . .

Soru awoke with a cry. He sat up in bed and looked around the darkened room. Kanawé was jolted awake as well. "What is it?"

"A bad dream, that's all."

"A bad dream? That's the third time in a week. And you never had bad dreams before. What are they about?"

"Bad people I once knew. . ." He didn't want to go into more details and trusted the dark to hide the feelings contorting his face.

"Bad people? How strange. Why now? Maybe it's the fast, Soru. Maybe you should be eating instead."

"No, it isn't the fast. Don't worry about it." He leaned over and kissed her in the dark. She settled back into bed and he pulled the blankets up closer to his face to ward off the cold and damp.

It was the fast, in a way. He had been reflecting about his life in the last week, as he had fasted, and he feared that his past would come back to destroy everything he had built: a happy marriage, the beginning of a family, a fascinating new job, a reasonably

comfortable life, a new religion . . . it was too good to be true, too good to last. And it could all be taken away from him by one or two evil men at any time . . . he laid in bed a long time, knowing he couldn't tell Kanawé, unable to sleep until he started to recite a prayer silently from memory, driving away hauntings until he was able to sleep again.

One result of the inadequate sleep was sleeping too late. Soru woke with a start; it was light out! During the Bahá'í Fast, one did not eat or drink from sunrise to sunset! He turned to the loaf of bread, orange, and large cup of water he had placed beside the bed the night before and began to consume them as quickly as he could without looking to see whether the sun was actually up or not.

Kanawé rose and hurried downstairs to use the bathroom before Saréidukter or her girls tied it up. In the peaceful loft, Soru pulled out his prayer book and read a few Bahá'í prayers. Then he went downstairs to wash up a bit before coming back up to change into his school clothes. Kanawé, Saréidukter, and the girls noisily ate breakfast; he came down to be with them, feeling a bit on the outs because he wasn't eating. Finally, the girls went to school and he and Kanawé hurried to the génadema. They had a long day ahead of them: even though there were no classes during Ejnaménu, Kanawé was busy catching up with the work she had not done the previous term because of her morning sickness, which was now abated; he was helping her and writing a big research paper about the ways deafness had been handled on Gèdhéma, which required hours of slow reading of English texts and frequent retreat to the English lab for help with puzzling sentences or pages; then they both headed to Mèddoakwés for their classes with their children at the hospital, from one to six bells; then a ride back home, a relaxing supper cooked by Saréidukter or her older daughter, an hour of relaxation, and bed. It was

a long daily ritual.

As they walked to the génadema they passed one of the new-fangled steam cars driving slowly north on Temple Street, avoiding pedestrians and bicyclists. Mitru Miller stopped his vehicle in front of the Mennea house and tooted the whistle lightly; it could be pretty loud if one pulled the cord for a long time. A moment later Chris and Thornton Mennea stepped out, leather coats bundled against the cold. With them was Marku Bejdédrai, the génadema's resident archaeologist and historian.

"Good morning," Mitru said. "I didn't realize I'd have a full run this morning! Maybe I should charge you!"

Chris laughed. They all climbed into the steam car. It was a compact vehicle; the fit was tight. "Thornton and Marku are coming down to survey the ruins, assuming Aryékwes has no objection."

"Ejnopéla is built on the site of Balara; at least I think it's Balara," explained Marku. "It was the largest city between Meddoakwés and Lilalara and its Lord was pretty important. Its temple on the hill of sacrifice was considered very sacred."

"Really? How do you know all that?" asked Mitru.

"The Great Library in Anartu has old records and books about the period, though they are crumbling, and there is an army officer—Skandu, of the House of Engurra—who has been reading them. I saw some of them last summer when I was in Anartu as well."

"Oh, you're the museum guy!" said Mitru. He smiled and extended his hands around to the back seat where Marku was now seated. "Lord Chris asked me about a year ago whether I would donate money to build a museum, or at least get one started, and I said yes. But no one pursued the matter further, and I didn't have the cash to spare then

anyway.”

“Do you now?” asked Marku, eyes lighting up. “Because we need some for a museum, and to preserve Penkwayukwa.” The latter, “Five Windows,” was an old Sumi villa that Marku had excavated last year.

“Well; maybe I do.” Mitru paused to consider what to say. Meanwhile, everyone being in the car, he put it in gear and started it down the street. “Right now everything is in flux again, and more so than ever before. As you probably heard, last week Miller Steelworks unveiled the steam car—like this one, which was the prototype—called the *kwapstélo*.” He paused for the word, meaning “steam stallion,” to sink in. “And next month we release the steam truck, called the *kwaptauro*.” He paused again for them to consider the “steam bull.” “It looks like every rich man who bought a steam wagon will sell it back to us in order to buy one or the other, or maybe a *kwapukso*, a ‘steam ox’ as we are calling our tractors.”

“And they aren’t just the same steam engine with different trailers,” commented Chris.

“No, not at all! They are specialized vehicles. The trucks can be modified to serve as buses, ambulances, or fire engines. The car is for moving a few people or a small amount of cargo, the tractor for agricultural work. We can rebuild many of the older vehicles into one or the other and expect a lot of demand for them. But I have no idea what it will do to demand for my vehicles, or how quickly I have to modify my fleet, or how many people and villages will buy their own vehicles and stop using mine.”

“They’re simpler, aren’t they?”

“In some ways. They steer and brake much better than the early vehicles and the

steam engines are smaller and heat up faster, but are powerful. But they are more complicated to maintain, with headlights and windshield wipers and such. What worries me is all the people out there who used to work for me, who can be hired by others or can become competitors with used vehicles. I'm going to have to keep one step ahead."

"You'll do it," said Chris. "And we're still counting on a donation, say, in another half year or so."

Mitru smiled. "Well, we'll see!"

"Say, did you drive to Khærmadhuna?" asked Thornton, changing subjects.

Mitru nodded. "Yes, I ran the steam wagon up the road and plowed the snow away, after the latest snowstorm. Their animals were really starved—worst winter up there in two decades—and they lost a few, but the hay and old grain was in time to save most of them."

"Thank Esto," said Chris. "They're good, hard-working people."

"The Kristanes," agreed Mitru. "Interesting bunch. I delivered a bundle of letters from Yagu to the headman, Pédrú, and then personally delivered the replies to Yagu two days later."

"He was thrilled; that's how I know," said Thornton. "So, you were there overnight?"

"Yeah, we had to stay overnight because it was too dark to drive back to Bellédha."

"Really?" Thornton thought of the eternal summer twilight. "Say, in your judgment, were day and night equal in length?"

Mitru shook his head. "No, definitely not. Daylight lasted maybe . . . eight hours."

“Interesting. Dad, that proves Éra’s axis now has a tilt! But two years ago it didn’t! We measured it here and it didn’t; then when I walked to the South Pole I made a lot of observations, and it didn’t there, not within half a degree.”

“Interesting. So what does that mean?”

“It means the axis precesses, and not over 25,000 years like Earth! It must precess pretty fast. Our seasons right now are driven by the eccentricity of Skanda’s orbit around the sun; winter at aphelion, summer at perihelion. But if the axis tilts, those seasons will change; it sounds like the northern hemisphere will get cold winters and hot summers, while the southern hemisphere will have no seasons at all. If the axis tilts enough, the entire seasonal cycle will be driven by the tilt and the orbital eccentricity will fade as a factor.”

“Hum.” Chris thought about that. “Better get the astronomers to work on that one. We wouldn’t want winter to come at the wrong time and kill the crops.”

“I’ll ask Skandu about that, too,” said Marku. “There are comments about crop failures in the old records, along with floods, droughts, and other disasters. Volcanic eruptions coated Sumilara with ash a few times, too.”

“Yes, ask him about all those things,” agreed Chris. “If I were him, I’d authorize a small army of readers to find all those things in the past. We have no idea how much grain to store for emergencies.”

They drove on in silence. They were already halfway to the capital; the concrete road allowed very fast speeds, and the shoulders were going to be widened for wagons and other slower traffic. “How fast can you go?” Chris asked Mitru.

“I don’t know, but once this thing gets headlights, I plan to take it out and drive it

from the South Gate to Deksawsuperakwa as fast as I can, and I'll let you know. I bet I can hit a hundred fifty dekent per hour, though."

"How many steam cars will Yimu produce?"

"Three per month; he's gearing up."

"How much?"

"They'll cost 4,500 each to make and he'll sell them for 7,000, though accessories can add another one or two thousand. Trucks are about the same; the main addition is installing a cab. Different trailers can cost two hundred to two thousand. Buses are 5,500 and 8,000. Tractors are cheaper, 3,500 and 5,000 because they have no cab, but you need accessories; plows and harrows are only 100 each, but the latest wheat harvester is 5,000 all by itself."

"But it does the work of twenty men."

"Exactly. When these things really spread, I don't know what farmers will do."

"They'll work in manufacturing. How many per year is Yimu making?"

"We'll see. He can produce ten model-E steam engines per month, but they can be configured two different ways, to produce either twenty-five or fifty horsepower. He can make up to three cars, eight trucks, twelve tractors, and one bus per month; bodies and accessories for twenty-four vehicles. The question is how many used model-D and model-C engines are turned in; we can clean them thoroughly and retrofit them with an automated coke dispenser, electrical system, headlights, and a few other niceties, and convert them into trucks or tractors."

"And there's the question of demand."

"Exactly. Meanwhile, I'm getting more contracts for moving things all the time;

the palace wants me to move hundreds of tonnes of rice to Bellédha and Tripola and wheat in the other direction. Local villages are asking me to move their surplus harvest to the big-city granaries for better storage once the latter have space. Sumilara's importing wheat and corn. Business grows every month, even in the winter! And I already have two small competitors on the western shore."

"That's to be expected," said Chris. "Just keep training your workers to be more efficient and pay them enough so you retain them; otherwise their experience will go to your competitors."

"True, but at some point there won't be enough of a margin of additional efficiency because the skills aren't that complicated. At that point there may be a price war, and wages may have to go down."

Chris nodded. "Yes, that could happen. Count on your office to be more efficient as well; those skills won't be learned as fast. Make your vehicles as efficient as possible. Concentrate on quality; on time delivery and passenger movement. You'll develop customer loyalty."

Mitru glanced at Chris. "Father says that you worry too much about workers; that on Earth, workers get less."

"I admit, I have been trying to create a better situation for workers. But there are benefits: less danger of a future revolution, for example; less danger of extremes arising, like communism; and a living wage means the workers can live in dignity. Earth has become a very greedy place and we don't need to copy that custom."

"I agree with you there," he said, reflecting on his own father's behavior.

The rest of the trip they exchanged informal discussion while Thornton and

Marku chatted in the back. It took three quarters of an hour to get to Ejnopéla. When they arrived, they parked in the future bus station; it had a long loop of concrete so buses could parallel park to load and unload passengers under an overhang. They got out and Mitru gave them a tour of the bus station. The waiting hall had been combined with the market building and was lined with stalls for future small businesses. One corner had room for a new steam car, steam truck, or steam tractor to be put on display. It was the world's first real bus station; Məlwika and Məddoakwés just had bus stops.

They crossed Broad Street to see the schools. The elementary and middle school was separated from the high school by a grassy rectangle that represented a future extension of the Sacred Way. Both had an entrance area, an area for administrative offices, and a grand stairway leading to the library on the second floor. Both floors had a corridor that had only one finished classroom on the right and on the left, for a total of four finished classrooms. But the next set of four classrooms had been partially enclosed and would be fully enclosed before the first set of four were used, so that construction noise would be minimized.

They were walking through the high school, admiring the classrooms with their new furniture and painted plaster walls, when Aryékwés arrived. He joined the inspection tour; overall, he was very pleased by the expansion of his town, which had brought three dozen construction workers to Ejnopéla. The townsite now had fifty houses and two contractors from Məlwika were building more; Chris worried that a construction bubble might result. The activity had attracted three more members of the Old Houses, and their villas were scheduled to go up that summer.

“What are the builders doing behind the building?” asked Aryékwes.

“They’re preparing a soccer field,” said Chris. “It’s a game with a ball that you kick.”

“They’re going to play games?”

“Athletics are important,” said Chris.

“Besides, this school is getting the better soccer players,” added Thornton. “The two schools will have pretty good teams.”

“So, when will the school open?” asked Aryékwes, ignoring Thornton.

“When the month of sacrifice ends,” replied Chris. “We’ll redirect 180 high school students here, and it may get a few more from the area. They’ll use two classrooms in the elementary school, leaving one for grades 1-4 and one for grades 5-8, which will also be filled. The other eight classrooms will be done by early summer and we think we’ll fill most of them. If not, they can be used for a clinic, storage, and offices until they’re needed.”

“And where are the teachers coming from?”

“We’re hiring them. Some are teaching the students right now in Melwika. Some of the new houses being built will be sold to teachers.”

“Once the school opens, I’ll have four buses every morning and evening coming through here,” said Mitru. “Two will go on to Meddoakwés, then return; three will make an extra run at noontime to the east, west, and north, then back, so people can come here to use the market. Bus service will be extended farther down the valley to Naskérpēda and Ornakwés, so students from farther west can come to school. Because of the service to Meddoakwés, people living here can count on getting to jobs in the capital. That will

make this place grow more. There are one hundred people living in Məlwika and working in Məddowakwés.”

“Really?” The notion of a “suburb” had not occurred to Aryékwəs, though Mitru and Chris had had it in mind all along. “When will the bus station open?”

“Next month, and we hope to have some businesses in it by then as well. The repair facility in the back will take a few more months.”

“Impressive.” Aryékwəs smiled. “So, Əjnopéla is now rooted! It has to grow now!”

“Let’s hope so,” replied Chris. “The two schools with their sixteen classrooms will cost seventy thousand dhanay, the bus station another thirty, the market building another twenty, and all the small houses being built are probably a hundred thousand more. It’s a lot of investment.”

“I’ve made a lot of money from the sale of the house lots and should get substantial taxes on the businesses, so I am very happy.”

Chris looked at Aryékwəs and nodded. He was tempted to say that if the Lord had invested some of his fortune in the buildings, he could have made even more. Most of the money had come from Məlwika, especially the Miller and Mennea families, the city council—which had loaned money to cover construction of the school—and various merchant families. Ironically, Məlwika was going to be enriched by the construction of a lower valley parallel city. “Lord, we think there is a lot of potential here. We figure there are ten thousand people in the lower Arjakwés and lower Dwobrébakwés who are closer to Əjnopéla than Məddoakwés, so can be attracted to buy things here. If they spend an

average of one dhanay per week here, that's 650,000 dhanay per year."

"And that will attract more people, which will attract more business, and there is the 50,000 dhanay per year of student tuition being spent through the school. Ejnopéla can become quite big. Please come to my house to celebrate. And there is another piece of good news. I met with Her Majesty three days ago and she pledged to spend one hundred lédhay to build a new temple on the hill of sacrifice."

"Really? Congratulations. Did she agree to station soldiers here?"

"No, but she said we should establish a police force like the ones in Məlwika and Məddoakwés."

"Did she offer to pay for it?"

"No, and it won't be paid out of the local taxes due to me, either, so there will have to be a special assessment for it."

"Lord, if you lay too many expenses on the businesses, they won't be able to compete with businesses elsewhere, and they won't grow," noted Chris. "One of the purposes of the local taxes is to pay for local services."

Aryékwés shrugged. "The service that the taxes pay for is the privilege of doing business in Ejnopéla. That's the way it is. Same with the fire station. The schools should contribute their share as well, because the schools need fire and police protection." He pointed. "Please, come to my house. I know Mitru will share some wine with me!"

"Lord, my son and Marku want to walk around the old city; do they have your permission? Marku teaches history at our génadema."

"You do? Maybe you can tell me something about these old ruins then, some

time! Of course, feel free, then come to my house for some wine.”

“Thank you, Lord, we will be honored,” replied Marku. He looked at Thornton, smiling.

They all walked out of the high school building. Chris and Mitru followed Aryékwes toward his villa while Marku and Thornton headed northward along Broad Street. Marku stopped at the first block that didn’t have new buildings on it and began to pick through the piles of debris. He took a few pictures with Thornton’s digital camera. “No good archaeology to do here; everything has been displaced.”

“But it is the usual stuff,” said Thornton, fingering a potsherd, then a broken chunk of red roofing tile.

“Yes, it’s a pretty rich site. I remember looking at it last year for about an hour. Now that it’s being built on again, we won’t be able to do much archaeology.”

“It may be a while before the entire site is occupied again, so there’s some time. We should check Ornakwés out before Roktəkəstər builds on it; there was a big Sumi ruin there as well.”

“I remember. I’ll have a lot of field work to do this year.” He walked to another pile of debris and picked through it as well, placing a few samples in a bag he had carried with him. Then he looked up. “Let’s walk the edges of the site and get a better idea how big it is.”

Thornton nodded and they set off at a fast pace along Broad Street. The Sumi town had been built on a grid with concrete streets or alleys every fifty Sumi doli; roughly every twenty meters. Eryan cities were not very different. In about half an hour they determined that the built up area was about five hundred by six hundred meters, or

thirty hectares. “In other words, this place was as big as Məddoakwés before the new addition,” noted Thornton.

“And about as big as Məlwika,” agreed Marku. “Both of those places have big areas that are nonresidential; the capital has the palace and army complex, Məlwika the industrial and educational complexes. The hill of sacrifice was pretty big here, too; so let’s say this town held two thousand houses, like Məlwika today.”

Thornton nodded. “Something like that; ten to twelve thousand people. Ornakwés is about the same, I think, and Lilalara was maybe four times as big; an entire square kilometer.”

“It’s amazing to contemplate where all the people went.” Marku shook his head sadly. “Anyway, a lot of this site hasn’t been disturbed yet. We should request permission to do some detailed surveying and some excavating along the Sacred Way before it’s destroyed. Interesting that a quarter of the old town is now a glider runway!”

Thornton laughed. “Yes, the Sumis would never have expected that!” He glanced at the hill itself. “Dad has been inside almost an hour; I bet we don’t have too much more time. Let’s go to the top.”

“Okay.” Marku liked that idea. The two of them walked to the Ceremonial Way and began to ascend the sacred stair, a monumental structure six meters wide, with lots of small steps and ruined stone carvings. The stair started up the east side of the hill, then curved around a cliff toward the south side. Aryékwes had cleared it of debris, making it a wide, clean pathway to the top. The stair also provided access to several ruined buildings built into the side of the hill; probably priests’ quarters.

The hill of sacrifice had a relatively small crest, made flat by decapitating part of

the old peak and piling the debris behind retaining walls. The Sumi temple had occupied much of the thirty by forty meter plaza on top. Parthenon-like, it was a rectangular pillared structure about fifteen meters wide and twenty-five long with a carved stone frieze above the front entrance. Surprisingly, half the old roof was still intact; the other half had collapsed. Aryékwes had hauled the debris out so that the old sacrificial space was usable again.

“They’ve already been sacrificing here,” said Thornton, noting the charcoal blackening the altar stones.

“I bet the sacrificing never stopped,” replied Marku. He pointed to an old pedestal for a statue. “But where’s the image? It’s under the existing roof; it wasn’t smashed by the collapse.”

They walked around and soon found the sandstone statue in two pieces outside; a trail of drag marks and scratches made it easy to locate. Marku smiled. “Enlilu again! He was popular.”

“A very Sumi looking Enlilu, too; he bears less resemblance to Mitro than other statues I’ve seen. That may explain why Aryékwes is discarding it.” Thornton pointed to numerous small drill holes in the stone. “What are these holes?”

Marku frowned, then nodded. “The statue used to be covered by metal; probably gold. It’s been torn off.”

“Of course, those holes held on the clothes.”

“Exactly, and a helmet, I’d say.” Marku measured with his eye. “This was a big statue; about four meters high. And it looks like Aryékwes is throwing it away! Maybe we can haul it to the museum we want to build!”

“We can ask,” agreed Thornton. “How would we get it down the stairs?”

“Carefully. It’d be expensive.”

“We better take a bunch of pictures and get back. Dad may be waiting.”

“Okay,” agreed Marku.

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As the clock in Market Square began to ring out six bells, the parents began to arrive to pick up their children. Kanawé’s assistant came to escort two of Soru’s deaf students to the buses that would take them home in Perkas. Soru began to pack up the things on his desk, depressed that his class had gone so badly that day. He had been disorganized, confusing, and the kids had responded by misbehaving.

Kanawé came in once her last student had left. Soru’s last student was on the way out as well. “How was your day?” she asked.

He shook his head. “I’ve had better. How are you feeling?”

“Alright, but I’m tired.”

He nodded; they hadn’t told anyone yet that she was pregnant. “I’m tired, too. Let’s catch the express bus.”

The last student was gone, so they turned off the lights and closed the doors to their two classrooms, across the hall from each other. They pulled coats on tightly as they said goodbye to the hospital’s receptionist and stepped outside into a chilly evening. During the eclipse the temperature had dropped a lot, and it did not recover after the sun was fully uncovered.

The express bus was just about ready to go. They stepped on, handed the driver their ticket cards—thirty rides for a dhanay—he blacked out a square representing one

ride, and they headed for the only free seats in the back.

They chatted on the twenty-minute ride to Melwika. When the bus reached Foundry Square, they got off. A crowd of first shift workers was waiting to get on and head home to Meddoakwés. Soru and Kanawé slowly walked to Sareidukter's house where supper would be waiting for them. Soru looked forward to his first food and drink in twelve hours.

As they entered the South Enclosure, Soru looked around and spotted three men leaning against the wall of the old classroom building, talking. He cringed. Kanawé frowned. "What is it?"

"Oh . . . nothing. They looked like some guys I knew once."

"Such a strong reaction," she commented. "Soru, what's bothering you?"

"Oh, nothing, nothing really," he replied.

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172.

## Radio

The metal box was about half a meter tall and a quarter meter wide and thick. An antenna stuck out of its top that extended halfway to the ceiling; it wiggled whenever the box was moved. One side of the box was open, revealing an array of vacuum tubes filling the top and a large battery in the bottom.

Amos replaced a burned out tube and flipped the power switch. The collection of tubes began to glow. He closed the door and began to tune the transceiver.

A faint burst of static could be heard over the headphones by Chris, Éradëku, and John Miller, who were also present for the historic launching, along with six members of the electronics team that designed and built the radio. Then Amos hit on the frequency used by the army's radios. They had the Menneas' two citizen's band radios; one was located at Mëddoakwés, the other at Isurdhuna, and the radio Amos had put together a few years ago from spare parts the aliens had provided was located at Anartu. At the moment there was a routine army report being dictated over the frequency from Anartu, with an occasional "acknowledged" coming from the transcriber at Mëddoakwés. The voices were faint, since the headphones—made from two telephone receivers—were not designed to amplify the sound for the entire room. But the voices nevertheless were clear.

The routine report ended and Anartu signed off. Amos handed the microphone to Éradëku, who took it. "This is experimental radio transmission number one from Melwika, Colonel Éradëku speaking. Please acknowledge receipt. Over."

A long pause. He was about to repeat when the reply came "Experimental radio

transmission one from Mɛlwika, this is Mɛddoakwés, acknowledging receipt. Over.”

“Experimental radio transmission one from Mɛlwika, this is Anartu, acknowledging receipt. Over.”

“Experimental radio transmission one from Mɛlwika, this is Isurdhuna, acknowledging receipt. Over.”

“They all heard us!” said Amos, delighted.

“Isurdhuna, this is Mɛlwika, are we coming through loud and clear? Over.”

“Mɛlwika, this is Isurdhuna. Indeed, Colonel Éradɛku, we can hear you loud and clear. Where did you get the radio? Over.”

“Isurdhuna, this is Mɛlwika. We’ve been designing and building it with army funds at the Engineering School for the last six months, and it is now finished. This is our first long distance test broadcast. We can hear you clearly, Isurdhuna. Over.”

“Thank you, Mɛlwika, and congratulations. Over.”

“Fantastic; Isurdhuna’s half way around!” exclaimed John. “Do we know how the signal gets there?”

“It bounces off the ionosphere,” replied Amos. “Éra has one, just like Earth. Isurdhuna and Anartu sounded about the same to us, so I guess it’s high enough to reach both of them with one bounce.”

John nodded. “Thank you for inviting me to the inauguration. You must have been pretty confident it would work.”

“We’ve been doing test transmissions with Mɛddoakwés for a week,” replied Amos. “But not at the general frequency because it is so heavily used. It’s carrying civilian telephone traffic six or seven hours a day.” Just as he spoke, the Anartu operator

spoke up, asking Mèddoakwés to connect him to the telephone operator. Mèddoakwés acknowledged and a moment later a conversation in Sumi began. Amos turned off the radio. He extended a hand to Éradèku. “Congratulations. The test is a complete success.”

“Thank you,” said Éradèku, with a smile, and they shook hands. “Six months of work! It’s hard to believe the project is finished.”

“For now. There will be improvements.”

“So, how long before you make a second radio?” persisted John.

“Probably a month,” replied Éradèku. “I suspect the seven of us could turn out one per month, once we get the operation going smoothly.”

“So, the seven of you designed and built the first radio and will build the others as well?”

Éradèku nodded. “That’s why I came with a team. They learned how to blow glass bulbs from Rudhu and his people; they turn out a thousand lightbulbs per year. We soon found we could make smaller bulbs for our purposes. We learned how to pump out the air and seal the bases to make functioning vacuum tubes. We learned how to make a diode, then a triode, then a quadrode, which we are using as the basis of the radio. We built the transmitter and tuner along standard manufacturing lines. Then we put them together and got them to work together.”

“Where are you building the radios?” asked Chris.

“Our team will be located in Èndraidha, where we will make the vacuum tubes, transmitters, and tuners. The batteries will come from the new Battery Company; part of Mennea Tomi. The headphones and microphone will come from the Telephone Company. The metal box and frame will be made by Brébèstu Industries in Akèlséra, just outside

Tripola.”

“Oh?” said John. “We just gave them a license to use our metal stamping equipment for making small items, such as stainless steel cutlery, pots and pans, cups, bowls, buckets, etc.”

“They’re also making metal radio boxes for us,” said Éradëku.

“And ice boxes,” added Amos. “Following the standard engineering school licensing agreement, radio manufacturing goes to Endraidha, and five percent of any profits come to the engineering school for the next ten years.”

“So, will you sell radios to the public?” asked John.

Éradëku shook his head. “Not to anyone, but we’ll sell them to police and fire departments, ambulances, the geological survey, the glider . . . anyone with a legitimate reason. Our first priority will be to equip all army units and vehicles.”

“These are two-way radios,” added Chris to John. “But the possibility of commercial radio broadcasts has now been created. Very simple and cheap crystal receivers are actually very easy to make; if the signal is strong enough, it can be heard using a telephone earpiece as a headphone. No electric amplification is needed.”

“Though with vacuum tubes, amplification is not difficult, either,” added Amos.

“How much will the two way radios cost?” asked John.

“Probably about two hundred dhanay,” said Éradëku.

“And I suppose we’ll get our radios back in a few months?” asked Chris.

Éradëku nodded. “I assume so.” He rose. “Well, we’re all done here, and it’s sunset, so let’s break the fast.”

That comment surprised John, since it indicated that Éradëku had become a

Bahá'í. He rose as well. "I guess I'll head home, then. Thanks again for inviting me to the demonstration. The world has entered yet another new era." He waved goodbye to the others as he headed out the door.

Chris watched him go and rose himself. "Éradeku, who don't you come to our house for dinner. I'm sure we'll have plenty of food."

"Oh, you're very kind, Lord. Thank you very much." He and Amos grabbed their coats, as did the six technicians who had been working on the project. Everyone exchanged goodbyes for the day as they headed home.

"I hope you and your team can come back to Melwika," said Amos. "There is much more we can do. The radio needs to be improved, and there are a lot of applications to consider. My three electrical engineers plan to build a telephone signal amplifier next. Vacuum tubes will improve sound quality to the western shore."

"Yes, of course," agreed Éradeku. "Maybe in the fall. We need six months to set up our laboratory and work spaces in Endraidha and to build as many radios as we can. You have a lot of other telephone tasks to accomplish, anyway."

Amos nodded. Chris frowned. "Do we have telephone problems?"

"Yes, they're slowly accumulating. The cause is simple: growth. Melwika and Meddoakwés both have over 200 telephones; the area has 100 more and soon will have 200 more. Our local and inter-regional service is still alright, but regional service is collapsing because we don't have enough connections."

"Yes, it's hard to call Meddoakwés."

"Exactly, and getting worse every week. The new lines to Ékwædhuna, Brébestéa, and Perkas have brought fifty very active subscribers into the system and made the

situation worse. The lines connecting them to the capital are already overloaded. We have five line pairs between here and the capital and we'll be opening five more next month, but ten won't be enough for more than a few months. There's a line sharing system we can develop that will allow four lines to carry three calls, rather than two; that will help. And this isn't the only area with the problem. The 'local' line between here and Tripola is now clogged with calls between the South Shore villages and Tripola; Mēlwika can almost never use it. The same 'local line' is tied up in Lēwēspa by calls between Mēddwoglubas and the local villages. The south shore and Lēwēspa both need additional local lines. It's a matter of time before that will be true of the Ora, Néfa, and Bellēdha regions as well. Sumilara still has no local line and they want one. The long distance line between Tripola and Mēlwika is overloaded; there have been times calls between the cities have been routed via the western and northern shores!"

"That's because Endraidha's demand for service to this area has expanded," noted Éradēku. "The 'local' line between here and there is full, so they capture the long distance line as well. The army is concerned. They don't like going through the Mēlwika operator to connect to the palace. So I am pretty sure that, over the summer, they'll extend the Ējnopēla line that has just opened through Ornakwēs and then across the prairie to Endraidha."

"Really?" said Chris. "That will be good for Ornakwēs and Béranta, and will tie them directly to Endraidha and Swadakwēs."

"Exactly, and a dirt road along the line will give direct transportation as well," said Éradēku. "The army can afford to build it and lease the service back to the phone

company, and it'll give us a direct line to the palace, assuming we can string additional lines on the phone company's poles southwest of the capital."

"I'm sure that can be arranged," said Amos.

"What about switchboard technology?" asked Chris.

"We'll have to look at better switching systems in a few years," replied Amos.

"As long as a city has less than about a thousand telephones, we can manage with manual switchboards. I don't see any of our systems getting bigger than that in the next five years. But eventually we'll have to invest in mechanical switching systems."

"How can we afford all this equipment?" asked Éradèku, shaking his head.

"I don't know," replied Amos. "The telephone company took in sixty thousand dhanay last year and spent seventy. It has not yet made a profit. But pretty soon I think it will."

"Meanwhile, the wire company is doing well," said Chris. "It cannot expand fast enough to meet demand."

They reached the Mennea house and entered. Liz and Mary were both bustling around, helping the cook, but they came out to see Éradèku, who had been a frequent visitor at their dinner table over the last few months. Then they all sat to eat rice, vegetables from Èndraidha, and a beef steak the cook had bought in the market.

"Where's Thornton?" asked Chris.

"He should be back by now," replied Lébé. "It worries me, actually. He and the geology graduate students went up the Arjakwés a few dèkent to look at some outcrops."

"A few dèkent?" Chris considered. "That's close."

Liz turned to their guest. "So, Éradèku, are you ready to move back to

Endraidha?”

“Oh, yes, Lady Liz. My poor wife has been managing the household without me for six months, except for my occasional visits. I wish she had moved here for the project, but we didn’t realize it would take this long. It would have been hard on the kids, anyway.”

“Moving here?” asked Chris.

“No; moving back! The schools here are much better. And she would have fallen in love with the shops.”

“What do you think about going back, then?” asked Mary.

“Well, Endraidha is an exciting place in its own way, especially if you’re in the army. The génadema is quite exciting, and our lab will now be an exciting addition. The base is getting pretty big, too; we have five hundred soldiers and a thousand dependents, seven hundred veterans and two thousand dependents, and another six or eight hundred civilians. That includes Swadakwés, but it only has a few so far.”

“That makes Endraidha one of the world’s larger towns!” said Chris, surprised.

“It’s getting big,” agreed Éradeku. “And now I’m the only Bahá’í in the area, too. That’s going to be an interesting challenge because the customs of Widumaj are *very* important to the army. Plus the old worship of Endro. It’s still present; it’s unofficial, almost underground, but it’s there. But I think I could teach Ruhi Book One pretty well, especially the section on afterlife. That will be very interesting to people.”

“Good idea,” said Mary. “Find things people will understand and stress them. Some of Bahá’u’lláh’s prayers are very much like hymns and have been translated

beautifully.”

“Yes, that’s true,” agreed Éradëku.

“Now that the radio is done, and investment in the telephone company is declining a bit, I want to propose a commitment to make a wider variety of plastics,” exclaimed Behruz. “I no longer need to teach chemistry; we have some good teachers. I’d like to focus on making several basic plastics from coal tar or from cornstarch. If we could make plastic bags and food wrapping we’d help the merchants a lot, and plastic sheeting could provide Khermdhuna with better greenhouses. Telephones and steam cars would benefit from more widespread use of plastics as well.”

“Have you a proposal?” asked Chris. “Because we have a meeting of the Tomi Board coming up. Just about everyone wants to expand their operations. Modolubu has to expand paper production, and he needs to make carbon paper and mimeograph stencils, assuming we can get the mimeograph technology to work.”

“I’ll have a proposal by then,” agreed Behruz.

“Dad, there’s an idea the *Melwika Nues* editorial board is considering,” said May. “I talked to Sulanu about it today and he was in favor. It’s a proposal that someone—either the crown or the bank—mint copper *kentay*.”

“*Kentay*?” asked Chris. “Do you mean a penny? A hundredth of a dhanay?”

“Exactly,” replied May. “The dontay is a twentieth of a dhanay and it just isn’t small enough for many purchases. You can’t buy one apple or one orange in the market; you have to buy several. The *Nues* is overpriced at one dontay and giving a purchaser a coupon for another issue is complicated for our distributors. The average Melwikan earns twelve hundred dhanay per year but can’t spend it in small increments.”

Chris considered. "I bet there are plenty of merchants who wouldn't want kentay because they'd have to lower some prices."

"Some would say that's an argument in favor of the kentay."

"In some ways it is." Chris thought about it. "Why not? Publish an editorial about the idea and see what results. It won't get us fined. The public discussion will be good."

"Okay, we will," said May.

Just then the front door opened. A moment later Thornton hurried in. "Sorry I'm late, but we found more coal!"

"Where?" asked Chris.

"John will be pleased; about two dekent from here. Before the *aliénés* excavated the glubas, there was a large, deep lake on the other side of the ridge. It extended all the way to the Péskakwés; the two rivers flowed into one lake. But between the two was a big marsh, and a lot of peat accumulated with very little silt in it. Then the glubas were established, the lake drained, and the peat compressed down to become very soft coal. The bed is about a meter and a half thick in the places we looked. It appears to cover about half a square kilometer, so it's quite big."

"That's a *lot* of coal," noted Chris.

"A million tonnes!" agreed Thornton. "And it's on Melwika land."

"How deeply buried?" asked Amos.

"Less than half a meter; just by soil that the trees and prairie grasses built up over it in times of wetter climate. The trees on it have been cut and soil erosion has created gullies. We were there to study the soil erosion and make some recommendations to John about reforestation before it's too late and we spotted the black layer in the bottom of

several gullies, so we did some digging.”

“I know that area,” said Chris. “John and I walked it a few weeks ago because he was wondering whether it would be good farmland, and I said yes if it could be irrigated.”

“Well, I think it’ll have a different use, now!” replied Thornton. “After the coal is removed, the land could be reclaimed to make good farmland. The topsoil is rich, partly because of the coal!”

“You better eat fast, because John will want to know about this discovery,” counseled Chris.

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The following Primdiu, the last one of the month of Ejnaménu, was the city’s first hot day. Since it was the week’s only free day, everyone was out shopping or picnicking along one of the rivers, both of which were swollen from melting mountain snows. Soru and Kanawé did a bit of both. First they took a bus ride to a tree-lined stretch of the Arjakwés that the loggers had left alone about three dekent northeast of the city, where they socialized with a group of fasting Bahá’ís and their friends. Then they walked back to the city to shop in “Sumiwika,” as the new Sumi district had come to be called.

“I always enjoy visiting with Snékwu and Sterané,” Kanawé said, as they stopped half way up the steep street to buy a cup of lemonade. “The little one is so cute. And Primanu’s coming along.”

“Yes, they’ve done a good job with him. I think it was about a year ago they adopted him. Snékwu strikes me as a good father.”

“I agree, and Sterané’s a good mother. I wonder whether Primanu will ever get

back in touch with his family, though.”

“Right now he says he doesn’t want to; he’s still angry at them for abandoning him here.”

“I don’t blame him.”

“Neither do I. But he’s eleven. In a few years it wouldn’t be hard to go back to Néfa and find his home village, if he wants to.”

She shook her head. “I’m sure life is very hard there. It was a tough choice to put him on the steam wagon for Melwika. He should understand that.”

“He will, eventually. He can overcome his anger; he doesn’t have a bitter personality type.”

“True, he’s like Snékwu actually; always happy!” She finished the lemonade and handed the metal cup back to the owner, who nodded and dutifully wiped it with a wet cloth so it would be ready for the next customer. They started walking uphill to a big store nearby. “I think I’ll go to the class Sterané invited me to,” Kanawé said.

“Really?” Soru was surprised; Kanawé had never shown any interest in Bahá’í matters before.

“Yes. This religion of yours is kind of interesting, especially its emphasis on women. No one seems to know what equality of men and women means, but the Bahá’ís at least talk about the idea quite openly.”

“I can come with you.”

“No.” She shook her head. “This is a study circle for women anyway, but I need to look into this myself, Soru.”

“Alright.” He could see her point; she had to do it herself.

They entered the store, which concentrated on household goods. It was big and new and thronged with shoppers. Because there was a sale, prices were good, and the salesmen were willing to accommodate a little bargaining as well. Soru found a very attractive electric lamp with a painted porcelain base—next to it was a non-electric equivalent, where the porcelain base was an oil reservoir—that he very much liked, and it even came with a shade of fringed white cloth. It was made in Sumilara and he was impressed that the island was already exporting electrical items. The salesman knocked a dhanay off the price for them, so Soru immediately pulled out his check book and wrote a check for eight dhanay.

“It’ll be a nice gift for Saréidukter,” he said as they walked back outside. “Perfect for the little table she bought last month.”

“If she’ll accept it. It looks awkward; is it heavy?”

“Not very.” He adjusted his arms a bit, though, because it was hard to carry it comfortably and see over the shade. They turned onto Gluba Street, which ran toward the top of the gluba along the side of the ridge. It had a fair amount of foot traffic; it was the main route to Sumiwika.

They hadn’t walked more than a dozen meters when right in front of them three men suddenly emerged from the alley behind the store, heavily loaded with sacks of household items, and turned left, in front of them. Soru raised the lamp so the shade covered his face; it was Lujékwu and his men! He didn’t dare show any surprise to Kanawé, though. The thieves were five or six meters in front of them and walking slightly faster; no reason to slow down or stop. So he tried to pretend everything was normal as they strolled along, Kanawé talking about other things they could get for

Saréidukter's house by saying they were buying things for their own future house. Soru nodded and listened, keeping one eye on the gang around the lampshade.

He was relieved when they turned off the street and headed down an alley that followed the route of the old city wall. He slowed and as he walked past the alley he saw them walking into the third doorway downhill, on the right. So, that was where they were staying. He'd have to remember to avoid the neighborhood.

But as they walked home, he was nagged by the thought that most likely they had just broken into a house and stolen items from it. They had been stealing in Mēlwika and Mēddowakwés for almost a year, now; there were articles in the paper almost every month about a house theft. He felt guilty knowing something about them, yet he also was terrified that if he exposed them, his own past would be exposed as well.

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173.

## The Truth

Chris Mennea tried to take advantage of the Bahá'í Fast to take it easy. He had no courses to teach because the génadema taught no courses during Ejnaménu. His stab wound was still affecting him, making him noticeably more tired late in the day; it reminded him that while he was 55 on Éra, he was 60 terrestrial years old, and had to consider the effects of aging.

Yet in spite of freedom from teaching responsibilities, he could not help but devote extra time during the month to his businesses. The Mennea Tomi was doing well; it had a dozen very capable accountants and a manager he trusted; but he still kept a close eye on as much as he could. So that morning, the last Dwodiu of Ejnaménu, he went to the Tomi offices and caught up on reports—an accountant wrote a summary report of every business's finances every month—then reviewed all the reports for several specific entities, including the génadema and the school in Ejnopéla. Finally, he actually pulled out records and spot checked the génadema's books for accuracy.

He was just completing his audit when he heard a knock on his door. He looked up. "Dumuzi! Greetings, come in." Chris rose from his desk and came forward to greet the head of the House of Engurra.

"Hail, Lord Kristoféru. You have a very impressive office here. I had thought you worked at home, so I went there, and was redirected here. I had no idea you had such a big operation! How many people work in this building?"

“Almost twenty accountants and clerks. Many of them are students of business at the génadema. They pay all the bills of the Mennea Tomi and process the income for fourteen distinct operations, including the génadema.”

“Very impressive,” Dumuzi replied, in a tone of voice that hinted of jealousy.

“Come sit with me.” Chris pointed to a small round table with four chairs around it. He sat to demonstrate, Dumuzi did the same.

“Very nice chairs; I should buy some. I’m getting too old to sit on the floor all the time.”

“This position makes it easier to write notes, also. I apologize I have no refreshments to offer you. I normally don’t receive many guests here at the Tomi building.”

“Thank you, that is not necessary. Lord, I just came from the police headquarters, where I had a rather unpleasant meeting with Captain Dêku. Perhaps you heard that my son Buzurigisu’s house was broken into yesterday?”

“No, Honored Dumuzi, I did not! I am very sorry to hear about it! There is a gang robbing houses here and in Mèddoakwés, and possibly in other cities as well; they weren’t active here all winter. I guess they are back. The police have been unable to catch them.”

“That’s what Dêku said, too. Is it unusual that Dêku wouldn’t report a major theft to you?”

“No, not at all. The City Council has a meeting on Kwéterdiu and he will give us a report about the prior two weeks then.”

“I see.” That seemed to mollify him. “He was not particularly cooperative or

helpful to me. Indeed, I found his attitude condescending, like I was wasting his time. I had thought Sumis would get a better reception here in Mēlwika.”

“I apologize; I had no idea. The police have been trained to respect everyone equally, and Captain Dēku strikes me as a man of great integrity. I will ask him about it later today. Did the thieves take much?”

“Thank you for your pledge to inquire. Indeed, Lord, they stole quite a lot; silks, rich brocades, some fine cutlery, and several hundred dhanay of coin. Buzurigisu and his family were in Anartu and the servants were all out enjoying the warm weather.”

“That sounds like this gang. They must watch houses; they always strike when it is empty, and apparently they are quite quick.”

“Regardless, I am counting on these new police to be effective and catch them. I have lived in cities where the army steals almost as much as the thieves. In Mēddoakwēs the army has been known to ignore crimes against Sumis. I trust this place is different.”

“Indeed, it is different, Honored Dumuzi.”

“I await to see this with my own eyes. There is another test of Mēlwika’s tolerance coming, Lord. I own a stretch of ridgeline above my house and at the top of our beautiful street that runs up the mountainside. It is my desire to see the land there crowned with a temple to Enlil-Mitro. My family, and our entire Sumi community, are prepared to pay for the temple; we will not ask the city for assistance. But we do hope the city will not object.”

Chris paused to consider. “Honored Dumuzi, I am personally pleased to hear about the temple, but I am sure it will shock many residents of Mēlwika. In the past, many projects were begun in secret and completed in controversy. I wonder whether, in

this case, a very attractive drawing of the temple should be executed, and then the drawing be presented to the City Council and published in the newspaper. Then everyone will know, they will have their chance to express their concerns, and the project will proceed with less controversy.”

“If it then proceeds!”

“Honored Dumuzi, surely you would not want to shower thousands on construction of an edifice the Réjé herself then halts? Let the Réjé and the public know ahead of time. Let us publish the picture in the newspaper. Let the controversy blow over before you build. Then the money can be spent more safely.”

Dumuzi considered the suggestion, then nodded. “When we tried to build a temple in Mæddoakwés, we were forced to build a wall around it so no one could see it, but this one will be on top of the mountain where everyone can see it. It would avoid a lot of anger if the project were stopped before it actually proceeded. When can I come to the city council?”

“We meet every other Kwétærdiu. I suggest you get everything ready for two or four weeks from now. If the city council says nothing, that is still permission, and it will be harder to stop the project afterward.”

“My Lord, I will take your advice about this. Thank you.”

Chris nodded and they both rose. Dumuzi left the office and Chris returned to his desk to contemplate the rise of the Sumis and the trouble a Sumi temple would bring Melwika.

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Lujékwu’s gang haunted Soru. He barely ate supper and feared going to bed, lest the

dreams would return. He finally fell asleep and soon was awakened by a nightmare. The rest of the night he lay in bed.

When the Foundry Square clock sounded five bells, he rose and dressed. A full Skanda and spreading twilight from the impending sunrise—because of Éra’s small size, high clouds could be in sunlight two hours before the sun cracked the horizon—gave him plenty of light to walk to the Bahá’í Center. It was locked, but he sat on the steps and prayed for guidance, then began to cry when he heard no voice. He stopped at the temple to the Light of Esto—it was open—and went in, but all that occurred to him was to say Bahá’í prayers, so he said a few memorized ones, then added the only hymn of Widumaj he had ever learned. He stopped in the market—it was already open, as sunrise was now just half an hour away—and bought bread and fruit, so that he had an excuse to go out. He ate half the loaf of bread walking home, since he was starved after eating a tiny supper the night before.

Kanawé was not fooled. “You didn’t sleep at all last night, and you had another nightmare, didn’t you?”

He nodded sheepishly.

“You know, Soru, I’m tired of living with this other *thing* in your life, and you won’t even tell me about it. We’ve been married almost five months and we’re going to have a baby.” She looked around and lowered her voice; it could easily be heard by Saréidukter downstairs, and she was probably awake. “Soru, I *love* you. What’s eating you? Does this have something to do with the fact you once were a thief?”

He was startled by her insight and nodded. He hesitated, then took a deep breath proceeded at a whisper. “Well, as you know, my father, Isuru was deaf, so he was unable

to work very much. The thing that saved him was his brother, Stauru, who ran a caravanserai on the eastern edge of Ora, where the Royal Road reached the city. My father hauled straw for the animals, water and food for the caravan operators, helped load and unload the animals, etc. He could do that in spite of his deafness, because he understood a few gestures. But then when I was fourteen, dad died. So I took up the work he had been doing; I had already been helping. Uncle Stauru let mom and I stay. He married mom, which made his first wife very angry and my step brothers hostile, but it meant we could stay.

“Then when I was almost sixteen, Uncle Stauru died. His oldest son got the caravanserai and the first thing he did was expel mom and me. We were living on the street—the one paralleling the Delongisér, the roughest, poorest street in the city—mostly begging. Then, after two weeks, I stole four sweet potatoes from a street hawker when he was busy haggling with a customer. I was caught and sent to Belledha Prison for six years.”

“Six years for stealing four sweet potatoes,” she said, shaking her head. “How terrible.”

“It was a terrible place; I almost starved to death, I got fevers twice and came close to death, the food was minimal and the work very hard, mining ore. The guards were cruel, too; the prisoners were cruel to each other when they had any energy. Last winter I had only half a year left to my sentence when the prison riot occurred and the prisoners took over the prison, then the entire city.”

“You mean, you didn’t finish?” She looked horrified; now she understood.

“I didn’t. When we heard rumors the army was coming, the prisoners panicked;

many burned and looted buildings, and that made half the city burn down. We were sure that if the army came and took the city, we'd all be crucified. Most of the prisoners wanted to stay and fight, but Lujékwu and a few dozen others felt our only chance was to escape. I agreed with them; from what I heard about the army on Sumilara, I didn't think we had a chance. And working for a caravanserai all my life, I knew about different places, so I saw no reason to stay in a cold, burned, starving city. So we took all the garrison's horses and struggled through the deep snow, heading south eastward until we got out of the snow zone. Then we came through this area; we raided Yimuaidha briefly, and the main thing I learned by asking a few questions of the people there was the name of the village and where Melwika and Meddoakwés were. None of us had any clear idea where we were. I was the one figuring it out, and I was trying to figure out what place would be reasonably safe for a few weeks, so we could figure out what to do. Some of the guys wanted to stay together—safety in numbers—but I argued that with the new weapons and steam wagons, the army would go after a big band, so we had to break up into little groups and move into cities. I knew I couldn't go to Ora; I'd be recognized. But Meddoakwés is big and anonymous, and I had heard a little bit about Melwika being big, new, and full of strangers. I was in a very difficult position because the guys were the only friends I had. I could trust them only so far, but I had no alternative."

"Then you broke your leg."

"Yes; that's a story in itself, I'll tell you about that later. The guys tried to help, but they said there was nothing they could do and I would die from the infection. They offered to cut off my leg, but there was no guarantee that would save my life either; I had seen prisoners lose an arm or leg and die from the infection anyway, and I didn't feel I

could survive with one leg. So they rode me down to the old Royal Road west of the capital and left me there, hoping a steam wagon would come along, and one did. Mitru himself was driving and he took me straight to the hospital, where I was taken in like I was a wounded angel. I couldn't believe it."

"Dr. Lua is an angel."

"She is, and she has taught the doctors and nurses to be the same. I was so grateful, I had to help. Anyway, you know the rest."

"I do, but what's the problem? The army massacred the prisoners a week or two later."

"Not all of them. Lujékwu and two others are here. They're probably the ones responsible for the house break ins. I saw them yesterday coming down an alley with sacks of stuff."

"Where?"

"We had just come out of the store with Saréidukter's lamp and they came out of the alley behind the store."

She scowled, then nodded. "I remember those guys. They seemed spooky, and I remember you reacted a bit strangely."

"I was holding the lamp in front of my face so they wouldn't see me! Now I don't know what to do. I saw where they went, too. I can turn them in. But they can expose me and destroy our lives."

"If you are exposed, what would they do to you?"

"I assume I'd be executed."

"Oh, Esto." She shook her head. "And they could be caught any time, even if you

say nothing, and they could expose you anyway.”

“I know, that occurred to me, too.” He sighed. “That’s why I can’t sleep, why I have nightmares, why I can’t concentrate. . . I just don’t know what to do, especially now that I’m married, I’m going to have a child, I have good work. . .” He looked down and began to cry.

Kanawé came close and cuddled him; she began to cry, too.

“I’ve been praying for guidance,” he said. “I went to the Bahá’í Center, then the temple, but nothing came to me. I feel like Esto has deserted me.”

“Esto doesn’t usually speak to people; do you think you’re a widow?” She was startled by the idea. “Look, if you want guidance, we need to talk to someone; Saréidukter, or Dr. Lua.”

“Talk to people?”

“Yes.” She paused. “Or talk to your Spiritual Assembly. You keep telling me it is a divine institution and if it is constituted right, it is guided. Do you really believe it?”

“Yes, I do, but talking to nine people. . .”

“Look, you said they could be guided. Certainly they have to be trusted; they’re a divine institution. That’s what you say.”

He nodded. “Yes, they are a divine institution. And they’re a very good group of people. But—”

“But what?”

“Lord Chris is on it, and he . . . that’s how my leg got broken. He was driving a rover from Médhela to here and we decided to see if we could capture the rover so we would have the power of steam wagons. We didn’t know it wasn’t a steam wagon. And

he did something; I'm still not sure what, but there was a bang and my horse died instantly. I fell off the falling horse and broke my leg."

"Oh, is that what happened. Well, Lord Chris is the least of your worries right now."

"That's true."

"Look, we can't live this way. You can't sleep, you can't eat . . . you have to get this resolved."

"You're right." He nodded, hating the thought, because anything could make their situation worse. "Alright. The Assembly meets tonight. I'll ask Modolubu for some time with them."

"And I'll come along."

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It was six and three quarters bells when Chris, Amos, Lébé, Liz, and Thornton headed for the Bahá'í Center for the Spiritual Assembly meeting. They caught up with Modolubu, who was leaving his home over the paper making business.

"Hail," he said to everyone, and they responded in kind.

"We're a bit late," said Thornton. "I hope we won't have anyone waiting."

"Sulanu told me that Soru is coming to meet with us," said Modolubu. "An urgent matter of some sort."

"I hope he and Kanawé aren't having trouble," said Chris.

"I don't think so," replied Modolubu. He paused. "Chris, since we have a minute: you know how we've been talking about an expanded paper making plant."

"Yes. Do you have a proposal? The Tomi Board will be meeting next week."

“I know. I started on a plan, but then I talked to Bidhé and mom. They have both been moved by the Assembly’s call for Melwika Bahá’ís to move. We’re considering the idea of building the new paper making facility at Əjnopéla or some other place in the lower Arjakwés.”

“Really?” said Chris, surprised. “You’re from down there, right?”

“Yes, Frakdoma, which is just fifteen dekent away. We could live in Frakdoma and I could ride the bus to work every day; or more likely we’d live in Əjnopéla and visit Frakdoma often.”

“You could ride a bike that far pretty easily. You could build houses in both places.”

“What do you think, from a business point of view?”

“Well, Lord Aryékwés doesn’t provide a great business environment, but I don’t think it will be bad, either. He doesn’t get involved; he just wants to collect his taxes. He doesn’t want to spend them on the town, either, which is a problem. He’s making the businesses and schools pay for police and fire. But those costs will be less than a thousand a year.”

“That’s manageable. The cost of labor should be lower.”

“Yes, it should be. Will you bring your workers along?”

“Of course, but the expansion means I’ll need ten or twelve workers, not four. I have no room for more and the demand for paper is increasing. And now people want carbon paper, too. I have to have a new manufactory. Əjnopéla has power, water, and there are natural hemp beds along the river channel. I can’t get farmers here to plant

hemp, so I've had to import it from various places. I can get cousins in Frakdoma to plant it for me and I can hire some villagers as well. And I'd like to use some of my profit to help the village out."

"Excellent, then I think you should do it," replied Chris.

They entered the Bahá'í Center. The other three members of the Spiritual Assembly—Snékwu, Sulanu, and Sarésunu—were already there. Soru and Kanawé had arrived as well. Rather than have the couple wait, the eleven of them sat to pray together. It visibly relaxed Soru, though he still looked like a nervous wreck when they finished.

"Welcome, Soru," exclaimed Chris with a smile, though Soru turned his head away slightly when Chris looked at him. "We understand from Sulanu that you wished to meet with us. We are also pleased to see Kanawé again. How can we serve you?"

Soru looked at the nine men and women around the circle with him, relaxed, looking helpful and supportive, and tears began to stream from his eyes. "I want to do what is right, but I fear it terribly," he began. "I am in a very difficult, terrible place and I need your help and prayers." He paused and looked down at the floor. "I know who has been breaking into houses and stealing for the last year, and I think I know where they are staying. The ring leader is a blondish man named Lujékwu. He has two accomplices. Yesterday I saw them in Sumiwika, and I think they had just stolen some things."

That visibly startled Chris, for Dumuzi had visited him that morning. But he said nothing. Soru had more to say. "I know these three men from Bellédha Prison, where I had been a prisoner with them until the breakout sixteen months ago."

Several of those present gasped. Everyone was startled by the admission. "That's how I know them. I spent five and a half years of my six year sentence there. When I was

sixteen my uncle died, my father had already died, and my cousin expelled my mother and me from our house, where she had become my uncle's second wife. We were starving, so in desperation I stole four sweet potatoes, and was caught."

He looked up at them, then back at the floor. He was finished.

At first there was silence, then Kanawé spoke up. "Please help us. I don't want them to kill or imprison Soru. He is a gentle man; a good, kind-hearted, hard-working man. We love each other, and as some of you know, we will have a baby in four months. Please help us."

Thornton looked around at the others, completely baffled. He could not imagine what the Assembly could do. Snékwu, Soru's friend, was very pensive.

"I think we all know what a good man Soru is," exclaimed Liz. "His work with deaf children has been sacrificial and is irreplaceable."

"I don't understand," exclaimed Snékwu. "You arrived here before the army annihilated the band of thieves."

"Yes, because of the mysterious workings of Esto and the instrumentality of Lord Chris himself. Lord Chris, do you remember when you were driving back here from Médhela and a band of thieves attacked your rover? It was my horse that you killed. When it fell, my leg was shattered."

"Really?" said Chris. Then he laughed. "You are right, Esto is mysterious!"

"Soru, what was your role in the band?" asked Sulanu.

"I was the thinker. None of us knew how to get around, so I was trying to navigate us to a safe place. There were three informal leaders, including Lujékwu. Sometimes they liked my ideas; sometimes they didn't."

“What can we do?” asked Modolobu. “There must be a bounty on his head, and now we know.”

“We can pray,” replied Chris. “The action falls to me, as Lord, and Soru. Soru, will you come to the police station with me right away? The first thing to do is catch the thieves that have been plaguing this city and others for months. You don’t have to say anything about why or how you know them.”

“But Lord, they might say how they know me!”

“Very true. I would advise you to tell Captain Dëku the entire story, and truthfully. He can verify many details by talking to the guards in Belledha and others. If you tell him the whole truth, I will stand by you.”

“But Lord, what can you do?” aske Kanawé.

“I can petition the Réjé to pardon you.”

“You would do that for me?”

“Yes, I would, Soru, because as Liz said, you are a good man and you are doing good things. This is a very hard world and people often are put in very difficult positions where they have to make hard choices. Sometimes they need to be forgiven.”

“But will the Réjé forgive him?” asked Kanawé.

“If she understands he is a good man, perhaps she will.” Chris looked at the others. “What else can we do?”

“I can’t think of anything,” agreed Amos. “Captain Dëku will be thrilled if he can catch the thieves. That will count toward Soru’s freedom, too.”

“Go,” agreed Liz.

Chris rose and looked at Soru. He rose as well. Kanawé stayed. “Can I stay and

pray for a while?” she asked.

“Of course,” replied Snékwu.

“Let’s go,” said Chris. Soru nodded and they headed out.

They walked in silence across town to the police station, which was the old army tower in the west enclosure. Captain Dèku was off duty, but when the shift officer heard Soru’s story, he picked up the phone and called Dèku, and on the Captain’s orders called every off-duty policeman who had a telephone in his house, which was most of them. When Dèku arrived fifteen minutes later, the station had eight uniformed officers present.

“So, what’s the story?” he asked Soru, glancing at Lord Kristobéru.

“The other day—Primdiu, about two bells—my wife Kanawé and I were shopping in Bélana’s ‘Home Furnishings’ store in Sumiwika. When we came out of the store we turned down Gluba Street, and as soon as we did Lujékwu and his two accomplices walked out of the alley behind the store carrying sacks of items. I think each of them had one sack, or maybe one of them was carrying two sacks. They didn’t see me because I was carrying a new electric lamp with a big shade, and when I saw them I raised the shade in front of my face. We were about five or six meters behind them, and they were walking quickly; quicker than we were. When they reached the alley that ran downhill along the old city wall’s right of way, they turned and walked down it. As we were passing the alley I saw the three of them open the third door downhill on the right and enter.”

Dèku listened alertly and a little skeptically. “Did your wife see them as well?”

“She did, but she didn’t know who they were, so she didn’t think anything about it until I told her this morning.”

“And how do you know them?”

He hesitated. “The four of us were among the escapees from Belledha Prison.”

Deku exhibited only the slightest surprise. “And how did you survive the army attack?”

“I wasn’t there, because a few weeks before, when Lord Kristoféru was driving from Médhela to Melwika, I was leading a band of thieves to capture a few cows, because we were hungry, and we saw him driving his rover. We decided to attack the rover. He did something—I’m not sure what—and killed my horse. I fell to the ground at a full gallop and my leg was broken in several places. We called off the attack and he drove on. My companions took me west of here to the Royal Road down by Naskerpeda and left me in the hopes that the steam wagon would pick me up, and it did.”

“That’s a long ride.”

“It took a day and a half and I was half dead from the pain and loss of blood.”

“I can vouch for much of this story,” added Chris. “I did indeed shoot his horse; I remember the look of shock on his face. I didn’t recognize him until tonight when he told me. I never made the connection. But now I do. And Mitru picked him on the Royal Road with a badly broken leg, wrapped tightly with a tourniquet, and brought him to the hospital last Plowménu.”

“Okay.” Deku considered. “Let’s go get those thieves. You can show us the house?”

“Of course.”

“Good.” He looked at his men; three more had arrived. “I want all twelve of us. I’m not taking any chances. We’ll call Aisu and ask him to put a few soldiers on alert

while we're out, and call Lubésé to route calls to the army. I want everyone armed with swords and batons." He turned to Chris. "Lord, are you coming?"

"I think so."

"Very good." He turned to the armory and helped pass out the swords while the night officer called Lubésé and Aisu. Dēku even gave Chris a sword, but not Soru. Then they all headed out, across Foundry Square and up Gluba Street. When they reached the old city gate, soldiers living there poured out to watch and help. Dēku sent some of the police and soldiers down Reservoir Street, which was the other end of the alley, while he led the rest along Gluba Street.

They stopped just short of the alley and he beckoned Soru forward. The alley was dark and the houses lining it were poor; it had no electric line. Soru pointed to the door and Dēku appraised the situation, then retreated to the group of police waiting out of sight. He pointed to his second in command. "You take three men into the courtyard of the house via the neighbor's house on the other street. Knock on the third door. When you're in place, whistle."

The second in command nodded and led three other police down Gluba Street to the next alley, where they knocked on a door. Two minutes later they whistled.

"Okay, let's go." Dēku turned to Chris. "You and Soru stay here." Then he led the remaining three police to the front door and knocked very loudly. "This is the police! Open the door immediately!"

They waited. No response. "Open the door or we will break it down!"

Another short wait, then there was shouting and fighting in the courtyard. "In!" exclaimed Dēku, and he stepped back and kicked the door in. The four of them rushed

inside. Within a minute eight officers trooped out with four prisoners, three men and a woman. Meanwhile, the rest of the police and soldiers had run up the alley and a hundred people had stuck their heads out windows or come outside to see the excitement.

“Bind them,” said Deku. “Soru!”

Soru came down. Skanda was a quarter full and shedding vast amounts of light on the scene, so it was easy to see. He looked at them. “Yes, these are the men.” He pointed. “Lujékwu, Mitranu, and Majékwu. I don’t know the woman.”

“He’s a thief, too!” exclaimed Lujékwu.

“We know,” replied Deku. “What’s inside?”

The second in command went back inside with five men. They came out almost immediately. “The house is full of sacks of stuff.”

“And dhanay,” added another policeman.

“Good. They have some explaining to do. Let’s go to the station and interrogate the prisoners, and call a few people who have suffered losses. I think they will identify their possessions.” He looked at the three thieves. “And we’ll have three heads on the city walls.”

“What about Soru?” asked Chris.

“He has some explaining to do, too, but he helped. What do you advise, Lord?”

“Release him; he won’t flee. He’s been a solid citizen for the last year.”

“Very well, but Judge Wérgédu will be here tomorrow. He should come to the court at nine bells.”

“I’ll be there,” promised Soru.

[May 6, 2006; reread and edited 5/24/13, 8/5/17, 11/7/24]

174.

Audience

Soru slept a bit better that night; at least everyone knew about his past and the thieves could no longer expose him. He slept out of exhaustion more than out of relief. He cuddled against Kanawé all night, and Saréidukter made them a special soup for breakfast.

At nine bells they both went to the courtroom. It was packed; the three thieves and their female accomplice were there, with bound hands and fettered feet; Sulanu was there as a reporter, because the *Melwika Nues* was planning a special edition; Sajéku was there sketching scenes so that he could prepare woodcuts to illustrate the article; Krénanu, Wérgéndu's assistant, was there to serve as a sort of defense attorney; Deku was there to present the case against the three; and several victims, including Bélana and Ornéstu, were present.

Wérgéndu first asked the victims to testify about their property, and the three were all able to identify something; Ornéstu recognized jewelry he had purchased for Grané that the woman was wearing. Bélana went on and on describing his items and was quite specific about the amount of dhanay he had lost, which was close to the amount found in their house. Krénanu asked the thieves if they could explain where it came from. Their explanations were not very convincing.

Wérgéndu called up the landlord, who testified that he had rented the house to the four of them last Ejnaménu and they had not been present all the time, but had always paid the rent. He had not gone inside and knew nothing about them. He was quite

defensive about the situation. Dēku described what the police knew and confirmed the names of the four escaped Bellēdha prisoners. Then Wérgéndu asked the thieves to tell their story. It was a confused mix of feigned innocence and claims that Soru had helped them.

“Soru, come forward,” Wérgéndu said from his high seat in front. “You know that any untruths told here will result in severe punishment?”

“I do, Honored Lord, and I pledge to tell the truth.”

“What do you know about these men?”

“Honored Lord, we were all in prison at Bellēdha. When the prisoners rioted and took over, sixty of us decided that we had to leave the city before the army arrived, so we took the garrison’s horses and escaped. We came along the front of the mountains to Yimuaidha, past Melwika, and south toward Médhēla, stealing animals as we went. The thieves had no one leader; there were three leading figures and Lujékwu was one of the three. I was ‘the smart one’; I was talking to people we stopped and asking them where everything was, so we could figure out where to go. When we saw Lord Kristoféru in his rover we decided to capture the rover, because we thought it would be useful. But he had a device of some sort and killed my horse. I went down with my horse and my leg bone was smashed in several places. So my companions took me to Naskēpēda and left me on the Royal Road, where a steam wagon picked me up and took me to Melwika Hospital, where my bone was set and healed. About a month later I saw Lujékwu at Temple Square and I said he should drop thievery and go to the génadēma. He said no, maybe I should help him instead. I said no, walked away, and hurried away from him so he wouldn’t follow me.”

“Why is that?”

“Because I didn’t want to have anything to do with him.”

“Why?”

“Because I was going to the génadema studying, learning things, living a comfortable life for the first time, learning about Esto . . . I didn’t want to go back.”

“And you didn’t go to the army about them?”

“No, because then I’d have to admit I was an escaped prisoner.”

Wérgéndu nodded. “And I understand you are now married, will soon be a father, and have started the effort to educate deaf children.”

“Indeed, Honored, these things are true.”

“So, why did you go to the police this time?”

“Because Honored, I am a more mature person now.”

Wérgéndu pondered that statement. “Who here can speak to Soru’s character?”

Chris, Orngéndu, and Saréidukter raised their hands. He listened to each.

Saréidukter said, “Honored, what Soru says is true. He and his wife have lived with me for almost six months. He and Kanawé go to the génadema all morning in order to educate themselves, then they go to Mèddoakwés until six bells to teach classes, for he is educating five deaf children while she is educating eight children with various mental impairments. They come home exhausted, I feed them, they usually study at least another hour, then go to bed and do the same thing all over again the next day. They are dedicated to becoming trained so they can educate these children properly.”

“And you reject the idea that they have an association with this gang?”

“Totally reject it. It is absurd. Any spare time they have they use buying things for

the house or going to Bahá'í meetings.”

“How much money do they have?”

“Money, Honored?” Saréiduktər was puzzled.

“Money; are they living on what they earn, or could there be an extra, hidden source of money?”

“No, they are not getting extra money from thievery, if that is what you mean. They have a bank account; you can check it. You can search their room. The three of us ,together are doing pretty well; it’s amazing how nice a house can become if there are three incomes to fix it up! And they are saving to buy a house.”

Wérgéndu made some notes. “Captain Dəku, what do you know about these three men?”

“We have descriptions of the possible house thieves from two people who saw them, and the descriptions match these three men. One witness spoke of a woman as well, who perhaps was the lookout. No one has ever spoken of a fourth man. I have met Soru once or twice since I came to the city almost a year ago and he seemed pleasant. He wasn’t nervous around me.”

Wérgéndu turned to Lujékwu. “You have made an accusation that Soru was helping you, but there is no evidence of its truth. Majékwu claims the three of you are totally innocent. And as we have heard, last night Dəku called Bellədha and all four of your names were confirmed by the guards there as escaped prisoners. It appears there is now only one prisoner not accounted for, and they say in the confusion of the attacks they probably missed his dead body. The evidence is overwhelming that your house was filled with stolen property from the various houses that have been broken into over the last

year. This is your last chance to come up with an explanation.”

Lujékwu’s eyes flashed with anger. “Honored, they are all lying and framing us!”

“Was this stolen property in your house, or are you saying the police put it there?”

He hesitated, looked at the other two, then said nothing. He was tempted to say the police had planted it, but he had started stealing several months before Dëku and his men arrived in town, and everyone knew it.

Wérgéndu turned to Krénanu. “What other defense would you advocate?”

“I am unable to discover any inconsistencies in the charges against the three, and see no linkage of Soru to them.”

“What sentences do you recommend?”

“I see no grounds to argue against execution of the three. Soru has apparently lived a good and honest life for the last year and has made contributions to society. I would sentence him to serve his remaining six months of prison and be done with it.”

“I cannot do that with Soru, because the Réjé charged the army with the task of ending the prison revolt and recapturing or executing the prisoners. They spared the lives of three prisoners only. Soru would not qualify, as he himself admits he was the ‘smart one’ among the escaped prisoners, and he led a party to steal animals. Of course, this is information he has provided us, so unless it is corroborated we should not use it against him. Only the army or the Réjé can determine Soru’s fate. As for Lujékwu, Mitranu, and Majékwu, it is clear they are escaped prisoners, and it is clear they have been robbing houses here in Melwika for a year. I suspect within a few days we will be sure they robbed houses in Mëddoakwés and Tripola as well. So they deserve death for two reasons.

“So this is my judgment: Lujékwu, Mitranu, and Majékwu, you are to be beheaded a week from today at noon by the royal executioner. I will spare you from crucifixion, as that is reserved for prisoners in revolt and you are not in Belledha. Only the army can impose that sentence on you, and perhaps they will do so. Soru, you are to accompany me to Meddoakwés, where we will seek an audience with Her Majesty this afternoon. Those who have testified in your favor and Captain Deku are to come as well, and General Roktekester will be invited to be present. Krénanu, I want you to write up a summary of the case for Her Majesty’s consideration based on the facts we have heard. Have I missed anything?” He looked around. The glares of Lujékwu, Mitranu, and Majekwu were unmistakable. “The three of you have one week to make peace with Esto, for he will sit in judgment on you at that time. May He be merciful with you. I suggest you request that a priest or widu come visit you in prison. If you have any next of kin, we will contact them for you. Deku, Krénanu, I want a report a week from today, in the morning, about the disposition of the stolen property and any new evidence that has been found. This court is now adjourned.”

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They arrived at the palace at one bell, but they had to wait more than hour in the new audience hall—sitting in neat rows of comfortable chairs—before the Queen appeared. Almost an hour after they arrived, Lord Kandékwes entered with Wirese, Soru’s first deaf student, and her mother, Smiré.

“Golbkordé was in your classroom as well as Kanawé’s and told us you were here,” said Smiré. “I got the Lord to come. I am sure Her Majesty will find you innocent.”

Soru was startled. “Thank you, but I am here to seek a pardon, My Lady, for indiscretions I committed in my youth.”

“Oh . . . I see.” That got her thinking.

Kandékwes disappeared into the Queen’s private chambers. A page appeared and began to place five comfortable chairs up front near the throne, arranged so that no one had their backs toward the Queen. Fifteen minutes later they all rose as Her Majesty entered with Crown Prince Meméjékwu, Wérgédu, Roktekester, Estoiyaju, and Kandékwes. She sat on her throne, the rest of her party sat on the grand chairs up front, and the rest of them sat as well.

“We have a remarkable case before us,” the Réjé began. “The like of which I cannot recall in my thirty-nine years on the throne. Prisoners escape, but they are rarely caught; even more rarely do they cooperate in their own capture; and they rarely have made a good life for themselves. The new knowledge has already make it easier to catch prisoners, and in this case it has helped a prisoner make good, but only the prisoner himself can decide voluntarily to turn himself in. That, I think, is the most remarkable fact in this case.” She looked at Soru for a moment, trying to probe his soul through his eyes. “Soru, what do you think your fate should be?”

“Your Majesty, I have dedicated my life to helping deaf children. My father was deaf and it made it very difficult for him to earn a living. He was ignorant. He worked hard until he caught a fever and died. Children who are deaf can learn to communicate through gestures, and I have been reading English texts; they can actually learn to speak and read lips. I want to learn how to teach those things. Meanwhile, I have taught them how to communicate using signs.”

“So I understand.” She looked at Wiresé and Smiré. “What say you, good woman? Can you communicate to your child now?”

“I can, Your Majesty, and it is a miracle. Until Soru came along I did not know my child and she did not know me. But now we can share things; we can speak.”

“Show me.”

“Yes, Your Majesty.” Smiré hesitated, then turned to Wiresé and began to sign to her. The girl signed back.

“Soru, translate.”

“Smiré said to her daughter, ‘we need to show the Queen how we can use signs’ and Wiresé replied, ‘what shall I say?’”

The Réjé laughed. “The sign language can be used to communicate all sorts of things! This is remarkable new knowledge.” She looked at the others with her. “Do any of you have questions or comments?”

They all shook their heads.

“Very well, I am ready to render several judgments. Soru, please rise.” Nervously, Soru stood and bowed his head. “Soru, you are pardoned, but on this condition: that you never violate the law again. If you do, you should receive a judgment twice as harsh as anyone else, because you have been through an ordeal and appear to have learned from it; to break the law would be to show you have not learned.”

He nodded. “Thank you, Your Majesty. Your judgment is wise.”

“Sometimes it is. Prince Meméjékwu, Lord General Roktekester, Lord Kristoféru, and Judge Wérgédu: I am appointing the four of you to serve as a committee to consider how to build a new prison. My kingdom has gone an entire year without a new prison;

this is too long. I want construction to start by the end of summer. I want Soru to testify to you about conditions in the old prison and a consideration of which conditions are necessary for imprisonment and which are excessive. Lord Kandékwes: I want a report about the education of those with impairments; the deaf, the blind, the mad, the idiot. I am intrigued that some can be educated and want to know which ones should be. Minister Widéstu and the man who runs Melwika's schools should be part of the committee with you. I want Soru and Kanawé to offer you their ideas. Those are my judgments."

Everyone rose; the Réjé then rose and left the hall.

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## Controversies

Two vehicles—a battered old rover and a shiny new dark blue steam car—left Melwika under a sweltering spring sun and headed down Mæddoakwés Road. When they reached Morituora, eleven kilometers and twelve minutes later, they turned left onto a gravel road that passed the village’s new ceramics manufactory. They paralleled the old Sumi viaduct, now repaired. When the viaduct ended, so did the graveled road. The viaduct was replaced by an irrigation canal brim-full with meltwater and the gravel road by an old Sumi paved road. Teams of soldiers were working on the canal every kilometer or two, deepening and widening it or repairing side ditches. They soon lost sight of it, as the road followed the valley edge and the canal cut across the high prairie—former desert, now yellowed by an early-season drought.

The old paved Sumi road had been given minimal repairs, but that was enough to permit fifty kilometers per hour. In another half hour they reached a cluster of army tents at the mouth of the gluba leading to the Dhædhuba. A hundred soldiers and engineers were sitting under a canopy eating lunch. Gelnébelu, the army’s chief engineer, and General Roktekester rose and walked toward the vehicles, out of which came Chris, Amos, Thornton, and Marku.

“The legendary Amos visits!” exclaimed Roktekester, raising his arms in the air.  
 “Half the men here want to meet you!”

“Really? Why?”

“Because they’re our new engineering corps recruits. The other half are

considering the engineering corps as well.” Roktekester extended his hands to Amos and they shook. Then he turned to Chris. “Lord, welcome.”

“Thank you, General; it’s good to see you again.” Chris was surprised by the breach of protocol; Roktekester was a stickler for rank, so his greeting Amos first could only be seen as a snub. The general turned to Thornton next, then Marku. Gelnébelu came to shake Chris’s hands first, then turned to the others.

“Do you need food or drink?” said Roktekester to all four. “We have plenty of meat and bread. We can’t offer coffee or tea, of course, and we don’t serve wine on a work day, but we can offer water or okrakwa.” *Okrakwa*, “vinegar-water,” was a common army drink, valuable because of its vitamin-C.

“Thank you for your hospitality, but we ate a large lunch two hours ago,” replied Chris. “It was early afternoon in Melwika, just like it is here now.”

“Let me introduce you to everyone,” said Gelnébelu, and he went around and introduced every soldier by first and family name; another innovation Chris took note of. One young man about seventeen years of age stood out because of his name: Wepokester Doma-Ornakwési, “Slayer of Evil of the House of Ornakwés.” Chris turned to Roktekester.

“Your son?”

The General smiled. “Indeed. He’s been in school at Endraidha two years, now.”

“Doma-Ornakwési; a new family name.”

“We needed one. Everyone is taking one now, so it was the logical choice. All the Old Houses are taking names starting with ‘Doma.’”

“He looks like you.”

“He does, and is following my footsteps.” Roktekester said that with pride and seemed to warm to Chris a bit. Chris reflected how he had worked with the general for hours and had never known about his son; he had never even met Roktekester’s wife. It reflected the social distance that prevailed because he wasn’t an old-house and was gedhème.

Gelnébelu finished with the round of introductions, then turned to Amos and said, “We’ve finished eating; would you like to see our work?”

“Of course,” replied Amos. “That’s why we’ve come.”

“Then follow us.” The head of the army engineering corps led the way, with Roktekester, Chris, Amos, Thornton, Marku, and the other lead engineers right behind. They headed up the gluba, which was a mere six meters wide and eighty meters deep, so deep that it provided substantial shade from the sun. The gluba floor had been cleared of major rock falls and had a trickle of water on it from several springs along it.

The walk was almost a kilometer; the gluba was quite long and arrow straight. They could see the dam almost from the beginning of the walk, but it was so far away it was indistinct. Finally they reached the base, where the army had been installing new steel penstocks inside the old concrete ones.

“Very nice work,” said Amos, admiring it as he walked from penstock to penstock. There were three of them. Each one was equipped with a massive stainless steel gate that could be closed slowly and deliberately by the turn of an enormous wheel.

“When will you be ready for the turbines?”

“A few weeks, but there’s no hurry; the water level has barely reached the foot of

the dam on the other side.”

“We have one turbine and generator ready,” said Amos. “But our priority is to install it at Gordha because the reservoir is now full.”

“There won’t be enough head to make power here for a year, anyway,” said Gelnébelu. “You’re talking about a five thousand kilowatt turbine and generator, right?”

Amos nodded. “Identical to the one at Gordha. Expensive; twenty thousand dhanay. There isn’t enough demand for power to produce them faster.”

“Well, eventually this place will produce fifteen thousand kilowatts, plus irrigate the entire lower river valley.” He pointed upward. “Let’s go to the top.”

Amos nodded and the entire party started up a stairway built into the steep dam face. The engineers had added two meters of clay to the dam and covered it with rock, so the old Sumi structure was substantially renewed.

They huffed and puffed all the way to the top, seventy-five vertical meters above the floor of the gluba. When they reached the top, suddenly a huge basin, eight kilometers across, opened up before them. A waterfall thundered down the western side; they could hear the water several kilometers away. The lake had drowned an oasis of palms, only a few tops of which stuck out of the brown pool. They looked down at the giant lake in amazement. “What a resource,” said Chris.

“It’ll take two years to fill,” said Roktækestær. “We still don’t know how much water will leak into the bedrock. As you can see, we’ve devoted a lot of work to reconstruction of this dam. We’ve been diverting water to the top for six months and have been hosing it down so the clay will swell up again; the dam was full of desiccation cracks. We’ve been adding tons of liquid clay to the biggest cracks as well. Finally, we

added two meters of clay to both the front and back surfaces, *and* a new rock cover to both as well. We're confident the dam will hold up as the water level rises."

"This is very impressive engineering," exclaimed Amos. "Much more sophisticated than the work we ever did in Melwika. Gelnébelu, you deserve a prize."

"Thank you, Honored," he replied, very pleased by the compliment.

"This is very high quality work," agreed Roktekester. "Our army engineering corps is extremely capable. And we are now in the position to resettle the entire lower river valley, if we could only get the people to do it."

"You'll have the people," replied Chris. "The latest figures show that infant mortality in the region has started to drop. A third of all children were dying by age five, almost half by age twenty. We can reduce mortality to a trivially small number in the next decade."

That seemed to agitate Roktekester as well, so Chris said nothing more. Thornton wandered across the dam to the end to examine its interface with the bedrock. Amos and Gelnébelu took the stairs down the other face, toward the reservoir, stopping periodically to chat about the size of the face rock and the strength of the old core of the dam. Other engineers gathered in a knot on top to watch.

Chris wiped his forehead. "Today's a hot day. It looks like we're headed for a scorcher of a summer."

"Indeed," agreed Roktekester. "At least the river's running full."

"There was a good snowpack on the Spine this time," agreed Chris. "I never thought the Gordha Reservoir would fill so fast."

"Yes, and far more water's going through than we can run through turbines. But I

guess we don't need the power yet, anyway." He glanced at Chris. "So, you now have a steam car."

"Well, no, we don't. This one just came off the assembly line last week, and they want to break in vehicles a bit before they sell them, so John suggested we give one a try on this trip. We wanted to take two vehicles, and one of our two rovers really is retired; it has too much damage to the engine to be used for a trip this far. So we took a steam car." Chris looked at Roktekester, who seemed relieved. "It's interesting how different it is from a rover. A rover engine stalls at very low speeds, so it needs gears; steam engines have a big head of steam behind them instead, so they don't stall, but they accelerate very slowly. This vehicle has two forward gears and one reverse gear, but we never used the higher forward gear all the way here. You have to let the engine warm up about one minute before you can drive because it takes that long to build up a head of steam, and when you shut the engine off it doesn't really go off completely for a few minutes because the steam's still there. Steering is stiff and not as responsive as a rover. The brakes are slower, too."

"Interesting. As a member of Army Central Command, I'll be getting a personal car in a few months, with a driver of course. I understand it has an electrical system."

"Yes, to run the headlights for night driving, a fan to feed air to the firebox, a fan to heat the cab, and the speedometer. The rest of the system is purely mechanical, including the automatic stoker."

"It's an amazing thing."

"It is." Chris paused. "How's Ornakwés?"

Roktekester considered his response. "The main problem is that there is no

Ornakwés. We've laid out a town site about a dekont from the old Sumi ruin with room for five hundred houses, and the army has started on a small dam twenty dekont up the Ornakwés that will store water and divert the river into an irrigation ditch, which we have already started to clear. But other than the seventy people who were already squatters in the township, who still haven't accepted they will owe me taxes from now on, I have no residents. I have even offered to give away a house site and ten agris of farmland to farmers, but no one has taken up the offer yet. They all want to go to Melwika. Army recruitment is down twenty percent this winter; did you know that?"

"No I didn't." Chris noted the hostility and anger in the general's eyes. "I'm sorry to hear about the problems. In a way, they are surprising, because when you mechanize farming the result should be a labor surplus; a steam tractor with attachments can replace thirty or forty farmers. In this case, one place has produced farm machinery and has made it available to everyone, but most people have not utilized it much; the result is that any natural labor surplus goes to Melwika, where the machines give it a greater return. If the absentee landlords and old houses adopted agricultural equipment widely, they'd produce more unemployed farmers than Melwika can absorb."

"Theoretically true, but Mitru runs all the equipment."

"Because no one knew how to. Now they're learning and his monopoly is going away."

"And Ejnopéla is growing and absorbing surplus as well. I wish you had considered putting your school in Ornakwés. It would have grown."

"My Lord General, it would be premature to open a major school that far west. People might not be willing to send their kids there, and there are almost no children

farther west who would benefit. Right now, Ornakwés is too far west to develop as a market hub. As the valley fills with people, it will emerge as the next big center; then another center will develop near Nuarjora.”

Roktekester laughed at that. “There’s already another center developing down there, which might have strengthened Ornakwés!”

“Really?” said Chris, puzzled.

“Haven’t you heard? Remember the old caravan stop at Akanakvéi, where Melwika used to get its limestone? They had to move their village when the Arjakwés began to flow again; it created a lake, Arjmora it’s called, which flooded the village site, and the oasis east of the old reef is gradually getting encroached by the rising sea. Some time over the winter, some Sumis went to visit; I think Dumuzi, who has now moved to Melwika, was among them. They asked Lord Mitrusaju for permission to buy a large piece of land north of Arjmora where the reef connects to the old ‘mainland’ not too far from the royal road to Bellédha. He agreed.”

“I heard from someone who had visited Nuarjora that the Fish Eryan are furious.”

“I’m not surprised, because this isn’t far from Lepawsakhéma, the Fish Eryan village just north of Nuarjora. The ownership of the land in that area has never been settled. I am urging the Queen to declare the land part of Lepawsakhéma in order to render the sale null and void. Anyway, the Sumis have bought land for a village site, and they have already cleared a dirt track from the Royal Road to their site, then on to the relocated Akanakvéi, then down along the Arjakwés to the seashore. The plan is to set up a mobile port along the Arjakwés and use it to move goods between Sumilara and the Arjakwés Valley. Once sea level more or less stabilizes they’ll build a real port. They’ve

named the place ‘Arjdhura,’ ‘Silverport.’ There are already thirty Sumi families located there, building houses. So now we have a sort of Sumi invasion of the mainland—they won’t stay on their island—and a new town in the lower valley taking shape and competing with Ornakwés.”

“I can see why you are concerned, and there is not much that can be done.”

“Oh, there is something we can do: stop them! But what they are doing makes sense. It’s silly to move cargo between Anartu and Mëddoakwés westward to Néfa, then truck it north and east. It makes sense to ship it east instead.”

“Then the solution is to get Eryan investors involved in Arjdhura as well, and to establish an Eryan navy base at Arjdhura.”

“That is logical, also, but General Tritu has been pushing for the eastern shore naval base to be built at Swadlëndha or Èndraidha, so I doubt Arjdhura will get such a facility, even if it is the logical place to put it. And no Eryan investors are interested. I wouldn’t advise that you get involved; it might look suspicious.”

“I won’t. I wonder whether the Sumis are moving people to the mainland because the rising sea is displacing villages.”

“I’m sure! One quarter to one third of their people have to move, and Sumilara is a crowded place. I bet Arjdhura will fill up with them. You have quite a few in Mëlwika, don’t you?”

“Indeed. Every week, one or two more Sumi kids show up at the high school and Sumiwika is now completely built up. Dumuzi wants to build a temple to Enlil on top of the mountain.”

“I hope you won’t let him!”

“Lord General, Mēlwika does not restrict its citizens the way other cities do. That’s one reason why they are so prosperous. But the city council will deal with the matter publicly next month, and the newspaper will cover it, so everyone who objects will have a chance to speak. Maybe the city council will block the proposal.”

“We will definitely be there to object!”

“Good. I wish I could help you with Ornakwés. There was talk of manufacturing radios there.”

Roktekester shook his head. “No, that’s part of the engineering corps and is staying at Endraidha, which is struggling to get people to settle there. They aren’t encouraging anything there to leave!”

“But you’ll have a road and power line to Endraidha, right?”

“Indeed, the work has already commenced with new recruits.”

“Perhaps there are economic advantages to being half way between the capital and Endraidha. Do you have any natural resources to develop? There’s always farmland. With two steam tractors and a full complement of equipment and six or eight men, you could farm a thousand agris of wheat.”

“That much?” Roktekester was surprised.

“Easily; maybe fifteen hundred agris. Other crops require more work harvesting. I’d start with a project like that. You have to hire reliable and educated men to run the equipment, and pay them two thousand or twenty-five hundred per year. Mēlwika may have some farmers to spare because we have no more land and farmers are either seeking to use more land or rent their land to someone else. It’ll earn you a lot of cash. After that,

I'd consider what small projects you can start, either raising special crops or manufacturing special items."

Roktekester nodded. "Those are good ideas. I am grateful. I have a man looking into cattle raising, too, but the Gordha slaughterhouse is a formidable competitor, thanks to your family's advice. Now, I wish you wouldn't encourage new definitions of justice where escaped prisoners are spared the death penalty. It weakens the rule of law that protects and maintains our civilization."

"Lord General, Wérgéndu recommended that Soru be pardoned and the Réjé approved. I favored it, yes, but I didn't twist any arms. Soru made his own case."

Roktekester shrugged. "A poor, ignorant street urchin steals, gets what he deserves, escapes, and ends up going to the génadema."

"Perhaps the prison should produce better records of who is there, with photographs of each prisoner, so if he escapes we can print a poster with his picture that says 'Wanted Dead or Alive.' We can't verify the identities of our students. We can't even verify their names and dates of birth. Soru worked his way up from hospital orderly because he was smart and cooperative."

"I concede, he is doing good things. But what is justice?"

"Well, that must be considered by the prison committee. What is punishment? Is it taking away men's freedom and forcing them to work in a reasonably safe and comfortable environment, and perhaps teaching them a few skills so they can get a job when they are released? Or is it starving them and working their fingers to the bone, killing about half of them before their sentence is over, and then releasing starved, weak, desperate men back on the streets? Naturally the latter will try to escape and will be

vicious if they do.”

“You can’t coddle criminals.”

“I agree. And you can’t take a starving street kid who has stolen four sweet potatoes to feed his mother and put him in with hardened criminals, either; they’ll take advantage of him and will teach him how to do bad things. The prison needs to have different levels of security and qualities of life, and prisoners have to earn the privilege of being in the better area. Kids need to be imprisoned in a separate area of their own. There are ways to make them cooperative and work hard.”

“Hum.” He thought about that approach. “You always have interesting ideas, Lord. And I am never sure whether I like them.”

“And you are sure you don’t like some of them, Lord General. Éra is not Gædhéma; what works on one world won’t work on the other.”

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The Bahá’í Center was hot and crowded when Thornton entered. It was the sixth day of Ridván and Mælwika had entered its third week of heat; a dry heat, good for people but a serious problem for the crops, which were demanding extensive irrigation. As soon as he entered he heard a clacking sound coming from the registration table. He hadn’t heard such a sound in years. He walked over and looked over the heads of the spectators—he was taller—and saw Brébæstu sitting at the table, typing name badges.

A typewriter! Their first!

He resisted a temptation to shout praise to his friend; Eryan didn’t do that. The crowd was watching and chatting in fascination. Occasionally Brébæstu hit keys too fast and they clashed; sometimes he had to pull them back with the flick of a finger. Finally

Thornton was able to come forward for a nametag, since most of the crowd was watching, not waiting.

“Brébéstu, congratulations!”

He smiled. “Thanks. It’s been working for a month and a half, but I’ve been making minor adjustments to the mechanism. It works pretty well.” He put in a nametag and typed Thornton’s name on it, then handed it to him. Thornton leaned over close to watch.

“So, you used the English layout of keys.”

“Basically; we replaced ‘q’ with ‘ε’ and ‘f’ with ‘kh’ and ‘c’ with ‘ch’ and ‘v’ with ‘kw’ and ‘x’ with ‘dh.’ If you want ‘f’ you use ‘8’ and if you want ‘sh’ you backspace and add an underline beneath ‘s.’ I put ‘st’ to the right of ‘p.’ It works pretty well.”

“And it’s faster than handwriting?”

“Yes, once you learn, but there’s still no easy way to erase a mistake, and the ribbon rarely has the right amount of ink on it.”

“Those are problems to fix. Wow, this is fantastic. How many can you make?”

“Not many yet; we don’t know because we haven’t tried. They’ll probably be one hundred dhanay each.”

“That’s a lot, but it’ll be worth it.”

Chris arrived in time to hear the last sentence. “Brébéstu, I bet I can arrange contracts for a hundred typewriters for you at fifty dhanay each.”

“That’s all? Let’s hold out for more.”

Chris laughed. He looked at the typewriter as well, then looked at his nametag

with pleasure once it was done. “How’s business?”

“Pretty good. We’re making stainless steel pots, pans, dishes, cups, and cutlery, and I think I’ll get a contract from Ora to use our stamp to make parts for their steam wagons.”

“Really? Congratulations.”

“I’ll need to buy another metal press by fall, which means either another power line or raising the voltage on the existing line. Gugénu wants to build a power canal around the rapids to make power for the area and I keep telling him it is premature.”

“It is; everyone wants the prestige of making electricity and selling it to everyone else. On the other hand, we still have severe problems during the eclipse and probably need more power production then.” Chris waved goodbye to Brébéstu and he and Thornton began to walk away from the table. He patted his son on the back. “How are you?” They hadn’t seen each other since breakfast.

Thornton smiled. “Pretty good. The geology class was surveying the coal deposit all day without me; Dwosunu led them. Estonpréku and I have been trying to make sense of the data about length of day because the observers at Khermdhuna and Snékh péla were not very precise, so the results are contradictory. But we think the planet’s axis has a five degree tilt. And I’m sure when I walked to the south pole two years ago that the tilt was less than one degree.”

“Are you really sure?”

Thornton nodded. “So we have a two degree per year change. A lot. Estonpréku plans to go to Gordha next week to do some observations there. He should be able to detect a half degree change in axial tilt, and that will take three months if the tilt

continues to change at two degrees per year.”

“How much could it change?”

“I don’t know. The Earth’s moon has a half degree of tilt and a precession of eighteen years. We’re closer to Skanda and it pulls on us harder, so we could have bigger, faster precessions.”

“You should ask Skandu again about the Anartu records.”

“Marku’s going to Anartu over the summer with him and plans to look for information about floods and droughts.”

“Good.” Chris sighed and switched to English for privacy. “Well, we had another meeting of the Prison Committee this afternoon and had a long, tiring, and passionate discussion of what prisons do, what their goals are, and how well or badly they should treat inmates. But we’re making progress. It’s good to get to know Prince Meméjékwu. He did indeed spend months and months being tutored in Endraidha. He now takes fast notes in pretty good handwriting using the Eryan alphabet, and he can handle numbers pretty well.”

“General knowledge?”

“He’s good at quoting the hymns and aphorisms by Werétrakester and Gawéstu. But he does understand some science. Not business, management, or planning, though.” Chris shrugged.

“Well, if he keeps learning. And he makes good suggestions?”

“Yes, pretty much, and he listens. He’s not arrogant; his character seems fine. He’s twenty-six; he made reference to being born thirteen years after his mother assumed the throne.”

“Three years older than me.”

“Yep. I’ve got to go talk to Liz and Modolubu about some details of the first session, so I’ll see you tonight.”

“Okay, good luck.” Chris hurried off and Thornton began to wander through the crowd, looking for Lébé. Finally he spotted her, but she was busy sitting with Mary and helping translate for her. In the last few months, grandma had not been able to speak the new language very well; she had lost some of her ability to use Eryan, probably a sign of decline. She was frailer than before, also; she now used a cane and took short walks only. They had hoped that spring weather would bring an improvement, but the swelter that followed the cold had been hard on her instead.

He was about to walk over to Sulanu when someone came up from behind.

“Honored Dhoru!”

He turned and saw εjnu. “Hail, Honored εjnu. I hope you are well?”

“Oh, yes, well enough. Lord Albanu has been making my life difficult lately in business and wants to buy some land from me at an unfair price; he is still angry with me, I’m afraid. But he won’t win.”

“And your family?”

“Well enough. We practically have moss growing behind our ears. It has been raining non-stop in Néfa for the last few weeks.”

“Yes; Mëddwoglubas had to close its factory when the river flooded it and a quarter of the town. It seems when the eastern shore is too dry, the western shore is too wet.”

“Well, we now know it has to go somewhere; that’s a part of the new knowledge!

Say, Dhoru, I have a question for you. Why can't the Convention make decisions about its own functioning?"

"What do you mean? It can make some decisions; it chooses its own chair and secretary, for example."

"No, that's not what I mean. Why, for example, can't the Convention discuss the number of delegates that the community will choose? We now have six hundred Bahá'ís on Éra; why not elect ninety-five delegates instead of nineteen? Or why not twenty-seven or thirty-eight or fifty-four? We'll have two hundred Bahá'ís here in the Center, and we'll have many from every region. Why shouldn't the convention decide to double the number of delegates and appoint the additional ones representatively from among the Bahá'ís present?"

Thornton scowled. "Well, first of all, Shoghi Effendi gave the authority to elect delegates to the local Bahá'ís, not to the convention, and he gave the authority to settle on the number to the Central Spiritual Assembly. The convention is a voting body; it elects the Central Spiritual Assembly. It is a deliberative body; it discusses the conditions and goals of the community. But it is not a decision making body; it can't decide to do things. That's the job of the Central Spiritual Assembly that it elects."

Éjnu was not pleased by the answer. "That's what everyone says, but no one says *why*."

"Well, like I said, Shoghi Effendi made the Assembly the decision maker and the convention the elector and advisor. It wouldn't make sense to have two separate decision making bodies; what would you do when they contradicted?"

Éjnu didn't have an answer to that. "Well, thank you," he replied, and then he

turned and walked away.

Thornton found that rather strange. He continued over to Sulanu. “How are you?”

“Pretty good, Honored Dhoru; and you? How are the children?”

“I am fine, and the children are doing very, very well, thank you. How’s the paper?”

“We’re thinking about increasing the length from eight to sixteen pages per week, then switching to twice weekly. Advertising has grown a lot, and that has pushed up demand. But I doubt we’ll make such a change for at least six months.”

“Is the *Royal Standard* giving you competition?”

Sulanu shook his head. “No, they really aren’t a newspaper; they’re more like an official palace record. That’s fine and useful; we quote from them sometimes. But they allow no advertising, so their sales are still tiny.”

“I’m sure.” Thornton shook his head. “I just had a strange conversation with Eǵnu, asking me why the convention couldn’t decide to increase the number of delegates.”

“Yeah, I did, too. It was strange. He’s upset about something.” Sulanu pointed. “Looks like we’re starting.”

They both looked for empty seats and sat. Mitrubbéru, a graduating literature student from Néfa who had an incredible singing voice, stood before them. He was wearing his name tag around his neck and it had a blue ribbon on it, indicating he was a delegate. The crowd quieted and he began to chant a Bahá’í prayer in traditional Eryan style. When he finished a second prayer, Liz went to the piano and they led everyone in several rousing Bahá’í songs, some new. Thornton and Sulanu knew them because Mitrubbéru had composed them in the last four months since he had come to Melwika for

an intensive series of courses on music; several of the music students were Bahá'ís, and the great chanter, Kekanu, was still in town to give classes. The out of town Bahá'ís didn't know them and learned them enthusiastically.

“More! More!” everyone called after they sang three songs, so he led them in a fourth song.

“Well, that got us off to a good start!” exclaimed Thornton.

“Music will always do it, and Mitrubbéru is very good,” agreed Sulanu. “His new songs are inspiring, too.”

“Some are translations of English songs,” said Thornton. “The tunes often are different, though.”

“He's good at translation and at music. Thank goodness he's a second son of a small merchant family; I'd hate to see him have to quit these things to run his family's business!”

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The evening session was inspired as they all studied a compilation of Bahá'í texts about elections; a gathering of two hundred Bahá'ís from all around the world was a perfect opportunity to educate them. The next morning everyone asked Mitrubbéru to lead them in song again, then they read the Ridván message of the Central Spiritual Assembly and consulted about it. The Assembly had set two goals for the upcoming year: to establish the Faith in twenty more localities and to make a start on the Mëddwoglubas temple. The afternoon session, which also began with song, continued the discussion of the two goals. Because there were only nineteen delegates, once the delegates completed discussion of the topic they opened it up to questions and answers from the audience.

The evening had a closed session for the delegates only in a nearby classroom while the Bahá'í Center hosted a public meeting, to which many Bahá'ís invited friends. Kanawé went with Soru and was very impressed by the uplifting singing and music—even without Mitrubbéru—and the spirit of the gathering. As they were walking home she said, “That was *so* inspiring. I don’t know why the gatherings dedicated to Widumaj can’t be like it.”

“I suppose they could be, but no one has tried it yet,” replied Soru. “Give the local priests another year or two.”

“They are good men, but they’ll look at this as too innovative for five years, not one or two.” She looked at him. “Soru, I want to be a Bahá'í.”

He smiled. “You do?”

“Yes, I do. It’s such a beautiful, moving religion, and it has such wise teaching about women and governing. It’s a miracle, I think.”

“Do you believe in Bahá'u'lláh?”

She nodded. “I guess I do. I suppose I should start saying the obligatory prayers.”

He stopped and leaned over to hug her. “You don’t know how happy you’ve made me.” His voice even broke with emotion.

“Oh, honey,” she said, and she kissed him.

“This is unbelievable; Esto has showered me with even more blessings. In the last month I have had a weight of worries lifted off my back, my freedom is restored, and now my wife shares my love for Bahá'u'lláh.”

She smiled. “This is a blessing primarily for me, not for you! But I’m glad you feel blessed as well. It is a blessing for both of us.”

“Let’s go back to the Bahá’í Center,” Soru suggested. “We should find Lady Liz and let her know. I think we can get you enrolled right away.”

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The next morning, the convention reconvened in the Bahá’í Center. Since it was Primdiu and most people didn’t work that day, the crowd of Bahá’ís exceeded the building’s capacity, so many sat outside the opened windows to watch and listen. After several prayers and a rousing session of singing led by Mitrubbéru, Mary went to the podium.

“Last night, the delegates met in a solemn session to pray, contemplate their voting in silence, then everyone voted,” she said. “As an Auxiliary I was privileged to be present. The spiritual atmosphere was very uplifting. Rarely in my long life have I had such an experience, and I have been a delegate four or five times in three different countries. We can all be very proud and inspired by our delegates. I am now calling on the chief teller, Estobaisu, to give us the teller’s report.”

Estobaisu, a philosophy student in Isurdhuna, stepped forward. There was a certain excitement or energy in his face as he faced the audience. “Dear Friends, I was a delegate last year as well, and I can confirm Mary’s comment that this voting was special. The atmosphere was sweet. The spiritual energy in the room was palpable. It was quite remarkable.

“Like last year, all nineteen delegates voted, and all of the ballots were valid. The following individuals were elected to the Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá’ís Éra. When I call out their names, I would like to ask each one to step forward.

“Lord Kristobéru Mennea, 19 votes.

“Dr. Stauréstu Aywergui, 19 votes.

“Dr. Lua Behruzi, 19 votes.

“Modolubu Paperkwéri of Məlwika, 15 votes

“Lord Estodhéru Doma-Məddwoglubasi, 14 votes

“Dr. Mitretu Yimusunu, 12 votes.

“Estoiwiku Magantéknu, 9 votes.

“Brébéstu Doma-Slirbrébu, 8 votes.

“Mitrubbéru of Néfa, 6 votes.”

There was an electric reaction in the audience; Mitrubbéru was new, and Əjnu hadn't been reelected! Everyone turned to each other to comment about it while the members of the Central Spiritual Assembly walked forward to receive their votes. Əjnu sat in his chair, shocked. “The members of the Central Spiritual Assembly rejected me,” he said loudly.

The audience rose to their feet to applaud as the last one reached the front. Əjnu stood as well. “If they don't want me, I don't want them, either,” he growled, and he started for the door.

Mary saw him go and rose, but he was walking fast. “Go stop him,” she said to Liz, who nodded and hurried after him, causing about a quarter of the audience to turn and see what was going on, even though they were applauding.

“Əjnu!” she exclaimed as she reached the back door. He had just stepped outside; he ignored her and kept going, heading for the Məlwika Palace Hotel on Foundry Square where he was staying. She began to jog to catch up with him. “Əjnu! This isn't right. Please, calm down and return to the convention.”

He stopped and turned to her. “I have been humiliated. The other members of the Central Spiritual Assembly wanted to get rid of me and didn’t vote for me. Worse, they are nine of the nineteen delegates, and they refused to increase the number of delegates because that would have diluted their voting strength.”

“Ejnu, the number of delegates is never increased right away, and the number of Bahá’is hasn’t grown much either. Maybe next year or the year after the number of delegates will increase. But that is a decision of the Assembly, not the delegates, not any individual member. You were on the Assembly when it made that decision. You received the votes you received.”

“They pushed Mitrubbéru forward as an alternative!”

“No they didn’t. I planned the devotions with Lébé. He was scheduled to lead the singing Penkudiu night and this afternoon. The audience and delegates asked him to lead them in song the other times.”

He stared at her. “Humph,” he huffed, then he turned and walked away.

She watched him go. She turned and walked sadly back to the Bahá’í Center. The crowd outside was listening carefully as Stauréstu, last year’s assembly chair, was thanking everyone for their support of the Assembly. Then she spotted Soru and Kanawé in the crowd. She had enrolled Kanawé the previous night. She walked over.

“How are you today?” she whispered.

“Alláh-u-Abhá,” replied Kanawé, with a smile.

“Alláh-u-Abhá. It looks like the glow of declaration hasn’t dissipated.”

“No, not yet!” Soru nodded with a smile.

“Come inside,” said Liz. “We need to announce that you have declared.”

“No, please, I’d be embarrassed!”

“No reason to be. Come on,” said Liz, taking her by the hand. Kanawé smiled, embarrassed and pleased at the same time. Soru smiled and came along, happy his wife was getting recognition for her faith. Liz knew that Mary would be thrilled to introduce Kanawé, and it would help dissipate any bad feelings caused by ejnu walking out.

Reread and edited 5/24/13, 8/5/17, 11/7/24

176.

Health

Chris nodded and waved to the soldiers who waved the rover into the palace's rear entrance. He took his foot off the brake and started forward slowly.

"Well, they didn't arrest us," said Lua.

"We're not in trouble. You haven't lost an important patient lately, and I haven't done anything wrong that would require your presence."

"I just wish the Réjé had given us more notice."

"I had to cancel classes too. But you don't keep Her Majesty waiting." He stopped the rover in the courtyard to look around. "Damn! No parking spaces!"

"Really?" Lua looked around. She counted three steam cars, three steam wagons, and two armored vehicles. "They need a bigger parking lot! Three steam cars, how's that possible?"

"Three of the four! John told me people have been bidding up the price to ten or twelve thousand dhanay if he can deliver before the Grand Court, and they're paying in full ahead of time. So he's jacked up production from ten per year to ten in the next three months, has doubled the number of workers, and is keeping the facility going all night with an extra shift."

"Crazy, what prestige will do."

"Every time I drive this rover around, I think I sell another steam car for John."

Chris spotted a little corner spot and drove over. He squeezed the rover into it, though that meant his door couldn't open. He had to get out of Lua's door. "I'll have to tell

Roktekester about marking parking spaces with paint on the pavement,” he growled, as he locked the door.

They headed toward the new palace through the back entrance from the military headquarters. Roktekester was walking along the same sidewalk a dozen meters ahead of them; Chris called and the General paused to wait for them. “Hail to both of you,” he said.

“Hail, Lord General,” replied Chris. “How are you?”

“Very well and going to the same meeting as you.”

“Which is about what?”

“Health, Tutanēs, Sumis, and various other things. I’m looking forward to it because the queens’ quarters won’t be roasting hot! They’ve hauled in a gurni of ice and a fan.”

“Clever,” said Chris, wondering if he should push for more details. He decided not to.

They walked past the guards with barely a nod; another advantage of entering with the head of the army. They crossed the new audience hall, which was filled with workmen—mostly Sumi—completing a painting on the ceiling, another on one wall, and installing stained glass in a window. Even the audience hall was comfortably cool. When they passed into the private quarters, it was slightly chilly.

The Queen now had a small private audience chamber, but it was of a design that surprised Chris. The walls were of mahogany with many book cases, only partially filled, though they were still pretty impressive. Chandeliers of electric lights hanging from the ceiling illuminated the space pleasantly. One end of the room had a raised floor with a

large comfortable chair; elegant, but less subdued than a throne. Close by was a comfortable chair and a small table; Estoiyaju's place. A circle of comfortable chairs of carved wood and leather faced the queen's seat, and little wooden tables were available if someone wanted one for taking notes.

Lord Kandékwes and Widéstu were already seated; they rose when the three new arrivals entered. No sooner had they finished greetings when Werétrakester entered as well. The widu had visibly aged ten years; his hair and beard were mostly white even though he was only in his late fifties.

"I haven't seen you in almost a year, my friend," said Chris affectionately.

"I have had a remarkable year, a year of many insights. I have been with Gawéstu most of the time."

"How is the great widu?" asked Kandékwes.

"Weak in body but strong in spirit. He is still at his cave, but he has an assistant helping him. I don't think he'll come here."

"Are you back?" asked Chris.

Werétrakester smiled. "For a time."

"What about your family?"

"I have now lived to see the son of my son, so I have other responsibilities. I have renounced all possessions for the higher calling of Esto." He paused. "But that doesn't mean I will be living in a cave all the time, like Gawéstu. I have some things to write."

"Widus now publish books," said Lua.

Werétrakester nodded. "Indeed, they do! A new kind of widu is called for because of the new knowledge. And I will be here as a sort of advisor to Her Majesty, at her

pleasure. Rather like Auxiliary Mary for the Bahá'ís."

"But she isn't a widow," replied Lua.

"I'm not so sure," replied Werétrakester.

The door opened just then and in came Estoiyaju. He was wearing new spectacles. After a brief pause he was followed by Prince Mimejékwu. They all exchanged greetings, then rose for the Réjé, who entered and greeted everyone briefly.

"Lord Kristoféru, Dr. Lua, thank you so much for coming here," she said. She sat in her special chair. "You may be seated, please. Estoiyaju."

"Thank you, Your Majesty." Her personal secretary looked at a sheet of paper with a list of points recorded in his distinct and beautiful handwriting. "We had originally decided to invite Dr. Lua to discuss some health related matters, but then it occurred to us that Lord Kristoféru had some information Dr. Lua might not, and when we decided to invite him as well the list of topics to discuss kept growing. We are very pleased you were able to rearrange your plans and come here on such short notice."

"Let's start with the first concern," said the Réjé. "Dr. Lua, about ten days ago, the wife of one of our army captains went into labor, but the baby was turned and the midwife couldn't get it out. The woman and her husband did not trust the hospital and didn't know whether the army would pay. After two and a half days, she and the baby both died."

"I am so sorry, Your Majesty. We probably could have saved her."

"How?"

"We could have tried a cesarean. A surgeon takes a knife and carefully opens a slit in her womb, removes the baby, and sews up the skin. In a month or two the woman

would have been back to normal, and she could have had more children.”

The Réjé looked at Estoiyaju. “I was pretty sure you could have done something. You see, Estoiyaju; they have something they can try for almost everything. I understand you have in Melwika something called a Tomi and all the workers in the Tomi have free use of the hospital. How much does it cost?”

Lua looked at her father and the Réjé said to Estoiyaju, “and you see, only he knows that.”

“You know people very well, Your Majesty,” replied Estoiyaju.

“The Tomi covers two visits to a doctor, two cleanings of one’s teeth, and one visit to one’s dentist every year for free, plus one visit to an eye doctor every other year for free,” replied Chris. “Visits to the hospital are free, also. People have to pay for their glasses, and if they have to have fillings in their teeth they pay one tenth of the fee, which is less than the cost of having the tooth pulled out. The problem is getting people to use these services, but gradually they are doing it. Melwika also has many young people and they are healthier than older people. Right now all of this costs the Tomi about four dhanay per person per year. But as they use the services more and as our people get more education and experience and therefore will need to be paid more, it will go up.”

“How many people are covered by the Tomi?” asked Estoiyaju.

Chris thought. “We have 250 students in the génadema, 350 grange farmers, about 200 workers in the various businesses that are part of the Tomi, and the farmers and workers have about 1,200 wives, children, and other dependents. So that’s 2,000. The Miller Tomi has about 500 workers and 1,200 dependents as well. The city’s 100 workers and their 350 dependents have the same coverage as well. So altogether, about 4,000

people.”

“That must be the entire city!”

“No, the city has 6,000 now, and some of our workers live elsewhere. But a few hundred residents pay the same four dhanay a year to the hospital and get the same coverage. The city has 5,000 dhanay in its budget to cover the hospital costs of people not in the system.”

“I pay about that much, also, for sick people to go to Mæddoakwés Hospital,” added Kandékweś. “But now I see why Mælwika hospital is twice as busy as ours; it has a system financing it.”

“Of course, it isn’t a system for the purpose of the hospital, but for the health of the people,” added Lua.

“If two or three thousand people aren’t covered by your health system, why do they cost only five thousand?” asked Estoiyaju.

“Because they only come to the hospital for emergencies,” replied Lua. “And we ask them to pay; we charge the city only when they can’t. They have their teeth pulled out by the dentists in the marketplace. If they want glasses they have to pay for them and we charge them a bit extra and give them a free health and dental examination.”

“People in Mælwika generally can pay for routine medical care,” added Chris. “The problem is that they are not used to doing so.”

The Réjé looked at Estoiyaju, “Four dhanay.”

“We have 200 employees of the palace, and they have about 800 dependents,” calculated Estoiyaju. “That would include the royal family.”

“The army should be part of the system, too,” added Roktækestær. “We have 250

soldiers in the capital and 500 cavalry; they have about 1,000, dependents. The army headquarters has a hundred more officers and staff and they have about 500 dependents. Let's call it 2,500, altogether."

"Our Tomi has arrangements with all the other hospitals around the world," said Chris. "One of the businesses that uses some of our services—the bank—has employees in eleven towns and cities. The telephone company has employees in twelve. Mitru's transportation company has employees in eight. The other hospitals have been using the same four dhanay per year payment and providing more or less the same service."

"We should use the existing hospitals as well," agreed Roktekester. "We have just started to develop a military hospital in Endraidha. Obviously, sick military people already are using them, but we should formalize it."

"What about the post office employees we've been hiring?" asked Estoiyaju.

The Réjé sighed. "Yes, include them. Four dhanay is only a small amount compared to what we are already paying them."

"You could deduct all or some of the four dhanay from their salaries," suggested Chris. "Our businesses keep health costs in mind when they set the salaries. In effect, they lower the salaries."

"We'll have to do that," agreed Estoiyaju. "And we'll have to include the priests and their dependents."

"Then we should include the Old Houses," said the Réjé. "From time to time we adjust their allowances, and it's time to do that again."

"I'd cover their full time employees as well," suggested Lua.

"If they agree to the cost," agreed the queen. "I want to see my people stay well. I

was profoundly impressed by the work of the mobile clinic last summer; I could see how much it was helping people, especially the sick. Not everyone understands education, but everyone understands medicine.”

“And now that we are recording births and deaths in many places, we can see the results,” added Widestu. “Take Morituora or Boléripludha. Neither has seen many people move in or out in the last few years; they are neither young communities, nor old ones. We’ve been keeping birth and death records for both for a year now. I checked the totals last week. Moritua had 127 births and 60 deaths last year; Boléripludha, 77 and 40. That includes deaths of babies, too. The difference represents a population increase of about two percent.”

“And those death rates could be cut much more,” added Lua. “A typical town or village only has two percent of its population over age sixty, half a percent over age seventy. There is no reason why most adults shouldn’t live that long.”

“This is why you said we’d soon be able to populate the lower Arjakwés Valley,” Roktekestær said to Chris, who nodded.

“Obviously, we cannot afford to give free or partially free healthcare to everyone in the world,” exclaimed the Réjé. “That would cost a million dhanay. That may be possible in a decade, though. I suspect the health system can’t handle a sudden increase in patients, either.”

“Correct, Your Majesty,” agreed Lua. “We are about to graduate our first three doctors. We have twenty more doctors or dentists and thirty nurses in training. The mobile clinic has provided a place for them to gain experience and the money for the clinic has helped pay for their educations. Our second clinic is now ready as well.”

“That is a place we must put money,” exclaimed the Queen. “I want the money for two more clinics per year in the budget the consultative assembly considers, starting next week. Is twenty thousand enough to run each one? And ten to build one?”

Lua looked at her father, who nodded. “I think operations are two thousand a month, so twenty-four would be better,” he said.

“Speaking of clinics,” said Prince Méméjékwu. “This is another matter for this meeting, and I think we can move on to it. Relations with the Tutane are now my responsibility. Her Majesty and I have agreed I will visit the Tutane every spring. I’ll be leaving in two weeks and want a clinic to accompany me, if possible.”

“Two weeks?” Lua was rather startled. “Where will you go?”

“To all twelve tribes. I’ll spend three days with the smaller tribes and five or six days with the larger ones. A census team is coming along, though their work will be quiet. I’d like the geographical survey team to come as well. Our focus will be on strengthening relations and encouraging development, so the clinic is crucial.”

“The timing is difficult, but I think we can manage it. Many of our students are taking courses this term in order to be available for the clinic that will accompany Her Majesty this summer. We are already providing clinical services to the Dwobergone and the Meghendre and we have been talking to the Kaitere, Médhelone, and Krésone about visiting this year.”

“Excellent; now you will be able to visit them with me,” said Méméjékwu. “We’ll start with the Kwolone, then head south to the Kwétékwone and Wurone, come back north to visit the Médhelone and Krésone, then head up the Eastern Road to the Meghendre, Kaitere, Mémenegone, and Késtone, spend a week at Kostekhéma, possibly

go farther east to visit the Ghéslonε and Géndonε, then return to Mèddoakwés via the Dwobergonε.”

“We’re taking a new approach to the Tutanε,” exclaimed Roktekester. “Steam power and explosives have forever broken the power of the horse to dominate this world. They can never be a military threat again. They number about twenty thousand; we’re not really sure how many there are, especially the tribes east of the Spine, who are beyond our roads and who pay almost no taxes. The way to pacify them and make them pay taxes is to integrate them. Gordha is the best example of this, with their telephones, génadema, electricity, clinic, and now their slaughterhouse that sends beef all over the world. The Mèghendrés will never attack us again because they don’t want the money to stop. The Kaitéré with their nickel-iron mine are the same way. The Kwolonε are peaceful because they have always been a traditional ally of ours against the Mèghendré and because of their recent defeat, but now we have to integrate them as well. The other tribes are smaller and are allied with one or the other. So we are looking at ways to build roads to these tribes and eventually extend telephones to them, so we know what is happening.”

“Are you planning to meet with the clan elders at each tribal visit?” asked Chris. “We’ve done that with the Mèghendré, Kaitéré, and Dwobergonε.”

“That is the idea,” agreed Méméjékwu. “I’ve been studying the different development plans. We’re prepared to give them some of their taxes back if they can show us a plan on how they will use the money, and every year I’ll return to see how the plan is going.”

“That is excellent,” said Chris. “Roads, schools, clinics, business plans. I have many ideas about planning development.”

“Perhaps next week we can discuss them after the committee meeting.”

Chris nodded, pleased. “We have the opposite problem with the Sumis,” exclaimed Roktekester. “We don’t need to encourage them to develop; we have to watch them and make sure they don’t gain certain capabilities. And eventually they usually acquire what we don’t want them to have anyway. Students at the génademas sell their used textbooks to each other and they show up in the market; that’s probably how chemistry texts found their way to Sumilara. We recently became aware of a Sumi translation of the text. We are now allowing them to teach chemistry so that we know what they are teaching, and we are putting Sumi army recruits we trust in the classes to take chemistry so we know what they are teaching.”

“What do you know about the Sumis in Melwika?” asked Meméjékwu.

“My main source of information is the superintendent of Melwika schools, Ornéstu. Whenever a Sumi family moves to town, they register their children for school, and we have a form that must be filled out. A new Sumi family arrives in Melwika once or twice a week. They almost always settle in the ‘Sumiwika’ quarter. About half put their previous address as ‘Meddoakwés’ and the rest give a Sumilara address. Most are artisans or construction workers: painters, brick layers, plasterers, roofers, wood carvers, gold smiths, furniture makers.” Chris looked around the room. “I bet most of the furniture in here was made by Sumi artisans. Many of the workers I saw in the audience hall were Sumi. I wonder whether some of them live in Melwika.”

“We have had a lot of Sumi workers here in the palace and temple complex,” conceded Estoiyaju. “And there has been a surprising turnover, which makes us wonder what else they are doing for employment.”

“I think a lot of Sumi workshops are opening in Mēlwika. Maybe they move here from Sumilara, work for the palace for a few months, then open businesses. I have wondered whether someone on Sumilara has made the decision that they are better off exporting a lot of very capable artisans if their kids are getting a Mēlwika education. Dumuzi is making sure the education of every Sumi child is paid for.”

“They aren’t paid by taxes?” asked Widēstu, surprised.

“Not yet. The City Council has a policy that a child’s education is not paid for out of taxes until the child is resident for six months. We usually ignore the policy, but in this case we are being taken advantage of. The kids who are in the system this year will be covered by taxes next year, but new arrivals won’t.”

“How many Sumis are there in Mēlwika now?” asked Roktēkēster.

“The latest figure I saw was that we have about 600. Their presence has increased the tax collections noticeably.”

“You said you are being taken advantage of; in what way?” pressed Estoiyaju.

“We are a fairly free city and the Sumis are suddenly flooding us. What they are doing is not illegal, but it will create tensions and anger at them. It’s a problem. And now they want to build a temple on top of the ridge where the whole city can see it.”

“Will you permit it?” asked the Réjé.

“Your Majesty, I will permit it under certain circumstances. I do not feel we should suppress or oppose them; that will make them angry and resentful and will push their activities underground. When Dumuzi came to me with the proposal I said it had to be announced in the newspaper and there had to be a public hearing about it. If the public hearing about the Temple does not generate vicious, angry opposition that threatens the

town's peace and safety, we should approve it. Otherwise the project has to be postponed."

She considered then nodded. "A dangerous route to take, Lord Kristoféru. But banning a Sumi temple is dangerous as well. Better in Mēlwika than Mēdowakwés. Your main temple is now looking small and shabby, considering the growth of your city; perhaps it should be expanded and beautified as well."

"Perhaps it should, Your Majesty." Chris nodded; he took the hint.

"What have you heard about Arjdhura?" asked Estoiyaju.

"Three days ago, Mitru Miller came to me and said he had been approached by a Sumi merchant who asked him to start passenger and cargo service to the town. He said he couldn't until there was a gravel road. The merchant replied they'd have that done in a month or so and there would be plenty of business. Mitru asked my opinion and I said if he didn't provide the service, someone else would, and that would just create a base for a competitor, so he should do it."

There was a pause in the conversation as everyone looked at the Queen, who said nothing. "Your Majesty, if no one knows what is being planned at Arjdhura, someone should insist on being informed," suggested Chris. "They sneak around and do these things secretly because in the past it was easier to ask for forgiveness than permission. No one wanted to give permission, but everyone wanted the benefits that Sumi money brings and thus would look the other way. They are a clever people and as a result they have money. Arjdhura will have a big impact on the development of the region. It hurts General Roktekester's town. That is not a reason to stop them, but if everyone knows what they want to do, maybe General Roktekester can plan his town to take advantage of

facilities Arjdhura has.”

She glared at Chris. “My good Lord, people have good reason to fear me. Some naturally will always keep their activities secret.”

“Your Majesty, I am not saying that people will suddenly start to disclose everything to the Crown. I merely suggest that the first step should be to ask. The army has good reason to ask if they are interested in occasionally basing ships in Arjdhura to protect it against pirates.”

“Make a note of that,” she said to Estoijaju. “Lord, have you heard about the expansion of the Consultative Assembly?”

“Your Majesty, there was an article in the *Royal Standard* a few weeks ago noting that the regions would have representation based on the census data. I was very impressed by the plan. It is very systematic.”

“Did you hear that the House of Lords is being expanded as well?” She saw the blank expression on his face, so continued. “A few weeks ago a regional Lord complained to me that some regions are much bigger than others, but they all are represented by one Lord, so I agreed that Arjakwés, the northern shore, the southern shore, Ora, Néfa, and Isurdhuna could all have two. Lewésipa and Sumilara will have one.”

“For this region, the logical two Lords would be the one from Mæddoakwés and one of the two from Mælwika,” added Kandékwes.

“But I am not Eryan,” replied Chris. “Nor is my Eryan adequate.”

The Queen chuckled at that. “I think you can handle our language, and I think thirteen Lords can handle a gædhému.”

“You already know most of the Lords,” said Kandékwes. “They know you. The Old Houses will have representation by the second Lord from the North Shore. You know this world far better than most Lords. You have a vision and you can express it.”

“This is a difficult request because of my many duties. But I will obey the request of my Lord and my Queen.”

“Thank you,” said the Réjé. “And I am sure you will find ways to express your added responsibility through your generosity to your temple and to the people of this world.” She looked at Werétrakester. “Widu, what say you?”

“Your Majesty, I am very grateful to you and honor your decisions. I wish to accompany the Crown Prince, if that is his pleasure, because the Tutane people need to hear more about Widumaj. Perhaps the day will come when I will visit Sumilara as well. We must translate the hymns into their language. If they can have a temple here, we can have a place to chant the hymns there. I think perhaps we are laying the foundation of a new era of justice in this world. Justice is founded on consultation and acts of service, and we are fostering both. I believe Esto will be pleased.”

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Stauréstu felt out of place in Néfa. People kept staring at him as he walked down the street in his machine-woven clothes, carrying something they hadn’t seen before—an umbrella—as defense against the frequent downpours that had been pounding the western shore for the last month. Néfa was a more traditional place than he remembered. It looked poorer, or perhaps that was because it had not progressed as much as Mëddwoglubas, Ora, or Tripola, the three cities he saw regularly.

Ėjnu was quite a ways outside of town on one of the fingers of housing that ran

along one of the city's approach roads. An electrical and telephone line ran along the dirt road from house to house, with an occasional pole to support the wires if there was a gap between buildings, but it ended a fifteen-minute walk from his place. Stauréstu dodged puddles, dogs, and an occasional wagon—he saw no steam vehicles or bicycles—as he walked, wondering how he would be received.

Finally he reached the house and knocked. Lufané, Eǵnu's wife, answered the door. She did not look pleased to see him, but ushered him into the sitting room and offered him tea. He had finished his cup before Eǵnu swept into the room.

“Stauréstu my friend, how are you!” he exclaimed.

“I am well, my friend. Alláh-u-Abhá.”

“I'm glad to hear it. You had quite a walk from town; would you like more tea?”

Eǵnu took his cup before Stauréstu replied and refilled it, then poured a cup for himself.

Under his effusive friendliness, there was a slight nervous shake to his hand.

“How is your family?”

“Very well; my son just wrote from génadema that he is enjoying his classes and doing well. I am pleased. How are Aréjé and the baby?”

“Fine. Sliru is now over a year old and walking; he's growing fast. Aréjé is beginning to practice medicine under my supervision; she's had almost a year of courses for physicians, in addition to the nursing training she earlier had. And all the friends in Mëddwoglubas are well. We just had another declaration at the Twelfth Day of Ridván celebration.”

“Congratulations. I'm glad we have a woman studying medicine. She will make a

fine doctor. But how will she manage with the child?”

“Her mother and sisters are helping with Sliru. If we have another child, she’ll stop practicing for a few months. It is not easy, though, for both of us to work.”

“I can’t imagine having a working wife. Times are changing, I guess.”

Stauréstu sipped his tea. “Əjnu, the Central Spiritual Assembly has asked me to come and convey their deep sorrow that there was a misunderstanding at convention. We apologize if we have hurt your feelings; we never intended such a thing. We were surprised that we were unable to find you afterward and that you had even checked out of your hotel room and left town. We looked for you. We even called the two inns in Məddowakwés to see if you had checked into either of them.”

“I had, but under another name,” he replied. “I needed peace and quiet. I took a passenger wagon home two days later, rather than catch one of the two chartered buses that took everyone home when convention ended. I appreciate the spirit of the apology, Stauréstu, but I am not fooled.”

That startled him. “Fooled?”

“Fooled. The Central Spiritual Assembly didn’t want me on its membership; that was clear within a month or two. And when we discussed the number of delegates to elect and everyone wanted to keep it at nineteen, I was suspicious that the other members wanted to be sure they could vote me off. And they did. To be sure, they put Mitrubbəru at center stage as well.”

Stauréstu shook his head. “You are not being fair, my friend. As you know, the Faith has not grown much over the last year, so there is no justification for raising the number of delegates. If it grows, especially if it spreads out—and the convention

produced twenty pledges to move to new places, so it appears the Faith will spread out—then more delegates are justified. As for the voting, no one knows how anyone else voted; I don't know how you voted, you don't know how I voted, and I don't know how anyone else voted. As delegate you could have looked at the number of votes of the people who were not elected to the Assembly as well; it was posted and available. You came in tenth with five votes, just one less than Mitrubberu. Maybe next year the vote will be different. That's the way voting is; no one can predict the result. And you already know we had nothing to do with Mitrubberu being up front all the time; the convention decided they wanted him to lead them in song. But there is no reason to assume people voted for him because he has a good singing voice. That isn't on the list of characteristics to consider when voting, is it?"

Ejnu glared at Stauréstu. "This voting thing is a waste of time. It is just a way for the Menneas to keep control. We need a Bahá'í Faith with *priests*, Stauréstu, just like all the other religions here, and I dare say most of the religions on Gædhéma as well. The community in Néfa doesn't need a Spiritual Assembly. The assembly barely met three or four times last year. The community meets here in my house and I serve as a kind of priest, and I run everything. From the sound of things, none of the assemblies function very well. The communities that do function have one person who leads them." He raised a single finger, then shrugged. "How will that ever change? You and I should start a Bahá'í Faith suitable for Éra."

"Ejnu, which is it: that you think voting is a waste of time because you should be a Bahá'í priest, or that you think it was rigged and you can't offer any evidence of it?"

His face darkened. “Are you accusing me of dishonesty?”

“No, I’m asking for some evidence of your claim. I’m an open minded man, so give me a reason to consider your claim.”

“Stauréstu, you’re just part of their group. I’ve stated the evidence pretty clearly.”

“Well, then I apologize for being blind.” Stauréstu shrugged. “And I’m sorry you’ve had such a poor experience on the Néfa Assembly. Mëddwoglubas is not led by one or two people; we have a reasonably strong assembly. All nine are active. That’s true with Melwika as well, and it does not have a majority of Menneas on it. Neither does the Central Assembly. The whole purpose of the Faith is to cultivate human capacities; to empower everyone. That takes a lot of work and the task is never ending. It’s a hard task to accomplish when someone wants to be in charge.”

“Everyone wants to be in charge; admit it, don’t you like to be at the center of everything? The Menneas do. Don’t lecture me about being a servant, the way Mary did last summer.”

“Do you know how to recognize someone who is a servant, Ejnu? When they have to do something that benefits others and doesn’t benefit them, or even hurts them; that is a servant, someone who prefers others to himself. I’ve seen that behavior from Chris, Mary, Liz, and Lua, and I think if I were around the others more, I’d see it with them, too.” He rose. “I’m staying at the hospital tonight and catching the morning bus back home. Shall we talk again?”

He shrugged. “I’m not sure what good it’ll do.”

“Well, perhaps next month, then. Best wishes. Go with Esto.”

“Thank you, you, too.” [May 13, 2006; reread and edited 5/24/13, 8/5/17,  
11/7/24]

## Commemoration

A fancy steam coach pulled up in front of the Mennea residence and the driver got out to knock on the door. A moment later, Chris Mennea came out. The driver opened the door of the coach and let him in, then closed the door behind him.

“Lord Chris!” exclaimed General Perku from the rear seat. He made a slight move to stand, but one really couldn’t in the coach, so he extended both hands toward him instead, and they shook.

“It’s good to see you again, Perku,” replied Chris, warmly. He sat in the front seat, which faced the rear seat. “How are you?”

“Pretty well. The kids are growing. Sharé still misses Melwika and remembers you and the family fondly.”

“We miss her as well. Perhaps the two of you can come over for lunch some time.” The coach began to move forward. Chris looked around it. “This is quite nice; fancy.”

“Yes, it is nice. It’s not mine, of course; it belongs jointly to the chiefs of staff. We had it made over the winter by the coach makers in Mɛddoakwés. I like it better than a steam car; it’s more roomy. It requires a driver and a stoker, since it uses a Model-C steam engine, but that’s a minor matter for us.”

“And I counted four soldiers on the roof.”

“Correct. I figured we’d both feel more comfortable riding to Kwolone territory with an armed escort!”

Chris chuckled uncomfortably. “Yes, you’re right. When I got the summons last night from Prince Meméjékwes’s staff, one of my first thoughts was that this was a way to get rid of me. I felt better when you called and said you were going, too.”

“I must confess to momentary worry, also, but this came from the Prince’s chief of staff, Brébkordu, and I have complete confidence in him. He was Estoiyaju’s chief assistant until last year. The Réjé herself asked that his previous chief of staff be replaced by someone of great skill and competence.”

“That makes me feel better. I gather from Dr. Lua that the prince’s travels have not gone as planned.”

“No, the Kwolonε begged off the first time a visit was proposed; some sort of religious festival. So he went to the Wurone first, which was a disaster because the road was so bad it took three days to reach the village, and then they outnumbered the villagers! It is a small tribe, and many were already away to herd animals in the southern hills. The Kwétékwone were easier to reach, however, and most of the visitors were comfortable.”

“Lua was pleased with that visit, though it went long; I gather no one knew they had a third village. And now the party’s at Mēdhpēla. Perku, have we any idea how the Kwolonε were motivated to attack Mēlwika?”

Perku nodded his head slowly for a long time. “I think I’ve figured it out, but you can’t tell anyone. Jēsunu played a central role; he didn’t just try to get you assassinated, he encouraged the attack on Mēlwika. And now he’s out completely because his two plots failed. You will note that he has not been executed or imprisoned; he hasn’t even been

exiled, unless you want to call a fancy house in Ekwedhuna an exile. But he has no influence, and that is his punishment, adequate or not.”

He hesitated. “I have also learned this: Prince Məməjékwu’s personal messenger took the message from Jəsunu to the Kwolone, and the Prince went to the Queen with former General Aryornu, who told her the Məddoakwəs garrison could not leave the city until the troops and cavalry returned from Sumilara. Aryornu dragged his feet about getting them back, with the assent of two other members of the Central Command: the Prince and General Tritu. Roktekester was frantic about the situation, but they told him to maintain public order in the city, and with nine thousand refugees fleeing inside the walls that kept him busy. The decision not to deplete the capital’s garrison, on the surface, looks reasonable; but one does have to ask whether a hundred or two soldiers might not have helped out a desperate city seemingly on the verge of destruction. Roktekester repeatedly urged the sending of at least a few reinforcements.”

“Reinforcements certainly seemed important to me; if nothing else, it would have been a symbolic statement of support. On the other hand, *General* Perku, we didn’t do that badly.”

“We didn’t. I agree. And I think *if* Məməjékwu was a center of opposition to Melwika—to you—I don’t think he is any more. I think you have won the Queen’s confidence, and that is a formidable protection.”

“Interesting,” said Chris, absorbing the comments.

Perku sighed. “It still troubles me greatly. It strikes me as a kind of corruption, that such actions would be ignored. And even the people who strike me as basically good—like Roktekester—have their greedy side. The general has been using hundreds of

troops to build up his own town. Then my wife complains to me that I haven't made some extra deals, and I feel like I am ignoring my family by failing to pursue wealth more."

"I understand. A few times people tried to extract bribes or payments from me, and so far I have always very politely refused, by pretending my Eryan was not adequate to understand them completely or by making a joke of it. And so far I have been alright. But I urge you to do what is truly right and honest, my friend, and be confident Esto will reward you. And I truly believe He will. The Réjé will notice your trustworthiness as well, and she will give you responsibility she doesn't trust with others."

"I think you are right," he agreed, though with sadness in his voice.

There was a lull in the conversation. Perku looked out the window at the lush, green fields flying by, because the vehicle was going quite fast on the concrete road across Ménwika. "I can't believe you've assigned this entire township to farmers. And what's the drought and heat doing to them? It's a major problem in part of the lower valley."

"The areas without irrigation. But we have an irrigation system and plenty of water; both the Arjakewés and Péskakwés reservoirs are full. More importantly, the Gordha reservoir is full and is supplying Moritua. If the army hadn't built that dam, we would be in serious trouble right now."

"The drought, then, will work in your favor, by reducing harvest elsewhere."

"Unfortunately true; grain prices will be high this summer. Məlwika's 350 farmers may well produce half the region's harvest. We bought more guano fertilizer than ever before and we'll probably get a yield of grain about double the traditional level, and we'll

get in two crops this year. The farmers have also planted a more diverse set of crops this year; more vegetables, flax, and cotton, in particular, and more areas have been planted with olives, grapes, apples, and peaches. So we'll have a good year. A lot of our farmers are from the lower valley and they'll help out relatives and friends."

"Irrigation is spreading down there, too, thanks to the dams and steam shovels. You know, I've been surprised to see more and more people from Kërda living in Mèddoakwés; I think the valley's seeing a lot of out migration. I wish Lord Gnoscéstu would devote more of his resources to development."

"Especially since his cut of the taxes is half instead of a third! A lot of that goes to the temple and its small army of priests, though. The army's working on the road, right?"

"The Néfa Road, yes; we have five hundred locals and eight hundred soldiers upgrading it. But the heavy rains have slowed the work. They've made more progress setting up utility poles, and I gather the phone and electric companies plan to start laying their lines in a few weeks."

"I wish the winds would reverse and we'd get the rain over here!"

"I know, it's one of the worst droughts and floods in memory."

They slowed to roll through Deksawsuperakwa, a village of about a hundred houses on the northern edge of the Majakwés floodplain. The coach rolled across a long bridge—the river was flowing pretty strongly at the moment because of the vigorous spring melt on the Spine caused by all the rain it was getting—then crossed the remainder of the three-kilometer wide brushy floodplain on a viaduct. On the other side the concrete ended and they faced a wide, arrow-straight gravel road for forty-five kilometers to Mèdhpéla, the Kwoloné center in the rolling central hills.

“Wow; dry,” said Perku, looking at the prematurely yellowed grass. “This is bad for the Kwolone herds.”

“I hope that won’t signal another outbreak.”

Perku shook his head. “They wouldn’t dare, now that we have eight armored steam troop carriers and explosives.”

“It looks like the grass will be good for another month or so, anyway, and after that we’ll be able to sell them wheat straw from our fields.”

“Yet more money for Melwika.”

“Exactly, but legitimate money!”

They looked at the prairielands and chatted for the rest of the way to Medhpéla. The two-day ride by horseback took the steam-powered coach seventy minutes; they left Melwika at 35 degrees north latitude and arrived at a town right on the equator.

Medhpéla was built around a large perpetual spring that emerged from the base of a steep-sided, flat-topped hill and formed a creek that flowed southwestward twenty-seven kilometers to the Swadakwés. Before the Great Flood the equatorial zone had been prairie with reliable grass, and the creek provided reliable water, so almost half the six thousand Kwolone lived along it or the nearby Swadakwés. The road to Tripola went right through the settlement corridor and the steam wagons plying the route had become very popular opportunities to go to Medhpéla. Consequently the village around the spring had grown into a small town of about fifteen hundred more or less permanent residents, mostly women, children, and older people, while the younger men roamed with the cattle. Directly above the village was a large stone fort on top of the hill where Lord Staurekēster lived. The steam wagon stop, on the north side of the village, was on the

edge of a new marketplace with a paved plaza and a series of stone stalls for small merchants. Prince Méméjékwes's two steam-powered coaches—each the size of house trailer—were parked on the north side of the plaza, with an armored steam wagon that had a small garrison but mostly served to house the prince's staff, and the mobile clinic. The four vehicles were parked in a square, providing them with an enclosed, semi-private courtyard and putting them in a defensive position. The courtyard was filled with a large tent. Perku's driver drove to the armored steam wagon and parked.

“I should visit with Lua quickly, if that's alright.”

Perku nodded. “But I wouldn't keep the Prince waiting long. They're expecting us very soon.”

Chris nodded. He opened his door and stepped out into the windless, sweltering heat. He walked to the southern side of the square where the clinic was parked and quickly entered the main door. The nurses there greeted him; the Kwolone patients heard his name and gawked at the man who had helped defeat them three years earlier. Chris walked back to an empty examining room and didn't have to wait long.

Lua came in, looking professional in her white coat, but obviously very tired. Chris stood and they embraced. “How are you, dad?”

“I'm fine. We're all fine. But how are *you*?”

“Exhausted. The Kwolone veterans all have stories about their hospital stay and their healing. They've all come to visit, asking about a few nurses who of course aren't with us, and they've all brought family members who need glasses or dental work or have a pain of some sort. And when they leave here they tell their friends, and all their friends

are here because of the Prince's visit . . . so we have been totally overwhelmed by patients. The second clinic is coming down tomorrow to help."

"Both, here?"

"Absolutely. We have almost a thousand people who want medical work. We'll have to send a clinic here monthly until we can get one opened here."

"Wow. Behruz sends his love and the kids send hugs and kisses."

She sighed. "I want to go home! But Prince Méméjékwu is much more demanding than the Réjé. He wants *me* here all the time."

"I'll tell him you have to obey your husband and come home for a few days."

"I'm not sure even that will work!"

"I'll try. How are the Kwolone treating you?"

"Oh, fine, but I would advise that you stay in the square of vehicles; no walking around town. We're healers, almost magical healers, and they like and want that. But you are the enemy Lord who masterminded the deaths of about a sixth of their men. They have not recovered from their losses."

"I'm sure. Okay. What was the stop with the Kwétékwones like?"

"Interesting. Prince Méméjékwu committed us to return there monthly, too. He wanted a monthly visit to the Wurone, but I begged him not to make that commitment; they're very isolated and a very small population, and our resources will have to go elsewhere for now. I think he may agree to fund a mobile clinic dedicated to service of just the Tutane, and if he does, the Wurone will get their visits, too." She shook her head. "Watch out, he's giving away as many things as he can. This caravan is a gravy train. Has he contacted you about Tutane students coming to the génadema?"

“No.”

“He promised two slots to the Wurone and I think four to the Kwétékwone. There was a Kwolone present, so you can be sure they will expect more. The Wurone and Kwétékwone are getting improved roads to their villages. They wanted steam engines and I think he may have committed to them as well.”

“I wonder what his mother will think when the bill comes due.”

“Unless he is expecting Miller to provide the engines for free. No, the prince wouldn’t get away with that.”

“But he might try that stunt with me. I’ll have to be tactful. Thanks for the heads up.” He kissed his oldest daughter. “We both better get to work.”

“Go out the back door; it faces into the courtyard. I don’t want you walking around this place alone, even for a second.”

He nodded and headed out of the room. He walked to the back of the mobile clinic and opened the door, stepping into the courtyard. The tent’s sides were up, to maximize the tiny breeze, but a large fan was whirring away behind the Prince’s throne, plugged into the clinic’s electrical system. Seated to the right of Méméjékwu was his secretary, Brébkordu, and to the right of him was Perku, cross legged on a rug. In front of the three of them was Lord Staurekēster, the current Kwolone Lord, and six clan chiefs.

“Lord Kristoféru Ménnéa, welcome,” said the Prince. “Please enter our presence.”

“Thank you, Your Majesty.” Chris briefly turned to acknowledge the stone-faced Kwolone, then passed them and went down on one knee to bow before the Prince, as was the custom.

“You may rise. Please seat yourself next to General Perku.” He waved at two servants nearby. “Please provide our guest with a glass of iced lemonade.” He used the English word “lemonade,” much to Chris’s surprise. A servant rose and filled a glass from the punch bowl; the glacier ice imported from Snékhþéla clinked in the ladle. He handed it to Chris.

“Allow me to introduce everyone. I’m not sure you have met my chief assistant, Brébkordu.” Chris nodded, rose, and walked to him to shake hands. “Of course, you know Lord Staurekæster.”

“No, I have never met the Lord, though I have seen him at the Grand Court.” Chris approached him and offered his hands. Staurekæster looked affronted at first, but then, without rising, he extended his hands and they touched, but did not shake.

“These are the heads of the six Kwolone clans: Woduksekæster, Ékwukordu, Arjsteru, Tritusunu, Luku, and Markæster.” Méméjékwu pointed out each one, individually, so Chris turned to each and offered his hands. Woduksekæster, “Hipposlayer,” a young man with unusually ruddy skin and reddish-brown hair, withheld his hand.

“My father died fighting you.”

“I am grieved that he was killed,” replied Chris, trying to sound as genuine as possible, for it was sad that anyone had died. He turned to “Horseheart,” who did shake hands with him, acknowledging Chris with a grunt. “Silverstar,” “Thirdson,” and “Light” did the same. “Zebraslayer” even smiled and shook his hands with some notable enthusiasm, which clearly irritated Woduksekæster.

“We have been discussing the situations of the various clans,” said Méméjékwu.

“We have been moving west to east, basically. Markester, who is the farthest east, has just started.”

“Allow me to repeat, then,” he said. “Our clan is the smallest of the Kwolone. We have the driest land, though we have a lot of it, and we have the headwaters of the Swadakwés in the tropical mountains, where there is a lot of timber. We also have a lot of coffee; we are one of the main sources. And of course our main sources of wealth are our cattle and horses. We maintain good relations with the Kaitere just east of us; most people know that the Kwolone and Kaitere are cousins and come from the same ancestral tribe. If there is anything we crave, it is a road suitable for steam wagons. That way the clinic could visit us, we could get our coffee beans and cattle out more easily, and perhaps we could start to sell timber. We also want a school so some of our children can learn the new knowledge. These miraculous wires that carry voices and the power of lightning would also be very useful and important, as the others have mentioned.”

The Prince nodded appreciatively as Brébkordu took rapid notes. “I hear many common themes,” he said. “It is quite remarkable how similar the requests are.”

“And of course we have heard what the Kwétékwone requested,” added Staurekester, hinting that they needed even more.

“Understood,” said the Prince, nodding. “The Kwolone are a worthy people and have been great friends of the Réjé. We will grant you a gravel road up the Swadakwés as far as Awstroba. But we do this on the condition that the Kwolone provide the labor. The army will provide steam shovels and sivers to fill wagons with gravel and about one hundred Kwolone will distribute the gravel.”

“Your Majesty, our people are still smarting from the backbreaking work necessary to build the Royal Road across our land,” exclaimed Staurekēster. “They need some compensation for doing the work this time. After all, it is not a punishment.”

“That is a reasonable request. We are prepared to offer a dhanay per day to each road worker.”

That made Chris shift uncomfortably on the floor; the army paid locals half a dhanay per day on the theory that they were putting labor into a project yielding them a personal benefit. But Staurekēster’s reaction was the opposite. “Just one, Your Majesty? A worker in the Arjakwés Valley needs two dhanay a day.”

“And they are not paid that much, Lord! They work on the road when they have no farm work. It supplements their income. In your case, during the winter the road building equipment is often idle.”

“And the wires?” asked Luku, who, Chris guessed, represented the next most distant clan.

“If your people put in the poles, the telephone and electrical companies will string the wires.” Chris looked down at the floor, wondering who planned to pay for that, and for the annual maintenance, since the clans were not likely to make very many calls.

“Markēster, does the Swadakwés pass through any glubas in the mountains?”

“One or two small ones, Your Majesty.”

“Then perhaps a dam can eventually be put across the river as well to create more power.”

“Your Majesty, Awstroba is actually close to the Wurone village, Wurontroba,” noted Perku. “Perhaps it would be easier to supply the Wurone from the north.”

“Intriguing idea, General. We’ll look into that.”

“So, Your Majesty, if we have a road, will the clinic visit?” pressed Markester.

“I am sure of it. But it will be best if your village can set up its own clinic with its own doctor and nurse, next to a village school to teach your children letters and numbers. I am willing to grant the Kwolone eight scholarships to send students to génadema to learn to be doctors, nurses, and teachers. And we will establish six post offices in Kwolona; each comes with a partial 100 dhanay per year salary, which will help pay a teacher or doctor to stay.”

“But Your Majesty, you gave four scholarships to the Kwétékwone, and we are four times as numerous a people,” complained Staurekester. “Eight is not enough. We will need six schools and at least four clinics, and Medhpéla will need twice as much as any other settlement because it is so much larger. Clearly, we need five doctors, five nurses, and at least seven teachers.”

Meméjéku pondered. “Then Lord Ménéa can give you eight more.”

That startled Chris, but he didn’t dare show it. He pondered saying nothing, but the Prince stared at him, awaiting a response. “The Melwika Génadema has scholarships for many needy students, and if the Kwolone present students to us, we will accommodate them as best we can. The cost to attend our génadema is 650 dhanay per year; that includes a room and all meals.”

“I will not send students to Melwika,” exclaimed Wodukskester, and two other clan leaders nodded in agreement.

“They may prefer the génademas in Gordha and Tripola, then,” replied Chris.

“Lord Gugédu may have some scholarship money; ours covers students only at our

school. Right now anyone studying to be a doctor has to spend some of their time in Melwika. About a quarter of the required education can be acquired in Néfa and perhaps half in Meddwoglubas.”

“How many Kwolone students can you take in Melwika?” pressed the Prince.

“Four or five,” replied Chris, trying not to look irritated.

“Five, then, on top of my eight; that’s thirteen. How many years, Lord Kristobéru?”

“Teachers should have at least two years; they can teach after one, though. Nurses also need two, including hospital and clinic experience. Doctors need four years because it is very difficult work, and eventually we will want them to have five years.”

“Thank you, Your Majesty,” replied Staurekēster. “And steam wagons; can we have them?”

“Lord, since no Kwolone know how to drive them, it is best to approach Mitru Miller first. Once there is a road, he will start to send passenger and freight wagons along it at a reasonable price. Usually he asks that the service for the first month or two be free or half price and the tribe pays the difference; that gets the service established. Then he will charge half a dhanay or a dhanay per person to go from Awstroba to Medhpéla, and ten dhanay per freight load. When the tribe gains experience, it can buy a vehicle.”

“I see, Your Majesty. And windmills: our cattlemen need them, for there are many pastures that are far from water and the cattle must walk long distances to drink, so they never grow fat.”

“Windmills are easy to set up, are they not, Ménnéa?”

“Indeed, Your Majesty. They can be purchased from Sullendha for fifty dhanay each, and two men will come down to set up the first one or two. They have to be placed over a well.”

“We have many wells.” Can we get . . . fifty?”

“Perhaps the people of Sullendha can give you some.”

Perku decided he could say something about that. “Your Majesty, the good people of Sullendha work hard making the windmills and earn a sparse living with them.”

The Prince considered. “Then perhaps the crown can cover half the costs, if the Kwolone come up with the rest.”

“Perhaps, Your Majesty,” replied Staurekester. “And Medhpéla needs a manufactory or a business of some sort, like Gordha’s slaughterhouse.”

Meméjékwu looked at Chris, so he replied. “Driving into town we saw quite a large vegetable field. Winter vegetables would be an excellent business, and because the Arjakwés can’t grow any that time of year, there is never enough.”

“The Kwolone are not dirt farmers,” growled Arjsteru.

“Is that all you can suggest?” asked the Prince.

Chris spoke slowly, so as to remain calm. “I am not familiar with the sources of livelihood of the Kwolone, other than cattle—”

“They were our greatest source of wealth,” responded Staurekester. “Until Gordha opened its slaughterhouse. Now we can’t sell our cattle for a fair price because their meat is inexpensive!”

“What about blacksmiths? Leatherwork? Cheese?”

“Of course, like anyone else.”

“Those are sources of wealth that can be developed.”

“We want new sources.”

“Then sell horses,” said Chris, raising a finger. “Your horses are the best; everyone knows it. And more and more farmers want horses to help them with plowing and harvesting.”

“Our horses are our life, not our livelihood,” said Staurekester, though several of the clan leaders seemed impressed with the idea.

“But we sell some every year,” commented Ekwukordu.

“Melwika does not deserve any more of our horses,” grunted Woduksekester.

“Why?” injected Perku. “Honored ones, we bear you no ill will for your attack. Lord Mennea will tell you this as well. You were manipulated into attacking Melwika and all we did was defend our town—”

“But not like men, who fight fairly!” shouted Woduksekester.

“And you were prepared to give our farmers horses so they could fight you as equals?” asked Perku. He shook his head. “From the beginning of time, men have always had the right to defend their homes from attackers. That is what we did.”

“You set us up to attack you!” shouted Arjsteru.

That surprised Chris. “Honored, the city of Melwika had nothing to do with your attack. We heard of your intentions to attack us several times from several different people, and since we were outnumbered, and our farmers had no experience fighting, and since Perku was a captain commanding less than one hundred soldiers, the city planned its defense very carefully. We defended ourselves honorably. We never pursued you to Kwolona. We never disturbed Kwolona at all. We, too, grieve over your dead. You should

come to the cemetery of your honored fallen. You will find the graves well maintained. It is a place of peace; in fact, we have dedicated the land to peace.”

Woduksekester stared at Chris. “Lord, I want to see and honor my father’s grave, but I cannot.”

“Honored, you are welcome to come and honor your dead any time you want, so long as you come in peace. Any time. That is my pledge as Lord.”

There was a long silence. Chris and Perku said nothing more; the Kwolone considered what they had heard. “Then I will go on the afternoon passenger bus,” replied Woduksekester. “Alone, if necessary.”

“Why alone?” asked Chris. “If you come in peace, many can come.”

Woduksekester looked at Staurekester. “The afternoon bus usually has room for thirty or forty,” said the latter.

“If more people want to go, we can call Mitru Miller on the telephone and ask for a bus to come,” said Chris. “It is very simple. I think he will charge ten dhanay for the bus for the day. If you squeeze sixty or seventy on board, it will cost very little. If you need more buses, he will send more.”

“And you will guarantee our safety?” asked Staurekester.

“I will.”

“So will I,” added Perku.

“And so will I,” exclaimed Məməjékwu. “In fact, I will come along.”

“I will pay twenty dhanay toward the buses,” added Perku.

“Your people—men, women, children—will be welcome to enter the city if they leave their weapons outside the walls,” added Chris. “The city’s soldiers and police are there to keep everyone safe and secure.”

“Then tomorrow,” said Staurekēster. “With Your Majesty’s permission, that is.”

“Yes, I welcome this,” replied the Prince, who seemed surprised by the sudden turn of events.

“We’ll go there in the morning and return in the afternoon or evening,” said Staurekēster. “Send out the word across the town and down the river. The women should bring food. The priests should come, and there should be some sacrificial animals.”

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The unexpected commemoration involved an entire night of planning. Horsemen went down the creek to the Swadakwés, and from there up and downriver to scattered families and hamlets. The three clans up the Swadakwés could not possibly participate; they were too far away. But there would be other commemorations, and they lost fewer men anyway, since they had sent fewer. Staurekēster and Meméjékwu planned what they would do the next day based on the messages returning to town. Chris came in every hour or so to get the latest guess about the numbers and to call Mitru to negotiate another steam wagon or steam bus. By midnight, Mitru was calling around to find steam engines able to pull farm trailers, and was calling in spare equipment from as far west as Ora. The latter had the advantage that it could pick up people down the Swadakwés and the town creek. That meant more people would want to go. Fortunately, with the Grand Court only a month away, followed by the Réjé’s trip west and culminating in the annual pilgrimage to Isurdhuna, Mitru had been accumulating a lot of spare passenger capacity.

Melwika had plenty of preparation to make as well. The Mayor sent city workers to cut the grass and generally clean up the cemetery; it was true that the cemetery was maintained, but not often or carefully. Chris asked that several large génadema tents be set up so the visitors would have shelter from the sun, and that latrines be prepared and ice water be available. A telephone line ran by the site; Chris asked that a phone be set up so that emergency calls could be made. The second clinic had planned to go to Mèdhpéla that day; it would set up at the peace park instead. The police made plans to be available in full force, and Aisu had the troops prepared as well.

The first buses arrived from the west an hour before dawn and waited at the westernmost hamlet until people were ready to get on. Buses and steam wagons reached Mèdhpéla a half hour after sunrise and began to load up. More buses were needed; Mitru scraped and scrambled. As soon as they filled, they headed northward up the Royal Road, straight to the cemetery an hour and a quarter away. In the end, twenty passenger transports were needed to carry seven hundred men, women, and children; over a tenth of the Kwolone people. For most, it was their first ride on a passenger vehicle. Prince Mèméjéku squeezed yet more into the armored troop carrier; he brought clans chiefs and other clan leaders in his two personal trailers. Chris and Perku rode in the latter's steam car.

"How safe are we?" asked Chris to Perku, as they approached the cemetery.

"I don't know. But I think we are. They have given their word to be peaceful, and the Kwolone take their word very seriously."

"As all of us should," said Chris.

They drove off the road and parked where all the other vehicles were located. Others were coming right behind them and parking. They got out and were greeted by stares, but nothing worse. They joined Mëméjékwu's party, which included the clan chiefs and Lord Staurekëster.

"It is very fitting," said Staurekëster, looking at the neat grass around the sticks marking each grave.

"It is," agreed Wodukëkëster, tears in his eyes. He walked over to the one-armed veteran who was walking from grave to grave, saying who had been buried under each stick.

"They know where everyone is, still," said Chris. "It has been three years."

"We will never forget," replied Staurekëster.

"My Lord, at some point we should talk about how to improve this cemetery," suggested Chris. "For example, it could have a wall or fence around it to set it off as a sacred place. Your people are welcome to come here and do the work. We could also take a big stone and inscribe the names of those fallen on it, so future generations will remember."

"You would do that?" asked Staurekëster.

"My Lord, these men died bravely and deserve respect for that. They have sacrificed to make this cemetery a little piece of Kwolona."

Staurekëster nodded, not sure what to say.

Saréidukter walked over to Lord Chris. He turned and was surprised to see her, especially since she was dressed in a police uniform. "Hail, Honored Saréidukter. Have you joined the police?"

“Perhaps for the day, Lord. No, I am the city’s official representative to this event and in charge of the tents. We have a few hosts there already awaiting the visitors, and the visitors need to know they are welcome to rest under the shade and drink cool water.”

“We can walk over and demonstrate it,” said Staurekēster. He was startled to see a woman dressed like a man. He looked at her closely. “I remember seeing you outside the walls, helping with the wounded.”

“Indeed, Lord, I did help in that way. I organized the women to do that work, because they were safe.”

He looked at her, not sure what to make of her. Then he looked toward the tent and saw a familiar face. He was surprised and smiled. “Lord Walékwēs!”

The Lord of the Mēghendrē and of Gordha nodded to him from the tent. Staurekēster and the clan leaders walked over to see their colleague and occasional adversary. Walékwēs extended both hands to Staurekēster as the latter approached. “Hail, my brother. Last night one of my son’s friends who was studying here in Mēlwika heard of your plan to come to the graves and telephoned Albékwu with the news. He told me and I felt I had to come.”

“Thank you so much, my brother, for honoring our dead. You don’t know what this means to us.”

“It is my honor and pleasure to serve these brave warriors.” Walékwēs pointed to the tent and the cemetery. “My brother, Mēlwika honors them as well, even though Mēlwika was the victim of the attack. There is a monument in town to their fallen. After this ceremony is over, will you go with me and honor their dead?”

That startled, almost shocked Staurekester. He opened his mouth, then closed it. He looked around. “Very well, I agree. I will go pray for their dead.”

“Excellent.” Walékwes looked at the western sky; cumulus clouds were beginning to form and grow there. “I think we will have three or four hours before the rain. Perhaps our mutual forgiveness and respect will be rewarded by an end to the drought.”

[May 17, 2006; reread and edited 5/24/13, 8/5/17, 11/7/24]

## Endings and Beginnings

Chris had a few extra minutes on his way from his house to the génadema, so he detoured past the Defenders Memorial, then into the park along the riverbank. It was a pretty park and an island of tranquility in an otherwise very busy city; it was built on the sloping bank between the river and Ménwika, which was eight meters higher than the water, and was landscaped with bushes, clumps of flowers, and beds of herbs, with a path that wandered up and down the slope. Across the fifteen meters of slow-flowing water—the Péskakwés Dam was letting out a lot of water at the moment, but ninety percent went into the irrigation canal, so the creek was flowing very slowly—was an unbroken wall of houses, with an occasional porch on the river.

He walked slowly, admiring the flowers and herbs, listening to a trickle of water flowing over a dam where the old eastern city wall had been. When he reached the dam he stopped to say hello. “Hail, Estoibaru,” he said to “one-eye,” who was in charge of keeping the city streets clean. “Hail Brébanu,” he added to the head of the city parks. Both men had teams of four to six men who worked for them; both were on their lunch break.

“Hail, Lord,” they both replied. “Getting hot again,” added Estoibaru.

“I guess the relief was temporary,” agreed Chris. “How’s the fishing?”

“I think I always catch the same little fish over and over, then let him go,” said Estoibaru, who was dangling his fishing pole in the water in front of the dam.

“He does,” agreed Brébanu, as he chewed on a sandwich. “This garden really got trampled the other day, then the torrential rains did damage to it as well.”

“There was quite a crowd here when the Kwolone came to pay their respects.”

“Yes, people couldn’t believe it happened,” said Brébanu.

“I was surprised as well, but it was spontaneous. I thought it was a very important gesture because it shows the troubles caused by the attack can be healed.”

Brébanu shrugged. “I’ll believe it when I see it. The Tutane are all the same; untrustworthy and dangerous.”

“Well, I hope you’re wrong. It looks like Mitru will send a bus down every Dwodiu morning to bring Kwolone to the peace park, then the marketplace; that means Melwika will become their principal place to shop. We’re gradually becoming the center of commerce and education for most of the Tutane tribes, and that is good.”

“So, that’s why there seems to be Tutane every time you turn around,” said Estoibaru. “Them and Sumis. I don’t know which is worse.”

“At least they’re unarmed when in town,” replied Brébanu.

Chris shook his head. He had been through the matter with them before. “Well, I won’t argue; you know my views. Have a good day, gentlemen.”

“You too, Lord.”

Chris waved and walked up the garden to the eastern end, contemplating the deep prejudices of his townspeople and to some extent even of the Bahá’ís. The eastern end of the riverbank was a very pretty rose garden ablaze with blossoms, attracting several people eating lunch. He nodded to them and stopped to talk to one—a Bahá’í and farm wife—briefly, then headed to the génadema. He gave instructions to his secretary there,

grabbed some papers, and stopped at the Mennea Tomi building—practically attached to the génadema’s administration building—to review several matters. Then he entered the bathroom to change clothes; he had to be wearing his best toga for the afternoon’s business.

Properly dressed, he walked to the rover, parked at the engineering building where it could receive tender, loving care from the students. One rover was so unreliable that they had stopped using it; the aliens had promised a new engine block a year ago but had not yet delivered. They had put 200,000 kilometers on the vehicles in five years and had practically burned them out, especially with hard farm work. The primitive steam cars Miller made looked better than their tired, scratched, dented rovers.

The road to Mèddoakwés was now concreted the entire way and was being widened to accommodate the bikes, horses, wagons, and pedestrians on it. Chris had to watch his speed several times because of the shifting configuration of traffic. He also passed a line crew adding wires to the poles; demand for telephone service had exceeded the four lines they had between the capital and the town by the gluba, so four more line pairs were being added. The fields were green and mature; the harvest was a few weeks away. The route near Morituora was especially pretty because of the rice paddies.

Entering the capital’s east gate, he turned right and headed for the military entrance to the palace complex, where he squeezed into a parking space; they had moved the two armored steam wagons to another place to accommodate the need for parking, so the situation was temporarily improved. He walked into the palace complex, nodding to the guards and explaining to them he had to go to the Consultative Assembly meeting about to start. The House of Commons and House of Lords were meeting separately that

afternoon, the latter in the Queen's old private audience hall, the former in her old public hall. The Lords had set a fairly leisurely pace, meeting two days every two weeks to catch up with backlogged business from the other chamber. That day twelve of the fourteen Lords were present. They sat around a great octagon of tables, arranged as if they were seated geographically around the Central Sea, two to a table, except for Kandékwes, the chair, who sat by himself. The members were Kandékwes and Chris Mennea from the Arjakwés; Déolu of Bellédha; Dontu, the absentee Lord of YUSDWOAKWÉS, who had stayed at his home in Perkas that day, unless he was hunting; Yusbéru, heir to the aged Lord Gnoskéstu of Isurdhuna; Widubéru of Albagras in southern Kerda; Albanu of Néfa, the chamber's curmudgeon, who had gone home for the funeral of an old friend; Molkordu of Charnéfa, a reliable ally of Albanu; Mitru of Ora; Gnoskwéru of Nupurmara, their oldest member at 75, partially deaf—they all had to talk loudly for him—and a reliable ally of Lord Mitru, who had awarded him the Lordship of the new township and helped people move there from their drowned rice paddies; Estodhéru of Mæddwoglubas; Gugédu of Tripola; Manéjnu of Snékh péla, a devotee of progress; and Lamuno of Anartu, a very active participant who was staying with Dumuzi in Mælwika.

“Tomorrow morning we will have a joint session with the Commons,” announced Kandékwes, as they got started. “The subject will be hunting; several villages along the Gédhakwés have overlapping claims, and Akras's area overlaps with the area claimed by Sulléndha. The army will have to survey the area and mark boundaries, but meanwhile the complaints must be aired.”

“Less work for the Grand Court,” commented Lord Mitru.

Kandékwes nodded. “This afternoon we have two bills before us that have passed the Commons; the Health Finance Bill and the Kentay Minting Bill. The former is pretty routine and we should be able to discuss it quickly. Wëranobëru, please pass out copies of both bills.”

Wëranobëru, Kandékwes’s chief administrative assistant for governmental matters, rose from his secretarial table on the side of the room and began to pass out copies. The House of Lords got new-fangled typed copies; Chris got a carbon, like most, though his was rather faint. “Allow me to summarize,” said Wëranobëru. “The budget has three sections, for hospitals, mobile clinics, and medical schools. The new hospitals in Anartu and Isurdhuna get five thousand each for equipment; the nine hospitals get three thousand each for charity cases. The mobile clinics get fifteen thousand each for personnel and supplies; this is half their estimated budgets, but they are expected to raise the difference through fees for eyeglasses and local village support. The two new ones get fifteen thousand total, since they will be operating only a year between them. There is thirty thousand to build and equip a third and fourth mobile clinic, for Tripola through Ora and Néfa, Isurdhuna, and Bellëdha respectively. The three medical schools get ten thousand each.”

“One hundred thirty-nine thousand; a lot of money,” commented Molkordu in surprise.

“Her Majesty wants to improve the health of her people, hence the dedication of a third of our budget to it,” said Kandékwes.

“But why are the Tutane getting an entire mobile health clinic of their own?” asked Lamuno. “They have less than half the population of Sumilara.”

“And even less than southern, western, and northern shores that get only two!” added Mitru angrily. “This is ridiculous.”

“It is a pledge of Prince Méméjékwu and cannot be dropped,” replied Kandékwes.

“Why do the three medical schools all get the same amount?” added Mitru.

“Mélwika has a full medical school, after all; Mëddwoglubas can offer only two years and Néfa only one year of classes.”

Everyone looked at Chris, so he spoke up. “In two weeks, we will graduate three doctors, and at that point Éra will have four. We’ll have one in Mëddwoglubas, one in Melwika, one in Mëddoakwés, and one army physician who will be moving around. Mëddwoglubas needs a lot more expertise before they can offer more courses; Néfa even more so. Néfa in fact can only offer two or three basic medical courses; the only reason it is counted as a medical school is because much of the first year focuses on basic science, math, and reading.”

“Then why can’t we get more mobile clinics?” asked Déolu. “I think last summer all of us saw what they could do and how popular they were.”

“Because we can’t train personnel to run them any faster,” replied Chris. “We can barely run two now, and by the end of this coming year we’ll be lucky to handle four. The year after, we might be able to handle three more.”

“The other thing that’s happening is that seriously ill people are being moved to the Mélwika and Mëddowglubas hospitals,” noted Kandékwes. “So they are getting more and more seriously ill patients. With more steam wagons and cars, and more and more telephones, we can expect the two main hospitals to get even more patients. The hospitals

are spending over a thousand dhanay a year on long distance telephone calls so that nurses and doctors in training can call doctors elsewhere and get medical advice.”

“If there is any request I would make, it is that Sumilara should get more,” exclaimed Lamuno. “Right now we have no doctor, no hospital, and no access to mainland hospitals. The two army nurses are not excited about treating Sumi patients. We have had pelui outbreaks and could do almost nothing about them; Dr. Lua can’t come to Sumilara at all, the army will not allow it. What are we to do? The census being conducted this year will show, I am sure, that we have a larger population than either the Arjakwés or the Ora regions. My Lords, is this fair and just?”

There was a silence, because it was not fair or just, but no one dared say so. “My Lord, I suggest you invite the Réjé to visit Sumilara this winter,” said Chris. “She will want to bring a clinic and be generous for her people. But of course, her people there will have to give her a warm response.”

Lamuno considered that. “There is wisdom in your comment,” he conceded.

“I wonder, Lord, whether you can advise us whether the Arjakwés clinic should begin visiting Arjdhura?” asked Kandékwes.

Lamuno shrugged. “I can imagine, Lord, that a direct connection between Sumilara and the Arjakwés will be lucrative, and the town will do well. I understand the townsite is set up for two hundred houses, but it can easily be expanded to a thousand.”

“If it does well, then, we will all do well,” replied Kandékwes.

“I move that we vote,” said Mitru. “This budget was drawn up by Widéstu and approved by Her Majesty, and we all know its strengths and limitations. We can’t change it much, so let’s vote.”

“Very well.” Kandéwkes looked around. “All in favor?”

All twelve hands went up.

“It passes unanimously. Moving on, then, to the bill to authorize the bank to mint kentay.”

They all turned to the next bill, which was a single long sentence on its own piece of paper. “What does ‘to cover reasonable expenses’ really mean?” asked Mitru.

“It means the bank can’t lose money minting kentay,” replied Chris. “The bank has planned the kentay to contain about  $1/130^{\text{th}}$  of a dhanay of copper, but it is worth  $1/100^{\text{th}}$  of a dhanay. The difference will cover minting and generate a modest profit; how much profit is unknown, probably about ten percent.”

“And how many kentay will it mint?” asked Mitru next.

“The Bank’s central board has commissioned a report, and it calculates that we will eventually need about one hundred fifty kentay per person, so 400,000 dhanay of kentay.”

“So you’re looking at a forty thousand dhanay profit?”

Chris nodded. “Over about three years.”

“So, the bank may actually make a profit for once,” concluded Lamuno wryly. He was a shareholder, like several others in the room, including Chris.

“Actually, it will make a profit this year. The huge costs of the telephone and electrical lines around the sea have been absorbed and the lines are being used more and more all the time; the use by the hospitals was just mentioned.”

“How much profit if you mint more coins?” asked Gugédu.

“I think President Yimanu was asked that question before the Commons and said twenty percent,” replied Chris. Most of them had attended the debate there, but Gugédu had not.

“That’s a lot,” said Widubéru.

“The bank is also assuming the risk,” noted Kandékwes.

“Where will the mint be?” asked Gugédu.

“Belledha, where it will employ ten people full time,” said Kandékwes.

“Why isn’t the royal exchequer minting the kentay?” asked Widubéru, a bit angrily.

“The exchequer wasn’t interested,” said Kandékwes. Chris shifted in his chair slightly; that was an understatement, the treasurer had said the coins were of no use or value to anyone.

“Have we any idea whether the coins will be useful?” asked Mitru, who probably knew of the exchequer’s opinion.

“The bank has studied the question,” replied Chris. “It thinks they are needed. For example, when local apples are in season, you have to buy two or three per dontay. If there was a smaller coin, you’d pay two kentay each, or get two for three kentay. Little candies are five or six to the dontay; they’d be one per kentay. Newspapers include coupons to get one free because they really should be two or three kentay each, and people don’t want to spend a dontay to get one because they might lose the coupon.”

“Ice,” added Manejnu. “In Snékhépéla we can load a ten-gurni trailer for two dhanay, including our profit. Transport costs ten dhanay. The new twenty-gurni trailers will mean twenty gurnis can be moved for ten dhanay! Right now, including local profits,

a dontay will buy you a ledhi of ice; soon it'll be two ledhi, twenty-four kilograms. Who wants two ledhi of ice? We need the kentay; we even need the proposed half-kentay coin. We think demand for ice will double in a few years with the new coin."

"It'll be hard to use ice boxes if you have to buy two ledhi of ice," agreed Kandékwes.

"Then let's give it a try," said Gugendu. "I move that we vote."

"Shall we vote?" asked Kandékwes, and the others nodded. "All in favor?"

All the hands went up.

"Very well. We are a congenial group today, aren't we? The education bill next week will not be so easy, I think."

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The day was almost over and Soru was going over the lessons with his three deaf students one last time when he heard a rustle at the door of the classroom. Usually that indicated the arrival of a parent to take one of the kids home, but when he looked up he was surprised.

"Lady Awster!"

"May I come in?" asked Lord Kandékwes' wife, who dedicated a large fraction of her time to taking care of the poor and needy; she was often called "the mother of the poor" in the capital.

"Yes, certainly! How can we help you?"

She entered with two young men, one with a notebook and one with a pad of paper. "This is Lukaru, chief reporter for the *Royal Standard*, and this is his sketch artist,

Manu. I heard about your school for the deaf and had to come see it. I was watching you communicate with them for a minute; really remarkable!”

“Thank you, but when you get used to communicating with your hands all day, it becomes quite simple.” He pointed to a girl. “This is Wirese, my first student, who is now eleven and a half.” He turned to her and signed, and she smiled, stood, and bowed.

Awster was charmed. “Thank you, my dear,” she replied, and Soru translated. “I’m sorry you can’t understand my speech. I wish we could talk.”

“She says thank you, she is honored to meet you, and she understands your lips a little,” Soru translated for her, as she signed a reply. “And she can always write notes to you, because she can write pretty well.”

“Really?” said Awster. “She can read and write?”

“Yes, pretty well, and draw.” Soru signed instructions to her and she picked up her school notebook and opened it. As she flipped pages they could see page after page of very neat handwriting, complete with pictures.

“Stop on that page!” said Manu. “You know, she’s pretty good as an artist!”

“Indeed, she has some talent,” agreed Soru. Wirese turned back to a picture of an olive tree, which was rendered quite well. “When you can’t hear, your eyesight becomes sharper.”

“Remarkable,” said Awster. She tentatively took the notebook from Wirese and flipped through the pages.

“And she’s totally deaf?” asked Lukaru.

Soru nodded. “Totally; she can’t hear anything, though she can feel vibrations with her hands and feet.”

“And I understand you used to have five students?” asked Awster.

“Indeed, but two have dropped out.”

“Why?”

“The parents heard about my previous life.”

“A shame,” replied Awster.

Just then Smiré arrived to pick up her daughter Wirecé. She was startled to see the guest. “Lady Awster, what a surprise!”

“Lady Smiré, it’s nice to see you again! And I see Wirecé is your daughter! She’s charming and very smart!”

“Why, thank you!” said Smiré, whose first reaction was shame; Eryan had always hidden children with handicaps. But she was pleased with the words of praise. “My Lady, Soru has worked a miracle with her. He has given me my daughter back.”

“How so?”

“I couldn’t talk to her, communicate with her practically at all . . . but now with signs, we talk a lot.”

“So, you know the signs as well?”

“Indeed, our entire family does. There are even times when my husband and I want to have a private conversation in public and we use them. They’re the only way to talk to her, since she’s deaf.”

“Of course, I understand. So, you think this school should flourish?”

“Absolutely. Kanawé’s class for learning disabled children is the same way. She can discipline children and help them learn in spite of various difficulties.”

“Yes, let us visit there as well,” Awster said to the reporters. They nodded and walked to the neighboring classroom, where Kanawé was helping a fifteen year old retarded boy write numbers on the blackboard, smiling and encouraging him. She was equally surprised and introduced all her five students, one by one, to Lady Awster. Meanwhile, Soru and the remaining two kids came over and watched.

“And you used to have more students, right?”

“Yes, my Lady; there were seven.”

“Why did two leave? Were they dissatisfied with the class?”

“No, I don’t think so . . . it seems to have been the issue of my husband’s previous life.”

“But the Réjé pardoned him.” Awster looked at Soru and Kanawé. “Lukaru will write an article for the *Royal Standard* about both classes.”

“I’d like to use one of Wirese’s drawings, too,” added Manu. “I’ll prepare a woodcut with a sketch of the kids and a reproduction of one of her art pieces, and maybe a bit of her writing.”

“To illustrate the article?” asked Soru, surprised.

“Yes, the *Standard* has pictures in every issue,” replied Lukaru. “We can make them pretty quickly, now.”

A father of one of Kanawé’s children arrived and they paused while Awster introduced herself and praised the child, much to the father’s shock. He was a tailor and not wealthy, but praised Kanawé. “I used to think that Rudhu would never be able to do anything and would have to stay in our house forever,” he said. “But Kanawé has shown

me a few things that help him learn, and now I think in a year or two he can help me a little in my business.”

“Excellent,” said Awster. “He is a very warm and friendly boy.”

“Yes, he has always been that way,” replied the father. “I have started letting him come into the shop with me; I am not so ashamed of him as I used to be. And it hasn’t frightened away any customers, which was my fear.”

“I am pleased. Best wishes to you, good sir.” She turned back to Soru and Kanawé. “I understand you want to expand your schools and improve your service. Lord Kandékwes is already providing the classrooms, and I am proud we have been able to assist you in this way. I’d like to add a personal gift from both of us of a thousand dhanay, so you can afford to hire an additional assistant. I understand that recently you had to cease employing an assistant because of the decrease in students. This will restore the assistant.”

“Oh, thank you!” said Kanawé. A tear appeared in one eye. “You don’t know how much this means to us! I’m having a baby in four months and I need an assistant who can run the class for me while I care for our child. We were becoming desperately worried about the situation.”

“Worry no longer,” replied Awster. “And who knows, the article may help you gain new students as well.”

“It’ll be in the paper next week,” added Lukaru. “Circulation has grown to three hundred, and we’ll be adding advertising next month, so we expect circulation to double soon.”

“We are grateful for the publicity as well,” said Soru. “This has been a surprising day!”

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Two weeks later, it was graduation day at the Mēlwika Génadema. Quite a large crowd came to the quadrangle of college buildings to watch two hundred twenty uniyères, eighty-eight dwoyères, and thirty-one kwétéryères get their diplomas; almost twice as many first year graduates and almost three times as many four-year graduates as last year. But the special applause was reserved for the eight *pates* or masters students, who had completed five years of education, which included a thesis; among them were Lébé and Thornton. There was also special applause when Stauréstu, Mitrētu, and Béndhu were given their medical kwétéryère degrees. Éra now had three native doctors!

The next morning was a similar graduation at the Gésélékwēs Maj Génadema in Mēddoakwēs. It was roughly half as large. That afternoon the planet’s ten Master’s students and three doctors were invited to a special audience with the Réjé, attended by the Houses of Lords and Commons, a hundred other Lords who had arrived early for the Grand Court, most of the heads of the various génademas, bureaucrats, army brass, and others. They all rose when the Queen entered and walked to her throne.

“You may be seated,” she said. “Graduates, please approach the throne and introduce yourselves.”

They formed a single-file line; Thornton was first. “I am Thorntonu Ménnéa and my Masters is in geology.”

“Yes, Kristobéru’s son. You look like a fine young man, and I have heard much praise of your intelligence and talent. What do you plan to do?”

“Continue to develop our Geology Department, Your Majesty. We have also become an unofficial Geological and Geographical Survey for the crown and have helped map about half the world.”

“Even the army uses your maps. Continue your magnificent work for our kingdom, Dhoru. Thank you.” She nodded and he headed back to his seat; Lébé stepped up and bowed.

“I am Lébé Miller Ménnea, and my Master’s is in Eryan literature.”

“And the only woman among the graduates here today. Congratulations. You are Dhoru’s wife?”

“Indeed, Your Majesty.”

“Do you have children?”

“Two, Your Majesty.”

“Two? How did you have time for school?”

Lébé smiled. “It was difficult, Your Majesty, but we have cooks, house cleaners, and nannies for the entire Mennea family, including Lua’s and May’s children.”

“Of course. And what do you plan to do?”

“I have been teaching Eryan literature and have published a book of old women’s stories. I have also done a lot of translating, and this year I will publish my first novel.”

“Novel? What is that?”

“A long story; a book-length story.”

“I see. I want a copy of all your books. Best wishes to you, Lébé.”

She turned to Estodatu next and praised his translating work—he had mastered Italian and Persian as well as English, and was able to translate as much as ten pages a

day almost effortlessly—and thanked him for his service, for he was now moving to Mèddoakwés and would work for both the génadema and the crown. She asked Dwosunu and Rudhisèru about geology and Gwiwèru about the weather; she was fascinated by the idea that it could be forecast with some accuracy and asked why there was a heat wave and drought this summer. The other four master’s students were in engineering, business, and agriculture. Then she turned to the doctors, speaking to each one at length.

As the last one sat, she turned to the crowd. “Today we have witnessed an important development in our world: the education of truly bright and capable young people to serve all of us and improve our society. I am pleased to meet all of them, especially because I sense charm and dedication in them. Éra needs more graduates like them. But they are the summit of the mountain. The summit is the highest point, but it is always the smallest; as one descends the mountain the slopes get wider and broader. We need tens of thousands of elementary school students to produce thousands of high school students, to produce hundreds of kwétèryèrès every year and even fewer pàtès up at the summit of the mountain. Specifically, Éra will need two hundred doctors and two hundred nurses if we are to improve our people’s health and lengthen their lifespan. We will need two or three thousand teachers in our elementary and high schools, and the génademas will need one hundred pàtès. It will take decades to expand our system enough to reach everyone. But today is an important milestone on the road. Let us all give our graduates a round of applause.”

The audience applauded vigorously; it was a happy and triumphant occasion. As the applause began to wane, she raised her hand, and they stopped clapping. “Will the heads of our génademas please stand.”

The ten who were present rose, including Skandu, representing the Sumilara schools. “The kingdom owes all of you a great debt of gratitude. Thank you for your service. For your hard work, the crown wishes to endow a chair for a professor of education, so that education continues to be improved and expanded. I understand the All-Génadema Council will begin its meeting tomorrow. I ask the Council to present to me a five year plan for the continued development of our génademas. The wonders of the new knowledge and the miracles of healing it brings us must continue to flourish and spread.” She turned to the guard near her, and he shouted “All rise!” The audience rose, then the Réjé stood and left the room.

The room dissolved into conversation; some sat, some turned to their neighbors, and a few headed for the exit. Lord Mitru of Ora made a beeline for Dr. Stauréstu, who was himself headed toward the Mennea clan, all of whom (except the small children) had attended the audience.

“Doctor! Doctor!” he exclaimed.

Stauréstu turned and saw Mitru, who was in his early fifties, hurrying over. “Lord, how may I help you?”

Mitru reached him, almost out of breath. “Greetings, Doctor, and congratulations on your medical degree. You are badly needed and most welcome.”

“Thank you, Lord, you are very kind. It is an honor and joy to heal people.”

“I’m sure it is. Dr. Stauréstu, Ora needs you, and needs you very badly. As you know, our hospital has two partially trained nurses and a traditional healer. That’s all. But Ora now has over nine thousand people, and it is the center of an area with over forty thousand. Forty thousand, and we have two nurses and a healer! It’s a tragedy. Yet

Mëddwoglubas Hospital has a staff two or three times as large, and for how many people? If there is any way you can move to the city, it would immensely improve our health. Please, Dr. Stauréstu.”

Stauréstu knew the situation well; he had tried to visit Ora once a week, though between taking and giving classes that had not always been possible. The hospital building was good sized, but so little of it was being used that most of it had been converted into a high school. Ora’s situation, however, was better than Tripola’s, Bellédha’s, and Isurdhuna’s, which each had a nursing student or a first-year medical student. Néfa was a bit better; at the moment it had a very bright second-year medical student and a very capable third-year nursing student in residence. Mëddwoglubas had three medical students and four nursing students.

“Lord, my wife and I have a very comfortable arrangement in Mëddwoglubas, though I plan to—”

“Doctor, I’ll give you a house and ten lëdhay.”

That gave him a moment of pause. Ten lëdhay—1440 dhanay—was a bit better than the 1200 he was anticipating in Mëddwoglubas, though the house was nice.

“Lord, I have a wife and child to consider, and a mother in law—”

“Twenty lëdhay, then. No, twenty-five.”

He wasn’t even sure how much twenty-five lëdhay was; Mëddwoglubas was a working place and never counted money in lëdhay, like the Lords, old houses, and rich merchants did. He stared a moment, calculating . . . about 3,500. . .

“Tell you what. Four thousand dhanay.”

Four thousand was concrete; the Lord apparently had figured he was trying to convert the money. The sign on the edge of Mëddwoglubas that said “Ora • 50 kilometers • 100 dekent” flashed through his mind. Ora was 60 kilometers from Néfa, 135 from Isurdhuna, and 90 from Tripola. It was more central than Mëddwoglubas. It was larger. It needed a good hospital. It would have a larger budget. With 4,000 dhanay, he and Aréjé could afford servants. He could strengthen the city’s weak Bahá’í community and even help the Néfa Bahá’ís more.

“My Lord, I think you have an agreement, but there are conditions. First, I will reside in Ora and spend three days a week at the hospital, but I will need to be able to visit the other western shore hospitals.”

“Understood, you are the only physician.”

“Exactly. I will need the house and salary because my wife is studying to be a physician and we need a nanny, housekeeper, and cook. Finally, I want to examine your eyes.”

“My eyes?” Mitru was startled and stepped back. “Why do you want to examine them?”

Stauréstu looked closely. “Because I think you have a cataract in your right eye. I suspect your vision is impaired.”

“I can see fine!”

“We can check later; meanwhile, I don’t want to work for a Lord who doesn’t want personally anything to do with the new medicine.”

“Alright, when you are in Ora you can look at my eyes,” Mitru growled.

“Very good, then, Lord, I think you have a deal.” He extended his hands and they shook.

“When can you start?”

“After the Grand Court ends.”

“Thank you.” Mitru smiled and backed away. Stauréstu watched him go and wondered whether he had done the right thing. But his intuition told him it was right.

The Menneas were still talking, mostly congratulating Thornton and Lébé, though Chris and May were talking about the new professorship. “I can’t do it,” said May. “I have branched out and taught psychology, but that was too much of a stretch. Until we get an expert in education, we’ll have to let this chair stay empty.”

“We could ask Ornéstu,” suggested Chris.

“He still doesn’t have a kwéteryeri,” said May. “He’s getting close, but he’s so busy with the Melwika schools.”

“But he is teaching at the génadema,” said Chris. “He’s supervising various seminars, and he is our education expert. And I know he and Grané could use the money.”

“You’re right, he already is filling about half a chair; maybe we should bundle those tasks together and give them to him as a half-time professor paid by the crown.”

“Good; more money for the arts,” said Liz, raising a subject she had raised with Chris a dozen times in the last month.

“And more for medical supplies; we need to pay someone to develop some better quality dentures, and we need prosthetic limbs.”

He raised his hand. “And more for salaries; we have six faculty with better educations and they have to receive a raise. I’ll review the audit of the books tonight; the tomi accountants are going over them right now. But I’m pretty sure we have a surplus of ten thousand dhanay.”

“Ten thousand! That’s excellent!” said Liz.

“This was a good year, we had more students than projected and we kept costs under control. We should use some of it to pay off construction debt and we should save some, but I think we can devote a thousand dhanay to the arts and humanities and one or two thousand to dentures and limbs. Those are important developments. But the university board has to make the final decision.”

[May 20, 2006; reread and edited 5/25/13, 8/5/17, 11/7/24]

## Profits and Plans

“Here are the data from the various measurements,” Thornton said, flipping to the third large sheet of paper in his presentation at the All-Génadema Conference. He paused for a moment to let the crowd look at the neat table of numbers; also to let his father, May, and Amos find places in the back of the standing room-only auditorium. It reminded him momentarily that he was speaking to over three hundred people, and that gave him momentary butterflies in the stomach. “Unfortunately, the data are not completely uniform and consistent. As you can see, when I went to the South Pole two years ago, the sextant data suggested a tilt of Éra’s axis of only half a degree, pointed toward 105 degrees solar longitude; in other words, the maximum tilt of the northern hemisphere relative to sun occurred about one month after the beginning of summer. The big problem with these data, however, is that it was not gathered from one place over a long period of time, but over a twenty-hour period while walking to the South Pole. So it may not be reliable.

“The data collected at Khermdhuna in late winter should be much more reliable, because it was collected at one place over a period of time. It involved using a clock, which we supplied, to measure the exact length of day for a month. When an axis is tilted, the pole gets half a year of daylight and half a year of night. As you move away from the pole the lengths of the day and night get closer to twenty-four hours. If you know a place’s latitude—Khermdhuna is 71 degrees north—one can calculate the amount of inclination of the axis, and the direction of tilt, quite precisely from the number of

hours and minutes of daylight. It's quite a complicated calculation, but it can be done. Khermdhuna yields a tilt of 2.1 degrees toward 81 degrees solar latitude; in other words, a much steeper tilt, and pointed to a spot almost a month before the beginning of summer.

“We then sent the same clock to Snékhþéla, latitude 67 south, where the local school teacher recorded the length of day for a month ending two weeks ago. As you can see, Snékhþéla currently is receiving eleven hours of sunlight per day; in other words, the axis is tilted to favor the northern hemisphere. The data suggests a tilt of 2.5 degrees toward 80 degrees of solar latitude. This suggests a continued increase in tilt just over the four months separating observations!

“Finally, we have a direct measurement at Gordha Astronomical Observatory by Estonþréku about two months ago. This involved very precise measurement of the positions of stars near the northern polar axis over several nights, both right after the end of evening twilight and right before the beginning of dawn twilight. They yield an axial tilt of 2.3 degrees toward 81 degrees solar latitude; right between the other two.”

He flipped pages again. “From these data we formulate the hypothesis that if we observe the axial tilt in early fall, it will have increased to about 2.7 degrees and the solar latitude will be about 79 degrees. If this is correct, we are witnessing a very rapid change of the planet's axial inclination; something we cannot find explained in any physics textbooks, which suggest that the inclination usually changes by a degree every few tens of thousands of years, not a degree per year!”

He flipped to his final page. “So, what are the implications? Right now, our climate is driven by our elliptical orbit around the sun; we are twenty-five percent closer to the sun in the summer than the winter, so we get 56% more solar energy in the

summer. But consider that right now Snékhþéla is getting eleven hours of daylight while Khermdhuna is getting thirteen. That means that at midsummer, because of the ellipticity of the orbit, Snékhþéla will get about 50% more heat, while Khermdhuna will get 62% more heat. And as you would expect, Snékhþéla is having a cool summer and will have a warm winter; Khermdhuna is having a warm summer and will have another cold winter. If the tilt continues, in a decade or so Snékhþéla will get more sunlight in what is now winter than in what is now summer, and its seasons will reverse! This may have serious consequences for the region's plant life. Khermdhuna will have much warmer summers and much colder winters, and while the seasons will still occur at the same time, their intensity may also have a serious impact on the plants and animals. The entire world climate will be modified in ways we can only begin to guess: hotter, drier summers, for example, for the eastern shore are a possible long-term pattern, as are colder winters.

“But I must stress that this is only a hypothesis at this point. Further research is essential. We are hoping that a thorough search of the Great Library of Ninurta in Anartu will reveal references to droughts and floods thousands of years ago, and they will show us a pattern. We are also searching for ancient trees whose growth rings may show climatic cycles; the area south of here, for example, has several ancient olive groves some of whose trees are still growing after perhaps six hundred years. Next year we may have more data.

“Any questions?”

The audience applauded him vigorously; they had been given a lot to think about. Then the hands went up. “So, should we be storing extra grain?” asked someone.

“I can’t answer that question, but obviously that’s something we’ll have to look into.” He pointed to a man half way back, whom he recognized as Lukaru of the *Royal Standard*.

“Have you thought about asking the *aliénés*?” he asked.

“Hum. Interesting question. No, we haven’t asked. Maybe we should, too.”

Another man raised his hand. “So, could this mean agriculture will become impossible for a time?”

“I can’t speculate about that. We simply don’t know what changes of the inclination are possible and what they’ll do to the climate. But history tells us that agriculture has never been impossible in the past.”

The chair of the session rose and began to hover over the proceedings; Thornton’s time was up. “Thank you again,” he said and headed for his seat to additional applause. He sat next to Lébé. “Good job, but rather worrisome,” she said.

“I know,” he replied.

They sat and listened to Estonpréku’s half hour presentation about the geography of Skanda. He set up a gigantic map of the world Éra orbited and pointed out the seas, land masses, mountains, rivers, lakes, and other major features, some of which he had begun to name. Skanda was 13,524 kilometers in diameter; 6.7% larger than Earth. It rotated on its axis once every 16 hours and Éra was located about 29,000 kilometers away; it was ten times closer than the Earth’s moon.

After fifteen minutes of questions, the afternoon session ended and everyone rose to head out. Thornton and Lébé were greeted by Chris, May, and Amos at the exit. “That was a good presentation, son,” said Chris. “And I was relieved you didn’t speculate. The

second questioner was a reporter from the *Royal Standard*, and I'm sure he plans to write a summary of your talk for the paper."

"Yes, I recognized Lukaru, so I knew I had to be careful. I don't want to cause a panic."

"Exactly," said Chris. "We should head home; we've got about fifteen guests coming for dinner. Agné and Stérésé have been cooking all day."

"How was the meeting?" asked Thornton. "Did you collect literacy statistics?"

"We didn't because Widéstu had already collected them, and he gave a quick report. It appears the literate population increased to about 8,000 last year. It was 7,500 last year, so it sounds like the increase was very small; but Widéstu thinks the numbers previously were wishful overestimates. There are now eight high schools; Isurdhuna's and Anartu's are the newest ones."

"More interesting were the various plans of the génademas," commented Amos.

"Yes," agreed Chris. "Ora, Isurdhuna, Mëddwoglubas, and Èndraidha are three years into their kwétèryeri; Anartu is already planning theirs, even though their most advanced students are barely two years along. Néfa and Tripola have solid dwoyeri programs, as does the other Sumilara school. Bellédha and Gordha are refining uniyeri programs and want to expand to a dwoyeri in a few years if they can get the financial resources. The Temple Génadema, interestingly enough, still does not have an uniyeri in place."

"Money and good intentions are not enough," exclaimed May. "You need to have something to teach!"

“And someone,” added Chris. “The sons of priests prefer to collect pensions then go teach in remote villages for a pittance!”

They crossed Temple Square and glanced at the temple, which was covered by scaffolding for the new, improved glass dome and expanded annex. “That suggestion that you talk to the aliens was interesting,” said Amos. “And I wonder whether it is a wise suggestion.”

“I wonder, also,” added Chris. “If we need to store grain against several bad years, we should begin immediately. Especially this year; the harvest coming in is the best we’ve ever had by far.”

And the price is up because the harvests elsewhere are so bad,” added Amos. “The Grange will have a financial surplus.”

“I’m sure; the Board’s meeting in a few days to discuss the budget,” said Chris.

They climbed the little hill in front of their house and entered. Guests were beginning to trickle in: Widéstu, the heads of the various génademas, and some of their wives. The courtyard was filled with a big U-shaped table covered by an elegant tablecloth; the pots of flowers were supplemented by bouquets that filled the courtyard with a beautiful smell. The meal was sumptuous and the conversation fascinating: stories about the impact of literacy, aspirations to educate every person in the world, plans to expand schools, innovative financing schemes. Sumilara, in particular, was raising extra money through school fees and patrons, because the local Lords received a much smaller cut of the taxes and because the island was suffering from a rare drought that had reduced the area of the rice paddies. The men and women separated into two circles of

conversation once the tea and coffee came out. Thornton, May, Lua, and their spouses left to put kids to bed and returned to active discussions.

At ten bells, people began to thank their hosts and head for the Mēlwika Palace Hotel on Foundry Square. Thornton and Lébé went up to their apartment, where the two kids were sleeping soundly. “Finally, Kalé sleeps by herself and doesn’t get up in the middle of the night,” said Lébé, looking in on their daughter.

“Finally,” he agreed. Kalé was now thirteen months old. They headed into their own bedroom. Their flats now had large bedrooms and bathrooms and small family rooms; the entire clan relied on the same kitchen, dining area, and courtyard for most of their daytime activities. Lébé headed for the master bathroom. Thornton looked around the room. “I think I’ll call Philos.”

She stuck her head out of the bathroom. “Now?”

“Well we never know what time it is at their base down on Skanda. Dad thought maybe I should ask about the axis and climate.”

“And I’m sure everyone else would like a confirmation about the next shipment.” She nodded. “Okay, fine with me.” She went back into the bathroom.

Thornton walked to the family room and opened the door to the library, which was between his flat and his parents’ bedroom over the front door; the library had three doors into it, one from each couple’s space and one from the balcony. He flipped on the light. His old computer was sitting there, turned off; next to it was one of their two cellular phones (the other was locked up in the hospital, for the mobile clinic’s use). He picked up the phone, turned it on, and began to dial Philos. Then the door from his father’s flat opened.

“You’re calling Philos?” He had heard the door open and saw the light. Thornton nodded, so Chris sat to listen.

There was a long pause, then Thornton heard the ringing. He waited for an answer or for the voicemail to start. Then there was a click. “Hello? Is this Thornton?”

“Yes, is this Philos?”

“Yes. How are you, Thornton? We haven’t talked for a long time. I’m sorry I haven’t called. But we don’t have any new doctoral students, so no one has wanted to interview your family, and we didn’t have the engine block ready yet. The engine block has been very complex. We never should have agreed to it. But it’ll be finished in two weeks, I think. We’ve also been reviewing Dr. Lua’s list of medications and think we’ll be able to make most of them.”

“Including the chemotherapy drugs?”

“Actually, there is a new, experimental chemotherapy drug that appears to be more effective. It’s horrendously expensive on Earth, but it’s easier for us to make than the drug she proposed. So I think we’d prefer to make it, instead.”

“So you’ll have all those things in the next drop?”

“If we postpone the drop by two weeks, yes.”

“Excellent, I’ll tell everyone. But I didn’t call about that. Philos, has the inclination of the axis of Éra changed from half a degree to almost two and a half degrees in a few years? Have you any idea what will happen to our weather here?”

There was a long pause, probably because the translation software took a while to digest his questions. “Thornton, have you noticed that your compasses don’t work as well as they used to?”

Thornton thought about the question. “Come to think about it, yes, for the last six months or so it has been hard to get good, reliable compass readings. We’ve had trouble on field trips; locally magnetized rocks have often caused a deviation.”

“Éra’s magnetic field is weakening because Skanda’s recently reversed; the north magnetic pole is now in the south and vice versa. This happens to Earth’s magnetic field also, but Skanda is only a billion years old and is very active geologically, so its field reverses often. Éra is deep inside of Skanda’s magnetic field and has a small but intense field as well. Over the next few years, Éra’s field will reverse as well. Meanwhile, both magnetic norths point south and repel each other, and that has caused the wobble of the axis.”

“I am amazed the magnetic fields are strong enough to do that.”

“Skanda has fifty percent more mass than the Earth and most of that is in its iron core. Because it’s only a billion years old, it has a lot more radioactivity and geological heat. As a result, it has a much stronger magnetic field than the Earth. Éra’s field is very strong because its core is neutronium, a material in the outer layers of white dwarfs and neutron stars. But Éra’s field can be ‘pushed around’ by Skanda’s until it reverses.”

“Philo, how does Éra ‘work’? Earth’s astronomy doesn’t seem to know anything about it.”

“No, it wouldn’t. The universe has a certain small amount of superdense matter in it, which we call ‘neutronium.’ We made Éra by creating a collision between a neutronium body one kilometer in diameter and a carbonaceous chondrite asteroid from this solar system’s asteroid belt, 200 kilometers in diameter. They collided above Skanda about ten million years ago and the combined object settled into orbit around Skanda

afterward. The neutronium body melted and vaporized a hole to the center of Éra in about six seconds and its intense gravity caused the chondrite bedrock to compress and shrink in an hour's time to about 165 kilometers in diameter. The intense heat melted about half the chondritic mass as well, releasing vast amounts of gas and water, since carbonaceous chondrite is rich in volatiles. The volatiles poured out of Éra through hundreds of volcanic vents. The crust, which had heated the least, heated up from the heat in the center and expanded, so an era of compression was followed by several million years of expansion, creating rift valleys. All this occurred in orbit around Skanda, so the crust took on the shape it has today, the low hemisphere facing Skanda and the back side being as much as six kilometers higher. Éra's ocean covered about fifty percent of the surface. Then as the water escaped into space, the sea shrank to about a sixth of its surface, which is what it was until the Great Valley flooded."

"And you seeded it with terrestrial life."

"Yes, and cut the glubas, because this solar system is still experiencing terminal bombardment; Éra has been struck by twenty sizable objects in the last ten million years. We're still seeding it with terrestrial life; your central sea now has dolphins, whales, and a hundred species of fish that it lacked two years ago. Anyway, that's more than you asked about."

"What about the climate?"

"We have not studied the climate closely, so I can't answer that question.

Obviously it is affected by axial tilt, which won't increase much more, then when the poles reverse it will shrink again. The bigger factor is the jet stream, which flows east to west over the equator. If it is strong, the western shore gets all the rain and the eastern

shore gets a steady flow of dry air off the mountains. If it is weak, in the summer the land warms and the air over it rises, a downdraft develops over the sea, and the moisture is blown both east and west.”

“That sounds like our situation. Has this world ever had an extreme climate?”

“Like I said, we have not studied its climate. But smaller worlds tend to have less extreme weather because the pole and equator are so close; the pole cannot become extremely cold, nor can the equator get extremely hot. Éra generally has almost no axial inclination because of the stabilizing influence of Skanda’s gravity. Skanda’s orbit varies from fairly circular to fairly eccentric because of the influence of Werana and Mitra. When it’s circular, Éra has no seasons at all, which means large areas near the poles could have a frost any time.”

“Thanks, Philos, that’s very helpful. It sounds like there’s no reason to panic about the inclination, then. Let us know when the next drop is scheduled.”

“We’ll email you in two days about it.”

“Thanks. Bye.”

“Bye.”

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Two days later, the grange’s board of trustees met. Chris, as usual, walked to the Grange headquarters two kilometers south of town. All the wheat and corn fields had been cut and replowed; some had already been planted with their second crop, and a few were covered with shoots of green. Chris was pleased to see extensive fields of vegetables, beans, cotton, hemp, flax, peanuts, and other non-grain crops; most farmers had planted half their land in other crops, in order to diversify their income sources.

Soon the other four members of the Grange Board—Saréidukter, Kérdu, Werétranu, and Snékwu—had arrived in the grange’s small meeting room and were ready to start. Kérdu, who worked full time as Grange Coordinator, pulled out a sheet of statistics.

“Our farmers planted 4,000 agris in wheat,” he began. “The average yield per agri was twenty berwoni (bushels), 265% higher than the average on a traditional peasant farm. In other words, we get a harvest equal to the entire ten thousand agris in Melwika being planted in grains in a traditional fashion. The total is 80,000 berwoni of wheat, 2,778 tonnes of it, which almost fills our grain storage to capacity.

“The drought and floods have reduced wheat and even rice harvests significantly; the entire lower Arjakwés must have averaged six berwonis per agri instead of the usual 7.5; the Penkakwes was closer to five. Both areas have had all or part of their tax burden forgiven. The northern shore, with its slightly warmer than average summer and normal rainfall, has had good harvests; 8 or 8.5 bushels per agri. Lewésipa and Néfa have both had too much rain to grow any wheat, though corn did alright in Lewésipa. Néfa’s and Ora’s rice crop has not been seriously affected by the heavy rains; nor has Isurdhuna’s grain because the valley is in a rain shadow and has extensive irrigation. The overall result is uncertainty and a lower than normal wheat harvest, and a sales price of fourteen dhanay per bushel instead of the standard ten to twelve.”

“Ironically, farmers ignored our advice last year, planted a lot of wheat, and suffered from the price collapse,” said Saréidukter. “Then this year they heeded our advice and the price was pretty high!”

“Yes, but I bet if everyone had planted wheat, the price would have been closer to normal,” replied Chris. “So, 80,000 berwoni at 14 dhanay per berwoni. . . that’s . . . 1,120,000 dhanay, 124,000 more than expected.”

“And sales of beans, other vegetables, flax, and other products so far have been 750,000,” added Kérdu. “So total taxes paid have been 623,000 dhanay, 415,000 to the crown, 173,000 to the city, and 35,000 to you. Mortgage fees have been 187,500 and grange fees the same. If the second crop of wheat is equally bountiful and the sales of vegetables and other agricultural products stay about the same, all these figures will double.”

“That’s amazing,” said Chris. “I guess it’s the guano!”

“Guano, irrigation, machinery, and experience,” agreed Kérdu. “It means the average grange member will earn about 6,000 dhanay and pay half to taxes, mortgages, and grange fees, leaving 3,000, which is more than anyone could imagine a farmer earning!”

“It’s twice as much as a factory worker or a teacher. No wonder no one is selling their land and abandoning farming; it’s lucrative!” exclaimed Chris.

“Especially this year,” said Kérdu. “The number of grange members has actually increased; farmers have been subletting land to poor cousins or adding them to their families. The Béranagrés and Nénaslua Grange is doing pretty well, also, with incomes on smaller plots of about 1,200 dhanay after paying taxes. The budget of our grange is 200,000 dhanay but it looks like we’ll take in 375,000.”

“We better not spend it before we’re sure we have it, though,” noted Snékwu.

“Sure, but we just closed last year’s books and they had a surplus of 3,000 đ. And we already have a surplus of 12,500 đ on this year’s budget!”

“I think we should make some plans for the surplus,” said Chris. “And a party should be part of it.”

“I was thinking about that, too,” said Saréidukter. “Mæddoakwés is having its big harvest festival right now, and the whole area is going to it. So we can’t have our festival now. But we could hold our harvest festival in Brénmènu when the second harvest is in, and the whole area can come to it then.”

“Great idea!” said Kérdu. “It may not cost us much money, either, because we can rent booths to vendors.”

“We could hold the harvest festival just outside the walls in the greenbelt around town,” suggested Chris. “But that won’t spend much of our surplus.”

“I’d give some of it back to farmers,” said Wérétranu. “They’ve worked hard and deserve a reward. But it’d be best to invest as much of it as possible. Boléripludha and Morituora have talked about granges for their farmers; voluntary participation, of course. But that means they can’t raise the capital to get started. I wonder whether we should buy some new equipment for ourselves and hold onto the old equipment to loan to the new granges. That would give them an incentive to get set up.”

“I was wondering whether we can expand our farmland,” added Kérdu. “I’d rather invest our surplus in our own community. So many people want to move here! The Melwika hill country has a lot of good farmland. Irrigation ditches will be a lot of work, but we have the resources.”

“I think we should proceed slowly with that,” said Chris. “Because the bigger Melwika gets, the more resentment we’ll face, and the harder it will be to maintain a high income for our people.”

“But Lord Chris, people are coming here anyway,” objected Kérdu. “Every passenger bus brings someone new. The average income will drop here anyway because you’ll have prosperous farmers and factory workers and a horde of unemployed. We have to give people work.”

“I agree,” said Chris. “But we also need to help stem the tide of arrivals and make it easier for people to stay in their home villages.”

“But this is a big world, 100,000 dhanay won’t go far!” objected Kérdu.

“I agree, but let’s select and help a few places.”

“I think we should encourage our farmers to help their home villages, too,” said Werétranu. “What if we asked grange members to match or partly match grants or loans to villages or individuals?”

Saréidukter raised a finger. “And vouch for or help guarantee the loans. That’s the big problem we’d face with any program of loans; people won’t pay them back. But if their cousin is a grange member, we’d have a way to lean on them.”

“You also want to approve certain kinds of loans; for sewing machines, for example,” said Chris. “Then you can repossess the sewing machine if they don’t pay it back. You know, this might be a great idea. If we put up 50,000, we might be able to get 20,000 or 30,000 in matching grants from our members, and if the loans are for a hundred dhanay or so, it could go a long way. It could help a thousand families around the world, and that’s pretty significant.”

“How much would it cost to administer, though?” asked Kérdu.

“A thousand or so. It’s probably part time work for two accountants in the Tomi.”

“We should make grants available to our own people, too,” said Saréidukter. “It doesn’t make sense loaning only to their relatives.”

“If the average member has an income of 3,000, they won’t need loans!” objected Werétranu.

“You’d be surprised,” replied Saréidukter. “Go to the bicycle store. It’s bare. The farmers have bought every one. Come winter, the store will have bikes again and the farmers won’t have as much surplus. A lot of them plan to get the second crop in the ground, then go back to their home village for a month to throw a party and give gifts to their relatives.”

“Winter will be the time to distribute a bonus,” said Snékwu. “Their savings will be getting low.”

“It’s also the time to use the surplus to hire farmers and others to do work,” said Werétranu. “Now that I think of it, that’s the better way to use the surplus.”

“We should do some of both,” said Kérdu. “But I’m not sure what we can hire people to do for us! The irrigation system will need some repairs, and the roads will need some additional graveling, but that won’t cost more than a few thousand.”

“We’ll have to make a list,” said Saréidukter. “I bet we can think of other projects, like irrigating a thousand agris in the lower hills.”

“There’s also education,” noted Chris. “Offer courses at the génadema for free or for a reduced fee. It’s probably better to make farmers pay something, but the grange

could cover two thirds of the cost. Or adult education courses at the high school. We must encourage more education.”

“I wonder whether we could even make some scholarships available to village cousins,” said Saréidukter. “I have a cousin who’d love to come here for the winter and take a few courses to become a teacher.”

“Good idea,” agreed Kérdu.

“And don’t discount the idea of keeping some of the money in the bank,” added Chris. “The bank will give interest. It’ll be invested in businesses. The Tomi can invest some of it in Tomi businesses. We won’t always have such big surpluses; if farm prices drop, we might be struggling, and we’ll need some then.”

“What do you think about farmers starting businesses that join the Tomi?” asked Kérdu. “Like Ekweru’s poultry business. He is no longer farming land, so should he be a part of the Grange? Maybe his business should be part of your Tomi instead.”

Chris shrugged. “Sure. The hospital and old age benefits are the same. It might make more sense for his business to be directly part of the Tomi. We need to find someone who will do the same thing with pigs. We could dam the Arjakwés upstream of the reservoir and set up a fish farm; it could raise thousands of fish for sale.”

“Fish farming?” said Snékwu. “I’ve never heard of that.”

“What else?” asked Kérdu.

“The Temple,” said Chris. “The Grange should donate to it.”

“Okay.” Kérdu looked at his notes. “We have a long list. I suggest we divide up the possible surplus and figure out when we want to spend it. I suggest fifty thousand for loans in winter and spring, forty thousand for new equipment in the winter and spring,

fifteen for educational scholarships for the summer and fall, fifteen for projects to bring new farmland into use in the winter, ten for the festival, ten for the temple, fifteen for a bonus in the late spring, and twenty for savings, on top of saving the surplus we have from last year.”

“That sounds about right,” agreed Saréidukter.

“A good plan,” agreed Chris. “Especially since it spends most of the money when we’re sure we have it!”

“It’s agreed, then?” asked Kérdu. Snékwu and Wérétranu nodded, so he jotted down the decision.

They debated a few more details, like the equipment to purchase, then turned to a series of other decisions, most of which were fairly quick. A farmer had been injured hunting in the Snowy Mountains above Néfa with a cousin; the Grange would plant his second crop for him. A farm wife had lost a baby; they agreed to send the family a big fruit basket and fifty dhanay. Two farmer neighbors had gotten into a fist fight over the time to irrigate their crops; Kérdu would go admonish both of them and clarify the schedule. A farmer’s cow had grazed on a neighbor’s wheat field; Wérétranu would go try to arbitrate the matter so that the cow’s owner paid a fair compensation. A woman farmer complained of a neighboring male farmer’s inappropriate interest in her and did not feel safe on her land; Saréidukter and Snékwu would meet with the man to admonish him about proper behavior toward a fellow Grange member. The génadema’s sole agriculture expert wanted to meet with the Grange Board to make recommendations about improving farm production and yields; they set a meeting time with him for next week.

They hurried through the last business because a local passenger wagon was coming through soon; Mitru put the oldest equipment on the shortest local routes because people could endure the discomfort better on short rides. Werétranu and Chris headed back to town on the wagon and Chris went straight to the Tomi to see his latest financial records. Sure enough, 15,000 dhanay of the tax payments and 52,000 of the mortgage income had come through that day. He headed home, where Behruz was with eleven year old Jordan and five year old Rostamu in the courtyard. The boys had just gotten home from school.

“Grandpa, we’re going swimming in the river!” exclaimed Jordan.

“Oh, that’s fun! But the water will be really cold!”

“That’s alright, because today is really hot!” he replied.

Chris smiled and turned to Behruz. “Agreeing to sell farmland for a cut of the harvest is the best thing I ever could have done.”

“A bumper crop.”

“More than that; a bumper crop and high wheat prices! Fourteen dhanay per bushel.”

“How much?”

“On this harvest alone, 35,000 in taxes and 187,500 in mortgage payments; 225,500 altogether. That could double before the frost.”

Behruz whistled. “That’s almost three times last year!”

“The farmers are more experienced, we have more farm equipment, and we purchased 5,000 tonnes of guano. Nuarjora had twenty men working all winter to dig it for us. Best ten thousand dhanay we ever spent.”

“The crown will love Mēlwika.”

“You know it. Miller has hired fifty more men and is expanding production of steam cars and trucks, Mitru is phasing in the new twenty-tonne trucks and is finding that demand is rising so fast they aren’t enough, Mēddwoglubas can’t build power looms fast enough to make more cloth . . . it’s like a lid has been taken off the economy. The crown will be able to mint a half million dhanay of new coins, leave the old ones in circulation, and spend the money without worrying about inflation.”

“I’ll get even more for the arts?” said Liz nearby.

“Sure!” said Chris. “We’ll be able to donate to the Mēddwoglubas Temple generously. We may want to invest more in Lēwēspa, to help them expand and start granges.”

“And I can invest more on plastics and chemicals?” asked Behruz.

Chris nodded. “And we can invest more on medical supplies. We should start training people to manufacture medicines and vaccines; the aliens want us to do more of that ourselves. We can invest more in the School of Engineering and some of the inventions it wants to market.”

“And of course, all that means even more money,” said Behruz.

Chris nodded. “Of course. But look at this house; we’re not spending much on ourselves!”

[May 23, 2006; reread and edited 5/25/13, 8/5/17, 11/7/24]

## Glacier Burst

The muddy road wound through woods and around hills, then descended into the Northern Basin not far from a gleaming wall of ice. The winter snows had been replaced by emerald grass covered by herds of reindeer, though closer to the pole the land was still blanketed by white. Khermdhuna was a grayish strip of swamps wreathed in clouds of steam, with islands of grass and clusters of stone houses.

The geological survey's two vehicles—a rover and a steam wagon pulling a trailer—drove up to the church and parked in the plaza in front of it. They climbed out as the locals came out of their houses to greet them.

“Hail, Lord Pédrú,” said Thornton as the village's headman approached.

“Hail, Honored Dhoru. But please, call me Honored Pédrú. I do not like the title. Our only Lord is Jésus.”

“I understand, but at least the Réjé bestowed the title on you, Honored Pédrú. It means Khermdhuna has been recognized as a real place.”

“But we have always been a real place. The difference is that now I must collect the taxes we never paid.” He shook his head. “It will ruin us. The road is of little use; it needs gravel. The passenger and freight wagon takes two hours to travel sixty dekent to Bellédha. It's easier to go downstream to Yusdwoakwés, but getting through the gluba there is difficult because the road washed out in the spring. We have nothing new to sell; our reindeer are now taxed more than before; and our people want to buy things they never had access to before. So we are becoming poorer.”

“What about ice from the glacier?”

“We can’t get it out on the road! It’s too poor.”

“I see. I’d get the road fixed up as much as you can. Demand for ice is growing very fast. You can easily sell five thousand gurnis a year at one dhanay each.”

“What about the tar?”

“That’s why we’re here, to figure out what you have. Behruz was impressed by the potential of the samples. The oil shale underground is being cooked by the heat and steam. There’s probably natural gas escaping as well.”

“It bubbles up with the water. Is it valuable?”

“If it can be captured, but that may be difficult.”

“Yes, I think it would be.”

“I’m sorry we were unable to bring you home. We thought you planned to stay for the entire Grand Court.”

“No, if I had done that, I would have had to ride back with the other Lords of the northern basin, and they still do not accept us. But I enjoyed my trip to the capital. The palace is so beautiful! This world is changing so fast.”

Just then Bishop Jonu came out. He did not look happy to see Thornton. “Hail,” he said curtly.

“Hail, Honored Bishop.”

How long will you be here, Honored Dhoru?”

“Three days, Bishop.”

“Very well. But you are to say nothing about the Bahá’í customs while you are here; nothing.”

Thornton was startled. “Bishop, I am here to do geology, not teach my beliefs and customs.”

“Well, be sure to remember that.”

Pédru seemed a bit uncomfortable with the Bishop’s insistent tone. They watched him return to the church. “You may set up your camp in the same place as last year. You need guides?”

“Yes. Yagu thought it would be a good idea, and we will pay them.”

“We are looking forward to seeing Yagu,” said Pédru, and he turned to the génadema-educated geologist who had completed a uniyeri a week earlier. Yagu nodded uncomfortably.

“Let’s get started on the survey,” Yagu replied. “I want to show them the glacier first. I can tell by the river that the lake must be building up.”

“Yes, it will flood soon,” agreed Pédru. “But you can’t run up there without hospitality! You’ve just come on a long trip!”

“Honored, we’ll be back for a big dinner tonight,” replied Yagu. “We should take advantage of the daylight while we can.”

“I understand,” said Pédru reluctantly.

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The Grand Court had adjourned for the day. Chris stood, adjusted his toga—an uncomfortable thing to wear when sitting all afternoon—and headed slowly toward the exit. It had been a boring session, consisting mostly of complaints about the damage done by the weather. The frequent complaints that gedhéme witchcraft was causing the droughts and floods did not help. Sumilara had suffered more than usual and the lords

from there complained bitterly; and every lord on the island but one had actually attended the Grand Court that year.

As Chris approached the door, he spotted General Roktēkēster and his brother, Lord Gurwēkēster of Béranta, talking. They nodded to him, so he approached.

“Hail, my Lords.”

“Hail, Lord Kristobéru,” said the General. “I hear Melwika has weathered the heat well.”

“We have plenty of water, like the entire upper valley. Harvests have been good and were early in all the towns with water. How’s the Ornakwés?”

“Almost dry,” said Roktēkēster. “It needs a dam in the mountains. It flowed well in the early spring.”

“It receives little snowmelt. But there’s plenty of water in the Arjakwés system.”

“The canals are full,” agreed Gurwēkēster. “Or they could be; there’s plenty of water in Dhēdhuba. But we have no one to use it.”

“How many farmers?”

Roktēkēster looked at his brother and stroked his beard. “I think I have a dozen army veterans, now, plus the seventy squatters who don’t want to pay me taxes, and Gurwēkēster has about twenty farmers.”

“But ten of them were in the hamlet that was already there, so I recognized their land claim. They’re barely scratching out a living; they’re very poor.”

“What about your town sites?”

Roktekester laughed. “At least I have an army encampment; Ornakwés is the staging area for the Endraidha road and utility line. But they’ll be done in two months and the inn that opened will probably close.”

“Ah-hah.” Chris hesitated; considered. “Tell you what. I’ll make a deal with both of you.”

“What sort of deal?” said Gurwekester.

“You both have a good road, access to the Dhedhuba irrigation system, and a utility line. The soil is good and the climate is semitropical. I’ll buy a thousand agris from both of you for ten thousand dhanay—”

“Ten dhanay per agri? That’s ridiculous!” exclaimed Gurwekester, insulted.

“Let me finish. A total of two thousand agris. I want it as a continuous strip between the two towns, from the irrigation canal downhill to the Arjakwés. If the land of any of your existing farmers is in the way, that’s alright; I don’t mind working around them. You will get all the taxes you are due as Lords. If I succeed in attracting farmers to it, you’ll be able to sell the rest of your land for much more; that’s where you will make your money. But your land isn’t worth much if no one will settle on it. I’m assuming the risk to get your settlement started.”

“Risk? Twenty thousand dhanay?” asked Roktekester skeptically.

Chris nodded. “Yes, risk. I’ll build a grange at Béranta and one at Ornakwés and supply them with equipment. That’ll cost plenty.”

“And where will you get the farmers?” asked Gurwekester.

“From my grange. We have ten thousand agris and farmers who want more. My farmers made so much money on the last harvest, all their cousins want to come to

Melwika. We'll probably clear a thousand agris of land in the hills, but it isn't the quality of your land. None of Melwika's land is as good as your bottomland. Irrigation, guano, mechanization, experience; you'll get more than twenty berwoni of wheat per agri."

"*Twenty?*" said Gurwekester incredulously.

"Indeed, Lord. Twenty. That's what we just got. Give the farmers a few years and they will do better."

"So, you want the land to expand your grange, and once the two thousand is sold, we'll be able to sell our land and add the farmers to the granges?" asked Roktekester.

"Exactly. The farmers pay a total of half their harvest; a third to cover their taxes, a twelfth is the grange fee that maintains the canals and equipment, and a twelfth is their purchase price, though it lasts only twenty harvests. That's how the Ménwika Grange works. The two granges will need a tractor each and can rent spares from Ménwika Grange if the demand is scheduled when we don't need them. The grange fee will cover the equipment."

"But equipment isn't enough; the farmers don't know how to use it," said Gurwekester.

"But my grange farmers do. Some of them can move there permanently or temporarily. That's what I will bring to the deal."

Gurwekester and Roktekester looked at each other, then nodded at once. "You've got a deal," said the General. "When will you start? This fall?"

"Next week! As soon as the Grand Court ends, let's drive down and rough out the land, so we all agree on what is being sold to me, then we'll draw up the sales contract.

We have perfect growing weather, good soil, ample irrigation water, and plenty of growing season if we get started. The Ménwika Grange is just about finished with the new planting, so its equipment will be available. Demand for guano has ended for the year, so it won't be hard to buy more. We're accumulating landless men in town and many are cousins of grange members."

"Aryékwes will be furious."

"No, he has no reason to be. I offered to help set up a grange there last winter and he said no. He's been trying to farm the land with a few hired workers and he has made a lot of money, even though the yield hasn't been so good. If he wants a grange, I'll deal with him, too."

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The geology survey didn't stay to set up camp; the village's two teachers, Khawiéru and Ignatiu—Javier and Ignatio—came out of the church where they had been holding class for seventy children and agreed to set up the tents that afternoon. So the geologists climbed into the rover and drove to the glacier. After climbing around it several hours and studying the lake building up behind it—for the glacier had flowed across the river valley and blocked it several years earlier—they headed back to Khermdhuna to pick up two guides and headed for the areas with the richest tar pits. One of them showed signs of having burned a few months earlier.

They returned to Khermdhuna at about sunset; it was hard to be sure because the entire area had a high overcast of cirrus that glowed golden, and would provide twilight all night. It furthered their disorientation; it was about 5 a.m. Melwika time. They had

explored the equivalent of all night and were utterly worn out. The lack of Skanda in the sky was also strange, because Khermdhuna was just west of the “Skanda limit.”

They found a banquet prepared for them, which meant they had to stay up a bit longer.

“What did you find?” Pédrú asked Thornton, practically before he could sit to eat.

“The glacier lake will burst any time,” replied Thornton. “We measured its depth; it is more than nine tenths as deep as the glacial dam is high. That means it can already float the dam and the only thing keeping it intact is the fact that it is frozen to the ground underneath.”

Pédrú nodded. “We know. We are not keeping any reindeer herds overnight along the river. This happens about every five years. After the flood washes it out, the glacier will flow across the valley and eventually will block it again. Some floods are slow and gradual; others are sudden and enormous. Bellédha is safe behind its wall. Its fields get flooded, but the floods almost always occur in late summer after the harvest is over. This year’s flood will be early.”

“Because it has been a warm summer,” said Thornton. “The Mëgdontakwés gets them too, I guess.”

“No, not as much. We’re safe here. All our houses are built far enough above the flood. We learned that the hard way many centuries ago. But what about the tar?”

“It appears that the edge of the thermal field has the most tar; the center of the field is the oldest and the rocks there have had the tar leached from them long ago. A lot of gas does bubble out and we tried to light it, and it burned. So gas is escaping with the springs. We saw a tar pool one hundred doli by eighty doli, and it appears to be fifteen or

twenty doli deep. I figure it has between ten and twenty thousand tonnes of tar in it. Getting it out will be difficult, though.”

“We’ll come up with something. How much is it worth?”

“Perhaps fifty thousand dhanay.”

“That’s not much.”

“There are other tar pools around, though; you have maybe two hundred thousand dhanay of tar, and that’s not bad. We’ll have an estimate for you in another two days. You can borrow money from the bank to improve the road to get it out.”

Pédrú shook his head. “No debt, it’s un-Christian.”

Thornton was tempted to say he wished more Christians felt that way. “Your people can do a lot of the improving themselves. Cut trees and lay them down on the road surface, then dig a ditch parallel to the road and throw the dirt over the logs. You’ll have a well drained, rutless road surface.”

“But we’re talking about sixty dekent of road. We shouldn’t have to do it all ourselves. The other local villages should help, or the army should do the work.”

“Well, my Lord, cooperation between villages has never been easy up here, and the army has other priorities. Sometimes someone must arise and sacrifice for the good of everyone.”

“I suppose.” He sighed. “I suppose we could improve the road gradually.”

“The poor road quality will raise the cost of the tar, but no one else has any, so that won’t matter. Once the road is better and movement on it is cheaper, it’ll be profitable to ship ice as well. Also, I think the argument can be made that the crown *must*

install a telephone line to Khermdhuna, so that Bellédha can be warned of impending floods.”

“That makes sense,” agreed Pédro.

Thornton turned to his reindeer steak and cabbage; it was a good meal, albeit unusual for him. Just then Yagu approached with Khawiéru and Ignasiu. “Honored, I want to introduce you to my closest friends.”

“I’m pleased to meet you. What do you teach?”

“Reading, writing, numbers, and basic things to the local children,” replied Khawiéru. “Ignatiu handles the younger ones and I teach the older ones. We spent the winter at the Bellédha Génadema studying under Géndu. We came to appreciate his friendship.”

“He is a good teacher.” Thornton knew Géndu, who specialized in training teachers; he had come to Bellédha from Melwika. He was also secretary of that city’s Bahá’ís.

“Honored, is there any way we could come to the génadema over the summer or fall? Yagu can run the school.”

“By myself? And I’m not sure I want to come back yet!” exclaimed Yagu.

“I don’t make decisions about who the génadema accepts,” Thornton replied.

“And it’s expensive, but we do have financial assistance. Do you have any money from the village?”

Khawiéru looked at Ignasiu, then shook his head. “No, I’m sure we don’t.”

“We should do something, Thornton,” exclaimed Yagu. “They’ve been working hard. Just look around this gathering; there are sheets of newspaper from several different issues scattered about.”

“Yes, a lot of people are reading the newspaper,” agreed Ignasiu. “We get two copies every week. Many people knew a lot of the alphabet, but they had nothing to read. I’ve been teaching the new alphabet and people have been teaching each other. The issues are scattered all over the hamlets. They are moved from church to church.”

Thornton nodded. “All I can suggest is that you come to Məlwika and apply. If you don’t get in, we can give you the money to come back here.”

“Oh, we don’t want to come back!” replied Khawiéru.

Yagu went to get more food and they chatted a bit more about the village and life in it. The two men were quite disillusioned and hinted about the Bahá’í Faith. Then as they finished eating, Bishop Jonu came over to Yagu.

“So, Yagu, I never did get another letter from you,” he said. “We’re all so glad you’re back. The translation of the Gospel of John was so exciting and inspiring. We’ve been copying it and distributing it to all the churches. We already had parts of chapter 1 and a few others. Pablu remembered the text very well.”

“He did.”

“But we need a translation of the Gospel of Pablu.”

“Honored Bishop, did you get the Spanish *Biblia* I sent you? Did you see a ‘Gospel of Pablu’ in it?”

“We got the *Biblia*. It’s amazing, what it has; of course, we can’t read and understand more than twenty words and a few names! But we need your help to find the Gospel of Pablu. We never found it.”

“Honored Bishop, neither did I. I wrote you to that effect. There is no Gospel of Pablu; its contents consist of extracts from letters by the ancient Pablu and instructions from our historical Pablu about the mass and other sacraments, ordaining priests and bishops, and such.”

“But those instructions come from the *Biblia*! Even if they are scattered about, you could have compiled them together and translated them.”

“Honored Bishop, most of them are *not* in the *Biblia*. I sent you the passages from the letters of Pablu that talk about bishops. I never saw any that mention priests. He does mention deacons. There are references to the Last Supper and to baptism in the Gospel of Jonu, but not to other sacraments.”

“That’s impossible! Jésu established them!”

“No, Honored Bishop, he didn’t.”

Jonu was shocked by that remark. Then Khawiéru spoke up. “This is just as the Bahá’ís said in Belledha. Jesus lived two thousand years ago and none of his teachings were written down for thirty or forty years, and then they were written as letters to people and short manuscripts. Widumaj lived six hundred years ago and his teachings weren’t written down for centuries, but they were in the form of hymns that were easy to remember. Bahu lived almost two hundred years ago and he wrote down everything immediately, so his teachings are exactly as he gave them.”

“Blasphemy!” exclaimed Jonu. “Blasphemy! Jésu is the son of God and the others are impostors! Lord, these two really are Bahá’ís! They should be expelled!”

“Bishop, we aren’t expelling anyone!” replied Pedru. “We live in a new world and we have to accept that. The newspapers have hymns in every issue. If you want clinics and schools, you will have to accept newspapers and new ideas.”

“Lord, I warned you about these people!” Jonu pointed at Thornton. “With their dangerous ideas. We have had a happy life here. Our people are righteous and use this life to prepare for the next. We could use some medicines and some healing arts, yes, but we don’t need these other things!”

“Bishop, we now have to pay taxes, and they will deplete our reindeer herds quickly unless we do something else as well. Perhaps we should move to a warmer climate and raise better crops? We have to prepare for the next life in other ways, now.”

“Then we are lost,” said Jonu vehemently.

“We have lived our lives based on a book that doesn’t really exist,” retorted Yagu, angrily. “I have sought it, I have prayed about it, I have prayed it would be revealed to me, but I have searched everywhere, and it does not exist.”

The crowd, which had stopped talking to watch the confrontation, was shocked by that. There were worried and angry whispers when he uttered his pronouncement.

“And now you are a Bahá’í,” said Jonu.

“No, bishop, I am not; I am confused. I can’t speak for Khawíéru and Ignasiu.”

“We seek wisdom and truth wherever it is found,” replied Khawíéru ambiguously.

There was silence after that. There were popping and cracking sounds faintly in the distance, and no one noticed; then during the silence the sounds rose to the consciousness of a few.

“The ice dam,” exclaimed someone. “It’s breaking.”

Silence again. The glacier was three kilometers away, but it was still that evening and sound could travel a long way. “It is,” agreed Jonu. “We’ll need fast horses to warn everyone.”

“I can take the rover,” said Thornton. “It can go twice as fast as a horse if the road permits.”

“There isn’t much of a road, and it often dips into the floodplain.”

“I can go fast enough; I remember the road from last year. The rover has bright lights, too. I’ll need someone to guide me, though, because I don’t know the villages all the way to Yusdwoakwés.”

“Yusdwoakwés? We only warn the Kristane settlements.”

“Lord, everyone needs to be warned!”

“Yes, you are right. I had better come with you for that, also; I am the only Kristane who is known.”

“The rover has a horn I can sound to awaken people, so we won’t need to stop. We should go immediately.”

They dashed to the rover and Thornton started it up. Dwosunu came along as well. Thornton turned on the headlights, though they were barely necessary in the twilight, and headed out of the village following a dirt track that Jonu indicated. He

handed the cellular phone to Rudhisuru. “You know how to call the Mɛddoakwés operator?”

“Yes. They should put me through to Bɛllɛdha?”

“Exactly, and should send someone upriver to Yusdwoakwés. They can get there faster than we can.”

The dirt track took them over to the floodplain. The Yɛjismakwés was a “braided stream,” a river consisting of dozens of meandering channels covering a wide expanse of gravel and sand. In the semi darkness they could hear the roar of water coming down the plain, though it had not reached their point yet. Thornton drove down the dirt track along the top of the bank. They were staying ahead of the flood, so a few minutes later, with Rudhisuru watching behind, he dipped down into the floodplain where he could drive faster on the gravel.

Twenty-six kilometers from the central settlement of the Khermdhunas to Yusdwoakwés: they dashed the distance in twenty-five minutes, honking the horn incessantly, slowing to shout the warning whenever they approached a hamlet or village or even a sleeping herder with his flock. They were amazed how many flocks were actually asleep on the floodplain, but the gravel provided a clear view of any approaching predators. They didn’t see all of the herders, but in the still night the horn was heard over a long distance; most herders they passed were awake, alert, and curious.

The villages were mostly on the south side of the river, but there were a few on the north side as well, requiring that they zigzag a bit. When they reached the junction of the two waters—which was what “Yusdwoakwés” meant—they had to cross one more time to reach that small town, which was on the north bank. Their honking had

awakened many and they delivered their warning with five minutes to spare. Then a wave surged down the valley, covering everything in a foam of water, dirt, icebergs, and debris, pooling where the river turned to enter the gluba and flow southward toward Belledha.

“Did you ever get a warning from Belledha?” Thornton asked a man standing near the rover, watching the roiling water in the dim twilight, supplemented by a nearly full but low Skanda.

“No,” he replied.

“Is there a dirt track going upriver on this bank?”

“Yes, honored. It is not as good as the one on the southern side, though.”

“We won’t be able to cross anyway,” said Pédrú. “Let us wait.”

“You are welcome at my house, even the Kristanu,” the man said. “We are very grateful for the warning.”

“Thank you for your hospitality,” replied Pédrú.

“This has been quite a night,” Thornton said to Pédrú.

“Indeed. Our relations among ourselves are beginning to deteriorate just as our relations with the outside world are improving. I guess that is to be expected.” Pédrú looked at the torrent. “This is a terrible test sent by God.”

“I think the army can destroy the ice dam with explosives once or twice a year and keep the floods small,” replied Thornton. “But we may have to prevail on them to do so.”

[May 24, 2006; reread and edited 5/25/13, 8/5/17, 11/7/24]

181.

Kostekhéma

Thornton gave the outcrop a whack with his rock hammer. He had to be careful; a real rock hammer was made of special hardened steel that could split rocks without spalling off steel splinters, and his Éra-made rock hammer was not so sophisticated. He picked up the piece and looked closely with his hand lens.

Dumuzi was impressed by the show of professionalism. “What do you see? Any problems?”

Thornton barely suppressed a smile. He wasn’t trying to show off, but he realized that Dumuzi, having no idea what geology was, had no idea what he was doing. He looked at Amos, who gave him an ambiguous look.

“No, Honored, no problem. I wasn’t looking for a problem, actually, just looking at the kind of rock up here on the ridge crest.”

“What kind is it?”

“This is the most common, typical type of highland rock. We call it *metakondrita*; metachondrite. This world originally consisted of a grayish-brown rock made of nodules of sand to gravel-sized pieces of rock. Then the interior heated up, water and gasses came out, and lava came out. This sample was cooked by hot mineral-rich water escaping from the interior and consequently is filled with a lot of crystals, usually in sheets that formed in cracks. In other areas the metachondrite was cooked to a high temperature by lava. The lava, when it came out, made the blackish rock we call *basalta*, basalt, and the *basalta* often has chunks of *metakondrita* in it as well.”

“It’s a good, solid foundation for the temple,” said Amos, returning to practical matters.

“Good, that’s what I want to be sure of. It will be a heavy structure.”

“I saw the picture in the newspaper. Very impressive.”

“So impressive, they are expanding the temple to Esto of Light,” said Dumuzi. He seemed pleased he had forced an expansion of the city’s temple. “Lord Kristoféru gave us excellent advice when he said we should seek a permit to build the temple. The hearings were loud, but productive.”

“It’s always better to be called names in public, than only in private,” said Amos. “Because those with prejudice look like fools.”

“When there is a newspaper to report their statements and give our reply, anyway,” pointed out Dumuzi. “We’ll break ground next week.”

“You’re moving fast,” said Amos. He pointed to a pinnacle of rock in the middle of the temple site about five meters high. “How will you remove that? Sledgehammers?”

“I suppose. A few men can demolish it in a day or two.”

“Why don’t you ask the army to blow it up? It’d be faster. The crew that goes to the Dwobergone copper pit every week is stationed right here in town. Ask Aisu, he’ll have to ask the army and that might take a few days, then I suspect they’ll blast it and charge you twenty dhanay.”

“That’s how much it’ll cost the other way.” He nodded mischievously. “Alright, good idea. Either they accept our request or look like bigots.”

“Don’t tell them it was our idea!” added Thornton.

“No, of course not. I know how to respect my friends. Thank you for coming at this late hour. I hope I haven’t delayed your supper.”

“Oh, no,” replied Amos, though they were missing supper at the time. Thornton turned to his son Jalalu, a bit over three, and took the hand lens back, though the boy insisted on keeping the rock.

“So, will he be a geologist, like his dad?”

“I want to be!” said Jalalu, surprising Dumuzi, who was used to children staying silent in front of adults.

“We’ll see,” said Thornton. That also surprised Dumuzi, who expected a man to want his son to follow in his footsteps. “He’ll have a chance to come with me tomorrow. We’re going to Kostekhéma.”

“I see you just came back from the northern basin! Not much rest.”

“Not much. We were stuck on the wrong side of the flood for almost two days. But at least no one died.”

“I heard six people were killed.”

“Yes, south of Belledha. But none were killed in the northern basin. There were a dozen or more herders and their animals sleeping near the river and we warned all of them; they all scrambled to safety. And when we finally got back to Khermdhuna, we found that the rest of the geology team had gotten the work done and had even gone back to Belledha on a passenger bus!”

They headed down the rough slope to the back of Dumuzi’s house. “So, are any members of the Mennea clan planning to be in Melwika this summer?” asked Dumuzi.

“We’ll all be here for about half the summer,” said Amos. “May and I will be here the first summer term and in Ora the second term; she’ll be teaching English translation and I’ll be helping with a new 200-horsepower steam engine and its application in road building and construction. Ora makes the really heavy equipment; Mēlwika turns out smaller, mass-produced engines. Thornton and Lébé are away the first summer term and back the second.”

“Tutane backcountry, with a clinic and the census,” Thornton added.

“Ah, finishing that up. And the Lord?”

“Here the first term and in Néfa the second; mom will be in Mēddwoglubas the second term,” replied Thornton. “Lua will be with the clinic accompanying the royal party about half the time. Behruz will be here, except to teach chemistry in Tripola the second term.”

“And you have a lot of students?”

Amos nodded. “Éra now has 400 teachers, many with almost no training, and all of them plan to take a course or two. Some are signing up for one course here and another at another génadema where one of us is teaching. We’ll be very busy.”

“Good luck, and thank you again.” Dumuzi extended his hands to both of them. Then they parted and everyone headed home.

“Boy, he asked a lot of questions,” said Thornton.

“Dumuzi’s a shrewd man,” replied Amos.

“He asks, but won’t answer.”

“No, not necessarily. May told me the Sumis have agreed to a big article in the *Melwika Nues* about Arjdhura. I think they’ve discovered the value of getting public opinion on their side. They’re emphasizing the economic benefits.”

“And what are they really up to?”

Amos smiled. “Well, if I were them, I’d look at a map of the world and note that there’s a lot more unoccupied land off of Sumilara than on it, and if they don’t want to be overwhelmed, they have to reestablish themselves on the mainland.”

“That makes sense. And they’re smart people.”

“Very smart.”

The three of them walked home, where everyone but Chris sat at the dinner table. Chris came in a half an hour later, his shirt soaked from sweat. “Chris, you’ll catch a cold that way!” exclaimed Liz, when she saw him.

“Cold? I was roasting hot, that’s why I’m covered with sweat. And the shirt’s mostly dry now. I’ll stink, but I’ve got to eat and drink before I wash!” He sat at the table and filled his plate with rice, vegetables, and beef.

“How did the land look?” asked Amos.

Chris smiled. “It’s prime agricultural land; almost flat, but with a slight slope toward the river; rich; not salinated; the soil’s a dark brown but it may have been black once; and the old Sumi irrigation ditches are still visible. From Béranta to Ornakwés, along the road that runs along the irrigation canal at the edge of the valley, it is 8.5 kilometers, and from the road and canal downhill to the river is 2.5 kilometers. I’m buying a piece that runs along the road for about 5 kilometers, starting about 1.7

kilometers from each town center, and running 1.5 kilometers downhill toward the river; 7.2 square kilometers altogether.”

“And for twenty thousand, it’s a steal,” said Thornton.

Chris looked at his son sharply. “Not necessarily. If you can’t get any farmers, the land is useless. If I can fill it with farmers, and they yield the equivalent of 15 bushels of wheat per agri, and pay me  $1/12^{\text{th}}$  that amount for twenty harvests, that’s 300 dhanay; not a bad return on an investment of 10 dhanay per agri. We’re talking about 600,000 dhanay of return. But those are a lot of assumptions.”

“Who will you get to run the grange?” asked Liz.

“I’m going to ask Snékwu. He’s from down there. We’ll have one grange for the whole piece of land, even if it covers two townships. The first building will go in Ornakwés, the second in Béranta. We have a lot of farmers in our grange from the area, and a lot have cousins or brothers or even sisters who have come to Məlwika, but can’t get any land. So the pitch will be: let your cousin lease your land here and go carve out a new farm for yourself closer to home. That will give them security and a new opportunity. Or, of course, some of the farmers there will be the cousins who’ve come here.”

“How will you get them to leave magical Məlwika, though?” asked Liz.

“Good question. It’ll cost us a lot of money, I think. The land’s 20,000; surveying will add a few hundred. The tractors and equipment are another 20,000, but we’ll get that back from grange fees. The grange buildings will cost 5,000. There’s Snékwu’s salary—3,000—and the salary of an accountant to keep track of everything, 2,000 more. The granges will also have to serve for a while as post office, bus stop, bank branch,

store, and clinic. The grange will have to pay farmers 100 dhanay to clear irrigation canals, and that'll give them the money they need to live until the first harvest. And we'll need schools in Ornakwés and Béranta by fall; small one-room schools at first. That's another 3,000. The Lords have agreed to pay the salary of the teachers and will pay for high school students to go to Ejnopéla. We'll have to subsidize daily bus service to and from Melwika for a while, so people can get back and forth easily with farm tools and such. But if the first harvest is 15 bushels per agri and we get our twelfth and the grange gets its twelfth, that's 60,000 dhanay altogether, more or less the amount we have to invest. After that, we're making a profit."

"But I'm sure it won't go that smoothly the first time," said Behruz.

"I'm sure, also. But I'll be going down there one day a week for some time to make sure everything happens right. It's the only way. The land lies at a latitude of 15 degrees north and the local farmers say frost can come in Génmènu, so we have one month to get wheat into the ground, two months for some vegetables. That means all of our grange's spare equipment has to go down there, and as many of our drivers as possible, and some farmers to serve as paid workers. But the Ménwika grange is supportive."

"Well, don't overdo it, father," said Lua. "That's what I would worry about."

"No, I'm having the time of my life! I love to organize something like this. If it works, I may ask the Réjé for the next township downstream!"

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Two days later, a mobile clinic and the geological survey set out at dawn for Kostèkhéma with Prince Méméjékwu. The Mennea family's house trailer went along as well, to house

Lua and her two sons, Léb  and Thornton and their two kids, a nanny, and a cook. Rather than ride with the geologists in the rover, Thornton stayed with his family.

The trip to Gordha was routine; a fast roll across riverine pastures and short-grass prairie that used to be semiarid brushland. Beyond the central settlement of the M ghendres and the ridge to the east of them, the terrain underwent a transformation to mountain meadows, then a land with scattered trees and open forest. The road began up a series of crustal swells, waves frozen in the rock, ever higher and higher into cooler and cooler air. The Majakw s became wilder and roared louder as they went.

Thornton hadn't been up the road for about five years and was impressed by several changes. The road had also been widened and graveled better, allowing it to bear constant steam wagon traffic. Five years earlier, the road had been uninhabited after Gordha, but now it was dotted with houses and clusters of stone buildings. The M menegones and the K stones, two relatively small tribes, had partially moved to the road to take advantage of the daily steam wagons hauling ice from Kost kh ma, meteoritic nickel-iron from Gimutoba, and furs and leatherwork from everyone, in return for fresh vegetables, tropical fruits, machine-woven cloth and clothing, and steel tools.

The caravan of vehicles tooted their steam whistles as they passed each hamlet and kept on climbing. The sun was getting low in the west five hours and six time zones later when they finally reached the Spine,  ra's north-south mountain range that bisected the side facing away from Skanda. Except for glacial carving, the peaks were relatively round and gentle. The headwaters of the Majakw s lay in a lake at the very highest point in the Spine and Kost kh ma was built at the point where the river spilled from the lake. It was midsummer; the snow had melted, exposing alpine meadows, and the ice had left

the lake to reveal a deep gem-like blue to its depths. As the caravan rolled to a stop in the field between the village and the army fort on a pinnacle nearby, Thornton, Léb  , and the kids climbed out to admire the beautiful scene. The army garrison marched out its fort, uniforms pressed and neat, to salute the arriving crown prince, and the entire village turned out to see the show.

“An interesting mix of people,” observed L  b  . “The troops look Tutane or maybe from the southern shore, while the villagers are a mix of Tutane and everyone else.”

“This is a place of exile,” noted Thornton. “Kw  teru and the other Sumis are here.”

“I remember.”

Just then Lua stepped out of the mobile clinic. “Come on, Thor,” she said. “We’ve got to attend the audience.”

“I know, I’m coming.” Thornton hitched his rock hammer onto his belt and kissed L  b   and the kids, then followed his sister over to the Crown Prince’s trailer.

M  m  j  kwu had come with two mobile trailers, an armored steam wagon carrying a dozen servants and bureaucrats with a detachment of twenty soldiers riding on its roof, and a steam car pulling a trailer for the census team. It was substantially the same arrangement that had visited the southern tribes before the Grand Court. Since they were parking outside an army fort, there was no need to form a defensive square out of the various vehicles; they parked side by side instead. Two men were already busily snaking a power line from one steam tractor—which had an alternator and headlights and therefore was making electricity—to the Prince’s mobile headquarters. The Prince also had one of the new radios that allowed him to connect to the world’s growing telephone network.

Meméjékwu exited his trailer and sat on a grand chair watching the parade of the soldiers. They stopped before him and the commander, Sterékwu, came forward.

“Welcome to Kostékhéma, Your Majesty! The soldiers are ready for your inspection!”

“Thank you, Colonel.” The prince rose to inspect them, saluting as he went, even joking with a few older soldiers. Then he returned to the chair with Sterékwu at his side. The Colonel beckoned forward three dignitaries: the headman of Kostékhéma, Mitrubéru; Lord Modobéru of the Késtones and Lord Ornkordu of the Ghéslonges. Then the Prince beckoned the two Menneas forward. “This is Dr. Lua,” he announced. “She has come with a small hospital on wheels. She is here to fix people’s teeth, provide them with eyeglasses to improve their eyesight, and help them with their ills and pains. There will be no charge to anyone to come to her and her caring helpers; the costs will be borne by the crown.”

He paused. The villagers heard this and applauded. The army had sent Doctor Béndhu to Kostékhéma twice, and a tiny number could read the newspapers that arrived every week, so they knew about the new medicine. “We will be here for a week,” he continued. “And the clinic will be here the entire time, so you have six days to visit. After that, we will travel farther east, to the lands of the Géndoné and Ghéslongé, to visit those tribes and bring them health.”

That startled Sterékwu and the Ghéslongé Lord. The crowd was surprised as well; people turned to neighbors to murmur comments. The army had not ventured farther east for a century, let alone a prince.

Sterékwu leaned close to the Prince. “Your Majesty, the Royal Road has surely disappeared into the forest by now. It has not been maintained since the days of Géslékwes the Great.”

“Then Colonel, I suggest you deploy your men and some hired workers to repair it, because we have vehicles that need to get through,” Mëméjékwu replied in a whisper. He turned to the crowd. “Tomorrow morning I will tour the village, and then I will be available for personal audiences. There will be work to do at crown expense, starting tomorrow. Tomorrow afternoon there will be a demonstration of the armored steam wagon and its capabilities and parts of it will be available for anyone to tour it. In the evening there is to be a great feast for everyone. Kostékhéma is neglected no longer.”

That created a cheer. The Prince turned to Sterékwu. “Let us go into the fort, to your office. Lord Ornkordu, please come. Lord Modobéru, you are welcome.” He turned to Thornton. “Geologist, please come as well.”

Thornton was surprised by the invitation and nodded. The Prince seemed irritated by him, perhaps because they were close in age. Mëméjékwu rose and led Sterékwu and the others toward the main gate. The garrison marched in behind them.

The fort was a great pile of black stone mortared with white cement, its outer walls eight meters high and four thick. They enclosed a rocky pinnacle, so the gate was immediately followed by a steep ramp up to a long, narrow plaza that circled the fort. From the plaza Sterékwu directed them into the inner building through a heavy iron doorway and they climbed stairs toward the top of the pinnacle, which was completely enclosed. The fort housed 250 soldiers, their families—only another 250, since soldiers could not marry until they completed ten years of service—fifty horses, and a great

quantity of provisions. Thornton wondered whether it had ever been attacked, but didn't dare ask. He was surprised by the number of electric light bulbs illuminating dark corridors.

Sterékwu directed them through another set of doors and they entered his quarters at the top of the central tower. His wife was startled by the guests and after greeting them, disappeared into a back room. "Let us go to the top," said Méméjékwu, so Sterékwu led them up the last stairs to the open top of the tower.

They walked around the edge, looking out over the lake and village, admiring the alpine scenery and the snow covered peaks. A glacier descended from the southern peak and stopped just short of the lake shore; they could see the gravel road to it quite distinctly and a crew chopping up the glacier and transferring the ice to a waiting steam wagon. A battered road led along the northern shore of the lake, eastward, then descended toward the forests along Long Lake.

Prince Méméjékwu suddenly turned to the four of them. "Last month the army high command met to review its deployments and future plans. Kostekhéma was the center of much of the discussion. Its strategic importance was questioned by some; it is remote and its potential for pacifying unruly tribes was questioned. The road and the ice operation have brought a constant flow of visitors, so it is no longer adequate as a place of exile. Furthermore, there are still two tribes that are not really integrated into the kingdom: the Ghéslonε and Géndonε." The Prince paused to look at Ornkordu, who was not pleased by the drift of the conversation. "Therefore we have decided to create a new place of exile farther east, on the upper edge of the Long Valley. This new place of exile will have a garrison and will have a good road with a utility line connecting it to

Kostekhéma. This fort will remain, but with half as many soldiers; the other half will be deployed at the new settlement.” He turned to Ornkordu. “Of course, we are counting on the cooperation of the eastern tribes.”

“Your Majesty, we are loyal to the crown,” replied Orngédu quickly, though he seemed to choke on the words.

“I have no doubt about that. Lord Ornkordu, whichever tribe that gets our new settlement and garrison will feel they have been occupied at first, but within a few years they will find themselves advancing over the other tribe. They will have a connection to the rest of the world that will take their sales out and bring in goods for them to purchase. They will have money. They will have schools and a clinic. Their people will live longer. They will have electric lights for nighttime. In short, the settlement and garrison will be a good thing.”

“But my Lord, it will also be a bad thing for Kostekhéma,” objected Sterékwu.

“There will be some adjustments. Perhaps someone can bring work here.”

“Mædhkordu and her ladies will have to make adjustments.”

“I suppose half the prostitutes will go to the new settlement, and the men will have less variety.” The Prince shrugged.

“How many exiles are here?” asked Modobéru.

The Prince looked at Sterékwu, who said, “About forty. They bring a lot of money here, though, because often they are wealthy.”

“Many of my people live here, and can’t live in the land of the Ghéslone,” added Modobéru.

“Kostekhéma is not going away,” reiterated the Prince. He turned to Thornton.  
“Geologist, I want your survey to explore the area between the Spine and the Long Valley, pole to pole, with great thoroughness. Take a month.”

“We will, Your Majesty. It will be faster if we have horses, and safer if we have some soldiers.”

“You will have all the horses you need.” Mëméjékwu turned to Ornkordu. “Who is your heir?”

“My son Ornanu, Your Majesty.”

“And he is good on a horse? He knows your lands?”

“Indeed to both, Your Majesty.”

“Then he should accompany the geological survey.”

“What is this ‘geological survey,’ Your Majesty?”

Mëméjékwu turned to Thornton for a reply. “We walk the land looking for ores, if we find them we determine their extent and potential wealth, we record the richness of the forest and the animal life, we gauge the fertility of the soil . . . this is information for your tribe *and* for the crown. You definitely want someone to accompany us who can give you a thorough report.”

Mëméjékwu was not pleased by that additional comment, and Ornkordu noticed.  
“Very well, Ornanu will come with you. Your Majesty, I understand that the crown has no intention to take land from us.”

“You are correct, Lord. Your land will remain your land. But if there are ores, you should plan to exploit them, lest we feel the need to do so.”

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## In the Land of the Ghéslonges

Fifteen horses, bearing the six-man geological survey, three guides, and their gear, rounded the last hill between them and Kostékhéma. It had been a long, hard, five-day trip down the Spine and back. Thornton looked at the distant town and thought about a warm bath, soft sheets to rest in, and his wife's arms.

They descended the hillside to the southern shore of the lake and headed westward along it until they came to the dirt road to the glacier. A moment later a steam wagon towing a small passenger trailer and a large freight container approached them, on its way to the glacier to fill up. Thornton looked at it as it slowed and was startled to see a familiar driver, who immediately slowed.

“Dhoru, my brother!”

“Mitru, what are you doing here?”

“I had to get away for the day and think; Diné and the kids are driving me crazy. I wanted some scenery and besides, I knew you and Lébé were up here. I'm dropping off an empty cargo container, hitching on a full one with ten tonnes of ice, and heading back to Melwika with the sun.”

“I suppose it'll be one long, four-hour sunset.”

“Exactly, six time zones in four hours. Say, can you ride with me? Someone else could lead your horse.”

“Sure.” Thornton dismounted and tied his horse to Rudhisuru's. The riders headed toward town; they headed toward the glacier.

“We’ll get to town about the same time as they, maybe sooner,” said Mitru, sending steam into the pistons. They started forward, slowly, smoothly accelerating. “I was hoping to see you all, and I don’t have much time.”

“Yeah, I wouldn’t want to go down the road in the dark.”

“This baby’s got headlights! It’s not so bad any more.”

“True. Well, I just got back from a long trip southward; we got much of the way down the Spine almost to the southern polar areas. We explored 120 kilometers down and back in five days.”

Mitru whistled. “Poor horses!”

“They are worn out.”

“Any good hunting down there?”

“Yes, because it’s so remote. We saw no sign of regular hunting in the southern Spine. It’s mostly alpine tundra—no trees, just short grass—and lots of big grazers, mastodons, caribou, Irish elk, mountain bison . . . you name it.”

“Minerals?”

“We found small deposits of copper, silver, and lead. Nothing commercial.”

“How was the weather?”

Thornton shook his head. “Wretched, we got rained on every day and even were snowed on once. It’s all blowing from the sea to the west and is dumped on the peaks.”

“I’m amazed how full the rivers are. Is there any chance I’ll want to run steam wagons farther east? I gather the Royal Road is unusable, but if the clinic and the Prince are going farther east, they’ll need to fix it up.”

“Exactly. There are two hundred soldiers from the garrison and I don’t know how many hired workers—at least as many—toiling away to open the road up, so the clinic and royal vehicles can get through. And frankly—this is confidential—there will probably be a new place of exile that’s more remote than Kostekhéma.”

“With steam wagons, if there’s a road, nothing is remote. Sounds like I’ll have to expand operations out here, at some point.” He slowed as he approached the trailer full of ice, then stopped next to it. He and Thornton hopped out to disconnect the empty trailer, then Mitru pulled back the tarp covering the ice and inspected it. It glowed with the intense blue typical of glacier ice. “Yeah, it’s full.”

“Too bad we can’t get some to the clinic,” said Thornton. “After arriving here they found they couldn’t buy ice in the market!”

Mitru laughed. “Of course not, no one here can afford an ice box! We can unload some at the clinic.” He climbed back into his seat and drove forward, then backed up until Thornton signaled that the hitch was lined up. He stopped, jumped out, and they attached the trailer of ice. Once they jumped back into the passenger cab, he engaged the steam engine again. They started off really, really slowly. “Yeah, that’s ten tonnes, alright,” Mitru said, commenting on the slow acceleration. He pulled a lever to drop an extra charge of coke into the firebox.

“When will you switch to a twenty tonne trailer on this run?”

Mitru shook his head. “I’ll need a bigger engine on these mountain roads to do that, and dad doesn’t want me to buy engines from Ora. I wish he’d make a bigger engine. Maybe next year. Steam cars are such a rage! It’s ridiculous. But we’re laughing all the way to the bank.”

“How much?”

“Well, we managed to make ten by the Grand Court and they sold for nine thousand each on average, and we have orders for ten more at ten each and thirty more interested. Oh, and here’s the really latest news. Remember how I hauled 6,000 people to Isurdhuna last year for pilgrimage? Well, your dad suggested I print special tickets; twenty-five percent discount if people buy them a month in advance. That way I can predict demand better. I printed ten thousand and they’re all sold out!”

“Really?”

“Yes, at an average of 2.5 dhanay each! I’m printing another ten thousand tickets, we’re putting ads in the newspapers telling people to bring their own food, I’m scrambling to find every spare passenger trailer I can, we’re planning runs all night from Néfa . . . it’s big.”

“Did you tell the folks in Isurdhuna what to expect?”

“No, they haven’t been very helpful. I figured they’d read it in the newspaper.”

“Maybe you should warn them. If they’re prepared, people will have a better experience and will go again.”

“True. It was pretty crowded last year.”

“It was a crush! And the pilgrimage can only get bigger. They’re going to make a pile of money.”

“So will I. It’s time I came through and donated for the museum I’ve promised.”

They had finally gotten up a full head of steam and were flying along the dirt road at about forty kilometers per hour. The three kilometer run to town took five minutes and on the way they passed the weary horses of the geological survey. Mitru diverted from

the usual route to run up Kostekhéma's main street to the "Mitru Transportation" office; it was just about the only sign in the entire town, because everyone there knew where everything was and they couldn't read anyway. Across the street from Mitru Transportation was the only fancy, clean-looking building in town; it housed Mèdhkordé and her dozen whores upstairs and a fancy tavern downstairs. Mitru pointed. "By the way, they have great food."

"I haven't tried it."

"Well, don't unless Lébé's with you!"

They both laughed and Mitru headed up the street, took three lefts to go around a block, and then drove slowly down the busy main street to the plaza in front of the fort, which they reached at the same time as the survey. Mitru banked the fire in the firebox and hopped out for a quick visit. Thornton walked to his horse to get his gear, then followed.

Lébé and the kids rushed out of the trailer when they heard he was back. "You're here!" she exclaimed, running to him and giving him a big hug and kiss.

"I am." He kissed her an extra time, then yet again. Then he picked up the kids and talked to both of them, kissed them, and ended up holding Kalé, who was just a year old.

They started to walk to their trailer. "How was the trip?" she asked.

"Fascinating. The highest peaks are just south of here for about twenty kilometers; there are six of them and they're incredibly beautiful. They all have glaciers. Then the terrain gets lower and the Spine narrows and becomes alpine meadows full of

grazers. We got to about fifty south, then turned back. Very interesting land to explore. How's everything been here?"

"Pretty good. I've been taking the kids to the hot spring every day; my nose tells me that you should go before supper. They splash in the water and think this is the greatest place to visit ever. I've been talking to various native women and have followed up with interviews. I've collected a lot of good children's stories I had never heard before. And I have an interview tomorrow with, of all people, Medhkordé herself."

"Really?"

"Yes, she's quite a talker! Her ladies bathe at the hot spring every evening; I met her there when she showed up with them and everyone else had left! Believe it or not, I may write a story based on some of the things I've already heard; not to mention an article for the *Melwika Nues* about prostitution, but don't tell Medhkordé that."

He chuckled. "What about the language research?"

"That's been going well, also. The dialects up here have some very interesting old uses for words. I called May yesterday and she was fascinated. Skandu's taking me to see Kwéteru tomorrow; you should come along. But you may have a problem, because there's a Ghéslonu named Ornanu looking for you."

"Yes, son of Lord Ornkordu. He's supposed to accompany us on our trip through their lands."

"Well, he wants to set out right away. He's got four friends, too."

"They'll have to wait; I need a day to recover and organize my notes a little bit."

“Then there’s Okpétu; he telephoned a few hours ago to say he is taking off this afternoon, Melwika time, to fly all the way around the world. He should be flying overhead some time tomorrow. He’s photographing the lands east of here.”

“Yes, we need them to make a good map. The Prince has made it a priority; I suspect it’ll take much of the summer and other projects will be postponed.”

“It’s what; one quarter of the world? I guess it needs a good, thorough study. The Tutanés there are certainly interesting. I’ve never heard dialects like theirs before. They still use an instrumental case and a vocative case, and the nominal’s very different; they don’t use the six noun classes of standard Eryan practically at all. Rock is *ledhos* instead of *ledha* for example.”

“I was wondering about some of the things I’ve heard. I guess I’ll have to figure it out when I talk to Ornanu.”

“Who’s really Ornanos in their dialect, by the way! You go wash; you stink too much for me to talk to you. The clinic shower should be hot and it’s closer than the hot spring, which is full of prostitutes right now anyway. I’ll have tea with Mitru, then he’ll be on his way and we can eat with you. Lua will entertain you with stories, too. Their health here is pretty bad.”

“I bet. And . . . maybe we can have a romantic evening as well. . .”

“Perhaps not as romantic as you’d like; this is a bad time of the month for that.” She smiled. “Two kids are enough for now.”

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First thing the next morning, Skandu arrived to walk with them to Kwéteru/Rébu’s house.

“In some ways I admire him,” Skandu began. “He brought to the Sumis the concept of

génademas and all sorts of ideas. He was very young and didn't know much, though the other Sumi students in your génadema also knew some. But they took the knowledge and used it against the crown. And we saw the war that resulted. His disloyalty to Her Majesty greatly angers me. I am still not sure that sparing him was wise."

"How much harm can he do from here?"

"He writes letters. The army reads them all and lets some go through. We think some are getting through without our surveillance, too. He encourages sedition."

They stopped in front of the door of a stone building on Kostekéma's only street, other than alleys and nameless muddy stretches. Skandu opened the door and went up the stairs to the third floor. There he knocked on a door.

"Who is it?" came a voice which was not Rébu's.

"Skandu."

"Come in."

He opened the door and they stepped into a room crowded with papers and books. Thornton was startled to see so many books; he had no idea that Kostekéma had any books at all. Skandu was surprised as well. Another Sumi exile was sitting there, reading. He pointed farther back and said something to Skandu in Sumi. Apparently it was directions; Skandu headed back three rooms and turned right.

Rébu was sitting in a small, neat room on his mattress, a newspaper spread out before him. He had aged a lot over the last few years and looked forty rather than twenty-six. His beard had filled out considerably and was flecked by gray hairs. He wore comfortable machine-made clothes. He rose when he saw his guests and smiled grimly to Thornton.

“Dhoru; haven’t seen you in four years.”

“It’s good to see you again.” Thornton extended his hands and they shook.

“Lébé, it’s good to see you. I have your book of children’s stories.”

“It’s good to see you again.” They shook as well.

Rébu pointed to the floor and they all sat. Thornton looked around the spare room. It had one window with wooden shutters rather than glass and a very nice, expensive oil lamp standing on the floor. “I see you have a few amenities,” observed Thornton.

“Yes, though I wish we had a flush toilet. There’s an outhouse in the backyard.”

“I see you have a lot to read,” commented Skandu.

Rébu looked at him. “Indeed, we try to keep up with developments. We don’t want to become outdated or irrelevant.”

“I am very impressed by your Eryan dictionary,” said Skandu. “It’s an immense achievement. Work on the Sumi dictionary is continuing, too, and in the Ninurta Génadema they’re working on an Eryan-Sumi dictionary. Your chronology was groundbreaking as well. I spent a week in the Ninurta Library trying to fix it; I suspected you had not handled the overlapping reigns of a few kings properly. But in the end, I concluded you had handled the overlaps correctly.”

Rébu smiled. “That took a lot of work; there were several tricky spots. But then I look at the newspapers.” He picked up the copy in front of him. “And I see they have the date ‘624’ printed on them! It’s very gratifying.”

“It’s now too late to change the dating system, even if someone determines you made a mistake in your chronology,” commented Lébé. “You’ve changed the way we record events forever.”

“And ironically, we’ll never use that dating system on Sumilara,” said Rébu.

Skandu shook his head. “No, it is being used by the merchants and the government all the time.”

Rébu didn’t like to hear that.

“Are you reasonably comfortable here?” asked Lébé.

“As comfortable as you can be when five men are living on a thousand dhanay per year. The climate is wretched; this is as nice as it gets. The winter is bitter and we had five meters of snow last year. Sumi foods are incredibly expensive. We’re tired of eating venison with bread and milk all the time. And companionship is pretty limited.”

“Have you tried taking in students?” asked Skandu. “You have permissions to teach quite a few subjects. I bet the five of you could open quite a little génadema up here.”

“I doubt many people would be interested, or that the army would permit it.”

“The army would permit it,” said Skandu. “There’s a new policy toward the Tutane of encouraging development and integration. The policy toward the Sumi has changed gradually as well. As long as the génademas on Sumilara stay a few years behind the ones on the mainland, it is alright. Ninurta Génadema will be teaching chemistry this fall.”

“Well, those ‘few years behind’ summarize it all, doesn’t it? The Sumi must not be permitted to rise again.”

“Don’t be so sure. That policy can change, too, if the Sumi show loyalty to Her Majesty.”

“And why should we do that?”

“Because Sumilara cannot exist in isolation. The island is growing wealthy, and not because of independence; because of integration. The Réjé has spent a million dhanay on a new palace in the last two years; the army has spent the same amount on a new headquarters in Mæddoakwés. Do you know how much of that two million has been spent on Sumi furniture, Sumi tapestries, Sumi artisans to paint murals, Sumi stone cutters? It will astound you. It has astounded the army in Anartu.”

“Not to mention the six hundred Sumi who have settled in Melwika over the last year, and the town they’re building at the mouth of the Arjakwés that can house a thousand people,” added Thornton.

“That sounds like Dumuzi’s approach,” said Rébu. “There are always collaborators. I won’t deny that if we trade as equals with the Eryan, we will do well. That has always been the case. But if we are to be equals, we must govern ourselves. Until we have self-determination, we are simply enslaved people wearing fancy clothes.”

Skandu shook his head. “I don’t know what to say, Rébu. The crown’s position is very clear: Sumilara can develop and prosper. I suspect it will get more and more self government as well if it remains loyal. If anyone opposes that, they will be executed or, *if they are lucky*, they’ll be exiled to this Esto-forsaken place. You are actually one of the lucky ones, among the opposers.”

“I guess I should be grateful to my Queen, then,” he said, his voice dripping with sarcasm.

“I don’t want to debate you,” said Skandu. “It won’t change any minds. But I can offer you a deal. I’ll approach the army about you offering classes to the soldiers here. They need to read and write and use numbers; their sons do, too. You are qualified to do

it and the soldiers would have no choice to attend. The army can pay and you'll live much more comfortably."

Rébu eyed Skandu. "I'm not one to collaborate with the enemy army."

Skandu shrugged. "Suit yourself. I can see a lot of advantages to operating a génadema up here: a classroom, an office, plenty of paper, access to books, a chance to talk to a few other educated people, the chance to earn enough to marry and have a family. . ."

Rébu looked at him and said nothing.

"Think about it."

Rébu looked at Lébé. "So, the two of you have a child."

"Two," she replied, and she began to talk about Jalalu and Kalé. Thornton looked at Skandu, impressed by the man's cleverness. Skandu looked back at him sadly.

They switched to small talk about the family, Mēlwika, and Sumilara. Then Skandu rose to leave and the visit was over. They walked back to the house trailer. "He's tough," said Skandu. "And he's wasting his life. He thinks he's keeping himself relevant, but most people on Sumilara are forgetting the exiles."

"Teaching the soldiers here; that was a good idea."

"If he wants to be useful, to earn money, there are plenty of things he can do, even here. It's his choice. It's the choice of all the exiles."

They entered the trailer. The kids were with Lua's two and with Korudé, the nanny, in the back room. Thornton turned on the citizen's band radio while Lébé made tea for the three of them. He called Okpétu for a few minutes and thought he heard a faint reply, but wasn't sure. The radios didn't work as well during the day as at night.

They had tea and talked about various matters, then Skandu left. Thornton called Okpétu again; no response. He prepared to walk to the hot spring—which he had heard about but had not actually seen—when he heard someone knock on the door. He opened it and saw a tall young man wearing a leather tunic and pants, leather boots, and two feathers in his hair. His beard was fairly full and had a surprising amount of brown in it.

The man looked at him for a moment as well. They were both about the same height, build, and age, though their clothing spoke of radically different cultures.

“Are you Dhoru Ménnéa?” he asked.

“Indeed, I am. Are you Ornanos?” He used the Ghéslone dialect without thinking.

The man smiled. “Indeed, I am. You know our customs and speech?”

“No, only the way names are formed. Please, come in. This is my wife Lébé.”

“It is an honor,” he replied, nodding to her.

“It is an honor to meet you as well,” she replied, whether he expected a response or not, for Eryan women often remained silent.

Ornanu stepped inside and looked around, uncertain what to do. There was no customary mat for sitting on or a bench running along the wall, as in wealthier houses. Thornton pointed to a chair, then sat in one to demonstrate. Ornanu sat.

“You are welcome,” said Thornton. “Lébé, can you bring us tea?”

She nodded and Ornanu watched as she poured him tea in a cup and added a little sugar—she thought he’d like it better that way—stirred it, and handed it to him. He held it and stared while she prepared one for Thornton as well and handed it to him. He sipped. Ornanu sipped.

“It’s good?” asked Thornton.

“It is.” He seemed pleased and sipped again.

“This is not what we usually live in,” continued Thornton. “Our family has this because we travel a lot. My father, Lord Kristobéru of Mēlwika, goes to many cities, and my sister, Dr. Lua, travels to heal people.”

“Are you taking this on your ‘survey’?”

“No. The six of us just rode south along the Spine for three days, then back.”

“Whose hunting grounds? You were brave to do that.”

“We hired a Kaitere, a Késtone, and a Gédone from this village to accompany us.”

Ornanu nodded. “And what are you to do in the land of the Ghéslone?”

“Walk it from north to south and east to west, make a map of it, and find any useful ores. When we first came to Kostekhéma four years ago we were accompanied by two Dwobergone, and after watching us, they went to their lands and found a large deposit of copper ore. They are now mining it and selling copper. When we explored the area south of Ora we found a large deposit of silver that the local people are now mining.”

“Will we be able to mine our own wealth?”

“Correct, the Prince even said so to your father.”

“How do you know these ores?”

“We know them; that’s what we do. We’ve mapped about half of Éra. We will teach you what we know, as we go.”

He nodded. “When do we start?”

“Tomorrow morning. My men need to rest. My family wants to see me as well.”

“Very well. I suggest we go due east along the old Royal Road to our largest settlement, then head north along the edge of the Long Lake. There are other villages there; the people can take us to ores they know about. Then perhaps we should go up one or two of the rivers where there are other villages at higher altitudes. They will know of other deposits.”

Thornton nodded. “That sounds good.”

There was a lull in the conversation. Then there was a burst of static from the radio. “This is Okpétu calling Dhoru, over. Okpétu calling Dhoru, over.”

Ornanu was surprised. Thornton hurried over to the radio and answered. “Okpétu, we read you loud and clear! Where are you located?”

I’m about thirty kilometers east-southeast of Kostekhéma. Thornton, I’m caught in a very fast current and I’m scared to get out of it because the eddies along the edge are so fierce. It’s quite something. . . I must be moving about 150 kilometers per hour.” He had to stop and take breaths every few words.

“The aliens told us that when the rain is concentrated against the western shore, it’s because of fast atmospheric circulation. How high are you?”

“The altimeter reads 8,000 meters. I’m *very* high. I was gaining altitude just west of Néfa, going over the Snowy Mountains, when I got caught in it. I wanted to be sure I had plenty of altitude to get over the Snowys, handle the Long Lake, and then get over the Spine.”

“How’s your oxygen?”

“If I don’t move around I’m alright, but the air is *pretty* thin up here. And I’m freezing! I managed to get my coat on, but it’s really cold!”

Thornton looked around the room and spotted an army-issued pair of binoculars. He grabbed them, then picked up the c.b. radio, which was light and battery powered. “I’m going outside to look for you. Okpétu, you can’t stay in the jet stream much longer anyway, it’s carrying you westward too fast. You’ll pass beyond the sunrise terminator before you reach Mèlwika, and you can’t land in the dark.”

“I know, I’m scared of that, too!”

“Well, when you get closer to Kostekhéma, try to get out of the jet stream.”

Thornton was now outside. He put the radio down on the ground at a spot where he had a good view to the east and began to scan the sky, first with binoculars, then without, because they gave him too small a field of view. Fortunately, the sky was clear; the clouds usually started to build up in mid morning and they were a bit late today.

“What are you looking for?” asked Ornanu, intrigued.

“A *plétru*; it looks a bit like a white bird with long, straight wings. It’s still fifty or sixty *dèkent* from us, it’s very high, but the wings are about twenty *doli* long, so we should be able to see it soon. Okpétu is flying it.”

“A man, able to fly like a bird?”

“It’s a machine he controls; rather like our steam wagons.”

Ornanu ignored the incredulity of the information and started looking determinedly. In a few minutes he pointed close to the horizon. “Is that it?”

Thornton looked, used the binoculars, then nodded. “That’s him. You have good eyes.” He handed the binoculars to Ornanu who looked with surprise at the glider, then at the nearby mountain.

“These are quite useful; how do they work?”

“You’ll learn when you take a class in general science,” Thornton replied. He turned to the radio. “Dhoru to Okpétu: we’ve spotted you in the eastern sky. You’re moving pretty fast!”

“No kidding! I see the village pretty well now. I’ve been pretty busy piloting, but I have been snapping pictures as I go. Visibility is good. Okay, I’m going to try to get out of the current by losing some altitude. Here goes.”

Thornton put the binoculars to his eyes and he could see the result almost immediately; the glider clearly was getting buffeted about. It was quite dramatic to see the struggle with a distant invisible current because it made the current almost visible. “Whoa!” exclaimed Okpétu when a powerful blast turned him sideways and pitched the glider upward. He regained control. “Wow, that was a big one; I heard the wings creak!”

“Don’t snap them off!”

“No, she’s holding together. I’m down to 7800 meters now, descending gently . . . wow, that was another blast, it pushed me up twenty meters in a second . . . 7790. . . 7780. . .” He counted the meters off as he descended slowly, and soon the buffeting was noticeably less.

“Okpétu, it looks to me that you’ve slowed down.”

“Yes, I think I’m through the worst of it. I’m banking northward; I can still get some pretty good shots of the land east of the Spine.”

“What’s he doing?” asked Ornanu.

“Taking pictures,” replied Thornton. “It uses another device we made. Come, I’ll show you.” He led Ornanu back inside and pointed to a photograph. “That’s Lébé, my wife, our son Jalalu, and our baby daughter Kalé.”

“You can make things like this?” he was surprised.

“Yes, literally in a snap. Okpétu has a picture making machine; a *kamértru*. He moves something and it takes a picture. We’ll use them to make a map.”

“So, your survey isn’t the only spies; Her Majesty can see things from a bird-like machine.”

“The plétru can give us pictures of big areas; they will tell us where rivers, mountains, and houses are. The survey can actually look at the trees, the rocks, the soils. The map will be for anyone. We will make a copy for your father.”

“He will want one!”

They went back outside and talked to Okpétu more. Once out of the current, he used his altitude to fly across the prevailing wind, making a big circle to the north, rising slightly as he flew eastward into the winds to photograph the northern edge of the Long Lake, losing altitude again as he flew southward parallel to the shore, snapping aerial pictures of villages and pastures, then gaining altitude on the rising air as he approached the Spine. He flew over the Spine quite a bit south of Kostekhéma and turned northward again to photograph the peaks of the central range from the west. He looped eastward again about forty kilometers north of Kostekhéma and then turned south and westward again. Two hours after the conversation began, about noontime, Okpétu flew low over Kostekhéma. “Thanks, Dhoru,” he said. “It’s strange to say this, but I feel less afraid doing all this when I can talk to someone! I wouldn’t want to crash in the mountains up here; no one would find me for weeks!”

“I understand, Okpétu. By the way, I can hear a lot of shouting in the village, so I think everyone has spotted you! We have some explaining to do!”

“I bet. I should be easy to see, I’m only a thousand meters up. I’ve got some good pictures of Kostekhéma too, by the way. I don’t have much film left, so I think I’ll head straight home. I’m not too worried about photographing the lands west of here. I’ve already got good coverage as far as Gordha and I know I can take off from Melwika early in the morning and get as far as here by late afternoon, local time, then ride the winds back and take pictures as I go. The hard part is the eastern slopes of the Spine; I’m not sure I can get there from Melwika in daylight without flying all the way around. I don’t want to do that again, I’m exhausted!”

“I bet; you pulled an all-nighter. We need to get you a compact, reliable steam engine, so you have a proper airplane.”

“That’s the plan for this fall; the army has authorized the work if the harvest stays good. It should be a lot safer. I won’t have to rely on updrafts!”

“Stay safe, Okpétu. Bye.”

“Over and out.”

Thornton closed the connection. Ornanu had been joined by his five companions about half an hour earlier; they had all listened incredulously to the voice of a man, supposedly in the sky, coming from a little box. They had also seen the glider fly overhead; the whole village was still agitated by the sight.

Lébé and Lua came out of the trailer just then. “All of you are warmly invited to eat with us,” Lébé said.

The men followed the two women to the space between the house trailer and the clinic trailer, where the clinic’s staff were eating. Extra food had been prepared for the

Ghéslonés, who accepted it gratefully. Korudé brought the four children. “They’re yours?” Ornanu asked Thornton, forgetting the photograph.

“Two of them; Jalalu and Kalé,” replied Thornton, pointing. “Jordanu and Rostamu are Lua’s, and her husband, Behruz. He isn’t here; he’s at home.”

Ornanu nodded, digesting the information. “Fine, healthy children,” he said. “My wife and I have two, also.”

“Boys or girls?”

“One of each, like you. Our daughter is nine. We’ve had five children, actually.”

“Life is hard on children.”

“It seems that Esto takes them for a special purpose known only to Him.”

“I hope our clinic can help your children,” said Lua, eating nearby. “Children do not need to die, except rarely.”

“Then I hope you can help, also,” said Ornanu.

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The geological survey set out at dawn the next morning, heading eastward down the Royal Road that, a century earlier, Gésélékwes Maj had cleared all the way to the Long Lake. A week of work by five hundred men had been sufficient to open it again to wagons; trees had been removed from the roadbed, a few smaller bridges had been replaced, and other brooks were crossed by simple, shallow fords. After leaving Kostekhéma, the road began to descend to the headwaters of the Kostasuma or “Spine Stream”—so named because it provided the best route to the pass at Kostekhéma—then followed the northern side of the river valley eastward. Soon it descended below the treeline and the forest grew thicker and taller until the road wound through dense

coniferous forest with treetops fifty meters or more above the dark, damp ground. It was Éra's most impressive forest; the eastern slopes of the Spine had always received steady rainfall. Except for some jungle between Ora and Néfa, Thornton had never seen such dense forest.

They passed work crews every few kilometers who were fixing up some part of the road. They stopped often, much to Ornanu's irritation; he wanted them to get to his village in one long ride. But that proved impossible with the stops. They rode fifty kilometers that first day, an impressively long distance, and camped the first night at the village of Altagras, "High Fields," located at the junction of the Gherodhesruma, "Cave Stream," the largest tributary of the Kostesruma. The stream was so named because it flowed through a cave—probably a lava tube—part of the way. By the time he had reached the tributary, Thornton realized that all rivers on the eastern slopes were named with *sruma*, "stream," rather than ending in *akwés*, "water," or *isér*, "river," as was the custom on the Eastern and Western Shores respectively. Altagras, at an altitude of 2,400 meters, was the highest Ghéslone settlement with agriculture; they raised rye, peas, onions, beans, carrots, and beets in the cold, damp climate. Goats and pigs ate the remnants from the fields; Thornton was surprised by the pigs, which were rare in most Eryan settlements.

They set out at dawn the next morning to continue down the Kostesruma, which was now flowing through flatter plateau forests. About noon the river began to descend into a gorge that soon grew very deep; they were nearing the dropoff to the Long Valley. When the river bent sharply southward, the forest abruptly ended at an ancient stone wall. They passed through a collapsed gate and entered farmers' fields. A rocky pinnacle

covered by the ruins of a fort rose a hundred meters to the northeast; a large village was visible a few kilometers to the southeast. Ornanu pointed at the latter. “Moruagras; our largest town. The dropoff to the Long Lake gives us protection on the east and Kotesuma canyon blocks the southern and western approaches. The flat area of fields can be reached only from this side; the north, and the connection is only a few hundred doli wide.” He pointed eastward where they could see the fields ended, though they could not see the dropoff. “And this entire area is surrounded by a wall that was once built by giants. Hence the name *morua*, ‘island.’”

“How many people live here?”

“I don’t know; no one counts.”

They walked over to the dropoff and climbed up a pile of rocks to the top of the ancient wall to look at Long Lake. The wall yielded to a cliff that fell a hundred meters or more, then was replaced by steep slopes of talus covered by forest and occasional natural terraces until one saw the old high water mark. From there down, the trees were dead, brown sticks coated by a layer of silt. The lake level had fallen almost five hundred meters in four years, so the edge of the Long Valley for as far as the eye could see to the north and south was dominated by a brown band of dead trees. The other side of the valley, sixteen kilometers to the east, looked like a giant bathtub ring.

They continued to the settlement. The houses of Moruagras, like Altagras, were made of distinctively carved wood; as they entered, a team of men was carving a long, relatively thin log into a series of mythic figures that would decorate the eaves of a new house. The thatched roofs were steep and had wide overhangs to protect the buildings

from deep snow and heavy rains. The muddy streets were full of people and animals: cows, chickens, and horses, with barns and pig sties next to most houses.

When they arrived, the entire village turned out to watch them. Thornton guessed that about a thousand people lived in Moruagras. A very large house and an impressively carved wooden temple dominated the center of the village. Ornanu led them inside the house to his father, where they ate roast pig and fish—trout, Thornton thought—with peas and bread. The Ghéslone described what they had seen over the previous few days to Ornkordu and a few elders.

Lord Ornkordu listened very carefully to descriptions of radios, gliders, photographs, and electric lights. He had seen the lights. He asked Thornton and Rudhisuru—the geologist wore his army uniform so everyone knew he was a military officer—for occasional clarifications, scratching his beard thoughtfully.

“What is this new world that you have suddenly sent my people into?” he asked them, when the descriptions were over. “I wish we could just kill all of you and pretend the rest of the world doesn’t exist. But I have seen the army’s longbows and hand grenades. And besides, we need this stuff.” He reached over to his chest, opened it, and pulled out a handful of silver coins. “The world revolves around dhanay, doesn’t it?”

“If the world revolves around dhanay, let us create a world where everyone has some,” replied Thornton. “And let us make sure that dhanay do not dominate everything. People need to make a living, but if they are sick they must be healed, even if they have no dhanay.”

“Healing; you dheghéme are good with that,” conceded Ornkordu, using the old word for “gedhéme.”

“Father, Dhoru promises that we can have a copy of the map and survey book,” said Ornanu. “The knowledge won’t just belong to the Réjé and exist on the shelf of a génadema library.”

“I will make a copy for you,” reiterated Thornton.

“What good will a book do for us, when we cannot read? Even the map will be of little use.”

“Then send a few young men to our génadema to learn. They can return here and open a school to teach everyone, especially the children. The génadema extends its knowledge to everyone; we will send teams of students to a place to offer classes for a few weeks or a month, and we will offer suggestions about how a village can earn money. Mitru Transportation wants to start running its steam wagons down the Royal Road to here. Soon you will have contact with the entire world.”

“And again I ask, what is this new world that you have suddenly sent my people into? For now you tell me the world will start coming here every week!”

“You can tell the steam wagon not to come.”

“Dhanay.” Ornkordu raised a few. “Dhanay. The steam wagon has to come, so the new world has to come, also.”

“Father, let us make the best of the change, at least,” said Ornanu.

“By all means, let us make the best of it. If we can.” He stroked his beard. “We will call a gathering of the elders. The clinic will be here in a few days, as will the Prince. We will be able to ask many questions then. Ornanu, take the survey northward along the valley rim, then inland and back here via Altagras. That will take about seven or eight

days. You, Dhoru, Rudhisuru, and the others will make a report to the council. We don't need to be able to read if we can hear it."

[May 29, 2006; reread and edited 5/25/13, 8/5/17, 11/8/24]

183.

Land Rush

It was going to be another scorcher of a day. Chris rose an hour before the sun—Skanda was full and bright and the sky was already glowing a bit—and took a shower with cool water. He went downstairs and turned on a strong fan to circulate cool air over a ton of ice and around the first floor and the courtyard, which kept the lower part of the house comfortable during the day for two dhanay per week. He was making coffee and reviewing a checklist of things to work on when he heard the sound of a rover drive up. The front doors opened, and Thornton drove into the courtyard.

Chris hurried over and was relieved to see his son getting out slowly, not quickly. “What brings you back here?”

“I’m just here for two hours. I drove a geologist—Dwosunu—here because he’s got to catch the morning bus to Tripola. His father’s gravely ill. There were two nurses who wanted to come home too, so I drove them, and I have to drive two replacements back; I just left the instructions at the hospital. And I need—”

“Is everything alright?” asked Liz, sticking her head out of her bedroom door opening onto the second story balcony.

“Yes, just fine, I was telling dad I had to help with an exchange of personnel, and I need to get copies of some aerial photos Okpétu took about ten days ago. Ornanu and his friends are going back to Moruagras and I promised them a few pictures as examples of what we can do.”

Liz came down the stairs. “Can you stay for breakfast?”

“Yes, then I have to run to the geology and cartography lab and the hospital. If I hit the road by 9 bells, I’ll get to the clinic before sunset. I got here in three hours!”

“Wow; is that safe?” Liz asked.

Thornton shrugged. “The road’s not bad and it’s 160 kilometers, so I averaged a bit over fifty kilometers per hour. I’ll take a little longer going back; it’s uphill.”

The three of them sat and Chris poured coffee. “I guess it’s time for you to have an early lunch anyway, so if you eat and stay in daylight all day, you won’t get any jet lag. So, how was the survey of the Ghéslonε lands? Other than a few shouted transmissions that were mostly garbled, we haven’t heard anything.”

“The radios aren’t strong enough to work over such a distance. I guess the army and Amos need to design a stronger transmitter, or they need a radio at Kostεkhéma able to connect to the phone lines. It was a pretty routine exploration; a lot of riding, note taking, and some sample taking. They have incredible timber; trees sixty meters tall are common. The road needs improvement, but once that’s done, high quality timber can be exported. They also have iron ore; not meteoritic nickel-iron like the Kaitεrε, but hematite.”

“Good, Miller needs a new source. The bog iron supply at the upper end of Moritua is just about exhausted.”

“There are other sources that are closer, but he should encourage development of several sources anyway. The Ghéslonε already know a lot of their ore resources; they showed us their copper mine. It can produce a lot more. They have a small silver deposit, too, and some scattered gold. They don’t have much, except a lot of land.”

“How do they live?” asked Liz.

“The land near the edge of the dropoff to the Long Valley is 2,200 meters above the sea; high, but they can grow wheat, rye, peas, and some vegetables. They’ve cleared pasture land for horses and cattle and they burn some of the forests almost every year to keep down the underbrush and open the canopy a bit, so they have excellent game. I figure there are about 1,500 Ghéslonε; a thousand at Moruagras, 200 at Altagras, and three smaller villages either along the valley rim or upstream from the rim by a dozen kilometers.”

“How did they take to the clinic?”

“Slowly. There was no business the first day and a half, then people began to show up with their bad teeth and their sick kids, and the clinic ended up staying two extra days. Prince Meméjékwu had to stay two extra days anyway because the Ghéslonε elders gathered to argue with him, then bargain with him. He demanded current and back taxes; the Ghéslonε haven’t paid more than a token for decades. They want to be left alone, but they want a better living, too. They finally agreed to send five hundred pigs, a hundred cattle, and one hundred horses to Kostékhéma at the end of the summer for back taxes and in return the crown is paying them a thousand dhanay to gravel the road and replace the bridges. The crown will offer earth-moving equipment to the project to get the Ghéslonε used to them.”

“That’s seventy thousand dhanay; a steep fine,” commented Chris. “You said pigs, huh? They have a lot of them?”

“They do; most families keep two or three adult pigs and raise fifteen or twenty piglets every year for meat. They are let free in the woods in the summer and fall to fatten up; there are a lot of acorns and other forest foods.”

“We should buy ham and other pig products from them; they need an export and we need the meat. What about the clinic? Did the Prince make any promises?”

“It’s supposed to come back every two months except during the winter. The tribe has agreed to send six young men to génadema; probably two here and four to Gordha, which is cheaper.”

“Good. Did the Prince promise electricity or phones?”

“Actually, he did, because he wants to move the exiles from Kostekhéma to a more remote spot, and he asked the survey to recommend a spot. We recommended an old fortress on a pinnacle about four kilometers from Moruagras; close enough to benefit the village and far enough so they don’t feel invaded. The Prince accepted the idea.”

“You’ve got to tell the Ghéslone to watch the lake and be sure to get a claim on the valley floor when it starts to dry out. That valley will have some of the best land on Éra.”

“An area they call ‘the bench’ is now drained; it’s half way down. They plan to put cattle on it as soon as it has grass.”

“What about the Géndone?” asked Liz.

“We haven’t gotten to them yet. Their Lord has made excuses so far why he can’t come to the Prince, and there’s no road to them. If they don’t come around, the Prince will make a bad bargain for them, which will include clearing a road to their chief settlement and charging them.”

“So, where’s the clinic right now?” asked Liz.

“Visiting the Késtone village, about a third of the way from Kostekhéma to Gordha, for a week. Then they’ll go to the Méménegone village, and then back east to the Gédone if they can get through.”

“So, another month, maybe, for the clinic,” said Chris. “Everyone around here’s complaining the clinic stopped coming, and the Réjé wants Lua to catch up with her; Stauréstu’s running the clinic with Her Majesty, who’s currently in Belledha.”

“Lua really wants to come home, too. She has asked Dr. Béndhu to take over next week. Lébé’s getting bored now, too; Kostekhéma was fun for the kids and she got some good interviews, but since then the work has slowed down.”

“But you’ve got to stay?”

Thornton nodded. “The clinic has one doctor out of the three; the survey has all the geologists. But when we’re done, I’ll be back for the whole summer making maps. Lébé and the kids may come back when Lua returns. Oh, dad, something I want to tell you: they have trout!”

“The Ghéslone?”

“Yes. The trout are plentiful in the Kostasuma and the other streams flowing eastward into Long Lake. They call them *laksé*. We ate trout for three or four meals. Good sized fish, too; up to half a meter.”

Chris’s eyes sparkled. “Really? I’d love to do some trout fishing. I wonder whether we could get some live ones to stock in the Arjakwés and Péskakwés.”

“‘Péskakwés’: The irony is that it has no big fish at all. I think the drought must have been so severe at some point in the past that all the large fish were killed on this side

of the Spine. The reliable mountain streams are glacier fed, too, and the glacial rock flour plugs their gills.”

“See whether you can get me some live fish, will you? If you can’t, don’t worry about it. But right now we’ve got plenty of money; I wouldn’t mind spending some establishing trout!”

“Okay!”

They switched to small talk at that point as they ate toast with fresh peach jam and the cook prepared a mix of chicken, potatoes, and eggs. May, Behruz, Amos, and Mary were soon up as well, as were May and Amos’s kids. Thornton repeated the entire story again, adding a few more details about the beauty of the glaciated peaks of the Spine and the hot spring, and May gave a brief, unnecessary discourse about the Indo-European root \*laks and the various fish it was thought to refer to. Then Thornton headed to the génadema in the rover to get the photographs and talk to the cartographers about the terrain and Chris headed for the other rover. The alien-manufactured engine block had been installed in it and it now ran like new, even though it looked pretty old and battered.

He had all sorts of troubles to deal with. He drove to εjnopéla fairly quickly, where Lord Aryékwes climbed in for the drive to Ornakwés.

“Lord, how will I ever attract peasantry after this? It will be utterly impossible!”

“My Lord, you are farming a thousand agris with six men and a steam tractor, and ten teams of horses, and making lots of money. Why do you want peasantry?”

“Because εjnopéla needs people! I’ve got a town of only 200 or 250!”

“Patience. Mēlwika had less than 250 a year after it started. You have fifteen villas of merchants and Old Houses; Mēlwika has nothing like that. You have ten school teachers living in town and ten more moving in. More and more merchants are settling here every day. Modolubu’s paper making business will open soon and the brick making business is doing well. Look at the progress.”

“But I want peasant farmers!”

“Then establish a grange for them.”

“I don’t know how to. Your peasants are raising twenty berwoni per agri while I’m getting eight.”

“You need more guano, the irrigation needs to be timed better, and the first harvest is never the best; the soil has to be improved over several years.”

“Will you establish a grange for my township, too?”

Chris looked at him. “But you might not like the business arrangement I made with Roktekester and Gurwekester. I bought a thousand agris from each of them for ten dhanay per agri. Two thousand agris is enough to start a grange. I’d need two thousand from you because Ejnopéla is too far from the other two granges. It’d be independent.”

“Two thousand? That’s a third of the town that can be irrigated!”

“I said you won’t like the arrangement.”

“What about fifteen hundred agris instead of two thousand?”

Chris considered the idea. “Maybe.”

“How many farmers would that be?”

Chris calculated. “Sixty or seventy. I’m selling each farmer twenty to twenty five agris.”

“That much? Mennea, you are ruining the rest of us. Peasants with that much land become wealthy and won’t stay peasants!”

“Lord Aryékwes, a farmer who can use steam tractors and harvesters can farm at least twenty-five agris. As the equipment improves, he’ll be able to farm even more. Either you prevent him access to equipment and force him to work unnecessarily hard, or you force him to farm too little land and become lazy and underemployed. Farmers don’t get rich with twenty-five agris. They earn one to two thousand a year after taxes. What’s wrong with that? It’s enough so no one need starve or be poorly clothed. With it they can afford to pay for the health and education of their families.”

Aryékwes swore. “You’re upsetting the natural order.”

“Then why are you asking me to establish a grange on your land?”

“Because it’s the only way to get peasants!”

“I’ll be frank with you, Lord Aryékwes. Granges work best when they are run by experienced people, and I only have so many experienced people to spread around. Furthermore, no one knows whether there are enough farmers to support two or three new granges. Endraidha and Swadakwés are trying to recruit new farmers as well. A lot of new farmland is becoming available. I can’t commit to starting another grange before the winter. It is a strain to get these two started; it requires an incredible amount of organization.”

“Fine, then let’s talk about a grange starting in the winter. Maybe next week we can walk the township and select the land. As I understand it, I’d be able to sell the adjoining land to farmers under similar terms and they could join the grange.”

“Exactly. If we want to do any walking, I suggest we do so starting two hours before dawn!”

“Fine with me; I live here, you don’t.”

They passed Béranta, Gurwekester’s new town center. A month earlier it had consisted of a bus stop with a store, Gurwekester’s villa where he lived part time, the villas of two other Old Houses who had agreed to relocate and buy large tracts of farmland, and a dozen small houses for servants and farmers who had already relocated. Now there were tents and brush shelters scattered around a large tent that served as the grange’s temporary headquarters. Chris made a fast count and was startled to count sixty small tents and structures, but the thousand agris, at twenty-five agris per farmer, should support only forty if all the land was sold, and he didn’t think it had been, yet.

They continued southwestward on the repaired Sumi road, which was in better shape than the Royal Road paralleling it six kilometers to the north because it had been paved with close-fitting unmortared stone. At Béranta they had reached the irrigation ditch that ran southward from the Dhædhuba along the edge of the valley; it was almost brim-full with swift-moving irrigation water. It was hard to believe that so much water was actually going to be used.

A kilometer and a half past Béranta they came to the first diversion ditch shunting water to the northwest. It was newly dug—obvious from the untidy piles of shoveled dirt along its sides—and was full of water as well. The fields to the right and left of it had been plowed some days earlier, harrowed, fertilized, seeded, and flooded; the ground was cracked from the sun and rows of corn were beginning to poke up from the drying mud.

In the distance, perhaps half a kilometer away, they could see a flooded section, and beyond a steam tractor was at work plowing and harrowing.

They reached another diversion ditch three hundred meters farther along, then another three hundred meters later, both full of water. The fourth ditch they came to had been finished close to the road, but a team of twenty men was hard at work digging it with shovels about two hundred meters along; they wore white shirts soaked with cool water and toiled under a large portable sunshade. The fifth and sixth diversion ditches had similar, though smaller, teams, and scattered pairs of workers were working with two steam tractors to dig smaller distribution and collection ditches to route water to all the ground and carry off the excess.

“So much energy and effort,” commented Aryékwes.

“When men work for themselves, they will work very hard. They started about midnight, when Skanda was bright and the heat of the day had dissipated. They’ll be quitting pretty soon. I’m surprised there were so many tents and brush shelters, because we soak the sides of the grange tent with water to keep it cool in the afternoon, and a lot of men sleep inside.”

“They’re probably marking their house lots with their shelters.”

They continued south through an undeveloped section of land between the townships, then passed through a similar area of developed grange land before reaching a buffer of non-grange land outside Ornakwés. The townsite looked about the same as Béranta’s, except there were Sumi ruins on the hill above the platted ground and an army camp nearby that had been supporting construction of a gravel road to Swadakwés, which was now complete. The number of tents and shelters was similar. Chris parked the rover

in front of Roktəkəstər's new villa—a bit bigger and nicer than his brother's—and Aryékwes went inside while Chris walked to the nearby grange tent to see Snékwu quickly. He was awaiting Chris in his tent office, which included, among other things, a telephone and an assistant who was busily talking on it.

“Good morning,” Snékwu said, then he added “Alláh-u-Abhá.”

“Morning,” Chris replied. “So, before the Lords eat me alive for ending a subservient and impoverished peasantry, what's the news?”

Snékwu laughed. “I'm sure they're upset. We've cleared six hundred agris in Béranta and about four hundred agris in Ornakwés. About half has been plowed, harrowed, fertilized, planted, and flooded. We're moving along at about sixty agris a day and are getting faster, so we'll have all two thousand done in about a month.”

“Isn't that too late?”

“Maybe. It's a gamble. We're working with the late comers to plant peas, carrots, and other autumn crops, in which case planting can be delayed a few weeks more and we'll have a breather.”

“There isn't any more equipment?”

“No. Two days ago I leased another team of horses from the army and that has helped.”

“How much of the land is sold?”

“As of yesterday, almost ninety percent.”

“More than I thought. I was amazed how many shelters there are outside the two granges.”

“That’s because a lot of cousins and brothers of farmers have come to help them get established. And not all of them are working for us because I’ve fired a few for laziness; they’re just hanging around. Judging from the accents, a third of our farmers are from the western shore; the rest are mostly from the lower Arjakwés. We don’t have that many Melwikans, but a lot of cousins of Melwikans who had been in town looking for land have come here. A lot of the cousins and brothers will come back and buy land in the fall and winter when their obligations in their home villages are over. Meanwhile, we’re paying them to help with the ditching, so money’s going out faster than expected.”

“That’s alright, because they’ll come back to settle. So, how many farmers or future farmers do we have?”

“Farmers with land, almost 80, and we paid 145 men yesterday.”

“Wow, that *is* a lot more money than expected. Are you sure we’re getting the work we’re paying for?”

“After I fired a cheating team leader last week, the others shaped up a bit. No, we’re behind schedule, even though we’re using more machinery and workers, because the men and machines weren’t as productive as we expected. But they’re learning and getting faster every day. I hired an extra team leader yesterday, so now we have thirteen. We have one team who prefers to work during the day and sleep at night; they started work only two hours before sunrise supporting the tractors, which are running eighteen hours per day. If I can shift a few more men to day work we’ll make more progress because the tractors will be more evenly supported. I’ve just ordered more wide-brimmed straw hats for day workers; they help.”

“Any team leaders that really stand out?”

Snékwu thought for a moment, then nodded. “Yes, several are very good at inspiring and leading a team. I’ve got one team that is almost twice as productive as average. I’ve been rotating troublemakers through that team because it helps straighten some of them out, and a few men who were in the team since the beginning have already been promoted to assistant team leader. Are you thinking about the grange board?”

“Yes, but also another grange: one for Ejnopéla. We’ll need team leaders there as well.”

“Hey, in a few weeks we’ll be so experienced, I think we could expand over the entire lower valley!”

That surprised Chris; Snékwu was very confident. “Good. When do you usually meet with the team leaders?”

“We’ll meet before noon to review what work was done and again at 11 p.m. to go over work assignments for the night. If you want to meet with them, let’s try to do it one of those two times.”

“I’ll plan to come over at noon, then; that’s still two and a half hours from now. I doubt the meeting will go longer than that. Thanks for the update. Can you come with me right now? I’d like to introduce you to the Lords and you can help answer questions.”

“Me? I’m filthy and smelly and my clothes are dirty!”

“It doesn’t matter. Be respectful, friendly, helpful; that will impress them. That’s what I need, plus a few facts I don’t have and a positive, confident attitude.”

Snékwu looked around. “Alright, we’ll tell the accountant; he can tell my assistant when he finishes the phone call. He’s trying to get a part for a broken steam engine. We

blew a piston a few hours ago. The driver had to plow through a bunch of roots and jacked up the steam pressure too high.”

Snékwu walked to the adjoining space where an accountant from the Mennea Tomi was setting up to pay the men; they would soon be arriving with their team leaders, who would come collect the pay and distribute it to the team members. Each worker got one dhanay, each assistant team leader 1.25, and each team leader 1.75. He and Chris spoke to the accountant quickly, Chris promised to come back in the afternoon to review the books, and then they headed for Roktekester’s villa.

Chris knocked on the door and a very impressively dressed doorman let them in. He wanted to stop Snékwu; Chris had to intervene. As they walked toward the gathering area, Chris tapped Snékwu on his shoulder. “Don’t slouch. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá wouldn’t. You are a spiritual equal to these men, regardless of what they think, and you are indispensable.”

He nodded and straightened up. They entered a very attractive room opening on a beautiful interior garden; an electric fan was circulating the air comfortably. Eight Lords were gathered, drinking wine and eating fruit with shaved ice. They turned to see Chris enter and looked startled at his companion.

Roktekester, however, was ever the good host, and besides, he had already met the head of his grange and was impressed. “Sit here, both of you,” he said, directing them to a spot at his right. “Welcome, Lord Kristobéru.”

“Thank you. Hail, my Lords. I wish to introduce Snékwu Primusunu of Tritějna, head of the granges in Ornakwés and Béranta. He is responsible for our great success.”

Snékwu bowed slightly. “I am honored to meet you, my Lords. I am at your service. I apologize that the service I perform results in an unpleasing appearance and possible offense to other senses as well. I was invited to come just minutes ago.”

“Perhaps you could summarize the progress?” suggested Chris.

“Certainly. A bit over two weeks ago, a dozen of us came down from the Melwika Grange with tents and six steam tractors and set up two granges, one in each township. The word of our plans had already been circulating, especially among the farmers who had arrived in Melwika seeking land. Within three days we had assigned a thousand agris to forty farmers and had another twenty men seeking day work. Since then we have assigned one thousand, seven hundred, seventy agris to seventy-seven farmers; an average of about twenty-three agris each, because some want twenty, some want twenty-five, and a few want only fifteen agris. We have 145 men working for the grange, including all 77 of the farmers, 12 tractor drivers and accountants from Melwika, and various day laborers, mostly cousins and brothers of the farmers. So far we have one quarter of the land planted. In another month it will all be planted. We will devote the winter to improving the irrigation system, graveling access roads, building our own grain storage silos, and constructing proper grange buildings. Meanwhile, we are getting crops in the ground.”

“When will you have all the land sold?” asked Gurwekester.

“My Lord, probably within the week. After that we won’t be able to accept more members into the grange for about two months because we can’t support them.”

“And then you can?”

“Exactly, my Lord. I would guess that you and your brother will sell a thousand agris each by the end of the winter and the spring planting will be of four thousand agris.”

“And you will have the equipment to handle four thousand agris?” asked Roktekester.

“We will plan for it. Our two granges here have reciprocal arrangements with the Granges in Melwika and Béranagrés, which together have 12,500 agris under cultivation. We rent equipment back and forth. Because the climate here is warmer, planting and harvesting here is done at a different time.”

“Clever,” said Roktekester.

“It takes a lot of careful planning, actually, and some telephone calls,” noted Snékwu.

“Now, why can your grange get farm equipment when I cannot?” demanded Lord Weranosunu of Yujakwés. Snékwu turned to Chris.

“These granges have not purchased equipment, Lord; they are renting it from the Melwika Grange, which completed its second planting three weeks ago, so it had equipment to spare. The Melwika Grange had a standing order for additional tractors because we try to keep a twenty percent margin. Over the winter it will sell some equipment to these granges.”

“The Melwika Grange has rental agreements with many villages,” added Snékwu. “I was on its governing board until a few weeks ago. There are voluntary granges in the process of forming in four or five villages in the area. The Béranagrés Grange now includes about half the farmers in Yimuaidha. So Melwika purchases equipment based on a prediction of how much it will need to rent.”

“You are from Tritejna,” said Wëranosunu. “How many of the farmers in these granges are from your village?”

“Tritejna is a village of 250 souls. It used to have more, but twenty-two young men and women moved to Mëlwika over the last four years. That was a serious blow to the place. Not many are left who want to move, so we have only one or two in these two new granges. But I have gone back to visit and have pledged to help. Tritejna has plenty of land, but limited irrigation potential. Over the winter the village plans to dig six wells and install six large windmills. Eventually they’ll install electricity, because electric pumps are more powerful. Next year Tritejna may be in the position to create its own small grange.”

What does the Lord say?” asked Lord Lukëstu of Perkas. He knew the Lord of Tritejna, an absentee who lived in Perkas as well.

“He neither helps nor opposes. He has not made a claim on the unused land around the village and has said they can plant it, assert usage and ownership over it, and pay him taxes. In contrast, the Lord of Naskëpëda has said that none of the unused land around that village can be farmed unless it is purchased from him. But there is now a daily bus from Naskëpëda through Ornakwës and thirty farmers may continue living in Naskëpëda but farm here.”

“That is an example of the problem we are concerned about!” exclaimed Wëranosunu forcibly. “We’re going to lose our people to these granges! And the ones left are already demanding that we provide them with equipment and irrigation! All our existing arrangements are collapsing!”

“Here here!” agreed Sérékwes of Ekwèdhuna, who had plantations in several townships. Several other Lords—absentee Lords—nodded vigorously.

“Honored Lords, most of you have steam cars or plan to buy one,” said Chris. “The power of steam has been discovered by the people of Éra and will never be forgotten again. Is it fair that you can use it and the farmers cannot? If the farmers use it, they have the equivalent of twenty horses at their command. Obviously, they can farm more land, raise more food, eat better, pay more taxes, and everyone will be more prosperous. Furthermore, the Réjé has created five towns in the last few years and they must be populated. Does it not follow that the way to populate them is to give all the existing farmers more land and help them cultivate it with the power of steam horses? How many times must we review this, my Lords? If you prefer, we can destroy all the steam wagons and let the Sumis rediscover their secrets. Then they will have armored steam wagons and their farmers will produce three or four times as much food per man, making it so cheap we will have to buy our food from them.” Chris shrugged.

There was silence for a moment; Weranosunu and Sérékwes were angered by Chris’s remarks. Then Roktekester said, “Lord Kristobéru is right. So far, all I have heard from some of the Old Houses and absentee landlords is complaint that the old ways are ending. Well, I have news for all of you: the old ways *are* ending. The crown is now receiving 1.5 million dhanay a year more in taxes than before, either because we are now collecting what we are owed or because we are now owed more. Because of the grange I finally will have a *town* on the land Her Majesty granted me. If you want to keep peasants on your land, I suggest you start obtaining steam power for them and training some of them how to use it.”

That insulted a few of the Lords present, but Roktekester didn't care. "Look, you complained to me about this change and I was happy to host this meeting so you could air your grievances to Lord Kristobéru and me," the General continued. "But what do you propose to *do*? The laws tying peasants to the land only applied to Sumi peasants who had been conquered. They never applied to Eryan peasants, who have always been considered free according to the law. Centuries have passed and the Sumi peasants have become Eryan, except on Sumilara. We have no Sumi peasants around here. And we now have the water and machines to farm huge new areas. One reason Her Majesty is so concerned about the health of our people is because if we can prevent most deaths from illness and malnutrition, our population will start to grow by four percent per year. That's 1,600 per year just for this valley; that's enough to fill the three towns in a few years! That's 10,000 per year for this entire world. The sea is rising and displacing thousands every year on the western shore, also. We need granges and steam tractors to feed everyone."

"I'll tell you what I plan to do," said Aryekwes. "I've asked Lord Kristobéru to help establish a grange for εjnopéla and he agreed."

"And I will help anyone else, as well," Chris added. "The Mēlwika Grange can only expand so fast, but it has the resources to help more and more granges every year. From what I saw today of the land rush to this area, I think εjnopéla will have a grange by springtime. These three new towns will have a hundred or so farmers within a year or two, the farmers will create about thirty jobs for bakers, merchants, and others, and they will have wives and children. The three new towns will become established places."

“The changes everyone sees coming from steam powered agriculture primarily are two: bigger harvests, which means bigger taxes paid; and fewer farmers. Obviously, none of you fears higher tax collection, since all of you are in the business of collecting taxes. So your fear is fewer farmers. But remember that villages can be smaller and still produce more taxes, and fewer farmers can mean more men and women earning money and paying taxes by doing other things. Modolubu is moving his paper making business to Ejnopéla from Məlwika because he is originally from Frakdoma. He’ll need ten workers. He’ll also need a good road, electricity, a telephone, and a post office. Ejnopéla has all of those things now. Most of your villages have or will soon have all those things as well. Rather than fighting farmers getting machines, help them get the machines and help businesses like Modolubu’s settle in your villages. Because if you don’t, the new businesses will locate in Ejnopéla or other towns that support them, those towns will grow, and your villages will continue to shrink. Gədhéma has ghost towns that disappeared entirely because they did not change with the times. But that is unnecessary.”

There was silence in the room as that plea was considered. “Gentlemen, let me bring out more refreshments,” said Roktəkəstər. “And let us consider ways we can encourage the villages of the lower Arjakwés to work together, rather than compete for farmers.”

[May 30, 2006; reread and edited 5/25/13, 8/5/17, 11/8/24]

184.

Storm

Soru wiped off the sweat accumulating on his forehead. The sombrero-like straw hat offered a lot of shade, but it was particularly sweltering that day, and picking giant green beans was not an easy or quick task in the heat. He glanced at the basket slung over his shoulder that he had been filling. Not bad; it was half full. He could empty it. He walked fifty meters to the bushel they were all filling, emptied the basket into it, unslung the basket for a moment, and walked to the irrigation ditch nearby. It was running half full that day; rather low, he thought, but the grange had started conserving water the week before. He dipped his hat into the canal, filled it brim-full, and poured it all over himself, then returned the cool, wet hat to his head. Then he put the basket back on and went back to picking. The ritual had been repeated every half basket by the six of them picking the bean field.

“Where is that damn wagon!” exclaimed Kaspuku. “We should be hearing the clock strike three bells pretty soon!”

“It’s late,” agreed Soru. “I guess there’s a lot of harvest today.”

“And not so much equipment, with resources going to the new granges. The steam wagons were more reliable.”

“I don’t think so,” said Soru. “Maybe they seemed more reliable because they were faster.”

“Maybe.”

Just then they heard the bell in Temple Square start to peel. “You see; three bells. An hour late,” noted Kaspuku.

“That’s alright, it’s another hour of work that counts toward our quota.” Soru concentrated on the picking and ignored the heat, which wasn’t so bad with cold water trickling down his back and chest. He was almost halfway to filling the basket again and beginning to feel hot when the wagon appeared on the gravel road a hundred meters away, the horses’ bells jangling as they walked. Someone in the field cheered. They all headed for the wagon, lugging bushels of picked beans as they went. They had to make several trips because they had picked for six hours; meanwhile the driver gave his two horses some water and hay and repeatedly soaked a rag in the irrigation ditch and ran it over their backs and sides. The poor beasts were suffering from the heat as well.

Six guys were already on the back with bushels of olives; they made room for the newcomers with their harvest and helped lift the full bushels to the flatbed. They climbed on board after one last soaking from the irrigation ditch, picking up the leftovers from their lunches and taking swigs from the remaining water in their water jugs. Then the driver jumped into the driver’s seat, whistled to his horses, shook the reins, and off they went to the Grange.

Soru leaned forward. “I thought the guy who dropped us off was also going to pick us up,” he said to the driver.

“Usually, but it’s been a busy day,” replied the driver. “And my team and I weren’t available until noon.”

“Are these your horses and wagon?”

“Indeed. I rent them out three or four days a week. This morning we were hauling stone for some new buildings.”

“Are you a member of the grange?”

The man frowned. “Yeah, of course; I’ve got fifteen agris. Just had a good cotton crop, and got a good price, too. I lease out my team to the Grange whenever I can; it’s a better return than swapping my labor for lots of help picking the cotton at harvest time. But sometimes I can get a better return on day labor elsewhere, especially now with the new granges drawing off equipment. Right now I can get six dhanay per day hauling stone.”

“Wow!” said Kaspuku. “I should go into hauling!”

“Well, you need the horses,” pointed out the man. “These are good Kwolone horses; reliable and steady.”

“From the attack?” asked Soru.

The man nodded. “The ones the grange has been buying the last few months are still learning how to pull our wagons.” The Kwolone had been selling scores of horses to buy hay from the Arjakwés farmers and windmills from Sullendha; otherwise all their livestock would die from the drought.

Soru saw a yellowish cloud on the southern and western horizons. He pointed. “What’s that?”

The driver looked. “A dust storm, I’d say. I haven’t seen one of them for ten years. That was a hot, dry summer, too.”

“I remember it,” said Kaspuku. “It was really bad.”

They continued in silence for ten minutes until they approached the Grange Building. The driver pulled up to the unloading area and Soru, seeing no one in the receiving area, headed for the table. "I'm authorized to check in loads."

"You are?" said the driver suspiciously. "If you can do office work, why in Esto's name do you do field work?"

"I usually don't, but the office was full this morning, and I want to get my work quota in this month. You see, I'm a school teacher, and that ties me down, even during harvest time. So my wife and I planted wheat on her land and had the Grange harvest it for us because we were both teaching. I still owe the Grange two hundred sixty hours." He sat at a table and pulled out the forms that had to be filled out. The driver, who was also authorized, pitched in by counting and weighing bushels. He called out the results to Soru, who wrote them down. The volume and weight fell within the acceptable range of harvest for the number of men and hours involved. He filled out forms for the six bean pickers and the six olive pickers indicating how much work they had done. He and the driver signed the forms. When someone came out of the office to register everything, they were pleased to see that the work was under control and went back in. Everyone wanted their hours counted properly; either they were replacing grange labor that had helped them with their harvest or were doing extra work that at the end of the month would result in pay of eight dontay per hour.

Soru gave everyone a duplicate carbon copy so they had their own record, and made sure the beans and olives were tagged so they could later be traced to the source farms if necessary. One of the olive pickers wanted to schedule some harvesting work for his tomatoes; Soru pulled out the scheduling ledger and added the hours needed and the

field number to the appropriate day's page. Some labor was still available that day. Then the work was done. The driver offered them a ride to the town's south gate before heading to his next assignment, so they climbed back onto the flatbed and took off for town. As they approached the gate, Soru looked at a dozen houses being built on a block of land 150 meters from the city wall. That was as close as any construction was allowed; the city wall had to have a clear sight line around it. The 150 meter strip around Melwika was irrigated and cows and goats, tethered to poles, cropped circles of grass. The driver pointed. "That's where I was hauling stone today."

"Who's building?"

"It's one of Estanu's projects. There's almost no unbuilt land inside the city walls, so construction's now filling the space beyond the buffer zone."

"The houses look pretty cute."

"They are; they're for families with incomes of 2,000 to 3,000 dhanay per year. There's a kitchen, parlor, dining area, and bathroom on the first floor and three or four bedrooms and another bathroom upstairs. Every house will have a white stucco outside with red tile roofs and nine glass windows."

"Wood stove?"

The driver nodded. "It's optional. So is one of the bathrooms. The houses will have electricity, gas, city water, and connection to the city sewer. They all have an enclosed back yard. They're being built to the construction code that will go into effect next year, too."

"How much?"

"I think 3,000 to 5,000 dhanay."

Soru nodded. “We can afford that,” he said with a smile.

The driver stopped next to the South Gate and they all jumped off, waving goodbye to him. Then the driver headed for his next job and the workers walked inside the city. Soru headed for the Génadema Library, where Kanawé probably was reading. Sure enough, she was there working on a paper for a summer course. She smiled when she saw him and they kissed. “You worked a long time,” she whispered.

“Until the wagon came, and it was late. We were pouring irrigation water on our heads every few minutes to keep cool.”

“It’s pretty bad.” She glanced at the fan nearby; because she was very pregnant, other students had let her sit closest to their source of comfort.

“That’s six more hours covered at least. Have you seen the new houses that Estanu’s building?”

She frowned and shook her head.

“I’ll show you.”

She nodded, rose, and gathered together her things. They stepped outside; Soru put his big straw hat on Kanawé’s head and they walked to the South Gate. Once on the other side he pointed.

“Oh, they’re cute!” Two were almost finished and three more were in various states of partial construction.

“That’s what I was thinking, too. They’re built to the construction code, and they’re three to five thousand.”

“Really? Then we could get a bank mortgage. But they’re outside the walls.”

“I don’t think that’s an issue anymore. No Tutane will attack Melwika; we’re too big.”

“Probably.”

“Do you want to take a look?”

“Sure, I can walk that far.” She was due in a few weeks.

Soru nodded and they walked across the greenbelt on the sidewalk next to the concreted surface of Majakwés Road. When the road reached the edge of the greenbelt it was intersected by West Road, which wrapped around the city on its west side. West Road made a right-angle turn and ended at a new traffic circle at Majakwés Road; the block of new houses was being built near the circle. They walked up to the house that appeared most completed and wandered around it, looking through the open windows at the tiled floors and the plastered walls.

A minute or two later, a man came out of a small tent next to a telephone pole along the road and approached them. “Can I help you?” Soru saw it was Estanu himself, supervising the work personally.

“Hail, Honored Estanu. We were admiring these beautiful new houses.”

“They are attractive, aren’t they? Are you looking to buy a house?”

“Eventually, yes. We’re both teachers, so we have a pretty good income between us, and we have some grange land.”

“And you have a child coming.”

“Yes; the beginning of our family.”

“But I plan to continue working as much as I can,” added Kanawé.

That surprised Estanu, but he didn't comment. "Come inside and look." He led them through the front door. "The house is eight meters square; that's sixteen doli using traditional measures. You come into a nice parlor with a dining area in the corner alcove. The kitchen opens onto the dining area with the iron stove between the two, so the heat circulates across the entire floor in the winter. There's also room for an optional iron fireplace in the parlor, attached to the same chimney pipe. You have a space under the stairs either for storage or a bathroom with toilet and sink."

Kanawé walked into the kitchen and admired the iron stove, with a wide cooking surface on top and a built-in oven. The sink was large as well and had two faucets. "Can it have gas?" she asked.

"Sure; that's extra, otherwise it's a stove for wood, coal, or coke. This neighborhood will have a gas connection."

"Hot water?"

"This house has it, but it's optional. We recommend everyone get it because it doesn't add that much to the total cost and it is very useful. The house also comes with an ice box and kitchen cabinets."

"They're very nice; good storage."

"You also have a pantry area next to the staircase." Estanu pointed. Then he led them upstairs. "Three bedrooms and a bathroom up here, with hot water if you want it. The stove's iron exhaust pipe comes right up through the area at the top of the stairs and helps to heat the upstairs." He pointed to a ladder going up. "And you have storage under the roof as well, or an additional room if you have a large family. There's even a window up there. You could put quite a harvest in the attic."

“How much?” asked Soru.

“This house is already sold for 4,400. Without hot water and gas, 4,200. We have a smaller house that’s 6.5 meters square, two stories, for 3,000. Since the house meets all construction codes, one can apply for a five year bank mortgage if you can put down thirty percent.”

“I’m surprised it’s that much; I thought it’d be about 4,000.”

Estanu shook his head. “The price is not subject to bargaining; it is what it is. You can get cheaper houses in the city, but they’re built to no construction standards, so quality is unpredictable.”

“That’s for sure.” Soru looked at Kanawé. “What do you think?”

She nodded. “I like it.”

“Okay.” He looked at Estanu. “Can we get back to you tomorrow?”

“I’ll be here. So far, five houses have sold. I’ll have number six ready for occupancy in about two months. But don’t wait; now that one house is finished, several couples a day are stopping by. They’ll sell fast.”

“Thanks.” Soru and Kanawé walked out and she pointed to the bus stop. “Let’s take the bus home. I just can’t walk that far in this heat.”

He nodded and they headed to the bus stop. “So, what do you think?”

“It’s gorgeous! The parlor and dining area together are the size of the entire house I grew up in! We had a dirt floor, walls plastered with mud, a leaky thatched roof, a fire pit that smoked up the entire house, a privy outside, and we washed next to the well every week or so.”

“That’s about what I had, except the humidity in Ora meant the house had lots of cockroaches, lizards, and an occasional snake.”

“We had scorpions. I’d feel guilty about moving into such a place! Can we afford it?”

“Sure. Including the retirement funds, we have 1,500; that’s more than thirty percent.”

“But we want to buy Mèdhé a sewing machine. And I don’t think you’ll ever work off our labor debt to the Grange, so we need to keep 600 in reserve in case we have to pay it.”

“The sewing machine’s only 150 dhanay, and I’ll work off the debt, don’t worry. I’d rather decrease our savings and put the money in property; I still don’t trust the bank completely. I’ve enjoyed staying with Saréidukter and I’m glad we’ve been able to help her fix up her place, but once we have a baby we can’t be living in an attic. It’s too small for the three of us and the baby will be too noisy for Saréidukter and her girls.”

“If we move out, the girls can move upstairs and get a real bedroom of their own, too.” She considered. “Say, how about this crazy idea. Mèdhé has been talking about leaving Terskua and moving here, but she can’t afford it. If we get this house, she could move in with us, and that would make it easier to take care of the baby. She could have one of the bedrooms upstairs, and it would be big enough for a sewing business. Right now Mitrukaru is trying to farm her land—”

“And he wants his own land in Béranata, a ridiculous idea for a 15 year old.”

“Exactly. Let him come here and help us farm my land. You’re going crazy trying to work for the grange over the summer when you should be taking courses and getting

the education to establish proper classes for deaf children. We can let him farm half of it for himself in return for his working our half for us. If it's planted in wheat, the twenty agris take 600 hours, mostly over the summer."

Soru nodded. "And he could go to the high school, and health costs for him and Mèdhé would be covered by the grange. That would help them a lot."

"Mitrukaru could have the attic, too. He'd love it. And Mèdhé's land in Terskua could be farmed by my brothers; the two of them are really struggling to support two families on dad's old farm."

"It's not big enough for them, but with Mèdhé's land they'd be okay."

"This is a good idea. They'd pay us some rent, which would help cover the mortgage. Mèdhé could take some classes, too, or go work for the widows making things, or could open a daycare. There are lots of opportunities here."

"And a lot more men to marry than in Terskua, if she wants to try that again."

Soru nodded. "I think we should do it. I'll go to the bank tomorrow and find out about the mortgage."

A bus was coming. Kanawé looked at the grayish-yellow sky spreading across the south and east, moving toward them fast. "Just in time. I'd rather not get stuck out here in a dust storm."

"It looks nasty."

The bus stopped for them. Soru handed the driver his fare card and he canceled out one ride; he let Kanawe, obviously pregnant, get on for free, for that was company policy for short rides. When it let them off outside Citadel Square a few minutes later, the air was beginning to turn hazy with dust. They hurried inside to escape the stuff.

Chris Mennea, however, was caught in the dust storm while driving back to Melwika from Belledha. It hit the rover a few kilometers west of Mæddoakwés; as visibility dropped to a few meters he put on the rover's headlights and flashers and slowed to a crawl. He stopped in the capital to drop off Generals Roktekester and Perku and turned down their insistent requests that he stay the night. It took an hour to drive the sixteen kilometers to Melwika, but by the time he got home the worst of the storm had ended.

"We were afraid for you," said Liz, running over to the rover when he pulled into the courtyard.

He kissed her. "It was really bad; I've never seen anything like it here. I guess three months of complete drought has killed all the ground cover. But I just went slowly and made it safely. I think I always had at least ten meters visibility. Well, no . . . five."

"That's not much! Come have supper."

Chris came to the dinner table. The folding wall between the dining room and the courtyard was closed to keep out as much dust as possible, but he could see a film on everything. Mary did not look well; the dust was affecting her breathing. May and Thornton had already left the table to get the kids in bed; Behruz and Lua were on the western shore with their kids; so it was a small gathering that night.

"You missed a lot of excitement here," said Amos. "The storm caused a small panic as everyone headed for cover. Someone was saying 'this is the end of the world Widumaj predicted' which made things even more frightening. But the priests promised to start a cycle of recitation of the hymns and that helped. Brébanu says this is a good omen and that it'll rain soon."

“Rain? That would be good. We drove the shortcut through Penkakwés and even the trees are wilting. The grasslands are brown and dead. Most of the dams have very little water left behind them.”

“How was the trip?” asked Amos. He had helped a lot with the design for the prison, since he had become the law enforcement expert.

“Pretty good. We got a tour of the work area and the foundations of the prison. They’re taking the construction standards pretty seriously; the concrete walls will be a half meter thick. Sets of iron bars are arriving daily from Miller’s foundry.”

“For 200 prisoners?” asked Liz.

Chris nodded. “Eventually; they’re starting with a wing for fifty, and that may be all they need until they get the regional jails to send their prisoners. Perku has responsibility for the prison system. Since really bad prisoners are executed, the prison only needs to be medium security. They’re building a wing for women prisoners, but they don’t have any at the moment.”

“How’s the city?” asked Lébé.

“It’s rebuilt, but there are vacant lots all over. Déolu told me they have barely 4,000 people. The prison has brought 125 construction jobs and that has helped a lot, especially now that the harvest is in and the farmers can do construction. The crown has spent fifty thousand to help Déolu buy the equipment from Miller to convert their limestone cliffs into cement, and he hopes that will bring Bellédha a permanent source of income. The army has agreed to buy concrete from them, and I gather John’s furious about that. The copper mine will reopen in another month or so and will be staffed by townspeople, not prisoners. The new royal mint will be there, and the bank is making its

kentay coins there as well, so they have some important economic mainstays. But there are still less than 100 men who can read and write in town.”

“But they’re planning a high school?” said Lébé.

“Yes, it’ll open in another month, but it’ll be pretty limited. They’re progressing, but they’re behind everyone else.”

“What will the prisoners do?” asked Liz.

“There will be three tracks. Petty criminals—those who committed little thefts, like what Soru did—will be given the chance to join the army and will go through a rigorous six-month boot camp that will emphasize discipline and obedience. The army needs more recruits and petty criminals are usually poor young men who are desperate. If the army proves to be the wrong choice, and the prisoner is transferred to minimum security, he will do work around the prison and might even work in the mine. Work conditions there will be much better. In either of these two cases, the prisoner will have a chance to learn to read, write, and count. The third track will be for more hardened criminals, and they’ll be locked up for five to twenty-five years. They’ll run a laundry and a bakery. The army is even thinking about having them make jam!”

Liz chuckled. “The widows will have competition!”

“We should teach them cooking; the taverns and inns of this world need cooks with real training,” said Amos. “I was talking to Dêku this morning and he said that the last five weeks has seen a noticeable drop in crime in Melwika, probably because a lot of young men who had come here to find work have joined the new granges.”

“Good. John’s hiring, too. I don’t know what we’re going to do to slow down this place’s growth. We must be up to 7,000 by now. The new townships and their granges

help, at least. I've got to go down to Ornakwés tomorrow or the next day to see how things are going there. They should have the planting almost finished, but now everything's covered by dust."

"Everyone here in town is worried about that, too," added Lébé.

They turned to other matters while Chris ate his late supper. May came back downstairs after the kids had gone to sleep and reported that twenty-five more letters had come in from people planning to return to the génadema this fall; it was shaping up to be a busy term.

Finished with supper, everyone scattered to various places in the house. Chris headed to his small office to read the mail that had come in. One letter was from Judge Krénanu. Chris read it and said aloud in English "the bastards."

Liz hurried in. "What is it?"

"Lord Weranosunu of Yujakwés is suing me," he replied. "He's alleging a loss of twenty thousand dhanay because of outmigration of farmers from Yujakwés to Melwika and now to the granges on Béranta and Ornakwés. Judge Krénanu is summoning me to court next month over the matter."

"Can he do that?" asked Liz, startled.

"He can. Eryan law is not well developed on a point like this. Yujakwés was given to Weranosunu's ancestors six or eight hundred years ago and its population then was Sumi, so restrictions on their freedom and movement were in place. Those laws have never been formally rescinded."

"But they can't enforce them now! Bring some Yujakwés farmers with you who look Eryan and don't know a thing about Sumis. Do you need a lawyer?"

Chris laughed. “Does Éra have lawyers? Well, I suppose there are some guys in the School of Law who would know all the laws. I’ll ask.”

“Who’s the judge going to be?”

“I suppose Krénanu. He’s pretty well trained and reasonably fair, I think.”

Liz shook her head. “So, does this signal a new phase in the opposition to us?”

“Maybe. I wouldn’t be surprised.”

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Soru didn’t venture out of the house until dawn the next morning. The night had been warm, but the winds had died down and a lot of the dust had settled. The sky still had a grayish cast.

Worried, Soru walked three kilometers to inspect their twenty agris of wheat. It was badly dusted. But as he walked among the maturing stalks, a breeze stirred and made them move, and some dust fell off. That was good to see; in a few days the dust would mostly be on the ground, where it belonged. He focused on the ground under the plants, which was still damp, but drying fast. They’d need irrigation again next week, and he feared it wouldn’t be available. The Péskakwés dam had been designed to store two year’s flow of the river, but the river had become much larger in the last few years because of the rainier climate. In consequence they had irrigated all of Ménwika, 10,000 agris of rolling brushland. And now, after three rainless months, the river had dried up above the dam and the reservoir had been drawn most of the way down. The grange had started considering expensive but desperate ways to pump water from the Arjakwés or even from the Majakwés, which received some of the precipitation falling on the Spine from the east and which still had a lot of water in reserve behind the Gordha dam.

He walked home and got Kanawé, and they headed to the bank with all sorts of papers. They sat with Yimanu himself and reviewed their ability to pay a mortgage, showing him their salary information and receipts for selling wheat. He called Ornéstu and put in a request for a letter from the superintendent of Mēlwika schools, with whom they had worked closely. They put Dr. Lua down as a reference as well. He said that assuming both recommendations came through, they'd be cleared for a seven year mortgage—the longest one they offered—at 10 percent interest on up to 3,000 dhanay.

“Let's talk to Estanu,” Soru said as they left the bank.

“You don't sound excited.”

“I am, but the excitement is tempered by the fact that we'll be paying and paying!”

She signed. “It is a bit crazy; we'll be paying 1/4 of our income! I was surprised when Yimanu apologized that they couldn't offer even longer mortgages because they weren't yet sure enough about the stability of our economy! Wouldn't we pay even more that way?”

“I think so. Never mind, let's go buy our house.”

They walked down Majakwés Rodha and out the south gate to Estanu's little tent next to the construction his twenty men were doing. At the time, he was inspecting and supervising work on the roof of the second house, but presently he saw them, wrapped it up, and invited them into his office in the tent. They were surprised to see a telephone inside; he was too busy to be without one.

They sat down and drew up a preliminary sales contract, then walked to the first house that was nearly finished and discussed various fine points and the options. It would

be the seventh house completed—the sixth had sold earlier that morning—but it would be ready in two and a half months for 4,557. Soru was irritated that it was more than 4,400, but they had liked some of the options, especially the insurance against fire. They'd pay 1,557 in cash and 3,000 in mortgage. If all the paperwork would be ready in a week, they could finalize the sale at the bank, where Estanu preferred to close purchases of this sort, since everyone had easy access to their money.

When Soru and Kanawé stepped out of Estanu's tent it was afternoon. "I'm starved," Kanawé said.

"Let's celebrate by eating at that new restaurant on Majakwés Rodha."

"We just cleaned out our bank account and put ourselves in big debt and we plan to celebrate by spending money."

"Well, why not! The money isn't being thrown away, after all. If we can't pay the mortgage, we can sell the house and get the money back."

"Unless the house gets burned or Melwika collapses and no one wants to buy anything here."

"I don't think Melwika will collapse, and that 50 dhanay extra we'll pay the bank every year at least guarantees we won't have to pay the mortgage if the house burns."

"I guess we can't eliminate all the uncertainties," she sighed.

"Let's focus on the baby we're going to have."

"And how we're going to afford furniture for our house?"

He laughed and they walked over to the restaurant near Temple Square. A restaurant was a rare treat and they took their time; it was summer, they were taking few courses, and they had no teaching to do.

They came out just as the clocktower was striking three bells. Soru looked up and was surprised to see a huge thunderhead building in the west. “Look!” he said. “Rain! Or maybe it has already passed!”

“No, the wind has shifted; it’s coming this way!” said Kanawé. “This happened ten years or so ago. I remember well. The entire summer was hot and rainless, then there was a series of dust storms, and then it rained. And then we almost starved the next winter.”

“Of course, we’ve only had one dust storm.”

“Let’s hope that’s enough. There were really bad grass, brush, and forest fires, too. We better get home.”

Soru nodded and kissed his wife. He gave her a special look and she smiled back. Then they strolled hand in hand to Saréidukter’s house in Citadel Square. Just as they reached it, raindrops began to fall.

“Rain!” exclaimed Kanawé. “Thanks be to Esto!”

“Let’s get inside and stay dry,” said Soru.

[June 3, 2006; reread and edited 5/25/13, 8/6/17, 11/7/24]

185.

## Construction

The Bahá'í temple was a great nonagonal hole in the ground. A ramp led down to the foundation's bottom; a heap of removed rock and dirt was piled nearby. Next to it was a great heap of stones where dozens of men were working with hammers and chisels to shape them into usable pieces. A steam wagon bearing another load of stone was arriving just as the Central Spiritual Assembly walked over to the site from Mëddwoglubas's old fort, which was now a school and hostel.

“As you can see, we're waiting for the concrete to arrive for the foundation,” said Estodhéru. “There's been quite a delay; we had hoped to start on it two weeks ago. Meanwhile, we're getting the building stone ready, so once we have the foundation ready we can start on the walls immediately.”

“What caused the delay; work on the other temple?” asked Estoiwiku, pointing to the Lojeb Estoi Ejnadema, the “Temple to the Word of God” that had been raised that summer next to the Fort. It was a stately but inexpensive structure of brick and stone with a wide portico around it.

“No. The house of sacrifice was also delayed because of the severe rains we received until a few weeks ago. But we managed to complete the roof before the Réjé arrived, and she seemed pleased. By the way, Bahá'is arrived to help with the work throughout the summer and since we weren't doing any work on our temple, we put them to work on the Ejnadema or house of sacrifice. They helped a lot and three of the workers

became Bahá'ís! We had planned to start the foundation of the Bahá'í house of worship as soon as the Réjé left—we didn't want her to see it—but there were rains again, then the concrete shipment from Bellédha was delayed because of the start of construction on the prison. When the rains stopped, those three new Bahá'í workers came back to work on our temple for free, too."

"Has it helped the budget?" asked Stauréstu.

"It has," confirmed Brébéstu, the treasurer. "I estimate we'll save 3,000 dhanay through donated labor. That'll be crucial. We'll be spending 70,000 by springtime to get the structure up, and we're still 20,000 short."

"And the interior will cost 30,000 more," added Chris.

"So, what's the schedule?" asked Estoiwiku.

"Once we get the concrete, we can start building," replied Estodhéru. "The walls will go up pretty fast because of the very large glass windows. The dome will be supported by stainless steel beams. We hope to get the walls and beams up during the fall. The roof and the big windows will take all winter, so with any luck it'll be enclosed by spring. Then we have to install the floor and the interior decoration, which will take another year. It should be usable by Ridván, though."

"Maybe we should hold next year's convention here," said Chris.

They circled the hole in the ground, then walked over to the workers, who were mostly Bahá'ís, to thank and encourage them. They all sat to pray together and Modulubu spoke briefly of the importance of Houses of Worship. Then they walked back to the fort, where they would start their meeting.

“Have you moved your business to ɛjnopéla yet?” Stauréstu asked Modolubu, as they walked.

“Next month. We’ve been building the new facility all summer; it’ll be big enough to accommodate twenty workers, and there’s room to expand.”

“Do you have a supply of hemp and other plant fibers to make paper?”

“The drought delayed that, but the new granges have signed a contract to provide me hemp, cotton, and other materials. How has the move to Ora gone?”

“Pretty well. Aréjé and I have a nice house with a trustworthy woman to cook, clean, wash, and watch Sliru, but the house and the lady took a month to find. Sliru was staying with Aréjé’s mother and sisters for several weeks. Lord Mitru has been rather demanding, but he has generally respected my request to have three days a week to travel on the western shore, and he has been generous. A whole new hospital will be built in Ora next year.”

“Who runs the hospital when you’re away?” asked Modolubu.

“Aréjé. She’s got two years of nursing experience and classes and a year of medical school. She can stabilize emergencies and we use the phone a lot if there’s something she needs advice about.”

“Your weekly visits to Tripola Hospital have helped a lot to train the staff,” said Brébéstu. “Not to mention teaching the Faith, since I usually squeeze some time out of you to give a talk.”

“The two of you have strengthened the Ora community a lot as well,” added Estoiwiku.

“And we’re even free from membership on the local Spiritual Assembly!” added Stauréstu with a laugh, since they arrived after the annual election.

They were walking close to the edge of the cliff, since they were heading toward the fort’s postern gate. Chris stopped and looked over the town, which was bathed in early morning light. He pointed at some buildings. “New housing?”

“Yes,” said Estodhéru. “And it’s controversial. We aren’t Melwika; everyone here is a Ləwəspan and you know it in an instant from their accent. But the manufacturing jobs are attracting workers from the villages in the region and from Ora and the south shore. The villages are mad, naturally; they don’t want to lose population. But they are also establishing granges and buying steam wagons and lots of horses and oxen, and that means they need fewer farmers. Məddwoglubas also has good schools and the second or third best hospital in the world. So our population has gone from 1,800 to 2,500 in two years. Half of the new residents are from outside Ləwəspa. That’s shocking to our people.”

“Surely, it helps to have a lot of Bahá’ís,” commented Dr. Mitreṭu.

Estodhéru pondered the comment. “It helps a little. The Ləwəspan Bahá’ís aren’t used to experiencing diversity; for them ‘unity in diversity’ is an abstract idea. We have spiritual assemblies in nine villages out of ten. But we’re still only two percent of Ləwəspa’s population. We can do only so much. The temple is controversial, too; that weakens our influence.”

“Do you have men moving here, or families?” asked Lua.

“First men, then families. At first we thought we just wanted the men; if they brought their families, they would plan to stay, and we didn’t want that. But when just the

men came, sales of beer and wine shot up, the town was rowdy on Suksdiu and Primdiu nights, and prostitutes began to settle here. So we decided it was better to have families.”

“You need to do more with commuting,” said Chris. “A bus could come here from Ora or Tripola with one hundred workers, then take them back at night, at a cost of two or three dontay each.”

“We’re trying to get villagers used to the idea of commuting, but they haven’t yet. That makes it hard on Mitru; if buses aren’t full, the tickets are more expensive. It also means the villages around here are getting very resentful of Mæddwoglubas because we’re wealthier.” Estodhéru unlocked the postern gate and they all headed inside.

“So, how many people have pioneered now?” asked Stauréstu to Modolubu.

“The news is pretty good. Mælwika will have sent out twenty-four people by next month when my business relocates. Most have gone to the lower Arjakwés, where we may form two new Assemblies next Ridván. The counts for the other regions are pretty good, too; twelve people have moved to new villages, mostly as teachers.”

“That’s almost a tenth of all the Bahá’ís!” exclaimed Chris. “That’s impressive! I guess that’s what happens when we constantly stress it.”

“And when four members of the Central Spiritual Assembly move as well,” added Mitrubbéru.

“How’s Néfa?” asked Modolubu, as they entered their meeting room.

Mitrubbéru nodded. “Pretty good. I’m enjoying teaching at the génadema. Dr. Stauréstu comes every week, too, and encourages us.”

“Anything new from ɛjnu?” asked Estoiwiku.

Mitrubbéru shook his head. “He still says he’s a Bahá’í priest for his new Bahá’í religion. Everyone’s ignoring him. No one goes to feast at his house, and he hasn’t tried to come to our feast. He hasn’t tried to call a meeting of the Assembly, either.”

“Let’s not talk about this now,” said Modulubu. “Let’s say our prayers and get started as an Assembly, then tackle this matter. It’s one of our most delicate.”

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Lord Kandékwes’s steam car was not like anything Chris had seen before. The best analogy would be to call it a limousine; it was long, able to hold a dozen guests comfortably, and luxurious, with carved, gilded wood, magnificent leather, and soft cushions. When Chris got on for the 80-minute drive to Arjdhura, he was tempted to ask the Lord who had done the work and how much it had cost. Mitru, who got in with him, was impressed as well, ran his hand over the woodwork, and said “Kentékwes,” the name of the royal coach maker in Mèddoakwés. That was the only possible answer, of course.

Lord Kandékwes got on as well, then a few minutes later General Perku, and, finally, of all people, Estoiyaju, the Queen’s personal secretary. He saw Chris’s surprise. “Well, we all want to know about Arjdhura,” he said.

“How did this get arranged?” asked Chris.

“You said several times we should ask; so we finally did,” replied Perku. “And they said yes. We can always send spies later to verify anything they say.”

“And we’re guests of Lord Kandékwes,” added Mitru.

“You are,” replied Kandékwes. “I want our transportation company man there; you have an eye for what they are and can do. And Kristobéru’s eye will see all sorts of things.”

“Thank you, my Lord,” said Chris.

The vehicle began to accelerate forward; the driver was in a separate compartment so they couldn’t see him at all. Chris looked out the window at the capital as they headed down a main street and out the south gate.

“How was your summer, Lord?” Kandékwes asked Chris.

“Busy but fruitful. The second harvest is coming in and it will be large as well, and the price is a solid 12 dhanay per bushel for wheat. The granges south of here have their land planted and if the cold weather does not arrive early, they’ll get a reasonably good harvest as well. I was in Néfa for four weeks teaching business and when I was in Ora, Lord Mitru and I talked about the idea of a conference for Lords in his region to help them execute administrative tasks.”

“Like the training you gave the palace staff last year?” asked Estoiyaju.

“Similar. Many have no idea how to plan a simple budget, and they are often handling twenty thousand dhanay. Now they have to allocate it to teachers and all sorts of new things. We’re thinking about having the program next summer.”

“I’d like that for this area too, then,” said Kandékwes. “Are the high schools ready to start?”

“Indeed, in two weeks. Registrations are even higher; Mēlwika and Ējnopéla will be overcrowded, with 38 students per classroom in the high school. We need your high school, Lord.”

Kandékwes nodded. “Next fall; it’s in the budget.” He turned to Mitru. “How goes transportation?”

“Very well, Lord. The numbers keep climbing; we’re shipping 120 gurnis of ice per month from Kostekhéma, 150 from Snékh péla, and 100 from Khermdhuna; 150 gurnis of guano per month from Nuarjora and Arjdhura; 100 gurnis of limestone a month from Nuarjora; 200 gurnis a month of coal from Nénaslua and Melwika; 150 gurnis of timber a month from Akeldédra; 200 gurnis of meat a month from Gordha; 50 gurnis of iron a month from Gimutroba and 100 from Awsmoritua; 100 gurnis a month of general cargo from Melwika and about the same from Meddoakwés; up to several hundred gurnis per month of wheat to each city’s granaries; etc. I’m not even enumerating the cargo flowing on the western shore, which is bigger. We move 500 people a day in the valley and when school starts it’ll double. We move 1,500 per day worldwide and it will double when school starts as well. We moved twenty thousand people to Isurdhuna for pilgrimage.”

“Twenty thousand! No wonder it was so crowded!” said Perku.

“Wait until next year; I bet thirty thousand will go. The new road and the buses greatly increased the number.”

“How much cargo from Sumilara flows through Arjdhura?” asked Kandékwes.

“About ten gurnis per week. Néfa handles two or three times that much. Sumilara generates over a thousand gurnis of exports per year and imports almost as much, especially ice and iron.”

“What goods does the island export?” asked Chris.

“Three types of things: Agricultural products such as tropical fruit; raw materials such as tropical woods and rubber; and luxury goods such as glassware, carved wooden

objects, dinnerware, draperies, and cloth. During the days of the caravans the luxury goods were the only items exported. The food and raw materials are new.”

“And how many people does Arjdhura need to unload ships and load trailers?”

Mitru smiled. “Ten gurnis a week? Maybe one!”

Kandékwes thought about it, then nodded. Ten gurnis were almost exactly ten American tons; one strong, experienced man could move that much, in small bits, in a day. They all digested the information. Chris figured that Mitru, at age 24, was one of the world’s richest men; his company was earning about 300,000 dhanay per year, and about a fifth of that was profit. Competition was beginning to develop, but the flow of people and goods still had a long way to go to match terrestrial economies. By wearing ordinary clothes and talking in a youthful way, he fooled many Eryan aristocracy into thinking he was unimportant.

They rolled down the Royal Road that ran along the northern edge of the Arjakwés floodplain and reached Arjdhura in an hour and twenty minutes. On the way they passed Nuarjora; Chris knew Lord Estoséru had rejected a pitch from a Sumi representative that the port be built next to their village and was unhappy with the new town, which threatened their access to the sea.

They all gazed out the windows as they rolled into Arjdhura’s townsite. It had been built on top of an old coral reef that connected to the old mainland four kilometers north of Nuarjora; between Arjdhura and Nuarjora was a large, low basin—a dhuba—filled with a lake fed by the Arjakwés, which broke through the coral reef at a gap south of Arjdhura. The reef was 150 meters wide and 4,000 meters long, and the northern half of the town consisted of neat brick houses with red tile roofs lined up along

a single long main street, recently graveled. Chris counted as they proceeded along the road; fifty houses were completed and three were under construction. The southern half of town was a random scatter of forty thatched stone houses; it was the relocated Eryan village of Akanakvéi. In between the two was a large square with several large houses, a public building, and a warehouse. The main street entered the square on the north side and exited the eastern side, where it descended the slope of the old reef to the old seabottom; there it joined the old Royal Road to Sumilara and rolled through Akanakvéi's palm oasis and wheat fields, which had not yet been flooded by the sea. As they rolled into the square, three men came out of the public building to greet them; Lord Mitrusaju of Akanakvéi, now Lord of Arjdhura as well; Adar, the head of the House of Gisnu, the second largest Sumi merchant family (Dumuzi's House of Engurra being slightly larger); and Ziusudra, cousin of Adar and headman of Arjdhura.

The five of them stepped out of the limousine and extended hands to the three. "Welcome, welcome!" exclaimed Adar warmly. "We're so pleased you came to Arjdhura! This town will need support and investment from all over the world to grow into its worthy destiny!"

"It's good to see you, Honored Adar," replied Kandékwes. "This is quite an experiment you have started."

"Thank you, thank you," he replied. "Greetings, Lord General; Lord Kristoféru; Honored Estoiyaju; Honored Mitru." Adar went down the line and shook hands with each. Mitrusaju was right behind, then Ziusudra. One couldn't help but notice the violation of protocol; Mitrusaju was the only Lord among the greeters and therefore

should have taken the lead. “Please come inside the town hall, we have tea ready for you,” added Adar.

They walked inside, entering a large room filled with about fifty kids taking a class. Chris was surprised; he didn’t know about the school. The kids, he noted, were mostly Eryan, judging from the color of their skin and hair; the teacher was darker and spoke Eryan with a Sumi accent. “As you can see, we now have a school, and we plan to expand it in the fall,” noted Adar. “This room is used for large meetings at other times.” He led them across the back of the room and into a wing of offices to a large, comfortable room with a beautiful wooden table and desk. He encouraged them to sit; an Eryan servant began to distribute cups of tea.

“So, how are your plans here going?” asked Kandékwes.

“Quite well,” replied Adar. “We’re very pleased with the hospitality of the villagers who were already here and the business opportunities this town has already created. But we’re still primarily in the settlement phase. We have a lot of work to do before the docks are set up properly and the warehouse is finished and ready to use.”

“Who’s doing the construction work; Sumi or Eryan?” asked Kandékwes.

“Both, of course. We would never discriminate against anyone.”

“Is that the main reason 50 or 60 Sumi workers have settled here?” asked Perku.

“I’m not sure we have that many, but yes, Sumi are supplementing the existing labor.”

“What other work are Sumis doing here?” persisted Perku.

“Work? There’s always loading and unloading the ships.”

“That’s all?”

“I didn’t say that. There are always the legitimate occupations of any town: storekeeper, street sweeper, blacksmith, artisan, farmer.”

Perku stared at Adar for a moment; the man was being evasive. “Perhaps this will help us be a bit more specific,” he added, and picked up his satchel, from which he pulled a sheaf of photographs. “These are photographs from the air, taken by our glider.” He put them down on the table to make a rough mosaic of the area.

Adar leaned over the table to look closely, trying not to look nervous. “Fascinating. So much detail.”

“Here is the dock,” noted Ziusudra, trying to be useful. He pointed to a small straight object sticking into the river close to where it entered the sea, fifteen kilometers downstream from Arjdhura. “You can’t tell in this picture, of course, but it’s a floating dock supported by metal barrels welded watertight and anchored to the shoreline by a pair of very heavy wooden pilings. The dock’s just about as far up the Arjakwés as boats can easily travel. It’s out of the waves; a secure dock. We’ve already started driving another pair of pilings into the shore here.” He pointed to a work area a hundred meters farther upstream. “We’ll move the dock here sometime during the winter; by then the sea will have risen another three or four doli and the current location will start to be drowned.”

“Clever,” said Chris appreciatively.

“I see this area is the farmland of the villagers of Akanakvéi,” said Perku, pointing to wheat fields and palm groves along the Arjakwés just downstream and east of Arjdhura. “But this area of farmland north and west of town is new, I believe; two hundred fifty agris of cleared land. We drove through a bit of it on our way.” He pointed

to another aerial photo that showed the cleared area pretty easily. A dry creek bed ran along it as well.

“As I said, Arjdhura needs everything any other town needs, including farmland,” replied Adar.

“If the people of Nuarjora dislike it, that is too bad,” added Mitrusaju forcefully. “This entire area has always belonged to Akanakvéi. When Lord Kristoféru encouraged the Fish Eryan to move to their current village site, they settled on *our* land. If I want to give permission for others to farm an unused piece of *our* land, that is within my right as local Lord.”

“Considering we’re talking about a Sumi colony on the mainland, I think as regional Lord I have some say as well,” responded Kandékwes.

“With all due respect, Lord Kandékwes, the lower Arjakwés has never been considered part of your region. We have never paid you any taxes. For that matter, neither have the two or three villages upriver from here.”

“The army, however, has the same concern about Sumi colonization,” added Perku. “Surely Sumilara is large enough, Honored Adar, for your people?”

“General, Sumilara is indeed large enough. We are not starting a colony. This is a business venture. It is all about expanding trade.”

“But the current volume of trade only requires a floating dock that is moved three or four times a year, a small warehouse, and a building to house two or three workers,” replied Mitru. “Actually, you could do without the warehouse and the building. The ship or the truck could wait for the other to arrive, the crew of the two could transfer the

cargo, and it would be finished. Right now you're moving one truck load, ten gurnis, per week."

"But there is the future to consider, Honored," replied Adar.

"You said you seek investment," said Chris. "What sort do you anticipate?"

Adar smiled. "That's the sort of question I like to hear! We very much hope the telephone and electric company will invest in lines; we need both of them. We'd like to see a school set up, like the one in Ejnopéla; this area has plenty of students who could attend. The farmers of Akanakvéi and our new Sumi farmers would welcome a grange. We need a steam tractor, though Sumi farmers have always used oxen for plowing and in consequence have about twice as much land under cultivation as the average Eryan farmer. The two hundred fifty agris you mention will be farmed by twelve farmers. The land needs wells and windmills. We're also looking for manufactories, artisans to set up shop and produce goods, etc. And of course, we want the daily bus service between Meddoakwés and Belledha to stop here, or a separate bus run established. We need transportation."

"In other words, you're setting up a Sumi colony, and you want our money to help," accused Kandékwes.

"Honored Lord, I repeat, this is not a Sumi colony! It is a town. Right now more than half of the residents are Eryan."

"And we have welcomed them," added Mitrusaju. "No one else has come along to offer us any help. No one else has offered assistance to expand our farms. No one else offered us a teacher and school. No one else is trying to get us electricity. No one offered to build a new road to Akanakvéi when the old one was flooded by the new lake east of

our old village. No one ever invited us to conferences to discuss development. No one encouraged us to send students to a génadema. No one encouraged us to find out about windmills. *No one.*” He reiterated the last point forcefully, then added, “We used to be an important caravan stop on the Royal Road to Anartu, but in the last four years we have become an obscure, isolated, out of the way place. We have been forgotten!”

“I am very sorry you were lost,” exclaimed Estoiyaju. “But you did not make an effort to ask for help, either. The Réjé is not omniscient the way Esto is. You know about the Grand Court, Lord. If you came to it, you would have had a place to complain, and your complaint would have been heard. That is what the Grand Court is for.”

“We’re getting distracted,” exclaimed Kandékwes. “This is an attempt to recolonize the mainland, pure and simple.”

“Whatever you want to call it, I welcome it,” exclaimed Mitrusaju, leaning forward toward Kandékwes’s face.

“But we don’t,” said Perku.

“And the army can’t tell me what to do.”

Estoiyaju raised his hand. “Then there is no reason to argue about the matter further, because it will have to go to the Réjé. She will decide.”

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When Kanawé’s contractions began to come twice an hour, she and Soru picked up her bag of things and walked the short distance to Melwika Hospital. It was 5 a.m. Both of them liked Dr. Lua very much and Melwika still didn’t have very many midwives, so the hospital was the place to have the baby.

Soru paced around in the waiting room; he was banished from her room because traditionally Eryan men were never, ever present at a birth; it would be considered bad luck. Lua came and went, visiting patients and meeting with people who arrived in the emergency room, while the nurse waited with Kanawé and encouraged her. Finally Soru went and got the mop and bucket and washed the hallway for the entire floor, like he had done after his leg had partially healed. It helped get his frustration out, and besides, it got him close enough to occasionally hear Kanawé struggling through her labor.

When he heard a baby cry about 2 bells, he stopped cleaning and just listened. It was a strong, loud cry; the power of it startled him. He walked over to the room to listen through the closed door; the excited sounds assured him that all had gone well. He sat on the floor outside the door—something he could do only because he had worked there—and listened, silently repeating every Bahá'í prayer and hymn of Widumaj he had memorized. He was a father! He thought about that and the things he had to do to make his child's life better than his own sad childhood, and worried about the forces over which no one had control; forces that could still destroy Éra's progress and bring the world another dark age.

Finally, the door opened. Lua came out and was startled to see him there. "I was just coming to get you," she said. "Congratulations; you have a fine, healthy daughter."

"A daughter. Thank you." He had hoped for a son, of course—no Eryan man ever hoped for a daughter—but a daughter was fine, too. His education and work in schools had taught him that, and as a Bahá'í he knew the principle of equality of the sexes, even though he had little idea what it meant. "Can I go in?"

“Yes, she is ready for you now. Kanawé is fine; she went through the labor pretty well.”

“Thanks be to Esto.” He looked at the door. “Thanks be to you, also, Dr. Lua.”

She smiled. “It is a great privilege to bring lives into this world.” She smiled and headed down the hall; he entered the room.

Kanawé was lying in bed, the baby next to her, wrapped in swaddling. All Soru could see was a little, pink, sleeping face. He came over and Kanawé smiled. He smiled back and they communicated their emotions with their faces.

“Your new daughter,” she said.

“She’s beautiful . . . and so small!”

“She weighs half a ledhi, which Dr. Lua says is about normal. She had quite a strong cry when she was born.”

“I heard it! I was outside, in the hallway, listening.”

“You were? I guess that isn’t bad luck.”

“I was saying prayers. So I tried to contribute in some way. Of course, you did most of the work!”

“And I’m sore from it! They said I could go home if I want, but they recommend I stay overnight, mostly to rest.”

“We should write a letter to your cousin Mèdhé.”

“What about your cousins? Do you think it’s time to try to contact them?”

Soru contemplated that, then nodded. “Sure, we can write a letter and see whether they get it. There’s a merchant in Ora who knows them, and I think I can write an address

that will get a letter to him. He'll have someone around who can read it." He looked at the little baby. "Are we sticking to Blorané?" The name meant "rose."

She nodded. "Yes, I like the name very much."

"So do I. Isn't it amazing both of our mothers had the same name. It was meant to be."

"Dr. Lua said the hospital now needs a family name for the birth certificate, though, not just a first name."

"Really? I guess it's time our family adopt a name, then." He looked at her. "I've been thinking about it lately, too. What do you think of Dénujénésé?"

She rolled the name on her tongue, it meant "Again-born." "Hum. Like it. We've all been born a second time, haven't we? You, with your escape and new life, and then marriage to me and freedom; me, leaving Terskua, losing Tritanu, then marrying you and starting a career helping children. Yes, we are 'again born.'"

"And our little one is in this world to prepare for life in the next world," added Soru. "We are all born again in that sense as well." He reached down and picked up the baby and kissed her. "Welcome, Blorané Dénujénésé."

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186.

## Oktoberfest

The 150 meter wide greenspace south of Melwika's city wall was packed by a huge crowd. As Chris and Liz headed through the city's south gate, they paused to look at the incredible throng. Dëku, the city's chief of police, was there as well; he had just descended from the tower over the gate, which served as the police headquarters during the festival.

"How is it going, Honored Dëku?" asked Chris.

"Well, my Lord. I've got police on horses throughout the crowd and they report very few problems; some petty thievery and pick-pocketing, mostly. The crowd out here is particularly dense right now because the chariot races just ended, and the horse races don't start until 3 bells."

"That must explain the wave of people coming in the east gate and streaming toward Temple Square. We had a lot of difficulty getting through."

"Indeed, the racetrack is along the eastern city wall."

"How big is the crowd?"

Dëku thought about that. "I would guess we have 15,000 people here; much of the population from Melwika west to Mëddoakwës. Mitru told me yesterday he would be assigning twenty-five buses and anticipated each would have to make up to four runs carrying as many as one hundred each. As you probably heard, he has said that all rides home from Melwika are free for the next two days, making the trips half price in effect. There were requests for extra buses from Mëdhpëla, Gordha, the Pënkakwës, and even

Bellédha. This morning he told me I could anticipate three or four hundred Kwolone attending.”

“Really? I guess that’s a positive development.”

“There are a lot of Tutane walking around the festival; they’re easy to spot by the feathers in their hair. Are you planning to walk around right now?”

“Indeed, we are.”

“Please allow me to assign someone to accompany you. He doesn’t have to be next to you; he can stay four or five meters distant if you wish. I would feel better about your safety under such circumstances.”

Liz tugged on Chris’s arm. “Say yes, dear.”

Chris reluctantly nodded. “Very well, but he should stay five meters back.”

“Of course.” Dêku dashed upstairs to the tower and returned a moment later with a soldier, Wéroilubu, whom Chris had met on other occasions. Chris greeted him, thanked him, then he and Liz resumed their stroll. They headed eastward along the base of the city wall toward a large carousel that was surrounded by a lot of people.

“There are a lot of Tutane in the crowd,” noted Liz. “They’re wearing leather as well as feathers.”

“I’m struck by the fact that three quarters of the people here are wearing machine made shirts, pants, and dresses, rather than robes made from homespun!” exclaimed Chris. “It’s quite a noticeable change.”

“It’s happened over the last year, too. Mëddwoglubas must be making a lot of cloth.”

“And money.”

They passed booth after booth with stone fireplaces behind them and glowing piles of coals to barbeque meat, toast bread, roast skewers of vegetables, or fry goodies of all sorts. Others sold mangos on a stick, sugar cane, flavored ices, sweet pastries, cider, wine, beer, or very new foods like ice cream, popcorn, french fries, baked potatoes, potato chips, or pasta. Lines at all the booths were surprisingly long. Chris and Liz were constantly greeting people, for everyone recognized them.

As they approached the carousel, they saw Amos standing by Primu Miller, 18, Yimu's oldest son and John's oldest grandson. Primu was running the attraction. The carousel was not an elegant thing; it consisted of a stationary circular floor with a circular roof over it that turned. Attached to the turning roof were twenty-five seats, suspended from the roof by chains. When the roof turned they went round and round very fast and rose into the air. "How goes the device?" asked Chris.

Primu pointed to the immense line. "Look how popular it is! Everyone wants to take a ride!"

"The electric motor's not strong enough, though," said Amos. "We have to baby it to keep it from burning out. It takes a long time to get everyone on board up to speed."

"You need a bigger motor?" asked Chris.

Amos nodded. "But there isn't a bigger motor, this is the largest standard size that's built. So the next carousel will have to be smaller."

"But I'll take it to Meddoakwés and Isurdhuna next year!" said Primu. "One could make a living this way!"

"We need to make some more complicated rides first," Amos said to Primu assuringly.

Chris chuckled. “Well, good luck. Where’s the Grange tent, anyway?”

Amos waved westward. “It’s most of the way to the other end of the festival. The area along the city wall has refreshments and along the Midway through the center of the greenspace are games. And various small tents for some businesses. The big tents for the Grange, Miller Industries, the génadema, and the city departments occupy the western half.”

“Okay, that’s where we’re going, then,” said Chris. He waved and they strolled down the Midway.

It was quite an interesting scene. Two elegant open coaches were going back and forth, taking passengers on a circular tour of the festival for a dontay each; it was interesting to watch peasant farmers or artisans, dressed in their best clothes, wives and small children and sometimes parents in tow, trying to look like refined aristocracy. No one would dare offer such a ride at the festival at Mëddoakwés because so many real aristocrats were doing the same thing; but at Melwika no one would be insulted.

Many of the booths along the Midway sported games with little prizes: throwing balls or darts at a target, rolling balls into a hole, shooting blunt little arrows at little wooden deer or little floating ducks, or tossing miniature javelins through little holes. If one succeeded, one won a child’s toy, a packet of nails, a spoon, or some other object worth about half a dhanay. Jugglers juggled; men played music for a kentay. And there were yet more food stands. Scattered among the food and games were tents for companies or associations where their members could sit, eat, drink, sing, and dance. They stopped briefly at the telephone company’s tent to say hello and listen to a very powerful singer, then visited at the Mennea Tomi tent for a cup of tea with the

accountants and their families. Both tents were fairly small, but the employees were also entertaining out of town cousins, so they were pretty full.

They passed the big U-shaped complex of tents for the Miller Tomi. The various Miller operations now employed almost six hundred men and women and the tent was full. A big dance floor in the middle was filled with couples doing a folk dance together. John waved to them and they waved back.

The Grange tent was next, but on the south side of the Midway instead of the north. It was followed by tents for the génadema, the Bahá'í community, the school system, the city hall, and several companies. Like Miller's, the Grange tent was really a cluster of tents; two thirty-meter tents for food ran between the Midway and the south side of the greenspace along Majakwés Rodha; a wooden-floored tent opened on the Midway for dancing; and behind it was a fourth tent for food preparation, storage, and purchase, with a place to eat as well. A series of fireplaces ran along the space behind it for cooking. The sides of all the tents were rolled up to catch a breeze, making one big space sixty meters across. A tent for the Béranagrés/Nénaslua Grange was next door and its sides were up as well to make the space even larger. Strings of electric lights glowed even though it was during the day.

Chris and Liz entered at the corner of the Midway and Majakwés Rodha, where a table of literature about the grange was also available for passers by. Chandu, the informal headman of Deksawsupérakwa, sat behind it. He had matured a lot in the three years since his arrival at the grange's south end as a squatter with a dozen friends from the drowning towns of the Ora region. He was now nineteen, had a full beard, a wife, and an infant son. He rose to greet them. "Welcome, Lord and Lady Ménnéa!"

“Thank you, Honored Chandu,” Chris replied. “How are you and your family?”

“We are well and greatly enjoying the festival. Have you met Slérané?”

“I don’t think so.” Chris extended both hands. “Pleased to meet you, honored Slérané.”

“Thank you, Lord, it is a great privilege to meet you.” She touched hands with Liz as well while Chris said, “And I see you now have a fine son.”

“Indeed, Lord; Chardu is a year and a half old now.” Chris bent down to see the little boy, who fled behind his mother, much to everyone’s amusement.

“We are so fortunate to have had him here,” added Slérané. “Because he was a month premature and I am sure he would have died if we hadn’t taken him to the hospital.”

“Esto protects,” replied Chris, using a common expression. He turned to an older man and woman nearby—both nearly toothless and weatherbeaten, though they were probably in their late thirties or early forties—and Chandu added, “This is my mother, Puá, and my uncle, Ervárju, who is also my stepfather. They have just arrived from our old village, Chartagras.”

“I am very pleased to meet both of you. You must be very proud of Chandu.” Chris shook hands with both, while Ervárju smiled and said, “We are indeed! We thought he was crazy when he left for here; Mēlwika seemed to be a rumor. But he has done well here.”

“He has indeed. We count on him to keep the grange building at Deksawsuperakwa in running order, plus run the post office and handle all sorts of

complaints and questions. He's gotten very good at calling City Hall to help someone with a problem."

"He is very patient," agreed Puá, beaming.

"Are you enjoying your visit?" asked Liz.

"Very much!" replied Puá.

"So much, we will stay," added Ervárju. "We've found a lot at the edge of the village and I'll build us a place over the winter."

"Which means I can help Sléraná and the other women with the child care business they run in the grange building," said Puá, calling her daughter in law by her western dialect name. "They always need help!"

"Good," said Liz. "But if you have any spare time, come up to the 'Women's Cooperative' here in town. They cook and sew together and have one of the best stores in town where they sell their wares. You'll have fun and pick up some recipes."

"I would enjoy that!"

"And you need to learn to read, mother," added Slérané, who was obviously repeating a point she had made before. "You can make twice as much money if you can, and besides, you learn some very interesting things!"

Chris turned to Ervárju. "I thought Chartagras had been drowned by the sea."

He smiled in reply. "The lower fields flooded starting several years ago. Last winter the village was flooded. But the problem, Lord, is where to go. I don't want to criticize anyone, but as you may know, there is much anger in our area. When the flood began, Lord Mitru assigned great swaths of hill country along the central valley, above the existing villages, to a dozen of his friends. Some of them were lords of villages close

to the sea; some were members of old houses who owned land, but did not have a village; some were merchant families. The Lord of Chartagras was not one of them. Two thirds of our village's land is now underwater and those of us who have stayed earn a paltry living farming some of the remaining fields or cutting timber in the drowned forests to feed Ora's insatiable need for charcoal. Of the thousand of us who lived there five years ago, only two hundred remain."

"Where have the others gone?"

Ervárju sighed sadly. "Some have gone to the new villages carved out of the central valley. But life there is not easy. The land requires clearing of thick forest and if you want to grow rice, it requires terracing and construction of many irrigation ditches. Many are raising sweet potatoes and corn instead; the corn you brought to this world has saved our lives, Lord, for the climate is too wet for wheat and it produces more per acre for less work. But the soil is poor and no one can afford guano. The Lords are demanding fifty percent of the crop for thirty years for us to acquire the land. There is a great gravel road being built to connect the new villages with a telephone and electric line, and many work on that to earn enough to feed their families. Otherwise, people are moving to Ora itself, which has swelled in size quite a lot in the last two years. There is work there."

"So I hear; Lord Mitru is using his taxes to employ many people."

"But half the time they don't seem to know what they are doing. My son works at the Foundry and is very unhappy," said Ervárju.

"But it is better than the situation with my daughter," added Puá. "She and her husband are still in Chartagras. Their land won't flood for another year, but it is rather poor and there is no reason to improve it now. They couldn't feed me, and Ervárju's land

drowned last year, so we had few choices. Coming here, at least, we can help Chandu and Sléraná.”

“And there are many opportunities here,” added Chris. “There is always more work to do in town.”

“I wish we could start to farm the land south of the Majakwés,” said Ervárju. “It can be irrigated by the river and with steam tractors we can break the sod easily. I don’t know how to farm in this climate, but I can learn. I am still strong.”

“We don’t have permission,” replied Chris. “But there is a lot of land in the three new towns in the lower Arjakwés. That’s one reason we helped establish their granges; we had people who wanted land.”

“But it is too far away to help here,” said Puá.

Chris nodded understandingly.

“Lord, you should have something to eat,” said Chandu. “We have some excellent food here.”

“I’m sure.” He looked at Liz, who nodded. “We’ll be back,” he promised, and they headed to the food tent, nodding and shaking hands as they went.

“There are a lot of members of the older generation here,” noted Liz, as they walked.

Chris nodded. “Mélwika’s now acquiring the grandfathers and grandmothers. They can be supported more easily by their kids here than by the ones back home, and they can do more here.”

“And that leaves more for the kids in the home village,” she added.

They each bought a *turidhonedi*, “cheese bread,” a bread with cheese, meat, and vegetables in the middle; they were cooked in an oven a long time and were more sanitary than other choices. Hot tea in metal cups completed their meal and they walked back to the front tent, where Soru had showed up. “Hey Honored Soru! How’s the baby?”

“She’s what; two weeks old?” added Liz.

“Indeed, she is. She’s doing very well, though we aren’t sleeping much! She and Kanawé are at the Bahá’í tent. They’ll be here in a little while.”

“We’re planning to get over there later.”

“A lot of relatives and friends of Bahá’ís are there; a lot of questions are being asked. Mēdhé, Kanawé’s older cousin, and her son are there, and they’re debating the nature of Esto with Mitretu!”

Chris smiled. “That’s a common subject of discussion. How’s your work with children?”

“Pretty good. We started classes last week; Kanawé’s assistant is keeping her class going for the next few weeks until she can come back.”

“I’m surprised to see you here at the Grange tent.”

“We’re members of the Grange, Lord. Kanawé still has her land.”

“Oh, of course.”

Just then, Snékwu approached with his wife, Sterané; Primanu, the boy they had adopted a year and a half earlier; and their own little one, now two. Chris smiled and clapped him on the back as well and shook both hands. “The grange of Ornakwés and Béranta needs a tent of its own!”

“Next year. We’re using this one, this time. I think three quarters of the farmers have come to the festival; it’s a great chance to see Melwika and the grange here. I’m taking a bunch of farmers on a walking tour of the main grange building in another hour.”

“How goes everything? Let’s all sit.” Chris pointed to space at a nearby table, so they sat.

“You must come and see! You haven’t been for a visit in three weeks and people miss you! The weather hasn’t cooled much and the rain has helped the crop grow. We’ll start harvesting grain in another two weeks. The farmers are upset about prices, though.”

“I think it’ll be ten dhanay per bushel. Not great, I admit, but better than last year’s second harvest.”

“And it’s a good living. Let’s face it, the farmers are complaining that they’ll earn 1,500 for their work when their village cousins are lucky to get half that! But they were expecting about 2,000 and planned for it, and now many will be in debt.”

“How did they spend that much?”

Snékwu shrugged. “A lot borrowed from the bank and bought a horse.”

“Demand for horses shot way up this year; the Kwolone are raising the price and making a killing. We’ll have a lot of work for them to do over the winter, though.”

“Yes, but they didn’t expect to have to work, and now they want work that will involve the horse as well. But the rest of the land in Ornakwés and Béranta is being snatched up. Even land in Ejnopéla is beginning to sell, with only a promise of a grange there.”

“But can we expand to cover Ejnopéla?”

Snékwu nodded. “Sure, if we have the equipment. We’ve been buying Kwolone horses, too; we’ll use the winter to train them. As long as we have twenty of them pulling, we can run most of the mechanical harvesters.”

“The problem is buying the equipment; demand has gone through the roof and Miller’s raising prices.” Chris shook his head.

“Everyone’s buying farm equipment. I was talking to Kérdu and he said the grange here can’t buy everything they planned.”

“Correct. Look, we’ve got to encourage the farmers to grow a wider variety of crops. Every farmer should plant at least two different crops. Demand for vegetables has been increasing—”

Snékwu nodded and interrupted. “I know, I know, and we’ve been trying. Everyone wants to raise a staple, which means wheat or rice. Corn isn’t completely accepted yet and rice takes a lot of work. Vegetables have never been much of a cash crop and people aren’t used to switching to them. Picking them is labor intensive.”

“Which is why they earn more. We have to try harder. They should switch to rice! The land down there is flat, unlike Melwika. It’ll be easy to flood and there’s plenty of water.”

“I wouldn’t call it easy. There’s no harvesting equipment.”

“We should work on that.”

“Lord, I understand your concern, but so far there has been no problem with wheat prices, and you have often said demand would grow.”

“I have; but it will grow gradually, and the price *will* drop. Snékwu, let us say the Melwika Grange plants two crops of wheat next year, like this year, but the yield goes up

to 22 bushels per agri, which is quite possible because the soil is improving. That's ten percent more wheat. And let us say the lower Arjakwés granges plant 5,000 agris and get 18 bushels per agri, and plant two crops instead of one. That means the granges will produce almost six times as much wheat as this year! And let us say there is no drought and everyone else gets a good crop; maybe better than ever, because they are using more irrigation, more guano, more horses, and more steam power. What do *you* think the price of wheat will be, under those circumstances? Four dhanay per bushel?"

That got Snékwu thinking; that would be a third of the usual price. "We might be right back to 600 dhanay per year after taxes."

"Exactly."

There was silence after that, and Snékwu wasn't the only one listening. "Farmers must understand that they are now businessmen," continued Chris. "They have a product and they are selling it to the public. Too much product and the public can't buy it all, so price drops. But if they sell two or three or four products, and the price of one goes up when the price of another drops, everything is alright."

Liz tugged on Chris's sleeve. "Enough of the lecture. Let's dance."

"Dance?" Chris was startled by the idea. He looked at the folk dancers on the dance floor. "We don't know that dance."

"We don't, but listen to the tune. We could foxtrot to it."

He listened and nodded. "Okay." They rose and walked to the dance floor. Once they started dancing—with some elegance, since they had spent a lot of time dancing a decade earlier—the others stopped dancing to watch, and when the music stopped the

audience applauded, much to Chris's embarrassment. "Tell you what," he said. "Teach us a basic folk dance, so we can join you, and then we'll teach you our dance!"

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Thornton had never seen a day fly by so fast. He rose at 2:30 a.m. after four and a half hours of sleep and by 3 a.m. he was driving slowly down Temple Street, weaving around singing and arguing drunks, to pick up Rudhisuru and Dwosunu at the geology lab. Once they woke up the guards at the South Gate to let them out of the city, they were on their way to Moruagras in the rover. The two geologists slept two hours while Thornton drove through the darkness, the rover's one good headlight throwing a beam of illumination along the graveled royal road before them. They passed Gordha shortly after sunrise and Thornton let Rudhisuru take over. Two hours later—the sun almost overhead—Thornton awoke in the back seat as they passed Kostèkhéma. They stopped to change drivers again and Dwosunu drove them down the newly graveled royal road to Moruagras. They arrived there a bit less than two hours later as the sun neared the western horizon.

Suksdiu was just beginning in Mèlwika, where it was 8 a.m., but for them it was over, for Moruagras was ten time zones to the east.

They stopped briefly at the new garrison outside the Ghéslonè town. The old wall around the pinnacle had been rebuilt and a new tower erected in the middle on the foundations of an old one. The space in between was beginning to fill up with barracks and other buildings, creating a settlement called Morustéa, "Island Pinnacle." The guard let them drive through the gate and they parked inside to find Colonel Sterékwu. As soon as he heard their business, he wanted to come along; they all walked to the rover immediately.

“Is there any news around here that we should know?” asked Rudhisuru as they climbed in.

Sterékwu considered. “Nothing important. The harvest came in a month ago and was a bit smaller than usual because of all the rain. They are a fairly peaceful people. The exiles have not been happy about the move, nor have the soldiers.”

“Where’s Mēdhkordé?” asked Dwosunu.

“She and the prostitutes stayed at Kostekhéma; Lord Ornkordu didn’t want anything to do with them in his village and we don’t want them in the fort. I am amazed how often my men find excuses to visit Kostekhéma.”

“The road is very well made,” said Thornton. “What about the side road to Gendonatroba?”

“It’s good as well. Are you going there, too?”

“Yes, tomorrow morning or afternoon. We need to leave for Mēlwika before sunset if we want to drive back in daylight. We have the same materials for them.”

“I’ll come with you to Gendonatroba.”

Thornton started the engine and backed out of the gate. He turned around and headed for Moruagras. “I’m amazed you were able to build the fort so quickly.”

“We hired two hundred Ghéslone for two months to put up the walls and tower from the old stones. The Crown Prince insisted they be paid 1 dhanay per day, which is incredible pay for this place. It’ll spoil them, I’m sure. We paid about the same number of Géndone to work on the roads.”

“Where did all the money go?”

“Booze, swords, tools, and other imports; the cargo wagons have been full all summer.”

“Sounds like the two tribes are now part of the economy.” Thornton looked at a solitary figure walking down the road from Moruagras. He looked closely. “Is that Rébu?”

“Indeed it is. He’s been working as a teacher in Moruagras; I guess he decided they were as oppressed as the Sumis. Apparently he’s pretty good, though he has been a bit radical and told them about revolutions and exploitation of the masses.”

“Just what we need,” said Rudhisuru.

“So far, they’re ignoring his ideas,” said Stérékwu.

Thornton slowed as he approached Rébu. He stopped a moment to say hello, then continued on. Moruagras was only a five minute drive away, but about an hour on foot. As they entered town Thornton noted three new houses and evidence they were buying all sorts of things, such as machine made clothing. He parked the rover in front of Ornkordu’s house and they entered.

The Lord was eating supper; they were immediately invited to join the meal. Ornkordu would not speak of business until after they had eaten well. Finally, he turned to Thornton and said, “So, Honored Dhoru, what have you brought us?”

Thornton nodded and reached for a large roll of paper. He unrolled it on the floor—it was almost two meters square—revealing a huge, immensely detailed map.

Ornkordu, fascinated, rose and came over to look closely. “This is Long Lake?”

“Indeed, and here is the Kostasruma, and Moruagras, and Morustéa. The blue lines are rivers; the black line is the royal road; these faint brown lines give elevation. This map is the first one we’ve made of a large area that gives elevations.”

“And there is a lot of writing.”

“We’ve put every name on the map we learned; rivers, hamlets, glubas, lakes, mountains, everything. The closer the lines are to each other, the steeper the land. As you can see, the Long Lake is surrounded by cliffs.” He pointed to the close lines. “This map also has a green shading to indicate forest cover. White areas are fields. And every single house is on the map as a tiny square.”

“Praised be Endro, you have everything! You used those photographs!”

“Indeed we did. Our maps have been getting better and better every year. This is the most thorough and detailed map we have ever made, Lord. We will be using it as our standard and all maps in the future will be made this way. Here are the photographs.”

Thornton reached over to another large scroll, a thicker, heavier one, and unrolled it as well. The photographs had been adjusted to be of the exact same scale and were glued together very carefully. Ornkordu got down on his knees to look closely, nodding.

“Amazing, amazing.”

“How much will a copy of this cost?” asked Stérékwu.

“The army needs to provide Morustéa with a copy,” said Rudhisuru. “I’ll make sure it happens.”

“We have detailed records indicating which photos were used and what had to be done to each one,” said Thornton. “We can make another one in a month if we have the staffing, at a cost of about 200 dhanay. The map can be hand copied for about the same

amount. We have a master copy. In Mēlwika we have a table with a glass top two meters square. We put the master on the glass table, put a clean sheet of paper on top, anchor them tightly in place, and shine a light through the master. Within a year we'll have a new technique that is faster, though; we can take a photograph of the map, put it in a computer, and print the map in strips, then glue them together. If we can do that, we'll be able to make a map like this for a few dhanay!"

"Amazing!" said Sterékwu and Ornkordu simultaneously, though neither knew what a "computer" was.

"And we can keep these?" confirmed Ornkordu.

"Indeed, Lord, and this." Thornton handed him a book. "The cover says 'The Geology and Geography of Ghéslona.' It is Dwosunu's thesis, the work he had to complete for his master's degree. As men in this village learn to read, they will be able to use the book."

"What does it contain, exactly?" Ornkordu was uncertain about "geology" and "geography."

"It describes the rocks, minerals, types of trees, types of soils, areas that are farmed, and areas that could be farmed more."

"So, some of it is useful. And you made a similar book and map for the Géndonε?"

"Indeed, and we will take it to them tomorrow." Thornton didn't add that the Géndonε had a pretty good copper deposit and some silver, maybe gold. Both tribes occupied strips of land about 90 kilometers long, the width varying from 90 kilometers at

the equator to half that closer to the pole; each had about 5,400 square kilometers for 1,500 people, which gave them more land per person than any of the other tribes.

“My Lord, the Ghéslone are rich in land and resources,” said Rudhisuru. “They are blessed.”

“And no one will take it from us,” added Ornkordu. “Who else has access to these maps and books?”

“The books are in the university library, so anyone has access. The maps are not available to the public yet, but they may be in the future,” replied Thornton.

Ornkordu nodded. “Honored Dhoru, you have kept your word. You have explored our land and told us what you found. We are very grateful. We have four young men who wish to come to your génadema; can you take them with you when you return?”

“Our rover does not have enough room for four more, Lord, but the steam wagon comes tomorrow night and some can ride back with it. We will greet them when they arrive in Melwika.” Thornton didn’t mention that the term had already begun. That was alright; they would need tutoring anyway.

“Excellent. We will pay for them to stay through the winter; we understand our ham will fetch a good price in Melwika. The clinic has been coming here every month and we are grateful for that as well. We are in your debt.”

“My Lord, I have an unusual request for you.”

Ornkordu frowned. “What is this request?”

“My father loves trout and we have none in the rivers near Melwika. We would like to put some in our rivers. If someone could catch twenty or thirty so that they are

alive, put them in a barrel, and put a top on the barrel so they will stay inside, we will take them back to Melwika and stock our rivers with Ghéslone trout.”

Ornkordu laughed. “That is your request? It is hard to believe that we have something you don’t! That is easy for us. Do you want little fish, or big ones?”

“Little ones may survive better.”

He snapped his fingers. “It is done. We will have your barrel of fish for you tomorrow evening.”

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187.

## New Home

Soru and Kanawé left the bank with the house key. They hurried to Saréidukter's to get Blorané, their cousin Mèdhé—who had just arrived the night before from Terskua—and her son, Mitrukaru.

“So you really bought the four thousand dhanay palace?” asked Mèdhé, who had been sometimes skeptical, sometimes critical of the idea all along.

“Yes, it is now ours—ours and the bank's,” replied Kanawé. “And please, cousin, let us celebrate, not criticize.”

“I'm sorry, dear. But four thousand five hundred dhanay—I'm not sure Lord Mitruluku's house is worth that.”

“I bet his house in Pèrkas is worth ten times as much,” replied Soru. “And houses in Terskua aren't worth much for a lot of reasons.”

“You could have gotten a place like this for a lot less.” Mèdhé pointed to Saréidukter's.

Kanawé shook her head. They had already gone over that argument several times in the last two months. “Cousin, this place is worth more than you think because it is in *Melwika*. But I already had a place like this, and remember what happened? It burned down because of bad wiring. That's the problem with most of the houses in town. If anyone wants to buy them, they need a thorough inspection and a lot of repairs; otherwise you can't get a bank loan. Without a bank loan, most people can't afford to buy, so the houses are cheap and dangerous.”

Médhé shook her head. “Bank loans. I still don’t understand this idea of a *bank*. Sounds risky. And four thousand five hundred dhanay; that’s *four thousand five hundred*, remember? You could buy half of Terskua for that. You could buy horses for twenty families for that much!”

“Then maybe they should apply for loans to buy horses,” replied Soru, patiently. “Or they could apply to the Melwika Grange. Because over three or four years the horse will pay for the loan.”

“Let’s go look,” said Mitrukaru, who was so excited to see the new house and living in Melwika that he didn’t care about the cost.

That’s the spirit,” agreed Soru. Médhé was holding Blorané, so he picked up the cousin’s bag of things and a bag of essentials he had packed. Mitrukaru grabbed a big bag as well, and Kanawé grabbed a bag. Then they put on jackets—it was early Génméné, the equivalent of early November, and therefore chilly—and headed for the door.

It was a slow, awkward trek across town with the bags. They emerged from South Gate and crossed the greenbelt; its grass was still trampled and crushed from the Festival a month earlier. The cluster of houses on the other side had grown considerably and now included seven completed and three partially built structures lining Majakwés Rodha.

“Which one?” asked Médhé.

“Number 725,” said Soru.

“If it’s the third house down the street, why such a high number?” asked Mitrukaru.

“Majakwés Street starts in front of the Mennea House and it’s about 725 meters from there to here. The numbers on the south side of the street are odd; they’re even on the north side.”

“Oh, so that’s why the address of the Grange is 2039 Majakwés,” the boy said.

““Addresses,”” fretted Mèdhé. “And everything has numbers.”

“Well, it’s a lot easier to find a house here than in Mèddoakwés!” said Soru. “This isn’t a little village like Terskua, where no one needs a sign because everyone knows where everything is!”

Mèdhé didn’t reply. She stared at the numbers on each house as they walked past each one, unable to read them, still baffled by the concept. At age 33, with half a set of teeth left in her head, she was a survivor; she had lived slightly longer than the average Eryan, though she had not yet grasped the fact that in Melwika she would likely see thirty years more.

They came to number 725. The house was on a lot fourteen meters wide and twenty-four deep, surrounded by a stone wall two-meters high; it was set back three meters from the front and side enclosures and had a thirteen by fourteen meter backyard. They stopped by the gate leading into the lot. Soru pulled out the key and turned the lock. With a click the gate opened and they entered, then he clanked it shut behind them. They walked to the house and he opened its front door as well.

They entered a spacious living room the entire eight-meter width of the house and five meters deep. The walls were whitewashed and clean; the terracotta floor was a pretty pattern of red and brown tiles; the ceiling was painted beige. The living room opened onto a three by four meter dining alcove in the rear left corner, and from there one could

enter the kitchen, which filled the three by four meter rear right corner of the first floor. The kitchen had a door to the back yard. The stairs to the second floor were against the wall separating the living room from the kitchen, and under them was a tiny water closet with a toilet and sink. They put down their bags and scattered, Mèdhé and Kanawé heading for the kitchen. Mèdhé flipped a switch and a pair of bulbs came on overhead.

“You’ve got everything,” she said, with a mix of admiration and admonition in her voice. “The stove has an oven?”

“An oven, plenty of room to cook on top, and it heats the house in the winter.” Kanawé walked to the sink and turned on the hot water faucet, then waited and nodded. “Feel. Running hot water. The hot water heater is in the pantry.” She pointed to a space between the kitchen and the stairs. “It uses gas and stores 150 liters of water.”

“Interesting.” Mèdhé had no idea how much 150 liters was.

“And here’s the ice box.” Kanawé opened it. “Hum; no ice. I’ll have to send Soru to the market to get some! It’s very helpful, cousin. If food stays cold, it doesn’t spoil. Especially milk, which is good for children and pregnant women. You can buy it in glass bottles in the market.”

Mèdhé nodded. She had to admit to liking that, though the kitchen’s ample cabinets particularly attracted her.

“And flush toilets?” she asked.

“Indeed, under the stairs *and* upstairs. Please remember to flush.”

“The smell will remind me pretty quickly.”

They walked back to the living room. Soru and Mitrukaru had gone upstairs, so they followed. The stairs took them to the center of the top story. Four doors opened onto

the landing, one to the bathroom and three to bedrooms. A strong ladder continued up to the attic and they could hear Mitrukaru walking around up there. “Hey, I have a window *and* a light!” he said from up there.

“Too much space and privacy for a boy,” fretted Mɛdhé.

Kanawé pointed to the door to the right, leading to a room over the kitchen. “This is your room, cousin. The one over the dining area is Blorané’s.”

“What will a baby do with a room?”

“She’ll sleep with us for the next two years, but then she’ll have her own room.”

Mɛdhé nodded and walked into her room, which was three by four meters, simple and white, with a window overlooking the backyard. She walked around, trying to look satisfied but not impressed, because she still wasn’t sure what to think of the place. She tapped the glass of the window; that was new and seemed extravagant as well. “The backyard has a lot of potential,” she said. “Vegetables, herbs, flowers. . .”

“We want to plant some trees in front, too,” said Kanawé. “A cherry and an apple, maybe.”

“A mulberry and a peach would be nice, too,” added Mɛdhé. She nodded. “Plenty of room for sewing.”

“And you have this closet, for storage.” Kanawé opened the door to show her, because closets were a new idea.

Kanawé took Blorané and stepped out of her cousin’s room so Mɛdhé could consider the space. She walked into the master bedroom, which occupied most of the space over the living room, except for the area occupied by the bathroom. It had two

windows facing eastward and the street; late morning sunlight was streaming in. Soru stood there, contemplating the space. He turned when she came in and smiled.

“Isn’t it incredible?”

“It’s unbelievable.”

“Will Mædhé be alright with it?”

“Sure. She’ll complain a few days and come around. She doesn’t understand Melwika yet.”

He walked over to her. “It does remind us that we need to help your brothers in Terskua more. Maybe we should help them get a horse.”

“Let’s see whether we can pay for this first!”

He chuckled and nodded. “So, will we be happy in this new house?”

She smiled. “If Esto wills it.”

“Indeed, if Esto wills it.” He kissed her. “But we will make the most of the chance.”

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Chris pulled his coat close around him as he got out of the rover. It was getting cold; snows were a month or month and a half away.

He walked over to the Arjakwés. Four kilometers uphill from Melwika it flowed through a large valley for two kilometers and they had bulldozed a dam across it near the top of the valley to divert the water into irrigation ditches along both flanks. It was a Grange project that would add 500 agris to the town’s farmland for next year, enough for about twenty more farmers. He walked over to the dam to inspect it, then checked the

irrigation ditch on his side of the river. It was already carrying water in order to soak the fields for a crop of winter wheat.

Satisfied, he walked to an iron cage set in the river. The bars were barely a centimeter apart; a sheet of steel was hinged to the bars to form a top. He unlocked the heavy lock that held the sheet of steel in place and swung it up and out of the way.

Inside were eighteen brook trout, all of the ones that had survived Thornton's six hour ride from Moruagras to Melwika plus the almost two hours of immersion in the iron box. They looked healthy and vigorous. Chris threw in a big pile of worms and they dove for them and began to eat vigorously. He watched, pleased by their energy.

He had been feeding them less and less, for the water flowing through the box brought them bugs, algae, minnows, and other food. They had adjusted well to the river. With winter coming the road might become impassable any day, and hunters, walking by, had become increasingly curious about the peculiar iron box in the pool. There were scrape marks on the lock indicating someone had tried to break it.

So, Chris decided, it was time. They would go up and down the river, especially up it; many would stay in the pool itself because it was familiar to them; and weather permitting, Chris would still come by every two or three days to throw worms and other foods into the water. Come spring, they would lay eggs, and the Arjakwés would have fish again.

"Okay little ones, it is time," he said to them, with a smile. Reaching down, he unlocked a cable that held the iron cage in place, then pulled and pushed it to tip it over. The trout gradually swam out of the box and into the pool.

"Welcome to your new home, fishies," he said to them.

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